

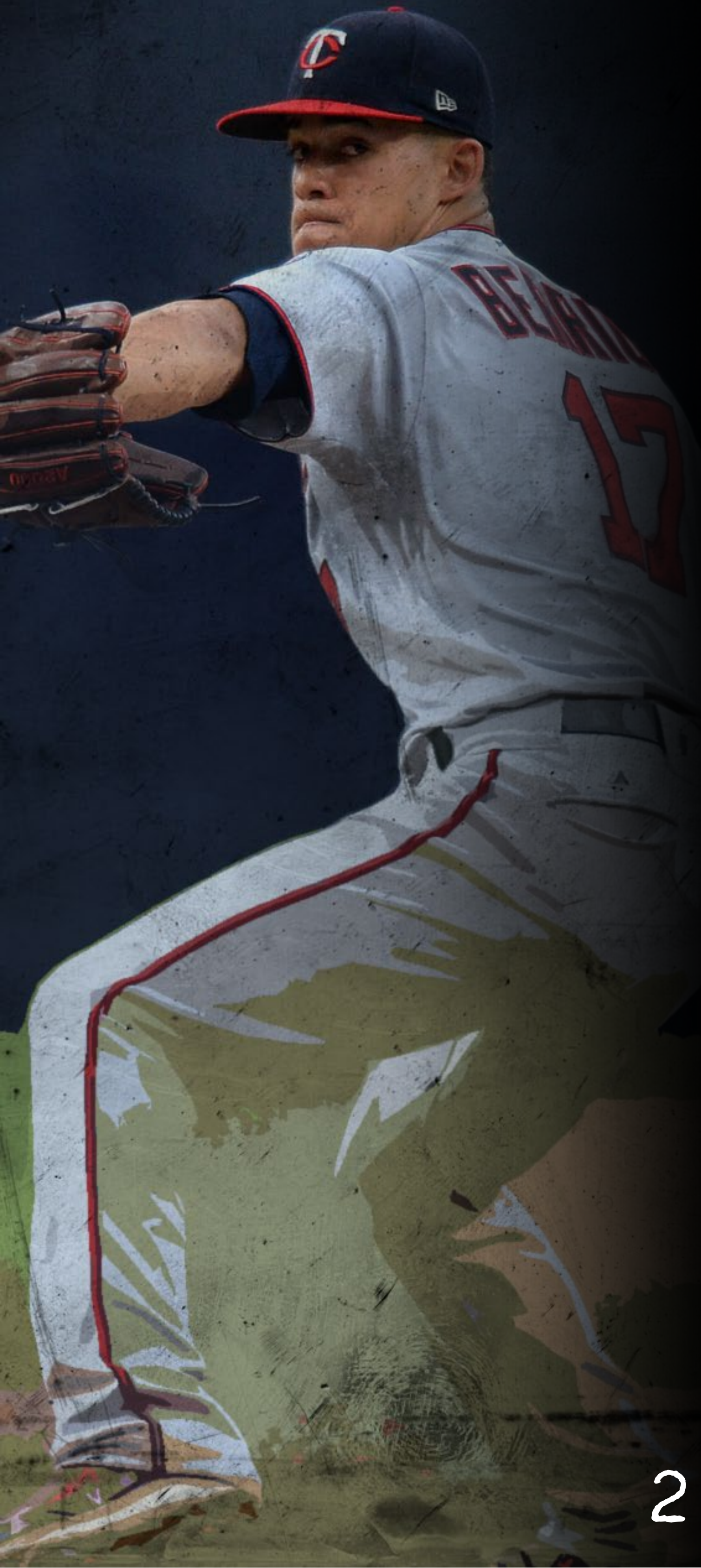


*Twins Daily*

Offseason Handbook 2018



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Twins Daily 2018 Blueprint



# Introduction

by Nick Nelson



## The Wait is Over

*The waiting is the hardest part  
Every day you see one more card  
You take it on faith, you take it to the heart  
The waiting is the hardest part*

Tom Petty tragically passed away one day before the Minnesota Twins' 2017 season officially came to an end, but legendary lyrics like the ones above will live on forever. And his song "The Waiting," in particular, is one that rings true for Twins fans who have spent the past half-decade doing just that.



Waiting for a youthful wave of talent to reach its potential. Waiting for front office leadership with the vision to contend against a new age of savvy execs. Waiting for games that mattered.

Good news, everyone. After plenty of heartbreak and free-fallin', the hardest part is over. A championship-caliber core, built largely by Terry Ryan, has arrived. This



# Introduction

by Nick Nelson



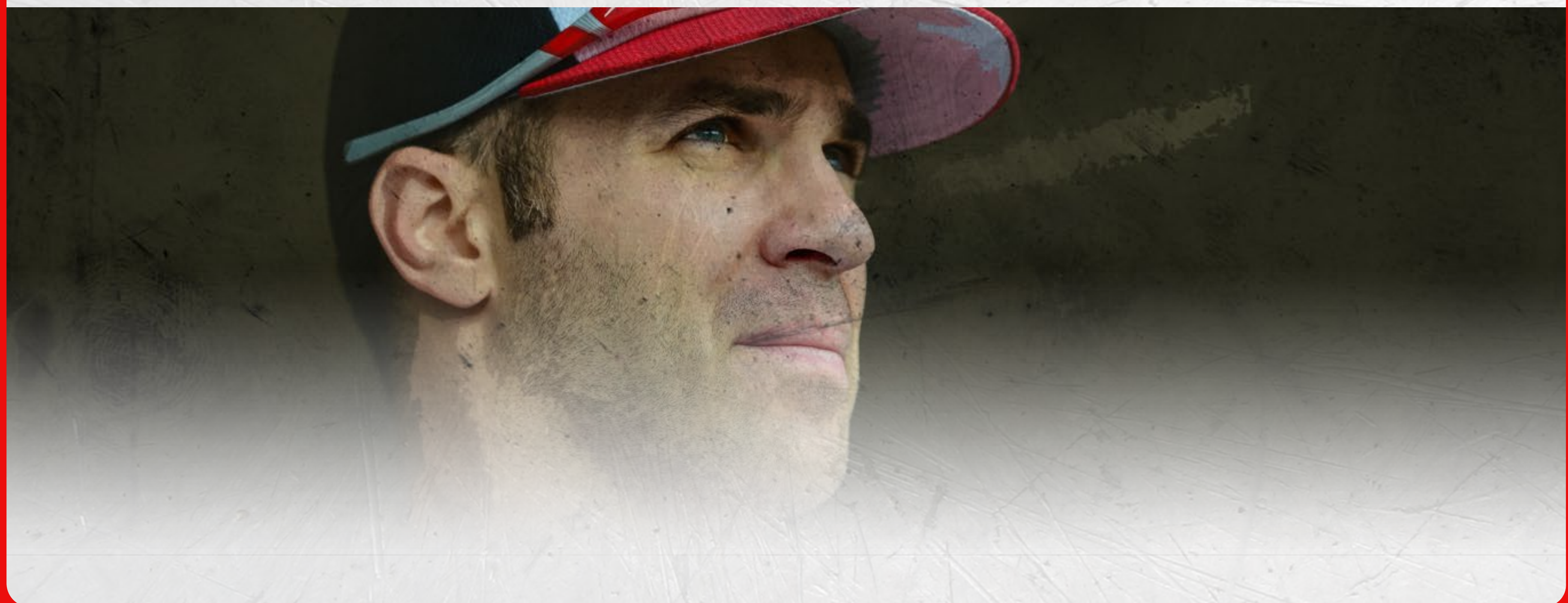
was made clear by a second-half surge that saw the Twins charge to the playoffs, driven by young players simultaneously realizing their potential.

Those pieces are locked in, and mostly very inexpensive, putting freshly minted Chief Baseball Officer Derek Falvey and his general manager Thad Levine in a very fortuitous position. This offseason, and going forward, there is significant flexibility to build around that core in whatever way they see fit.

Or, should we say, whatever way YOU see fit. As usual, this Offseason Handbook places you in the shoes of the top Twins decision-maker. We'll provide all the information you need to craft your own vision of the future.

What does the payroll layout look like? Who's eligible for arbitration? Which free agents are available at positions of need? What are the trade possibilities? How should you account for upcoming impact prospects within the system? All of that and more awaits you in the coming pages.

So what are you waiting for? Dig in.





# Organizational Depth Analysis



For the Twins to have long-term, sustainable, championship-caliber success, they will need to continue developing players at each layer throughout the system.

In 2017, the Twins had the best overall winning percentage of any organization. The Chattanooga Lookouts and Elizabethton Twins won their league championships. Every affiliate made the playoffs with the exception of the Rochester Red Wings, who went 80-62 but lost a tiebreaker for the final postseason spot.

You can view full charts of organizational depth at every position near the end of the Handbook.

Let's break it down, starting with the hitters.

## **CATCHERS**

Jason Castro is signed through the 2019 season, so he'll be around. He had his best offensive season since 2013 and his pitch framing statistics matched his reputation. Chris Gimenez didn't have great numbers, but everyone loves having him on the roster. He's a free agent and with Mitch Garver ready, it's hard to think Gimenez would be back.

### **Closest to the Big Leagues: Mitch Garver**

Twins Daily's Hitter of the Year in 2014 and 2017, Garver had a very nice year at the plate. He took a bunch of walks and showed really good power in terms of both doubles and home runs in Rochester. He made his big-league debut in August and is certainly ready for a bigger role in the majors.



# Organizational Depth Analysis



## **Top Prospect: Ben Rortvedt**

Rortvedt was one of the youngest regulars in the Midwest League in 2017. While he struggled immensely at the plate in the first couple of months, he showed improvement as the season went along. Defensively, Rortvedt is already very good and can get better. He's got the athleticism and a strong, accurate arm.

## **Sleeper: Mitchell Kranson**

While Brian Navarreto got to AA late in the season due to his advanced defense and cannon of an arm, Kranson has become one to watch as well. He actually did more catching when he moved up to Ft. Myers at the season's midway point. He's got some work to do behind the plate, but he's got a strong, left-handed swing that could generate power in time.

## **FIRST BASE**

Joe Mauer is in the final year of his eight-year contract in 2018. He's coming off of his best season since 2013. Could he come back for 2019 and beyond? Certainly. There isn't an heir apparent near the big leagues, but there is talent in the pipeline.

## **Closest to the Big Leagues: Brent Rooker**

The Twins drafted Rooker in the 38th round of the 2016 draft following his junior year at Mississippi State. He returned for his senior season and won the Triple Crown in the SEC. Good decision. The Twins used their supplemental first-round pick this year to draft the 22-year-old again. He reached Ft. Myers this season, hitting a combined 18 home runs over 62 games in his pro debut, and could move up quickly in 2018. Rooker has been working some in the outfield, but if circumstances dictate, he could be playing first base for the Twins as soon as 2019.



# Organizational Depth Analysis



## **Top Prospect: Lewin Diaz**

Diaz received a big signing bonus out of the Dominican Republic in 2013. He's a big man (6-3, 250) with a ton of power potential. But he can also hit for average and use the whole field. As a 20-year-old in Cedar Rapids in 2017, he hit .292 with 33 doubles and 12 home runs.

## **Sleeper: Zander Wiel**

The 24-year-old was Minnesota's 12th-round draft pick in 2015 out of Vanderbilt. This year with the Miracle, he hit .250 but got on base over 34% of the time and added 30 doubles, six triples and 13 home runs (which is good for the Florida State League). If he were to get to the big leagues, it would be on the strength of his bat.

## **SECOND BASE**

The Twins have a pretty good second baseman in the big leagues. Brian Dozier had his fourth straight exceptional season and is signed through 2018, so the Twins will need to make a determination on whether to extend him or trade him. While there may not be a lot of prospects at this position, remember that there are some shortstops who could move to second base as well.

## **Closest to the Big Leagues: Ryan Walker**

Walker was the Twins' 18th-round pick in 2013 out of Texas-Arlington. He has moved up gradually, and spent the 2017 season in AA Chattanooga. He had played 83 games there in 2016 and then 108 games in 2017. A smooth fielder who can play all three infield spots. He hit just .234 but got on base 33% of the time. The skinny 25-year-old has worked hard to add weight and maintain it throughout the season.



# Organizational Depth Analysis



## **Top Prospect: Travis Blankenhorn**

He ended the 2016 season with a month in Cedar Rapids and that's where he spent his age-20 season as well. The former third-round pick played the first half of the season at third base and then moved over to second for the latter half. He's got some swing-and-miss in his smooth, left-handed swing, but offers real power potential. He hit .251/343/.441 (.784) with 22 doubles, 11 triples and 13 home runs. He also stole 13 bases.

## **Sleeper: Luis Arraez**

After hitting .347 in Cedar Rapids as a 19-year-old in 2016, Arraez hit .335 in 45 games in the Venezuelan Winter League. He moved up to Ft. Myers to start the 2017 season but after going 5-for-13 (.385) in the first three games, he tore his ACL and missed the remainder of the season. While he isn't the best athlete, he has shown an advanced ability to hit and hopefully will be able to start where he left off before the injury.

## **THIRD BASE**

Miguel Sano certainly showed glimpses of being a solid defensive third baseman, but the organization will need to figure out if that's where his future lies. His move across the diamond to first seems more a matter of when, not if. Eduardo Escobar stepped up for the Twins this year when Sano was sidelined.

## **Closest to the Big Leagues: TJ White**

White's 2017 season started about six weeks late as he remained in extended spring training to work on his swing. It appears to have worked, as he put together his best season as a pro. White hit .276/.358/.484 (.842) with 26 doubles and 14 home runs. Already 25, he should spend 2018 in Rochester and be just one call away.



# Organizational Depth Analysis



## **Top Prospect: Jose Miranda**

While he was drafted as a shortstop and played mostly second base in 2017 at Elizabethton, he's got room to grow and will likely move over to third base in the not-too-distant future. Miranda, one of the Twins two supplemental 2nd round picks in 2016, turned 19 just as the Elizabethton season began. He went on to hit .283/.340/.484 (.824) with eight doubles and 11 home runs.

## **Sleeper: Chris Paul**

Paul is part of the Twins contingent in the Arizona Fall League this year. He got off to a very fast start for the Miracle in 2017 and was hitting over .350 at the end of May. However, the 24-year-old went on the disabled list with a broken hamate bone which cost him over two months of his season. He returned to the Miracle, playing both first base and third base.

## **SHORTSTOP**

Jorge Polanco had a season full of ups and downs. At the end of July, he would certainly have been sent to the minor leagues if that was an option. But he finished the season with two very strong months that saw him become the team's No. 3 hitter. Defensively, he was at least adequate, so will Polanco be the Twins shortstop of the future? Ehire Adrianza is also on hand.

## **Closest to the Big Leagues: Nick Gordon**

Gordon was the Twins first-round pick (5th overall) in the 2014 draft out of an Orlando high school. He has moved up one level each year and spent the 2017 season in Chattanooga. It's been a busy 12 months as he played (well) in the AFL and then received an invitation to big-league spring training. The 21-year-old was a Southern League All Star and played in the Futures Game. Some still question his ability to stay at shortstop, but he'll be given every opportunity to stick.



# Organizational Depth Analysis



## **Top Prospects: Royce Lewis, Wander Javier**

Royce Lewis joins Nick Gordon as a consensus Top 30 prospect in all of baseball. He was the #1 overall pick in June out of high school in California. He debuted in the GCL, but he ended the season by hitting .296 in 18 games in Cedar Rapids. He can hit, has tremendous speed and will stay at shortstop at least for the time being. His makeup is tremendous. But Wander Javier is also a top prospect. He spent the season in Elizabethton where he hit .299 and got on base 38% of the time. He added 13 doubles and four homers. Both are 18 and both should start the season in Cedar Rapids. It will be interesting to see how the playing time is allocated defensively.

## **Sleeper: Jermaine Palacios**

Meanwhile, Palacios regained the prospect status he established in 2015 when he came to the States and dominated the GCL and Elizabethton. He struggled offensively in Cedar Rapids in 2016 and his season came to an end early when he was hit by pitch in the hand. But Palacios got off to a fast start in his return to the Kernels in 2017, earning a midseason promotion to Ft. Myers. Combined, he hit .296/.333/.454 (.788) with 21 doubles, ten triples and 13 home runs. The Twins also drafted Ricky De La Torre in 2017 and signed Dominican shortstop Jelfry Marte to a \$3 million bonus.

## **OUTFIELDERS**

The Twins have a high-potential outfield that should be in the organization for several years. Eddie Rosario took a big stride forward in 2017. Byron Buxton showed down the stretch just how much of a difference-maker he can be. Max Kepler showed once again that he belongs, hinting occasionally at greater potential. All are 26 or under. It's an outfield that could be difficult to break into, but injuries and trades are always a possibility.



# Organizational Depth Analysis



## **Closest to the Big Leagues: Zack Granite, Daniel Palka, LaMonte Wade**

We saw a little bit of Zack Granite in 2017. He showed that he can put together a quality at bat and play good defense around the outfield. Speed is his game, but it's not clear if he has enough bat to be a viable starter. Daniel Palka missed a couple of months this year, but with his power, he can play some role in the big leagues, though we'll have to accept a lot of strikeouts. LaMonte Wade had a good season in AA and again walked more than he struck out. He can play center, though he is more of a corner outfielder. While he hasn't hit for a lot of power, the potential is there.

## **Top Prospects: Brent Rooker, Akil Baddoo, Aaron Whitefield**

Rooker was already mentioned in the first base discussion as well, but they want him to continue to play the corner outfield positions. It's his bat they will want in the big leagues, and when he's ready and there is a need at any of those positions, he'll likely be up. Akil Baddoo was the Twins Daily choice for Short-Season Minor League Hitter of the Year. He moved up to Elizabethton when Rooker moved up to Ft. Myers and was an ignitor at the top of their lineup. He brings a combination of power and speed, but in August, he was on base over 50% of the time too. Aaron Whitefield may be more of a sleeper, but is one of the best athletes in the entire organization. The Australian has only been playing baseball for three years and more than held his own in the Midwest League, hitting 11 homers and stealing 33 bases. He also plays center field really well.

## **Sleepers: Jaylin Davis, Shane Carrier, Jean-Carlos Arias**

Jaylin Davis has as much power as anyone in the organization. He has also greatly improved his defense. However, for him to take the next step and eventually get to the big leagues, he will need to reduce the strikeouts. Shane Carrier struggled early in the season with the Kernels. He went back to Extended Spring, hit very well with the E-Twins and returned to the Kernels where he was much improved. He also has a lot of power potential.



# Organizational Depth Analysis



Jean-Carlos Arias is another power-speed combo guy. He spent his second season in the GCL, though he was much more prepared in 2017 and it showed in the numbers. Arias is all about potential.

## STARTING PITCHERS

It all comes down to pitching, and while the Twins did get better in 2017 (thanks largely to the defense), there is still a lot of room for improvement. Ervin Santana and Jose Berrios are a nice start in the rotation. Adalberto Mejia showed signs of maybe being someone to grow with. Kyle Gibson's final two months make him intriguing. But more pitching is needed, and it would be nice to see a good power pitcher, maybe even an ace, in the mix.

### **Closest to the Big Leagues: Aaron Slegers, Stephen Gonsalves, Dietrich Enns**

We saw Aaron Slegers make three starts. The first went well. The second didn't, and the third came when he hadn't pitched in nearly a month. He had a great season for the Red Wings. Dietrich Enns came to the Twins in the Jaime Garcia deal. He made a start for the Twins before going on the DL. The left-hander could get starts in 2018, but is also a DFA candidate this offseason. Stephen Gonsalves is the Twins' top pitching prospect, and also the closest. In fact, late in the year a strong case could have been made to call him up. Instead, he'll wait until 2018. He should be given an opportunity to start coming out of spring training but may return to Rochester to start the year. He took another step forward in 2017 despite missing nearly two months with shoulder discomfort.

### **Top Prospects: Fernando Romero, Felix Jorge, Zack Littell**

Along with Gonsalves, Fernando Romero has the potential to be a top-of-the-rotation starter. He had a strong first full season since returning from Tommy John surgery. He throws hard, reaching into the upper-90s, and has a good slider.



# Organizational Depth Analysis



He also has a changeup that's been improving. He should surface in the big leagues in 2018. Felix Jorge made two starts for the Twins in the middle of the season, called up straight from AA. He wasn't ready, but he was on the 40-man roster and held his own in one start before struggling in the second. Zack Littell was the key piece that came back to the Twins from the Yankees in the Jaime Garcia deal. Combined between the two organizations, he went 20-1 on the season. His stock really improved in 2017 and many now believe he can be a mid-rotation starter. Gonsalves, Romero, Jorge and Littell (along with Slegers) will likely comprise the Rochester Red Wings season-opening rotation.

## **Sleepers: Cody Stashak, Tyler Wells, Sean Poppen**

It was an injury-plagued season for Stashak, but when healthy, he throws in the low-90s with really good control. Tyler Wells had the best stuff of any of the Kernels starters in 2017. He's a big, tall, sturdy right hander with a good fastball and two really good breaking balls. He missed time on a couple of DL stints, but he could take off in 2018. Sean Poppen went to Harvard, but he was more than just a smart pitcher. He works in the low-90s with a good four-pitch mix.

## **RELIEF PITCHERS**

### **Closest to the Big Leagues: John Curtiss, Gabriel Moya, Jake Reed**

John Curtiss was the 2017 Twins Daily Minor League Relief Pitcher of the Year. He went nearly 2 ½ months before giving up a run. He moved up to Rochester and continued to pitch well until he was promoted to the Twins in late August. Gabriel Moya came over from the Diamondbacks organization in the John Ryan Murphy trade. The left-hander was one of the best in the minor leagues in 2017, and when the Chattanooga season was over, he joined the Twins for the final two weeks. Jake Reed suffered an oblique injury on the final day of spring training. It cost him over two months of the season. He struggled at times with control, but his stuff remains tremendous.



# Organizational Depth Analysis



## **Top Prospects: Tyler Jay, Nick Burdi, Alex Robinson**

In spring training, the Twins announced that Tyler Jay was moving to the bullpen full-time. Unfortunately, he fought a couple of injuries and spent most the season rehabbing before joining the Miracle late. He's making up some of his lost innings in the Arizona Fall League. Nick Burdi was pitching well early in the season, but ended up needing Tommy John surgery and will likely miss at least half of the 2018 season. If these guys can get healthy they can be late-inning difference-makers. Lefty Alex Robinson gets tons of whiffs with a a fastball in the upper 90s and a nearly-unhittable slider.

## **Sleepers: Nick Anderson, Andrew Vasquez, Hector Lujan**

Nick Anderson signed with the Twins late in the 2015 season out of independent baseball. He's been as good as anyone in the system not named Hildenberger ever since. The Brainerd native ended the 2017 season by pitching well in Chattanooga. Already 27, Anderson won't appear on prospect lists, but his mid-90s fastball will give him an opportunity. Andrew Vasquez and Hector Lujan were both drafted out of Westmont College in 2015. Lujan led the Kernels in saves and reached 95 mph. Vasquez is a big left-hander with really good stuff and a heavy fastball. He will be working in the Arizona Fall League.





# 40-Man Roster



Here's a look at the Twins' 40-man roster, as it stood at season's end. As you can see, there are a few clear candidates for removal (some of that may have already happened by the time you're reading this). Those include free agents, who are denoted with asterisks. Players on the 60-day DL do not occupy a 40-man spot but will need to be re-added when healthy.

## Pitchers

Matt Belisle*	Jose Berrios	Buddy Boshers	Alan Busenitz
Bartolo Colon*	John Curtiss	Tyler Duffey	Dietrich Enns
Dillon Gee*	Kyle Gibson	Trevor Hildenberger	Felix Jorge
Adalberto Mejia	Gabriel Moya	Glen Perkins	Ryan Pressly
Taylor Rogers	Fernando Romero	Randy Rosario	Ervin Santana
Aaron Slegers	Michael Tonkin	Nik Turley	

## Hitters

Ehire Adrianza	Byron Buxton	Jason Castro	Brian Dozier
Eduardo Escobar	Mitch Garver	Niko Goodrum	Chris Gimenez
Zack Granite	Robbie Grossman	Max Kepler	Joe Mauer
Daniel Palka	Jorge Polanco	Eddie Rosario	Miguel Sano
Kennys Vargas			

## 60-Day Disabled List

JT Chargois	Phil Hughes	Trevor May	Ryan O'Rourke
Hector Santiago*			

\*Free Agent



# Payroll Analysis



## Wait 'Til Next Year!

“Wait ‘Til Next Year!” has been the refrain of optimistic Twins fans for – well, pretty much the entire decade. The hope was that the next year would bring fewer injuries (2011) or new coaching (2014) or new management (2016) or breakthrough young talent (2012-2017).

Eventually, we’ve seen all of those, but there is one piece we have not seen: aggressive spending on free agents. We’ve seen a couple of significant signings – some good (Ervin Santana) and some bad (Ricky Nolasco) – but the Twins’ payroll has been at or below the same level since they moved into Target Field.

With a competitive team on the upswing, and a new management team in place, could this be the year that the Twins leverage the free agent market for their ultimate push to a championship level team? An analysis of the Twins’ committed payroll suggests... probably not.

### **1. We don’t know exactly how much they’ll spend, but payroll likely won’t increase much.**

Per Cot’s Baseball Contracts, the Twins opening day payroll has been stuck in the \$105-108M range for spending the last three years. Plus, the MOST this franchise has ever spent was \$113M, back in 2011.

Also, Twins General Manager Thad Levine has already told us not to expect a sudden change in payroll. This August, at *Baseball Prospectus’* event at Target Field, Levine said, “We all know where Minnesota’s payroll ranks among the 30 clubs. We’re not going to be in the top 10, and we’re fine with that.”



# Payroll Analysis



Yes, they should see their revenues increase next year, so maybe they'll be able to increase payroll a bit, but there is no indication that they will significantly. *Forbes* estimates that even in the midst of this decade of futility, the Twins gross revenues increased from \$223M to \$247M from 2015 through 2017. But we didn't see any movement in payroll during that time. In fact, maintaining their same level of payroll moved the Twins downwards in spending compared to other teams as markets inflated.

I'll be optimistic and predict a very moderate increase of \$110-\$115M next year.

## **2. That doesn't give them a lot of payroll room this offseason; perhaps an additional \$15-20M.**

The Twins have about \$96M committed to their 2018 roster, even if they don't sign anyone as a free agent. The estimates are in the table after the story. Despite having many young and cost-controlled players, they have six commitments that account for over \$72M of that \$95M. \$23M of that is the much-lamented Joe Mauer deal, but another \$19.2M looks even worse: Phil Hughes is owed \$13.2M and Byung-Ho Park has guaranteed money (for both him and his Korean team) of about \$6M. And both of those deals will be in force in 2019, too, unlike Mauer's contract which expires next year.

## **3. Speaking of bad contracts expiring, wait 'til next year. (Maybe.)**

This is the offseason before two consecutive big years of expiring contracts. Next year, the Twins could have as many as \$45.5M come off the books when Mauer's contract and two others expire. Unfortunately, those two belong to Brian Dozier and Ervin Santana (if they decline his 2019 option), but the good news is that \$45.5M can add a lot of talent to replace them. Eduardo Escobar's \$5 million will also come off the books unless you extend him or re-sign him as a free agent.



# Payroll Analysis



Similarly, after 2019, the Twins could have as many as four contracts expire. Hughes' and Park's terrible contracts will come off the books, Jason Castro's deal will end, and Kyle Gibson (if the Twins continue to offer him arbitration) will become a free agent. This year those four players are responsible for ~\$31.7M in contracts.

Add them all up, and of the \$95.2M that we estimate is committed for 2018, \$82.2M could be freed up for the 2019-20 offseason. If you're pumped about this offseason, that is little consolation. But it should free up the new management team to be more aggressive in the future on the free agent market, even more so if ownership unties the purse strings a bit more. But all of that is unlikely to take place this offseason.

The Twins late season surge gave fans a glimpse of what their team will look like for the next five years. But the familiar mantra – "Wait 'til next year" – will likely apply regarding the team's offseason spending, unless you get creative or get the uncharacteristic go-ahead on a big increase.





# 2018 Payroll



## Starters

C	Jason Castro	\$8.0m
1B	Joe Mauer	\$23m
2B	Brian Dozier	\$9m
3B	Miguel Sano	\$550k
SS	Jorge Polanco	\$550k
OF	Eddie Rosario	\$550k
OF	Byron Buxton	\$550k
OF	Max Kepler	\$550k
DH	Robbie Grossman	\$2.0m

## Rotation

SP	Ervin Santana	\$13.5m
SP	Jose Berrios	\$550k
SP	Kyle Gibson	\$4.5m
SP	Adalberto Mejia	\$550k
SP	n/a	

## Other

SP	Phil Hughes	\$13.2m
1B	Byung Ho Park	\$6.0m

## Bench

OF	Zack Granite	\$550k
C IF	Eduardo Escobar	\$5.0m
M IF	Ehire Adrianza	\$1.0m
C	Mitch Garver	\$550k

## Relievers

CL	n/a	
RH RP	T. Hildenberger	\$550k
LH RP	Taylor Rogers	\$550k
RH RP	Ryan Pressly	\$2.0m
RH RP	Alan Busenitz	\$550k
RH RP	Tyler Duffey	\$550k
RH RP	Trevor May	\$1.0m

2018 Total  
**\$96m**



# Arbitration Decisions



Each year, the Twins have a number of players eligible for arbitration. This designation is for those who are beyond three years of service time but are still under team control. When a team tenders a contract to an arbitration eligible player, the two sides must come to agreement on a salary figure for the coming year. If no agreement is reached the case goes in front of an independent panel, but this is exceedingly rare.

Below you will find Minnesota's seven players up for arbitration in 2018, along with pros and cons that could be factored into determining a salary. We included our estimate for what they would stand to make next year, so you can plan your payroll. In each case, you can also choose to non-tender the player and move on.

## **Eduardo Escobar, IF**

3rd Year Arb

2016 Salary: \$2.15M | 2017 Salary: \$2.6M | 2018 Estimate: \$5M

His Case: Escobar earned a meager half-million raise after putting up his worst season as a Twin in 2016, but rebounded in a big way this year with 21 homers and a .758 OPS while proving invaluable during Miguel Sano's absence. He's in line for a healthy boost in his final year of arbitration, and is a candidate for an extension if you want to keep the popular clubhouse fixture around.

## **Ryan Pressly, RP**

2nd Year Arb

2016 Salary: \$500K | 2017 Salary: \$1.175M | 2018 Estimate: \$2M

His Case: The right-hander turned it around after a miserable first half to reestablish his value and utility. His overall numbers still weren't great (4.70 ERA, 4.36 FIP), and arbitration jumps for non-closer relievers are generally pretty small so Pressly should remain inexpensive. Given the gas he brings and the



# Arbitration Decisions



improvement he showed down the stretch, keeping him around is basically a no-brainer.

## **Kyle Gibson, SP**

2nd Year Arb

2016 Salary: \$500K | 2017 Salary: \$2.9M | 2018 Estimate: \$5.5M

His Case: For much of the season it looked like Gibson was on track for a non-tender, but he redeemed himself in a big way by transforming into one of the team's most reliable starters after the All Star break. He got a sizable uptick in 2017 salary despite posting worse numbers and throwing fewer innings in 2016, so expect him to vault past five million this time around. Still a great deal if he's anything like the August/September version going forward.

## **Robbie Grossman, OF**

1st Year Arb

2016 Salary: \$500K | 2017 Salary: \$500K | 2018 Estimate: \$2M

His Case: At age 29, after spending parts of five seasons in the majors, Grossman will finally get paid. He won't make a ton in his first go at arbitration, given the lack of big counting numbers (walks don't pay that much), but the outfielder should at least quadruple his customary \$500K salary.

## **Chris Gimenez, C**

1st Year Arb

2016 Salary: \$500K | 2017 Salary: \$950K | 2018 Estimate: \$1.5M

His Case: The veteran backstop gave the Twins everything they could have asked for from a backup catcher and then some, even helping out on the mound and in the outfield occasionally. He made 225 plate appearances and 54 starts behind the



# Arbitration Decisions



plate, both career highs.

## **Trevor May, SP**

1st Year Arb

2016 Salary: \$500K | 2017 Salary: \$500K | 2018 Estimate: \$1M

His Case: This is a tricky one, because May will be entering arbitration for the first time after missing an entire season due to Tommy John surgery. Although he was being brought along as a starter last spring before tearing his UCL, the Twins can still frame May as a reliever since that's how he was used in 2016. This will keep his cost down. He's certainly a wild card for the pitching staff.

## **Ehire Adrianza, IF**

1st Year Arb

2016 Salary: \$500K | 2017 Salary: \$600K | 2018 Estimate: \$1M

His Case: Adrianza logged his most time ever in the majors this year and was also more productive than ever before. He played all over the field and held his own at the dish. Sporadically used utility guys don't tend to earn huge dollars in arbitration but the 28-year-old should get around a million in 2018.



# Free Agency Overview



## Free Agency: Will You Pay to Play?

The free agent market typically has not been a major source of impact talent for the Twins. But in 2017 their success was fueled significantly by two players acquired through this avenue: Ervin Santana, who led the rotation in yet another strong campaign, and Jason Castro, who proved a quality addition in his first year with Minnesota.

This team desperately needed a steady front-end starter and a high-caliber defensive backstop, and this duo provided just that at an altogether reasonable cost (around \$20 million).

If the front office could hit on one or two free agents capable of delivering similarly at an area of need, it would go a long way toward pushing the Twins over the hump. Their model is largely dependent on building from within, but there are a few areas that could use outside help. Free agency costs them nothing but money, they should have \$15-20 million to spend plus more room in the future.

The following pages will focus on three primary needs for the 2018 roster: Starting Pitcher, Relief Pitcher and a Right-Handed Bat. Afterward, we'll cover a few noteworthy names at other positions, in case you wanna get wild.



# Free Agency: Starters



Acquiring starting pitchers through free agency is a fickle endeavor. Sometimes it goes right (Ervin Santana). Sometimes it goes wrong (Ricky Nolasco). Sometimes it goes very right, and then very wrong (Phil Hughes). Assessing these arms and how they'll progress over the life of a contract will forever be an inexact science. But aiming higher typically yields better results.

The Twins already have a number of credible starters in the mix, but if they are setting their sights on a postseason run, they could use a stud to slot in alongside Santana and Jose Berrios. This year's class features some very noteworthy names.



**Jake Arrieta, RHP**

**Age: 32 | Previous Team: Cubs**

**2017 Stats: 168.1 IP, 14-10, 3.53 ERA, 1.22 WHIP**

Arrieta had one of the best pitching seasons in recent memory when he won the Cy Young in 2015, and he won 18 games in 2016. He didn't look like himself in the first half this year, but pulled things together in the second half, posting a 2.28 ERA after the break. He turns 32 in March and his fastball velocity was at a career low (92.1 MPH), so there might be some hesitation in his market, but the Scott Boras client will get paid.

Estimated Contract: 6 years, \$168 million



**Lance Lynn, RHP**

**Age: 30 | Previous Team: Cardinals**

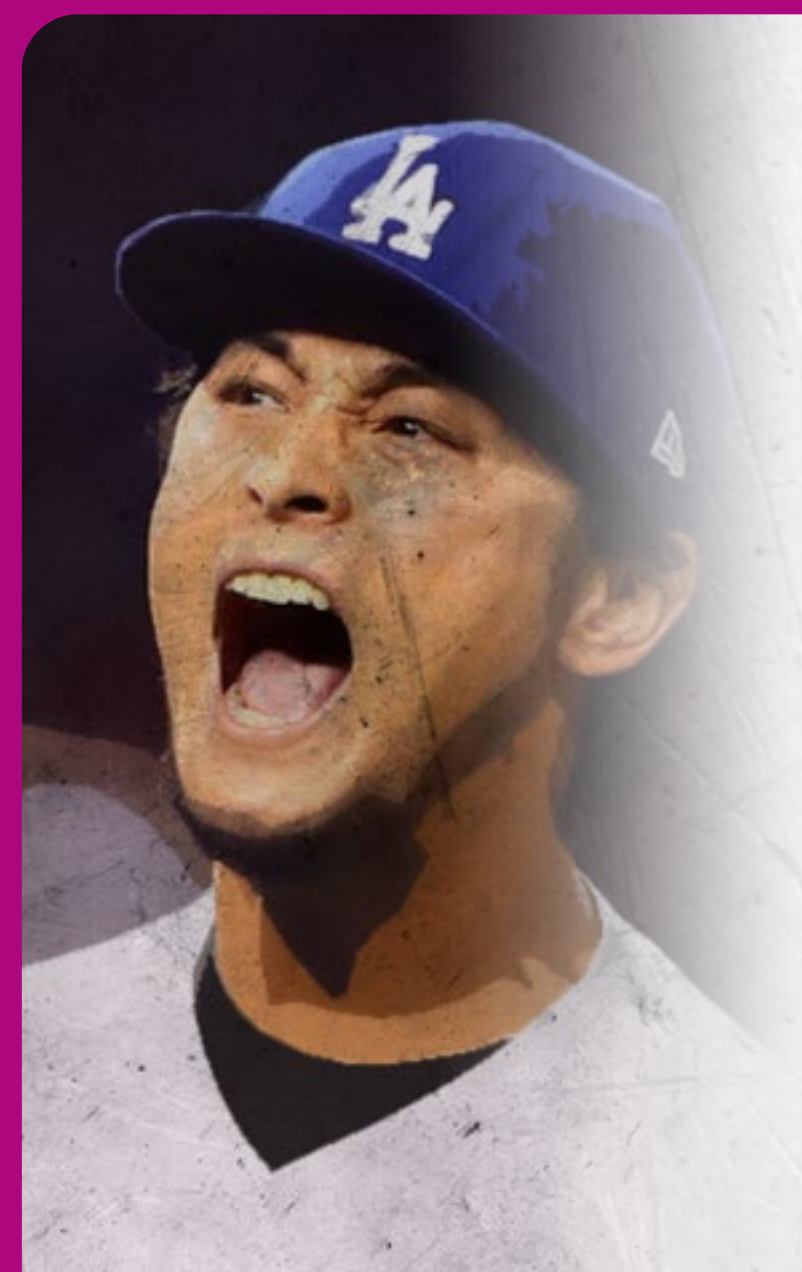
**2017 Stats: 186.1 IP, 11-8, 3.43 ERA, 1.23 WHIP**

After missing 2016 due to Tommy John surgery, Lynn came back strong in 2017, starting every fifth day and getting better as the season progressed. His velocity trended upward throughout the summer and in the second half he mostly looked like a rotation-fronter. Lynn has a 3.38 career ERA and has been extremely reliable in St. Louis. He's also two years younger than Arrieta.

Estimated Contract: 6 years, \$150 million



# Free Agency: Starters



**Yu Darvish, RHP**

**Age: 31 | Previous Team: Dodgers**

**2017 Stats: 186.2 IP, 10-12, 3.86 ERA, 1.16 WHIP**

He is one of the game's premier strikeout pitchers, with an 11.0 K/9 rate that ranks first among active starters since coming over from Japan in 2012. The results haven't always lined up with the spectacular stuff, and this year in particular Darvish had his battles, especially with the long ball. He posted the highest ERA and lowest strikeout rate of his career in 2017, so there's some risk here, but Darvish certainly has the ability to slot as an ace.

Estimated Contract: 5 years, \$135 million



**Trevor Cahill, RHP**

**Age: 30 | Previous Team: Royals**

**2017 Stats: 84 IP, 4-3, 4.93 ERA, 1.62 WHIP**

We've covered the three biggest names on the market. Cahill doesn't rank anywhere near them, but he does look like one of the most logical fits for the Twins. The righty battled through shoulder issues and struggled after the Royals acquired him ahead of the deadline, lowering his stock. It might be an opportunity to pounce with a high-dollar one-year deal. Before the injury, Cahill was a strikeout machine heading toward a hefty payday.

Estimated Contract: 1 year, \$12 million



**Chris Tillman, RHP**

**Age: 29 | Previous Team: Orioles**

**2017 Stats: 93 IP, 1-7, 7.84 ERA, 1.89 WHIP**

Tillman falls in the same category as Cahill: a high-ceiling starter looking to make good and reestablish value. However, he has far more to prove. Tillman missed all of April with a shoulder issue, and never looked right after coming back. He spent September in the pen, and finished with hideous numbers. But he had previously been a very effective starter and he's under 30. The risk is minimal, and the payoff could be huge.

Estimated Contract: 1 year, \$6 million



## Free Agency: Starters



### Other Options

**Brett Anderson, LHP (30):** Hope is fading for the perpetually injured southpaw. He has eclipsed 50 innings in a season once since 2011.

**Andrew Cashner, RHP (31):** He had a decent year for the Rangers (3.40 ERA in 28 starts), but an ugly 1.3 K/BB ratio should curb your enthusiasm.

**Jhoulys Chacin, RHP (30):** Could be a value buy with decent stuff and a respectable track record, but he's more of a back-end type.

**Alex Cobb, RHP (30):** Cobb's market will be interesting to see. He hasn't been quite the same since returning from Tommy John surgery but was still quite effective this year (3.66 ERA, 1.22 WHIP) and set a career high for innings.

**Scott Feldman, RHP (35):** Hittable strike-thrower whose ERA has hovered around average throughout his career. If you want a cost-effective veteran for the fourth or fifth spot, he's a solid bet.

**Doug Fister, RHP (34):** He's a much less reliable version of Feldman. We'd pass.

**Jaime Garcia, LHP (31):** The left-hander enjoyed a lengthy and illustrious career with the Twins, making one start in July as the Twins flipped from buyers to sellers. On the right terms he'd be a fine addition, but his upside is limited.

**Jeremy Hellickson, RHP (30):** He may end up regretting his decision to re-up with Philly on a qualifying one-year offer. Hell Boy was at his worst in 2016 (5.43 ERA). Potential buy-low opp.

**Derek Holland, LHP (31):** In 2016 with the White Sox, Holland went from being a mediocre lefty to a mediocre lefty who couldn't throw strikes. He may have to settle for a minor-league deal.

**Ubaldo Jimenez, RHP (34):** He still shows the occasional flashes of brilliance, but they are entirely too rare. When opponents made contact they absolutely hammered him.



## Free Agency: Starters



**John Lackey, RHP (39):** His final year with the Cubs was a rough one, as Lackey led the league in home runs allowed. But his other peripherals weren't bad. You'll have to pony up but Lackey is a bounce-back candidate and could provide the type of experienced veteran presence Bartolo Colon offered.

**Francisco Liriano, LHP (34):** Reunion time? All these years later, Liriano is still struggling to find himself. He pitched out of the bullpen exclusively after a deadline trade to Houston, and might be more interesting in that capacity if he could just throw some dang strikes.

**Michael Pineda, RHP (29):** He's one of the game's better strikeout pitchers and a former young phenom, but Pineda has already gone through a bunch of shoulder issues and he underwent Tommy John in June. Do you ink him on a two-year contract, hoping he can help down the stretch in 2018 but more with an eye on scoring big value in 2019?

**Tyson Ross, RHP (30):** He looked horrendous in his first year back from thoracic outlet surgery, but history tells us it can take a while to re-emerge from such procedures. Sometimes it never happens. But Ross is a talent worth gambling on, and still fairly young.

**CC Sabathia, LHP (37):** As a member of the Indians and Yankees, he's been a thorn in Minnesota's side for almost two decades. His performance in the past two seasons suggests he's not done getting results. Plus, if he joins up, he'll never need to face the Twins' bunt-happy offense.

**Masahiro Tanaka (29):** There is some thought Tanaka will choose to opt out of the 3 years and \$67M remaining on his contract with the Yankees. He'd be one of the youngest and highest-upside starters on the market.



# Free Agency: Relievers



The Twins bullpen was an area of concern heading into the 2017 season, and occasionally a costly weakness, but overall the unit acquitted itself nicely. There are a number of hurlers who did enough to make cases for jobs next year, including Taylor Rogers, Trevor Hildenberger, Tyler Duffey, Alan Busenitz and Ryan Pressly.

Yet, for the first time in memory, the team is heading into November without a closer. The guy who entered 2017 with the gig is available, and so is the guy who held it down in the final two months. Whether or not they target someone with closer experience, the Twins need to add some serious firepower to the back end.



**Wade Davis, RHP**

**Age: 32 | Previous Team: Cubs**

**2017 Stats: 58.2 IP, 2.30 ERA, 1.14 WHIP, 79/28 K/BB**

He's the one name in free agency that perfectly lines up with Minnesota's ostensible need: an experienced closer capable of shutting down games. To that end, he's a good bet. As Cubs closer, Davis didn't blow a save this year until September and is one of the game's most dominant arms. But he's also a heavily-used high-effort thrower with a history of elbow scares. Are you ready to put up Chapman type money for him?

Estimated Contract: 5 years, \$80 million



**Steve Cishek, RHP**

**Age: 31 | Previous Team: Rays**

**2017 Stats: 44.2 IP, 2.01 ERA, 0.90 WHIP, 41/14 K/BB**

Cishek has history as a closer and as a setup man. He's been successful at both. The sidearm sinkerballer is very much in the same mold as Trevor Hildenberger, but it doesn't hurt to have two such reliable options on hand. He's been an above-average reliever each of his six seasons in the league – the definition of steady.

Estimated Contract: 3 years, \$30 million



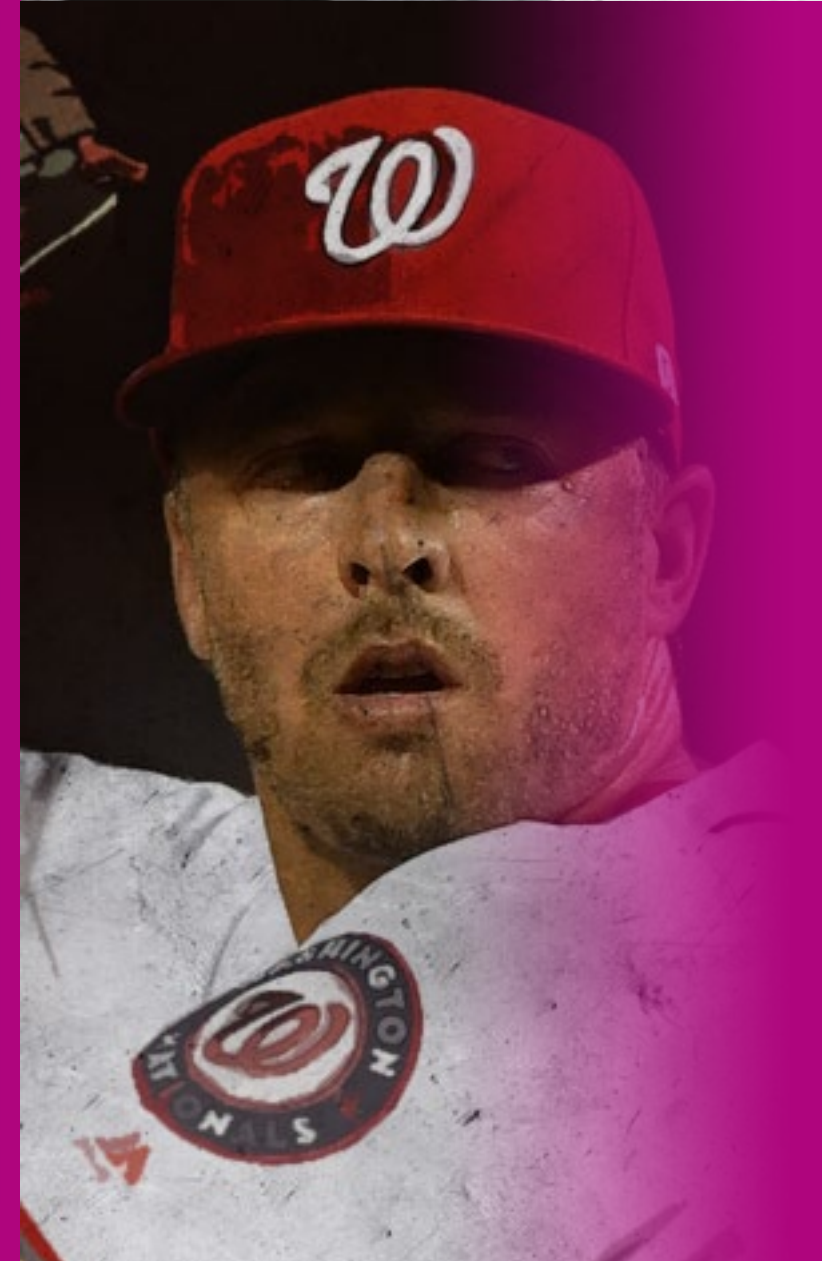
# Free Agency: Relievers



**Pat Neshek, RHP**  
Age: 37 | Previous Team: Rockies  
2017 Stats: 62.1 IP, 1.59 ERA, 0.87 WHIP, 69/6 K/BB

Time for a homecoming? The Brooklyn Park native came up with the Twins originally but has been away since 2010. He was at his best in 2017, making the All Star game and finishing with a ridiculous 69-to-6 K/BB ratio in 62 innings. On a short-term deal, he could help bridge to the next generation of young bullpen arms.

Estimated Contract: 2 years, \$17 million



**Brandon Kintzler, RHP**  
Age: 33 | Previous Team: Nationals  
2017 Stats: 71.1 IP, 3.03 ERA, 1.15 WHIP, 39/16 K/BB

We all know the story. The Twins went into seller mode just ahead of the deadline, and dealt their All Star closer to Washington. They did so knowing they'd have a chance to re-sign him a few months later. Now, Kintzler is on the table, and his heavy sinker still looks appealing after it continued to silence bats after the trade. His ability to induce whiffs continued to dwindle, though, so if he loses any of that sink...

Estimated Contract: 2 years, \$15 million



**Koji Uehara, RHP**  
Age: 42 | Previous Team: Cubs  
2017 Stats: 43.0 IP, 3.98 ERA, 1.16 WHIP, 50/12 K/BB

Set to turn 43 just after Opening Day, Uehara may elect to hang 'em up, but if he doesn't he would be a nice one-year addition and possible closer plug while you sort out your young arms.

Estimated Contract: 1 year, \$7 million



# Free Agency: Relievers



## Other Options

**Fernando Abad, LHP (32):** Feeling less than enthused with your left-hander situation? Abad still owns lefty bats, just as he did with the Twins in the first half of 2016. He shouldn't cost a ton.

**Andrew Bailey, RHP (33):** He'll be hunting for a minor-league deal after shoulder issues washed out almost his entire 2017. The Twins could offer him plenty of opportunity if he gets right. Formerly a Rookie of the Year and two-time All Star closer.

**Antonio Bastardo, LHP (32):** Another candidate for a minors deal. Hasn't been good for a couple years but was one of the league's best LH relievers in 2015.

**Matt Belisle, RHP (37):** Salvaged his value on a one-year deal in Minnesota with a strong second-half. Worth considering as an ongoing patch at closer, but you could easily aim higher.

**Tyler Clippard, RHP (33):** Buy-low option coming off a down year. Had a 2.77 ERA in the seven years prior.

**Luke Gregerson, RHP (33):** Trustworthy vet has posted career highs in K-rate the last two years and has plenty of postseason experience. A rich man's Belisle?

**David Hernandez, RHP (32):** Quality reliever who fired strikes at a career-best rate in 2017. He'd be a solid add for the seventh or eighth.

**Jake McGee, LHP (31):** More attractive option than many lefty relievers because he can get right-handers out too; he's actually been better against them in his career. He'd be pricy but arguably a worthwhile investment.

**Brandon Morrow (33):** Finally stayed healthy after a series of injury-ravaged years, and he was phenomenal out of the Dodgers bullpen. High-risk, high-reward.

**Juan Nicasio, RHP (31):** He was outstanding in his first year of full-time relief duty, pumping 95 MPH fastballs and nasty sliders.



## Free Agency: Relievers



**Seung-hwan Oh, RHP (35):** The Korean import was a big hit in his first year as Cardinals closer, but much less successful in his 2017 follow-up. He still wasn't bad, and has lots of experience in the ninth.

**Oliver Perez, LHP (36):** Lefty strikeout machine would add another weapon to the manager's late-inning arsenal.

**Fernando Rodney, RHP (41):** Want closing experience? Rodney offers plenty, ranking among the active leaders in saves. But his iffy control makes him a less-than-ideal bet.

**Sergio Romo, RHP (35):** His impeccable track record made his rough first half with the Dodgers surprising, but he returned to form after going to the Rays in July.

**Bryan Shaw, RHP (30):** At a position of volatility, Shaw has been the model of consistency – above-average every year since arriving in the majors in 2011.

**Anthony Swarzak, RHP (32):** If there's no bad blood, Swarzak would make sense in the late innings for the team that originally drafted and developed him, provided you believe in his 2016 breakout.





## Free Agency: RH Bats



In the past we've always separated this section by position. This year, that didn't seem like a logical way to survey the landscape for bats. The Twins don't have a need at any position, except perhaps DH. They are able to return the entire 2017 lineup, which was the league's youngest and easily among its most explosive.

What they need is depth, specifically in the form of at least one right-handed bat. Minnesota's starters at three of the four corner positions swing lefty. Same goes for their upcoming top prospect, Nick Gordon. Putting one more potent righty hitter at the manager's disposal would provide some much-needed balance.



### Eduardo Nunez, IF

Age: 30 | Previous Team: Red Sox

2017 Stats: .313/.341/.460, 12 HR, 58 RBI

If Nunez were interested in a reunion, the Twins would have to give it some thought. He's a right-handed hitter with defensive versatility, and as this team well knows, he brings a lot of energy and electricity to the field. However, he doesn't have a history of excelling against left-handers so his platoon benefit is somewhat negated.

Estimated Contract: 3 years, \$27 million



### Chris Young, OF

Age: 34 | Previous Team: Red Sox

2017 Stats: .235/.322/.387, 7 HR, 25 RBI

Young is a very logical fit on a team with lefty-hitting starters in the outfield corners. He could fill in for Rosario or Kepler against tough southpaws. But this hinges on him actually hitting well against the opposite side. He has generally done so in his career but batted .200 against left-handers in 2017.

Estimated Contract: 2 years, \$15 million



# Free Agency: RH Bats



**Matt Holliday, OF**  
**Age: 38 | Previous Team: Yankees**  
**2017 Stats: .231/.316/.432, 19 HR, 64 RBI**

The Yankees inked Holliday to a one-year deal and, while he was nothing special overall, he did hit .267/.366/.477 against lefties. The eight-time All Star isn't what he used to be, but has tons of experience playing for contenders and could be valuable in the right role. He could fill in mostly against southpaws at DH and first base. It'd be nice if he could occasionally spell Rosario or Kepler, but his outfield days are likely behind him.

Estimated Contract: 1 year, \$12 million



**Danny Valencia, 1B**  
**Age: 33 | Previous Team: Mariners**  
**2017 Stats: .256/.314/.411, 15 HR, 66 RBI**

Another familiar face. You may remember Valencia as the hotshot youngster whose rookie splash helped propel the Twins to their last playoff berth in 2010. Now, he's a veteran with a reliable skill: mashing lefty pitchers. He could platoon with Mauer at first and rotate in at DH, probably with a fairly low commitment.

Estimated Contract: 1 year, \$7 million



**Melvin Upton, Jr., OF**  
**Age: 33 | Previous Team: Giants**  
**2017 Stats: N/A**

Upton's appeal is similar to that of Young, as an outfielder who can shield the corners from lefties. His upside is higher – Upton is a better defender, capable of manning center, and he hit 20 home runs in 2016 with an .874 OPS against lefties. But his floor is much lower – he didn't play in the majors in 2017, released from a minor-league contract in August after dealing with thumb and shoulder issues. Why not bring him in for a look?

Estimated Contract: Minor-League Deal



## Free Agency: RH Bats



### Other Options

**Carlos Beltran, OF (40):** Switch-hitter could theoretically get most of the at-bats at DH, but he looked to be reaching the end of his rope in 2017.

**Franklin Gutierrez, OF (35):** Solid defensive outfielder has .838 OPS vs LHP in his career.

**Mike Napoli, 1B (36):** Twins were hot on him last offseason, but he ended up signing with the Rangers. Didn't have a great season but still hit 29 home runs.

**Mark Reynolds, 1B (34):** He's pretty much platoon-neutral, but Reynolds did enjoy a very solid season in 2017 (Coors Field caveat) and might look good as part-time DH.

**Jayson Werth, OF (38):** The experienced vet has a .928 lifetime OPS against lefties.





# Free Agency: Others to Watch



We've covered the three most evident needs for the Twins roster, laying out options based mostly on logic and precedent. Now, we'll let you dream a little. If the goal is to upgrade this team to a clear World Series contender, these major splashes would be a big step toward that goal.



## J.D. Martinez, OF

Age: 30 | Previous Team: Diamondbacks

2017 Stats: .303/.376/.690, 45 HR, 104 RBI

Imagine adding another elite bat to this already packed lineup. Martinez jolted his free agent appeal by going on a tear following his July trade to Arizona, launching 29 home runs in 62 games. As such, he'll be paid handsomely, but if you're willing to splurge Martinez would be an excellent DH against righties and corner outfielder against lefties. His addition would give Minnesota arguably the best offense in the game heading into 2018.

Estimated Contract: 6 years, \$144 million



## Carlos Santana, 1B

Age: 31 | Previous Team: Indians

2017 Stats: .259/.363/.455, 23 HR, 79 RBI

Designated hitter for 2018 and first baseman thereafter once Joe Mauer departs? Santana is a reliably excellent lineup piece – a switch-hitting on-base machine whose walk rate routinely ranks among the league's best. He also brings power, averaging 24 homers in his seven full seasons with Cleveland.

Estimated Contract: 4 years, \$84 million



# Free Agency: Others to Watch



**Zack Cozart, SS**

**Age: 32 | Previous Team: Reds**

**2017 Stats: .297/.385/.548, 24 HR, 63 RBI**

Right now, there's no evident need for a long-term shortstop. But if you were to trade Jorge Polanco, or deal Brian Dozier and move Polanco to short, that changes. Cozart enjoyed a timely breakout in his walk year with the Reds, delivering monster production to go along with characteristically stellar defense at short.

Estimated Contract: 4 years, \$80 million



**Mike Moustakas, 3B**

**Age: 29 | Previous Team: Royals**

**2017 Stats: .272/.314/.521, 38 HR, 85 RBI**

Moose heads into the open market with some serious momentum after a career-best season with the Royals in 2017. He obliterated his previous high for home runs (22 in 2015) and held his own against lefties. At 29, he's one of the younger players on this list. By signing him to play third, and making Miguel Sano full-time DH, you'd be upgrading the defense and lineup simultaneously.

Estimated Contract: 4 years, \$76 million



**Shohei Otani, SP/DH**

**Age: 23 | Previous Team: Hokkaido Nippon-Ham Fighters**

**2017 Stats (NPB): .342/.412/.560, 8 HR, 31 RBI**

Otani, a Japanese superstar who has made clear his intentions to sign with an MLB club this winter, is perhaps the most interesting figure this offseason. He's a great hitter, as the numbers above illustrate, but he also touches triple digits on the mound. He'd be a heck of an addition to the rotation. Because he's under 25, the international signing system limits his earning potential, so the decision will come down to more than money.

Estimated Contract: Two-year minor-league deal with \$10 million bonus



# Feature Article

by Nick Nelson



## Hip-Hip, Jorge! Trade Chip, or Nay?

In all my years watching baseball, I don't think I've ever seen a more remarkable turnaround than Jorge Polanco's August 2017 awakening.

Plenty of players have gone from cold to hot in a season. That's not a rare occurrence in this game of streaks and slumps. But at a time when the Twins badly needed him to get it going, Polanco flipped a switch and went from arctic to aflame.

In June, his .520 OPS ranked 11th-worst in the majors. In July, that figure dropped to an unsightly .276 – last out of 270 big-leaguers. Actually, it's the lowest OPS any player has posted in a month with 50 or more plate appearances since 2015.

Polanco looked badly overmatched, but the Twins, handcuffed by a lack of minor-league options, had no choice but to keep him on the roster. And suddenly, as the trade deadline came and went, with Minnesota selling and seemingly fading from contention, Polanco figured it out. All of it.

In August, he was one of baseball's best hitters, posting a 1.099 OPS in August that ranked 12th out of 289 big-leaguers, sandwiched between Mike Trout and Yoenis Cespedes. At one point he rattled off multiple hits in five consecutive games. At another, he homered in four straight. At no point did he let up even a bit, with the thunderous drives coming fast and furious, and he continued to hit well in September.

Now, as we head into a critical offseason, the Twins find themselves with a very intriguing asset on their hands: a young, controllable shortstop who has flashed the ability to be among the best hitters at the position. And one who is, theoretically, expendable.



# Feature Article

by Nick Nelson



Is it wise to dangle Polanco in the hopes of addressing one of the roster's weaknesses? Let's explore that idea from both sides.

## Why You Should Shop Polanco

Between Ehire Adrianza and Eduardo Escobar, the Twins have a pair of potential short-term plugs to hold them over at shortstop. Nick Gordon, one of their top prospects and also a shortstop, might open the 2018 season at Triple-A, just one step away from the majors. And further down in the minors, there are a couple of extremely promising talents at the position in teenagers Wander Javier and Royce Lewis.



It's never easy to part with a young breakout player like Polanco, especially at a position that has bewildered the Twins for many years, but there are a number of contingencies in place so it's not a crazy notion – for the right return.

What might the 24-year-old fetch in a deal? Well, if you're negotiating with a



# Feature Article

by Nick Nelson



general manager who believes he can stay at short, and that his late-season outburst is a reflection of his legitimate offensive potential, then a sizable haul is realistic.

For instance, might the Padres – desperately in need of an offensive jolt after another poor finish in the NL West – be on the hunt for a long-term answer at short, where they have no current or foreseeable solution? The organization has a number of promising young arms, including 24-year-old Dinelson Lamet, who had a nice showing as a rookie this year, as well as teenage top prospect Anderson Espinosa.

Another potential match would be the Marlins, who can't be all that enthused with JT Riddle as their shortstop going forward. They have some good pitchers that could be moved, including 25-year-old lefty Dillon Peters, who yielded strong whiff and grounder rates in his late-season MLB debut.

There are plenty of compelling possibilities, if the sense around the league is that Polanco's bat is legit and he's palatable at short.

## Why You Shouldn't Shop Polanco

Of course, it is entirely possible that the majority of the league's general managers do not view Polanco as a true shortstop. Heck, even Minnesota's own GM doesn't necessarily view him as one.

"Polanco is, as you guys know, a second baseman who we're asking to play shortstop," Thad Levine said in an interview with Aaron Gleeman of *Baseball Prospectus* at Target Field on August 5th. That's a perfectly reasonable stance, given that Polanco was playing second base exclusively by the time he graduated from the minors and looked utterly brutal at shortstop with the Twins in 2016.



# Feature Article

by Nick Nelson



He certainly looked more palatable there this year, but in today's defense-focused MLB, most teams are looking for an asset instead of adequacy. Polanco will probably never be that. And if his future is at second base, his offensive profile isn't nearly as interesting.

There was nothing cheap about Polanco's production in August and September. He was making contact regularly and hitting the ball hard. The Twins had MLB's best offense down the stretch and Polanco was often the No. 3 hitter driving it. Still, prior to that incredible surge, he had a long history of being very ordinary with the stick.

It could well take a more sustained run of hitting success for other teams to buy in. And if that's the case, it is probably best to hold off on shopping the infielder for now.





# Five Trade Candidates



## 5 Other Twins Trade Candidates

Jorge Polanco is one player you could choose to shop around, but these five also merit consideration for various reasons. Let's take stock:

### 1. Brian Dozier, 2B

The stars aren't aligned quite the same way as they were last winter. Dozier now has only one year left on his contract, reducing his appeal, and the Twins will have a tougher time moving him as the veteran leader on a young contending team. But if the right offer comes along, you could slide Polanco over to second base, a position he's better suited for.

### 2. Eddie Rosario, LF

He's coming off a breakout season. His youth and controllable cost are enticing. And while there's no clear replacement on hand, you could likely get by with Robbie Grossman and Zack Granite for a while; otherwise, a decent plug isn't too hard to find in free agency. Rosario could probably bring back a good young arm, and maybe a very good one if he's packaged with a prospect or two.

### 3. Nick Gordon, SS

This would be a win-now move, that's for sure. You can argue the Twins are in position to make one, though, and if they're OK rolling with Polanco at shortstop for a while, they can afford to part with Gordon. The 22-year-old is undoubtedly one of the organization's top prospects, coming off a very strong season in Double-A, even with the quiet second half. Young shortstops who can hit are in high demand, so if other clubs believe he can stick there, Gordon could fetch a high-caliber arm or two.



# Five Trade Candidates



## 4. Ervin Santana, SP

Trading Santana would be a hard pill to swallow – unless you were to take his \$13.5 million salary and put it toward, say, Yu Darvish or Jake Arrieta. With Joe Mauer coming off the books following 2018, buying a true ace in free agency is not an unthinkable proposition. Dealing Santana would help the money make sense up-front, while also netting a few prospects.

## 5. Eduardo Escobar, IF

The utility man turned himself into a real asset this year, hitting 21 homers with a .758 OPS and providing solid glove work all around the infield. He's the kind of piece a contending team loves to have, including the Twins, but with Ehire Adrianza around he's slightly redundant. You might not get a ton for Escobar, who's a year out from free agency, but he's definitely worth listening on.





# Feature Article

by Parker Hageman



## Rebuilt Byron Buxton is the Ultimate Building Block

The Minnesota Twins' 2017 success can be credited, in some part, to the offensive emergence of the team's young hitters. Players like Byron Buxton, Eddie Rosario, and Jorge Polanco all took significant strides forward and made vital contributions to the team's late postseason charge.

Behind the players, of course, is the newly minted hitting coach James Rowson. At the onset, Rowson's methods and philosophies were somewhat mysterious. In spring training, players said he rarely did any tinkering or instructing, instead choosing to monitor hitters closely and learned their personalities, asking them questions about their approach rather than telling them what to do. By the end of the season, Rowson received high praise from his students.

While all the young hitters deserves some accolades, Buxton in-season adjustments especially stand out.

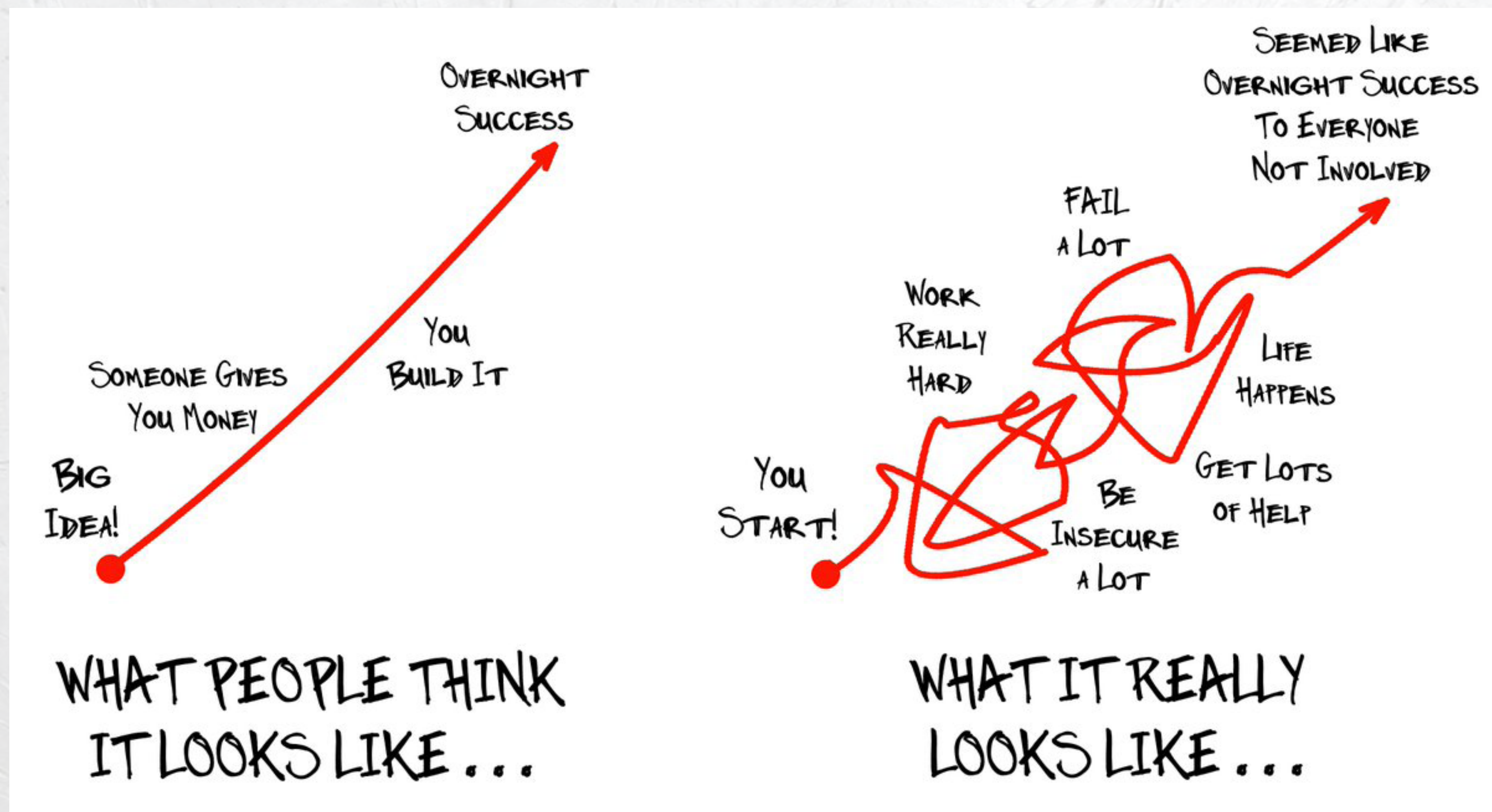
From afar, the narrative surrounding Buxton is that he jettisoned his leg kick and suddenly emerged as this elite hitter in the late throes of the season. The story sold was in the clickbait mold of BUXTON MADE THIS ONE SIMPLE CHANGE and, boom, he's all fixed. While that is the most visually obvious change, Buxton's journey to success is so much more complicated than that.

Making a radical change to your swing in a major league season is rather difficult. Yes, hitters continually tinker with their mechanics throughout the year but rarely is it seen that a player makes a fundamental switch in approach and thrives during the same season. Most times, organizations will send a player to the minors so they can rebuild out of the spotlight. It takes a special individual and a special support staff to make the improvements Buxton did in-season.



# Feature Article

by Parker Hageman



After splitting last season between toe tapping and leg kicking, Buxton proclaimed that he would be one hundred percent a leg kicker in 2017. This spring, with a newfound sense of clubhouse swagger, Buxton declared that the “leg kick is me now” and he was going to “stick with what I do.” In fact, one of his biggest influencers, Torii Hunter, spent the offseason sending him encouraging text messages to stick with the leg kick.

There was plenty of reason for Buxton to be riding high. He absolutely tore through pitching in the final month of 2016. In September, equipped with the full throttle leg kick, he hit 9 of his 10 home runs and posted a .287/.357/.653 line in 113 plate appearances. He still struck out a ton, to be sure, but the hard contact was eye-opening and a tasty sample of his untapped prospect promise.

But when the new season started, Buxton sputtered out of the chute. In April, he



# Feature Article

by Parker Hageman



struck out in a whopping 37.2 percent of his plate appearances (only Colorado's Trevor Story whiffed more). Putting the bat on the ball proved to be a difficult task as 36.7 percent of his swings failed to even make contact. Sliders were another kind of evil. He couldn't stop himself from contorting his body at pitches breaking over the left-handed batter's box. He swung and missed on 28.6 percent of sliders seen.

There was no denying something was wrong with his approach, fundamentally. The Twins' coaches, including Paul Molitor, were convinced the previous season's leg kick had to go. Bert Blyleven told broadcast viewers that former hitting coach Tom Brunansky had worked diligently in 2016 to entice Buxton of the same. In the spring, Molitor observed that he was spinning off too many pitches and believed he needed to get his legs in a better position in order to drive the ball. At one point at the end of April, Fox Sports North rolled tape of Buxton being joined by Hunter, Molitor and Rowson in the batting cage. The trio surrounded him and his batting tee and watched as he took a few swings with his leg kick. Hunter moved behind Buxton and repositioned his back leg, hoping to get to remain on his backside more.

Buxton was at low point and needed to make some changes. In a homestand at the end of May, it started with ditching the leg kick.

The supremely athletic outfielder had reduced everything back to square one and the early version was, to put it lightly, ugly as sin. Everything about it looked unnatural. Buxton, still displaying the front-side open stance, swung like his front foot was cemented to the batter's box. Any pitch that flew on the outer-half of the zone was nearly unreachable. Almost all of his body parts were working against each other. The pitches he did reach were beat into to dirt in front of home plate.

Fortunately, more minor adjustments were made.



# Feature Article

by Parker Hageman



A few series later, he closed up his stance but continued to keep his front foot firmly planted on the ground. Visually it looked a bit better but it was still a non-starter when it came to the results. By the end of June, the Twins' star prospect was hitting an unsightly .195/.269/.283. Only the Royals' Alcides Escobar turned in a lower OPS (537) than Buxton had at that point (552).

It was at this time that the "Trade Byron Buxton" movement had its crescendo. A growing number of the general population wanted to see him traded or replaced with Zack Granite. Even a *Sports Illustrated* writer suggested that the Twins cut bait. People wanted immediate results. But underneath all of the reconstruction and the poor numbers, Buxton and Rowson were beginning to trust the process and embrace little victories. It was a hard-hit ball here or laying off a nasty slider there. During a two-game stretch over the Fourth of July, Buxton put seven balls in play against Angels pitching and averaged an exit velocity of 99.6 MPH (five of those balls were hit over 100). The cluster of well struck balls was a signal that things were beginning to click for him. Although going 5-for-8 with a home run was nice, the process – multiple balls hit over 100 miles per hour on consecutive days – was just as rewarding.

July brought another important alteration. For the majority of the season Buxton held the bat and his hands high and away from his body. As the pitch would be delivered, he would draw them back to the launch position before firing them forward. It was a long and inefficient process leading to timing and contact issues. Now Buxton had lowered the bat and brought his hands closer to his body. Loading with his hands would not be as convoluted and would keep him from rushing his hands back. By reducing the travel distance, Buxton gave himself the opportunity to stay back more. This, perhaps even more than eliminating the leg kick, would be responsible for unifying his top and lower half.



# Feature Article

by Parker Hageman



Armed with this change, Byron Buxton announced his presence with authority.

Buxton had smashed the ball in July but a groin injury sidelined him for the most of the month. When he returned, he made one final change to his swing: Rather than keep his foot in place, he added a small stride forward. Everything looked compact and fluid compared to the big movements from the start of the year. He melted baseballs. He posted a .324/.354/.619 line, one of the game's top 25 hitters in August, merely two months after being one of the worst in league. The transformation was complete.

Byron Buxton's Many Changes							
	BA	OBP	SLG	Well Hit Avg	Contact %	Exit Velo	Launch Angle
Open Stance/Leg Kick	184	271	272	096	63.4%	83.1	14.6
Open Stance/No Stride	243	282	297	081	65.8%	85.3	9.6
Closed Stance/No Stride	189	286	184	135	79.3%	85.4	9.0
Closed Stance/No Stride/Lower Hands*	476	522	667	333	73.9%	94.4	7.2
Closed Stance/Stride/Lower Hands	298	342	541	164	68.9%	85.0	12.1

*\*Only lasted 23 plate appearances before injury*  
*Data Sources: ESPN/TruMedia, BaseballSavant.com*

Several years ago Brunansky told me something about coaching young hitters during their introduction to the major league level.

"Any young hitter that comes up and has the ability to be here, there's always kind of movement that goes on that they're going to have to clean up a little bit once they get used to the league and the pace of the league and the league shows them as hitters what they need to do," he said. "You can't come and change [them]. The hardest thing to do is tell a young hitter who has had success in the minor leagues who needs to change it at the major league level because they are going to say 'I hit like this' ... but [MLB] is a different animal."



# Feature Article

by Parker Hageman



That was the state Buxton was in at the beginning of the year. He did have success in the minor leagues with his swing. Heck, he had success with his swing last September. How could anyone – Molitor, Rowson, anyone – tell him in spring training that he would need to make adjustments after that stretch of baseball? It would take a thorough dismantling by the competition to make him realize that he needed to make changes.

If he had a different personality, Buxton may have dug in and refused to make the adjustments – and no one could blame him if he did. After all, the Twins had already made him conform to their swing back in rookie ball while he felt more comfortable with this leg kick swing. But as one poor plate appearance after another piled up, Buxton showed the maturity to recognize it was time for a change.

In the end, credit goes to both Buxton, Rowson and the rest of the coaching staff for setting him up for success. And now, he's a true centerpiece to build around this offseason and going forward.





# Organizational Depth Chart

The following pages provide a complete picture of Minnesota's organizational depth at each position, from the majors down to rookie ball. In combination with the earlier Organizational Depth Analysis, you can use this information to determine where help may be on the way internally.

## Catcher

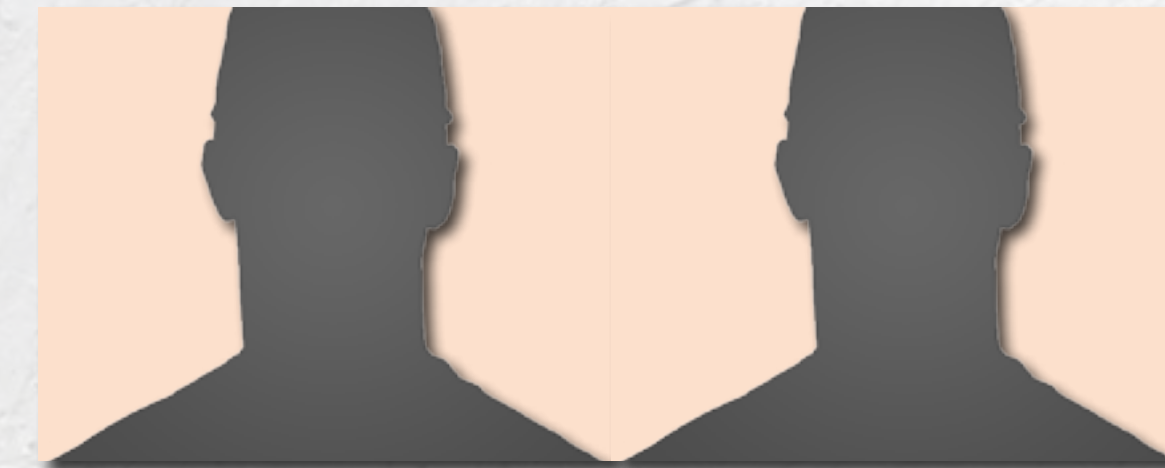


Mitch Garver  
AAA

Brian Navaretto  
AA

Mitchell Kranson  
A+

Ben Rortvedt  
A



Rainis Silva  
Rk

Jhon Alvarez  
Rk



Anthony Recker  
Free Agent  
AAA

Carlos Paulino  
Free Agent  
AA

Kevin Garcia  
A+

Caleb Hamilton  
A



Robert Molina  
Rk

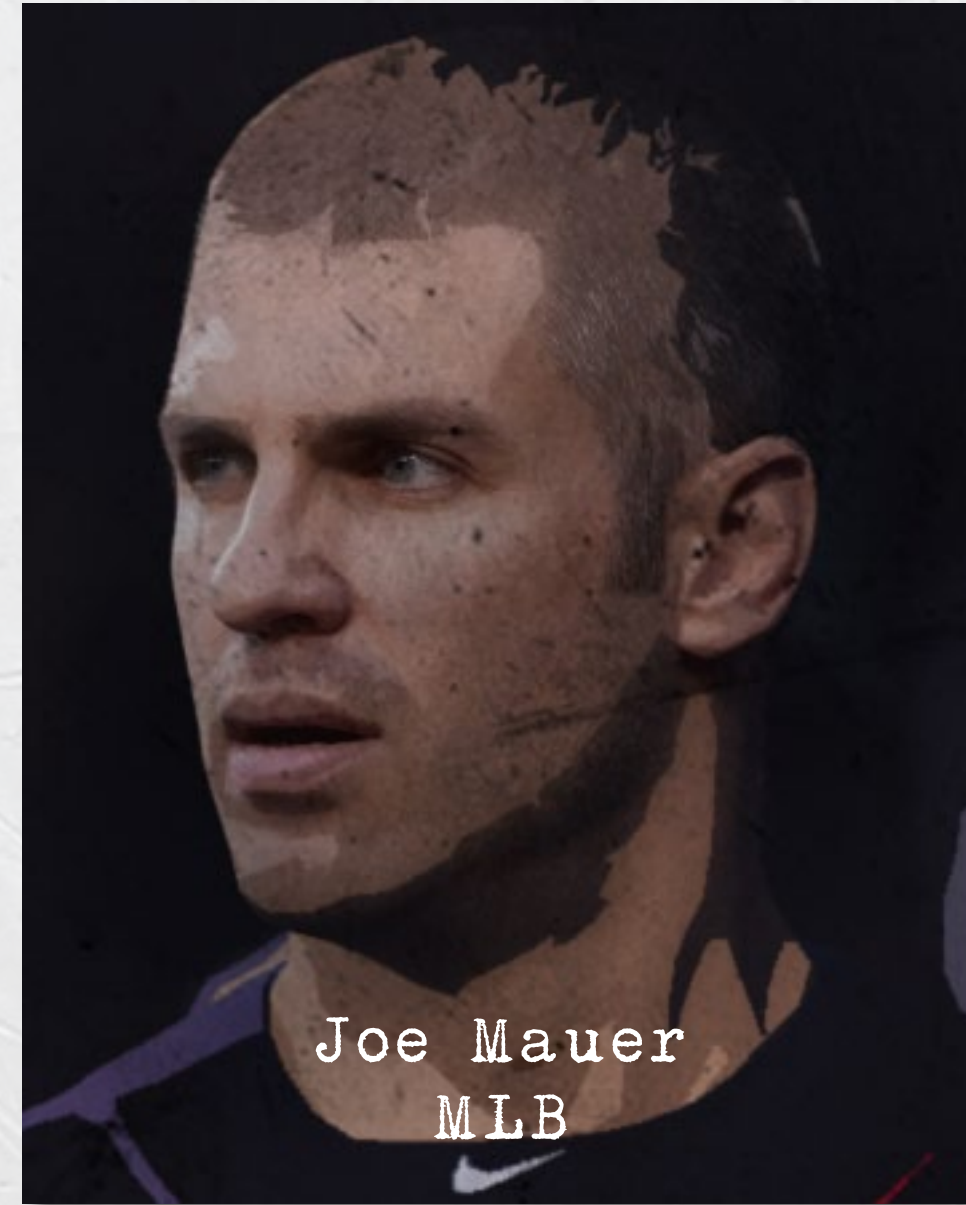
Kerby Camacho  
Rk



# Organizational Depth Chart



## First Base

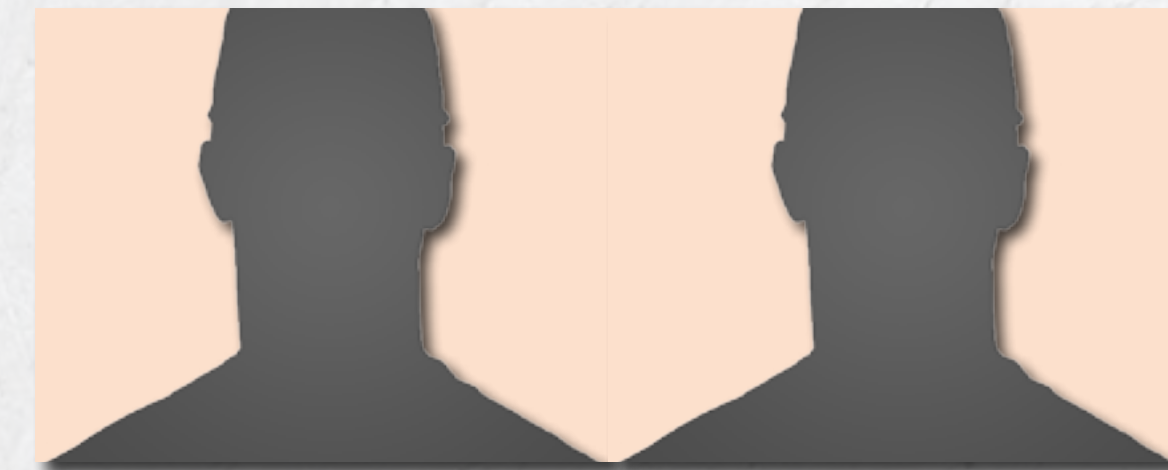


Byungho Park  
AAA

Jonathan Rodriguez  
Free Agent  
AA

Zander Wiel  
A+

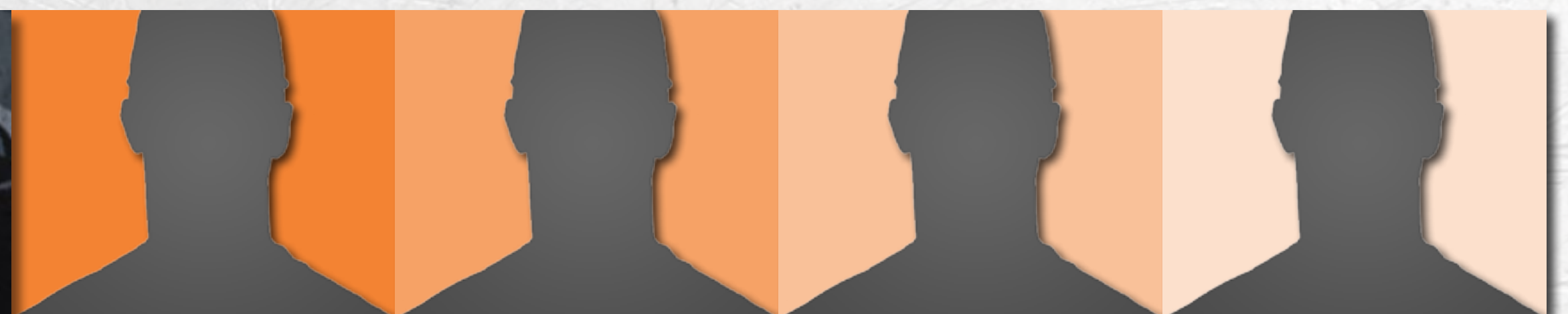
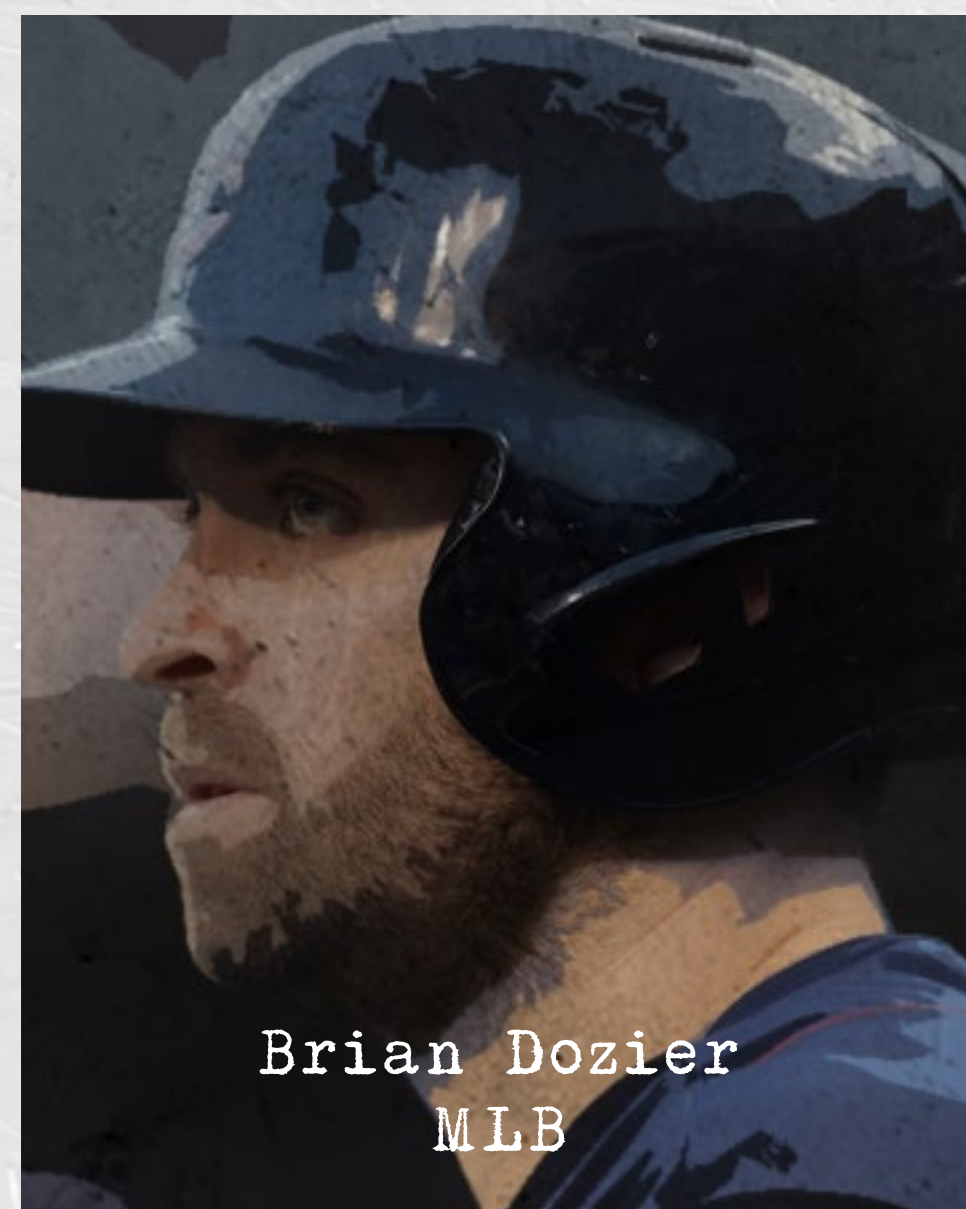
Lewin Diaz  
A



JJ Robinson  
Rk

Ben Rodriguez  
Rk

## Second Base

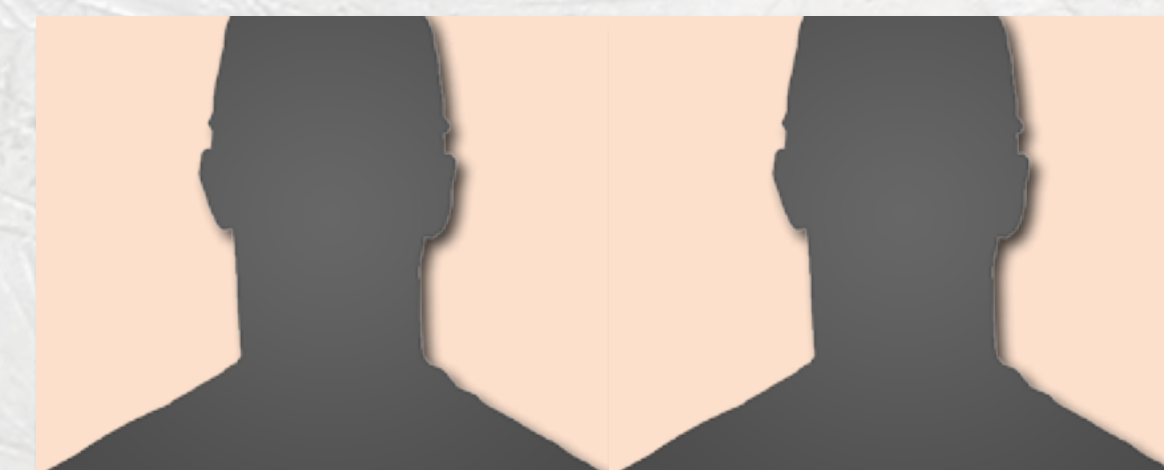


Niko Goodrum  
AAA

Ryan Walker  
AA

Brandon Lopez  
A+

Travis Blankenhorn  
A



Jose Miranda  
Rk

Emmanuel Morel  
Rk



# Organizational Depth Chart



## Third Base

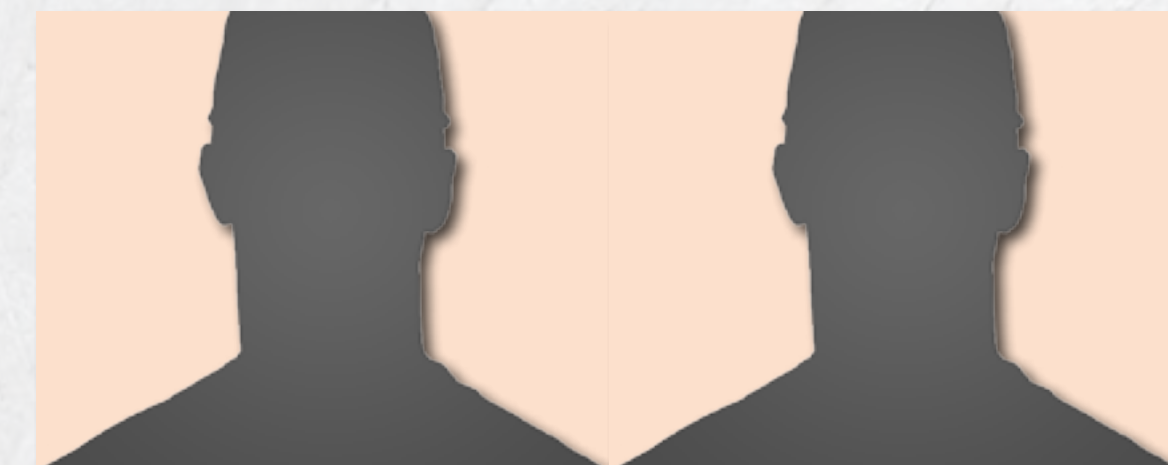


Leonardo Reginnato  
Free Agent  
AAA

TJ White  
AA

Chris Paul  
A+

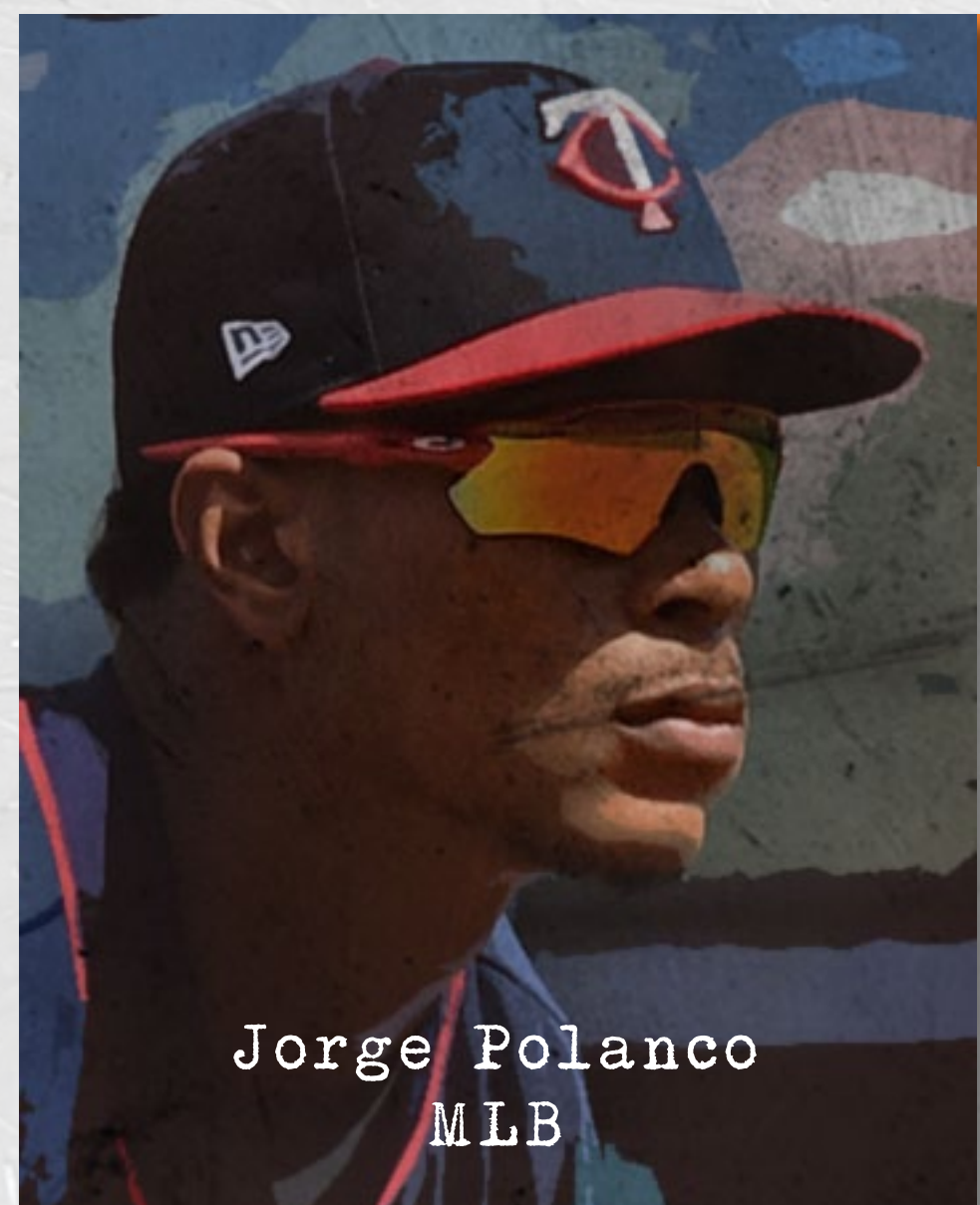
Trey Cabbage  
A



Andrew Bechtold  
Rk

Victor Tademo  
Rk

## Shortstop

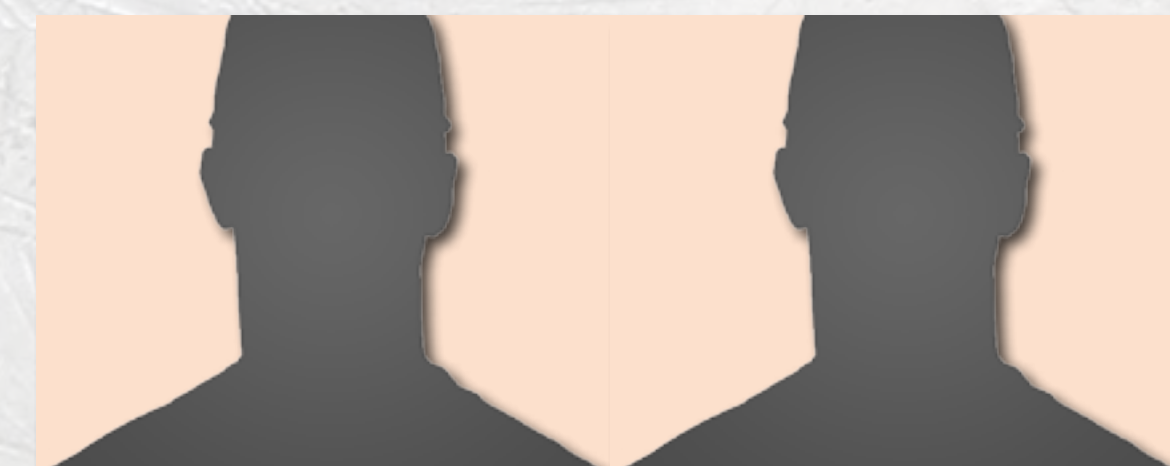


Tommy Field  
Free Agent  
AAA

Nick Gordon  
AA

Jermaine Palacios  
A+

Royce Lewis  
A



Wander Javier  
Rk

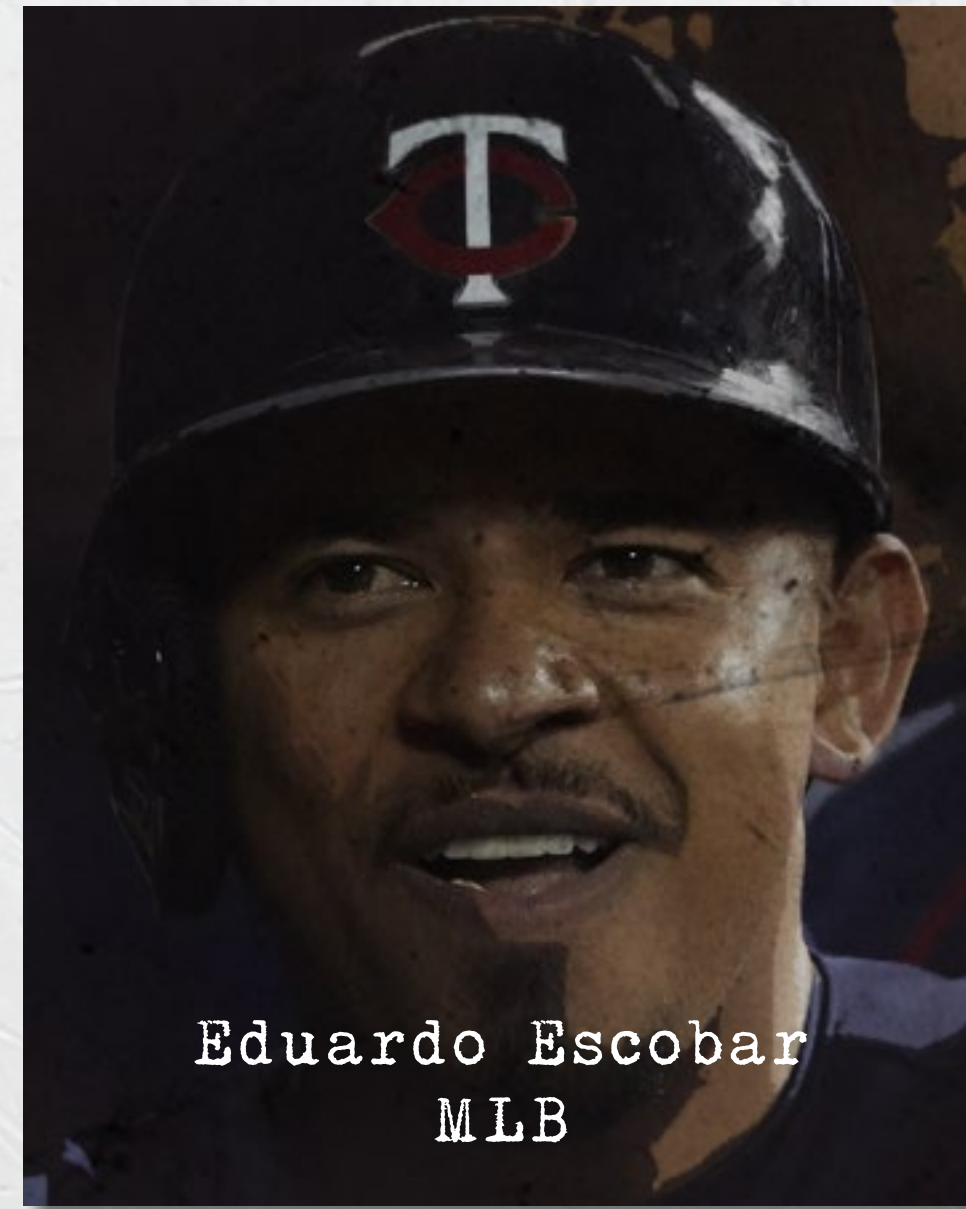
Ricky De La Torre  
Rk



# Organizational Depth Chart



## Utility



Matt Hague  
Free Agent  
AAA

Andy Wilkins  
Free Agent  
AA

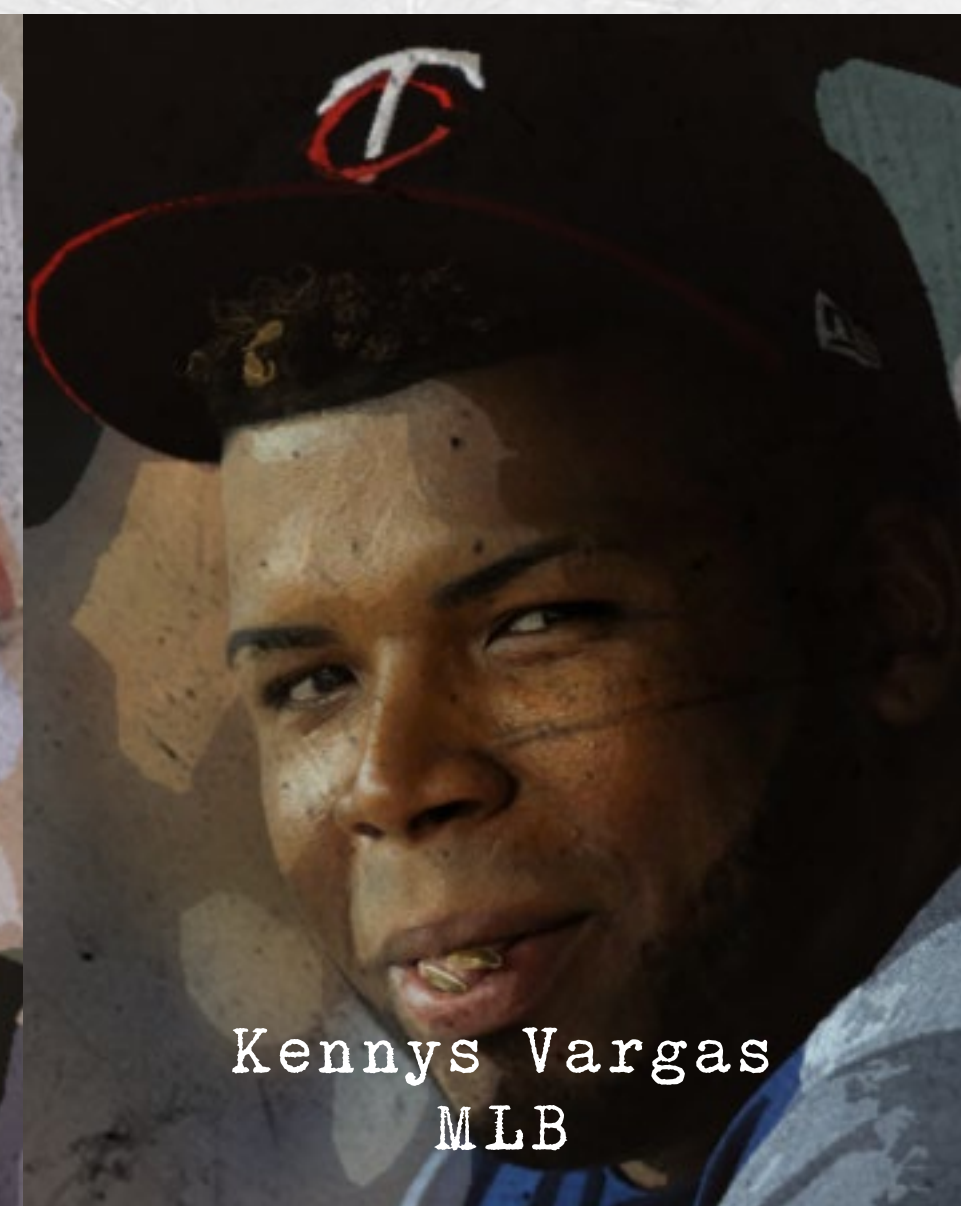
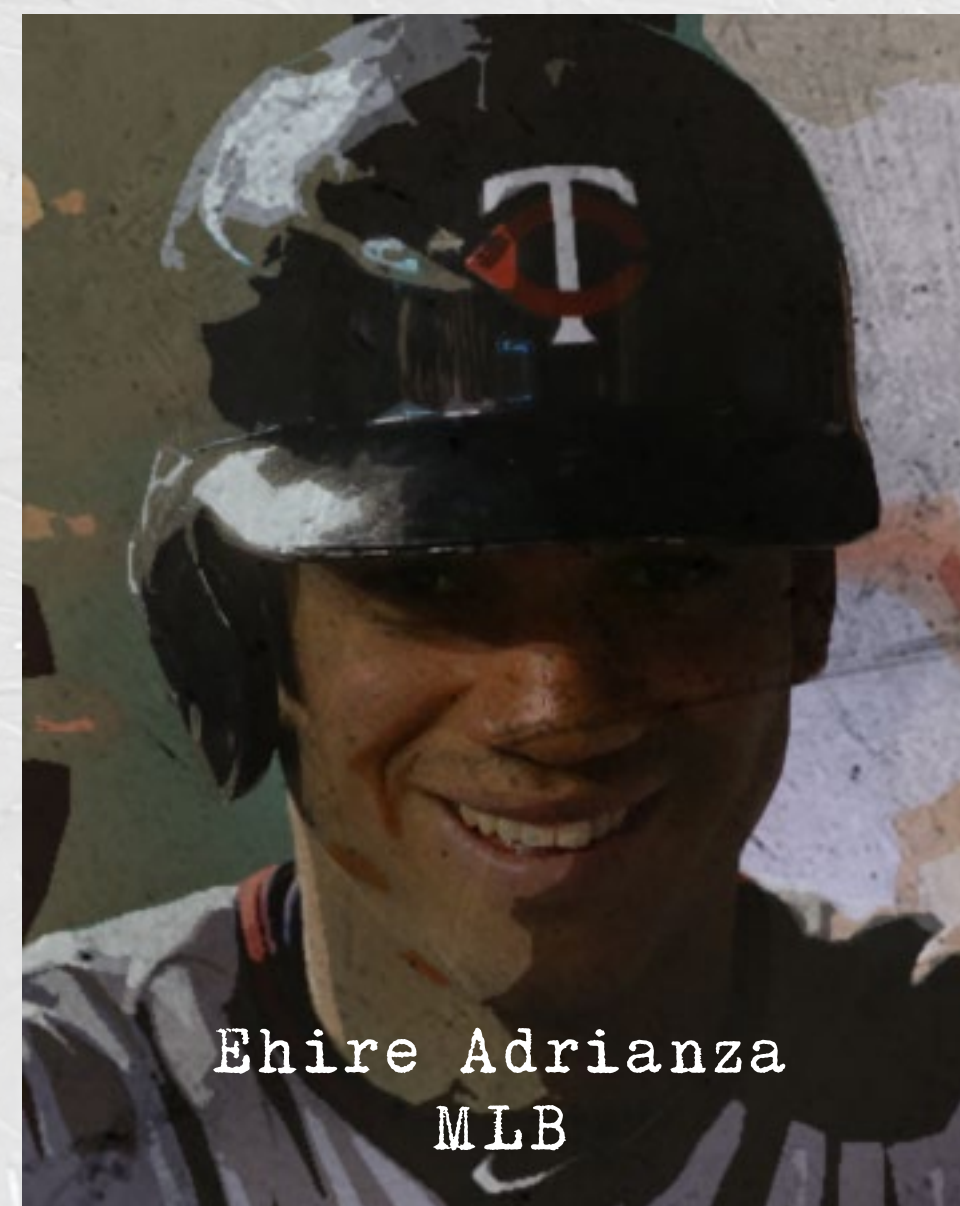
Nelson Molina  
A+

Ariel Montesino  
A



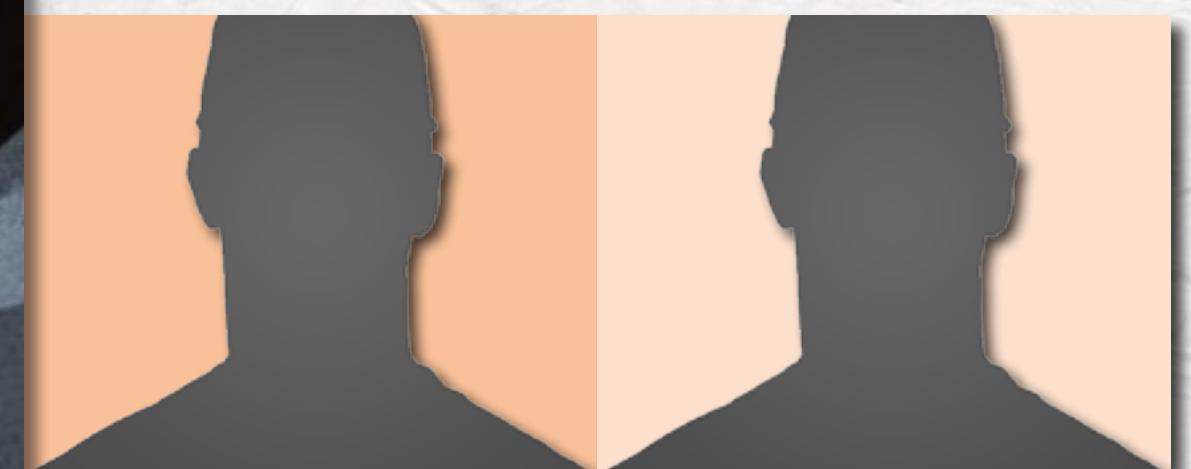
Carson Crites  
Rk

Alex Robles  
Rk



Alex Perez  
AA

Sean Miller  
A+



Joe Cronin  
A

Dane Hutcheon  
Rk



# Organizational Depth Chart



## Left Field

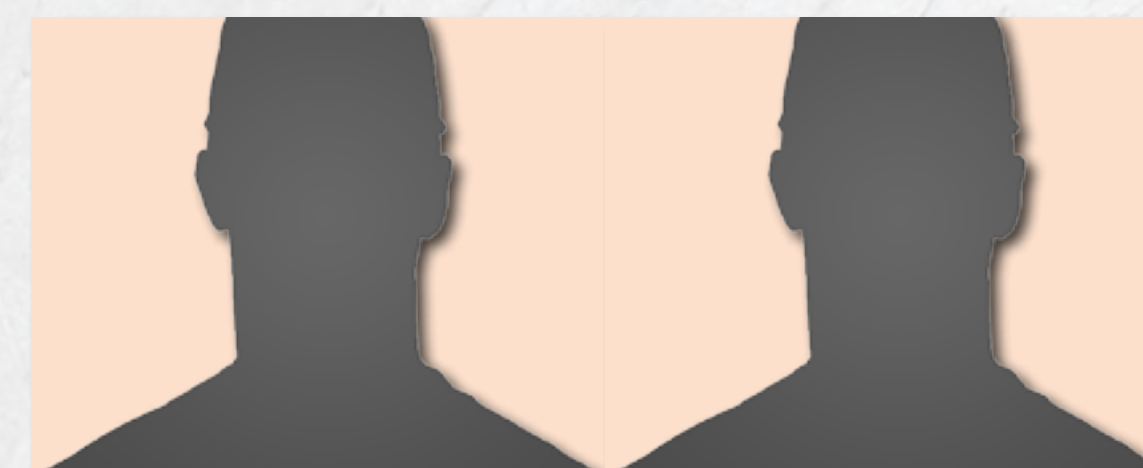


JB Shuck  
Free Agent  
AAA

LaMonte Wade  
AA

Brent Rooker  
A+

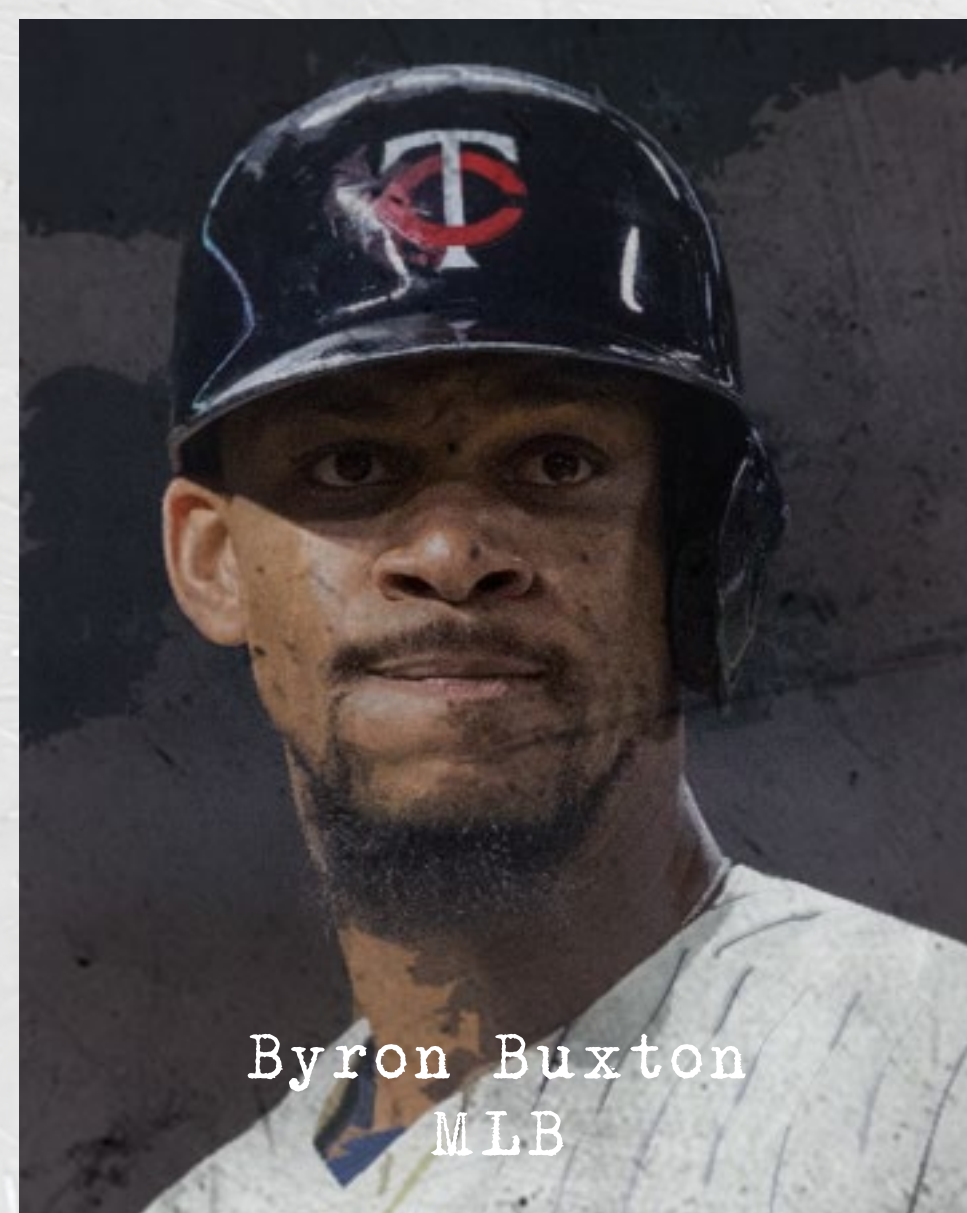
Jimmy Kerrigan  
A



Mark Contreras  
Rk

Colton Burns  
Rk

## Center Field

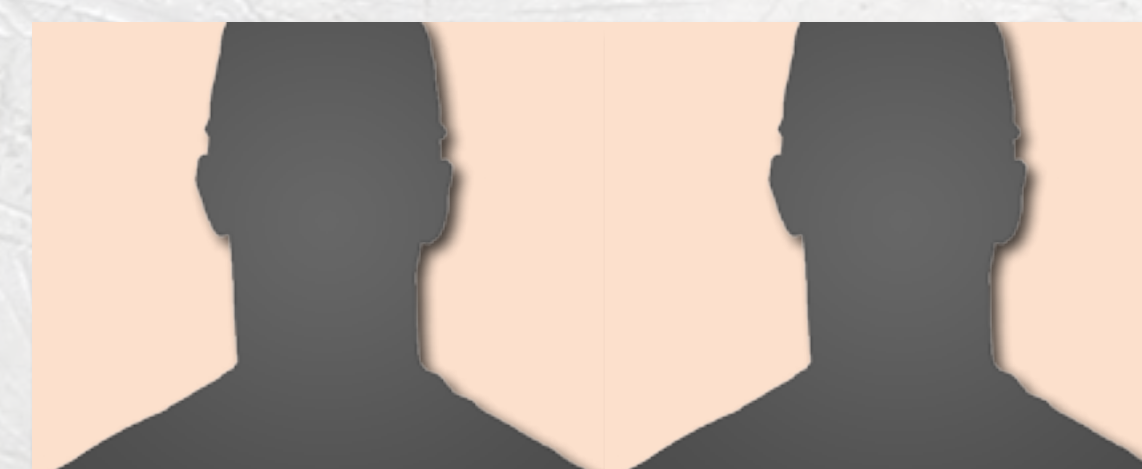


Zack Granite  
AAA

Max Murphy  
AA

Tanner English  
A+

Aaron Whitefield  
A



Akil Baddoo  
Rk

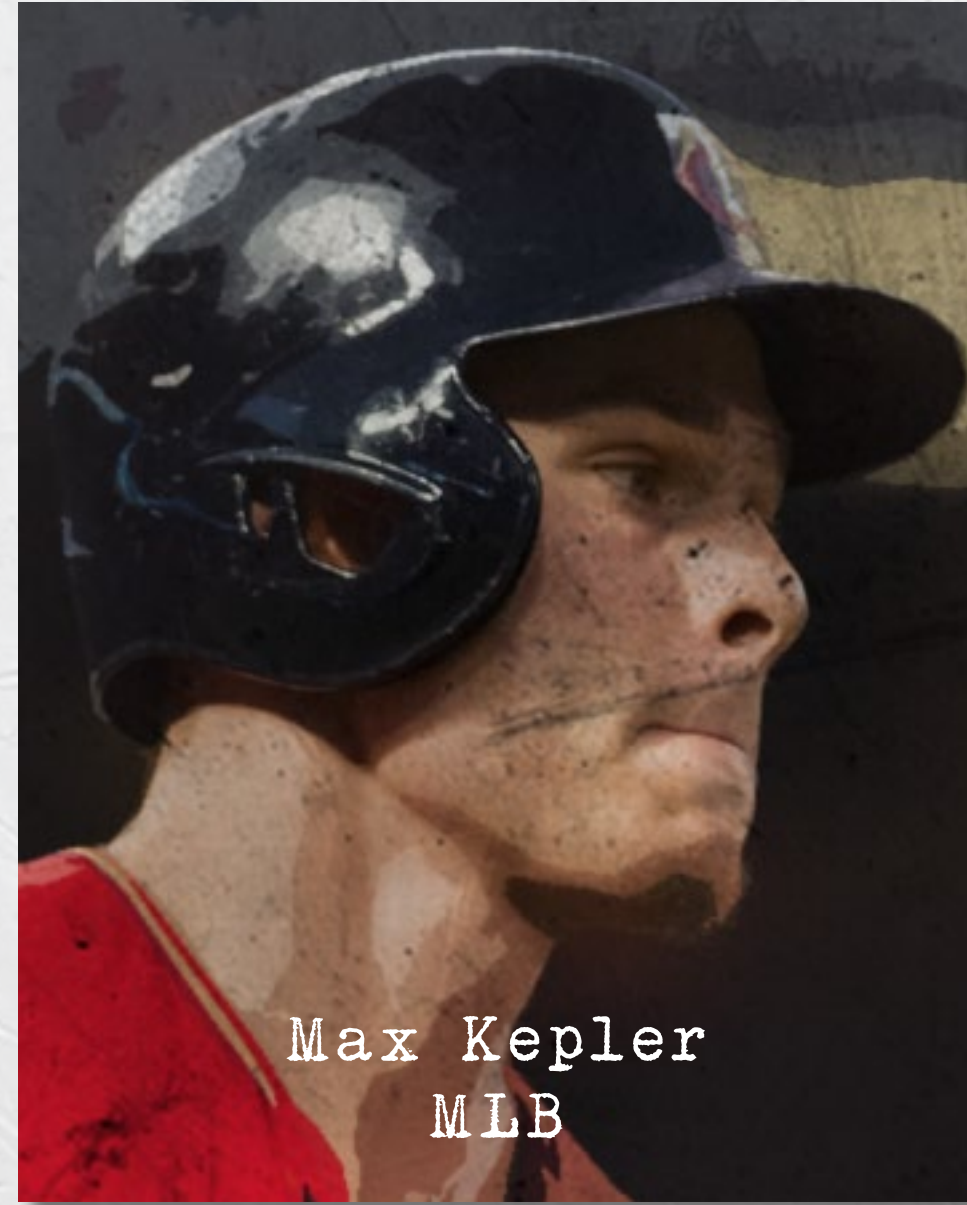
Jean Carlos Arias  
Rk



# Organizational Depth Chart



## Right Field



Max Kepler  
MLB

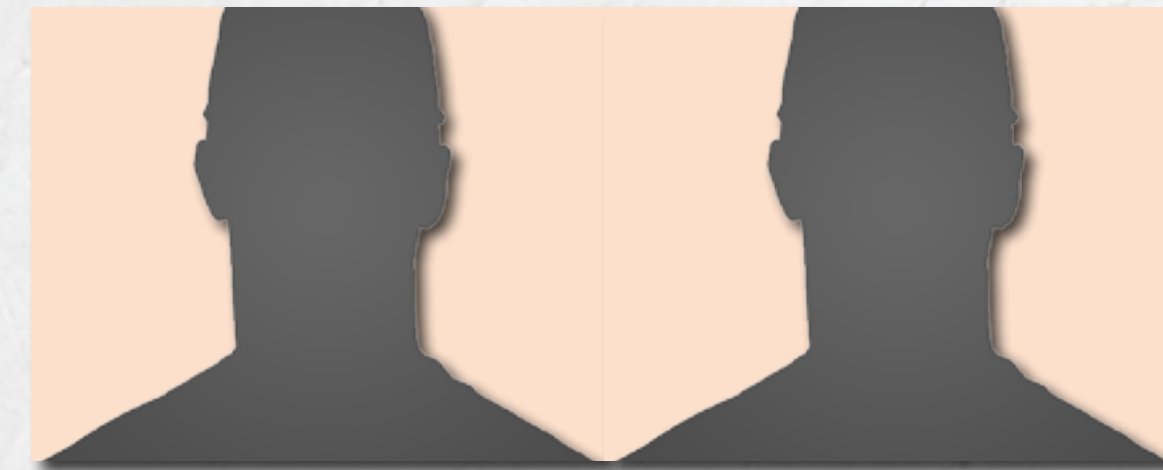


Daniel Palka  
AAA

Edgar Corcino  
AA

Jaylin Davis  
A+

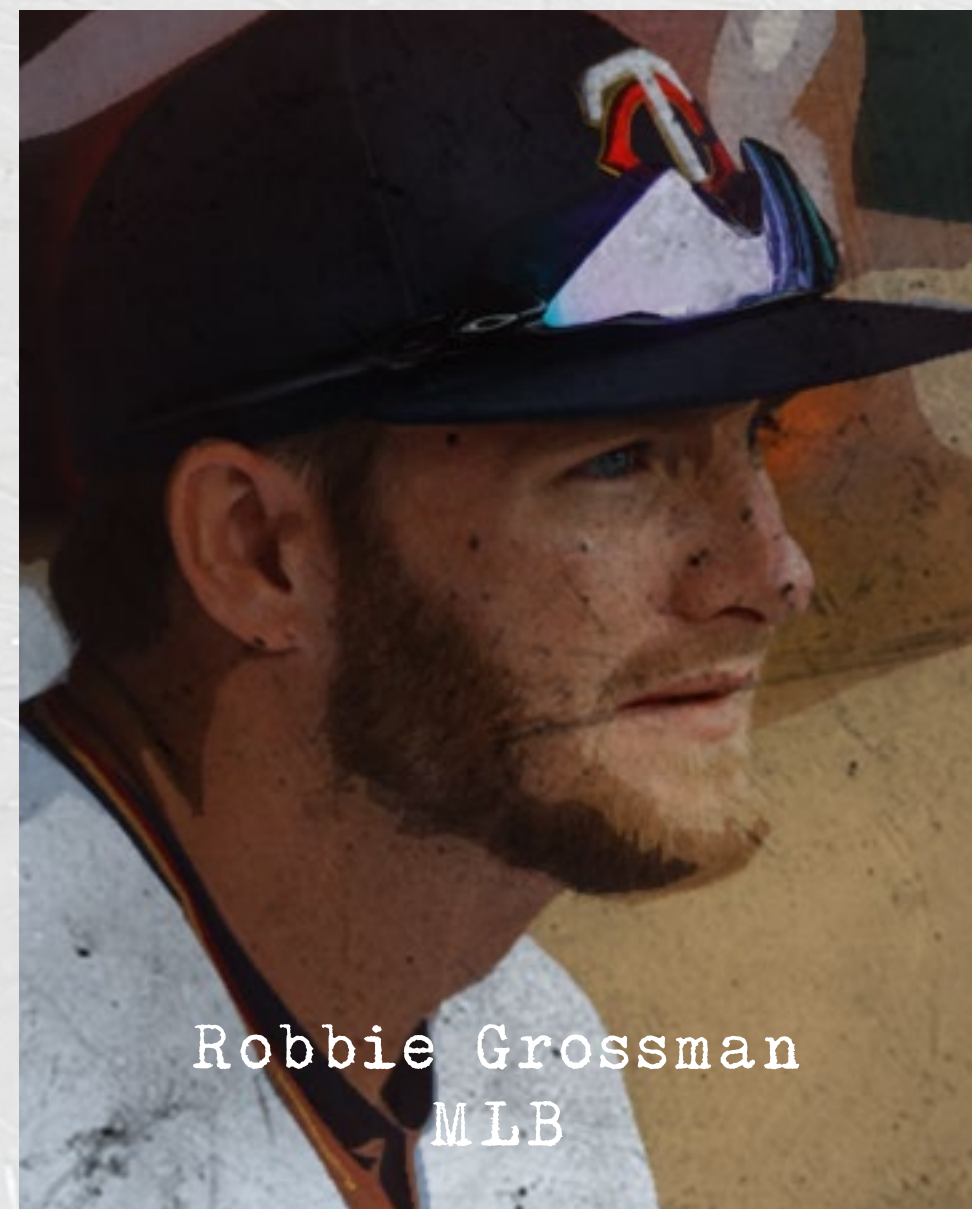
Shane Carrier  
A



TJ Dixon  
Rk

Jared Akins  
Rk

## Fourth Outfielder



Robbie Grossman  
MLB

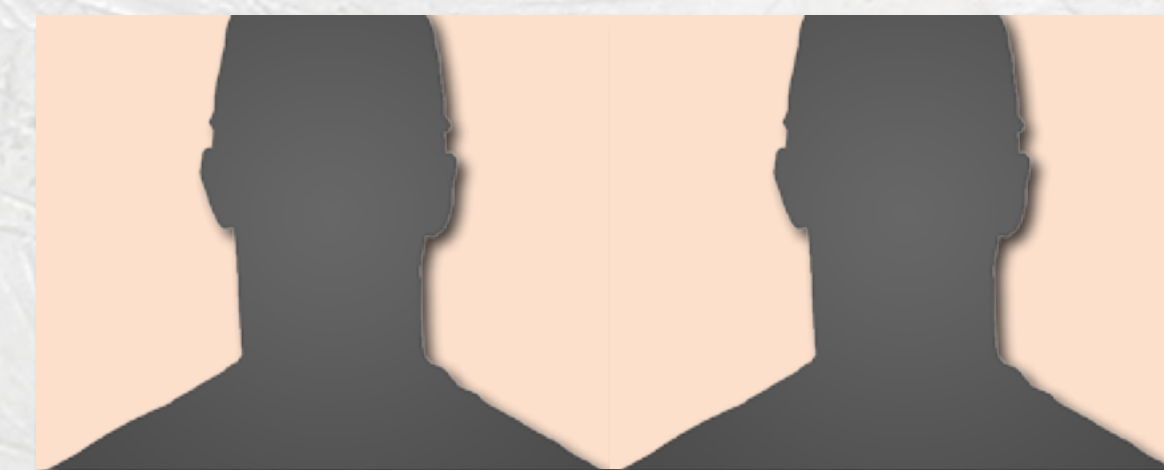


Levi Michael  
Free Agent  
AAA

Shane Kennedy  
A+

Christian Cavaness  
A

Matt Albanese  
Rk



Humberto Maldonado  
Rk

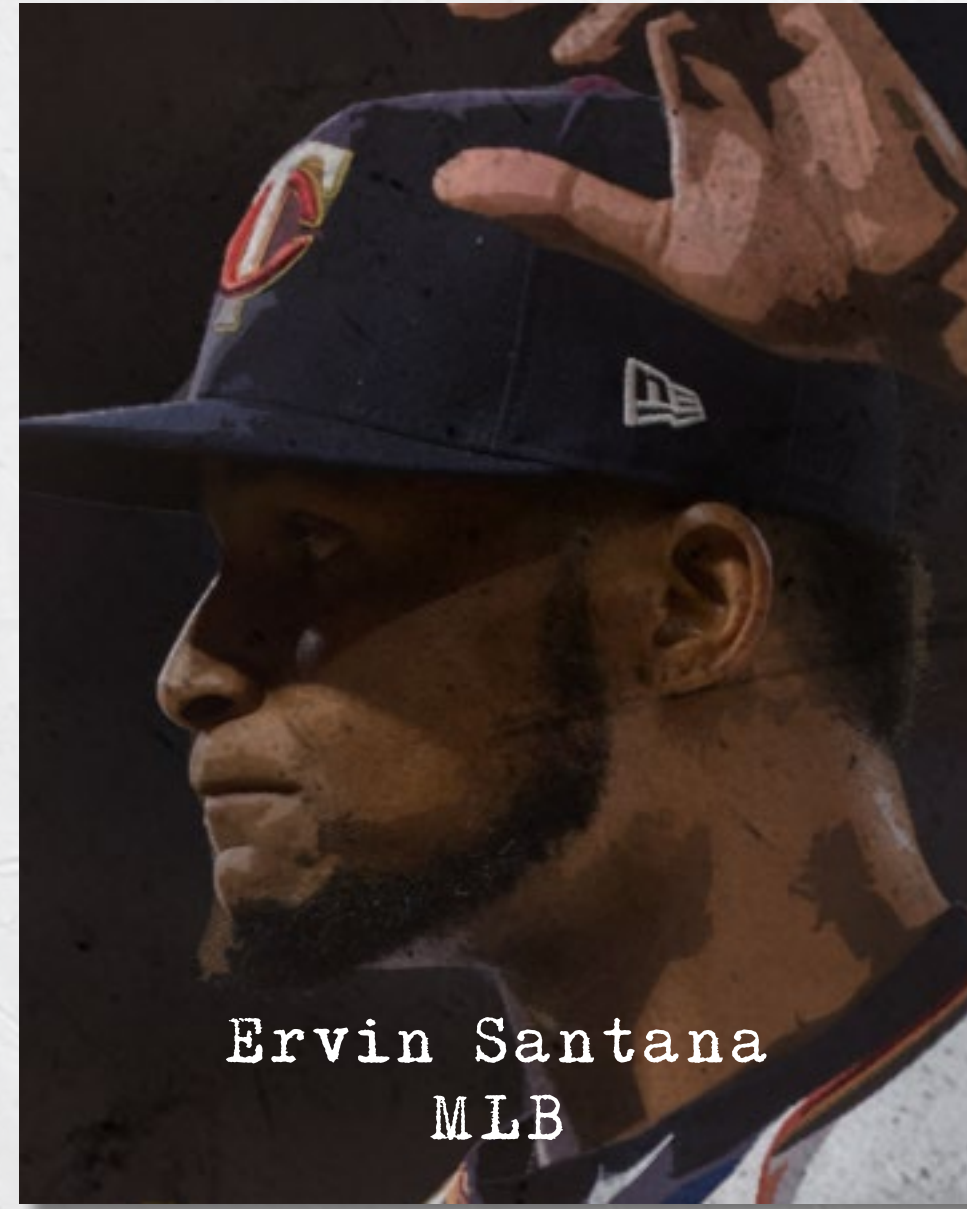
Colton Waltner  
Rk



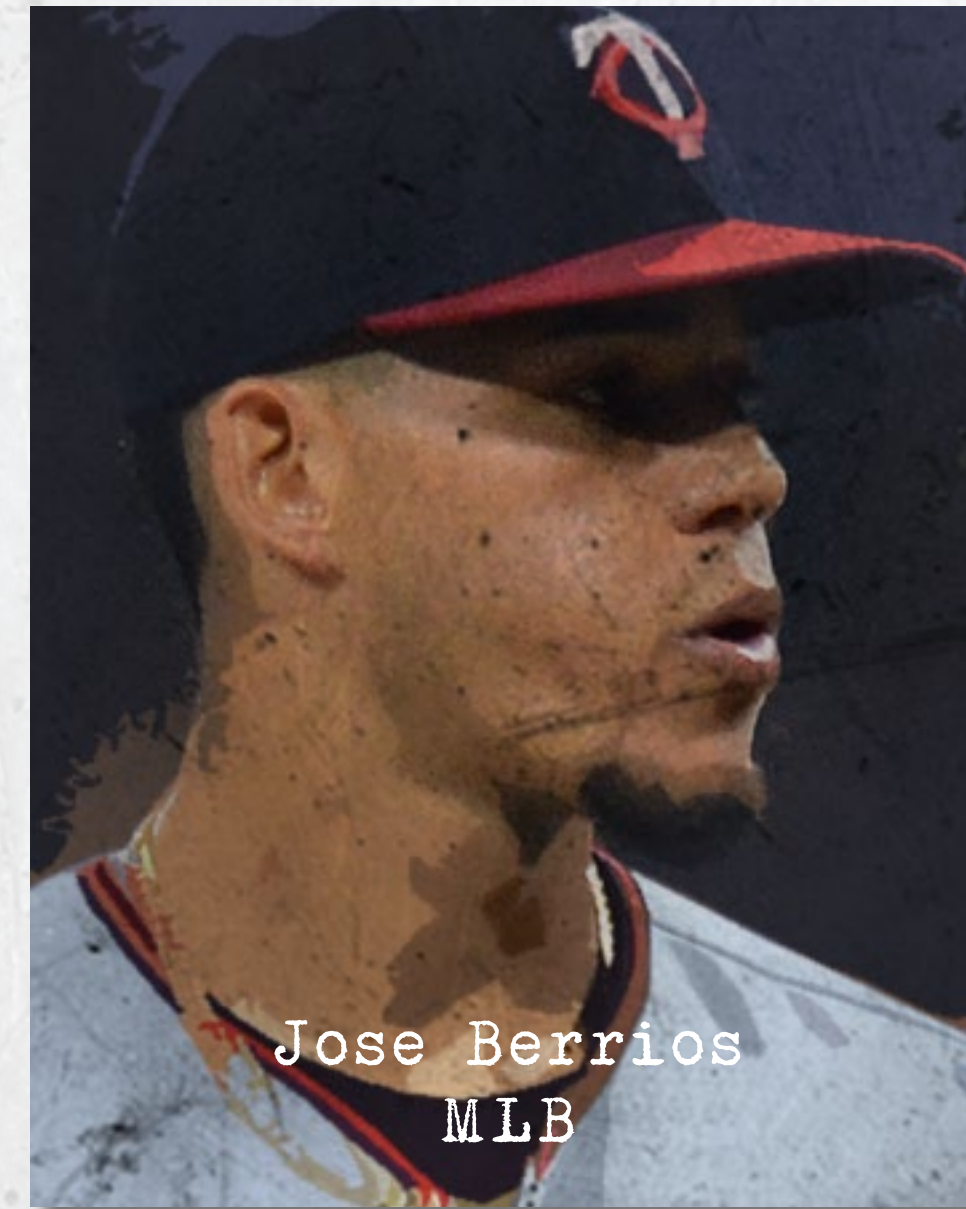
# Organizational Depth Chart



## Starters



Ervin Santana  
MLB



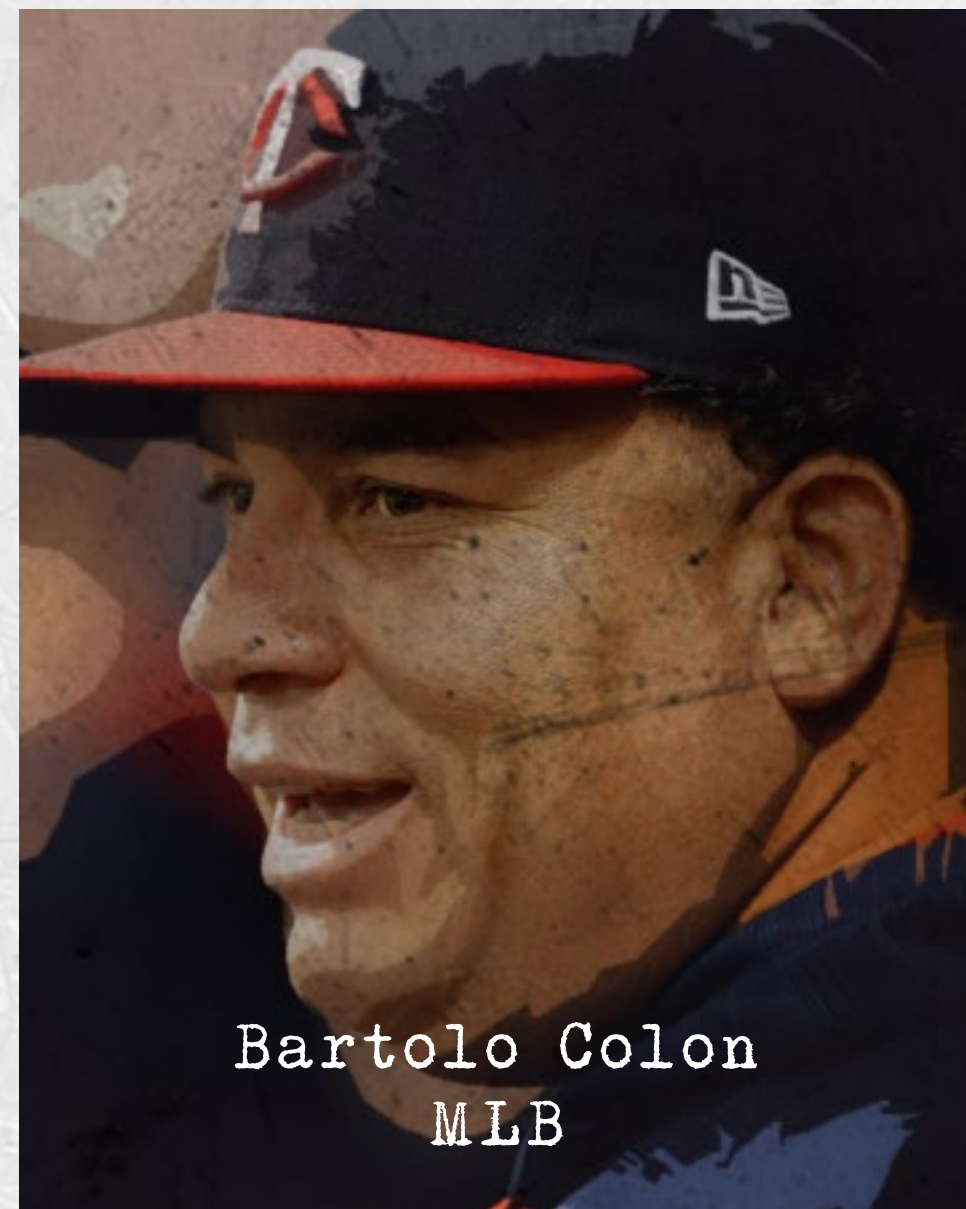
Jose Berrios  
MLB



Kyle Gibson  
MLB



Adalberto Mejia  
MLB



Bartolo Colon  
MLB



Hector Santiago - FA  
MLB



Aaron Slegers  
AAA

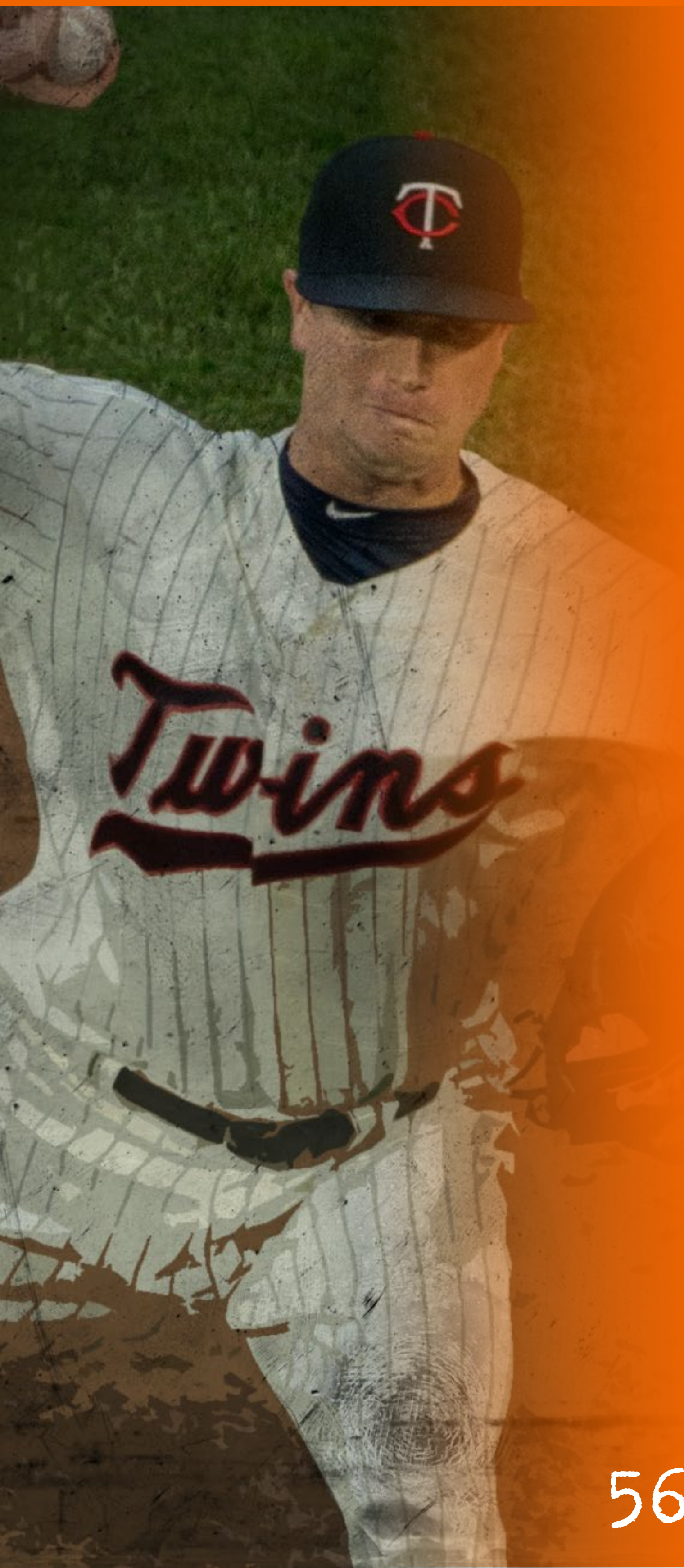
David Hurlbut  
Free Agent  
AAA

Stephen Gonsalves  
AAA

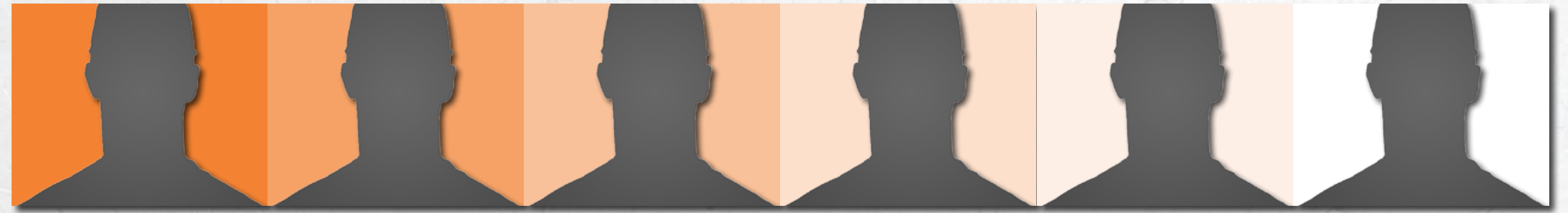
Dietrich Enns  
AAA



# Organizational Depth Chart



## Starters



Felix Jorge  
AA

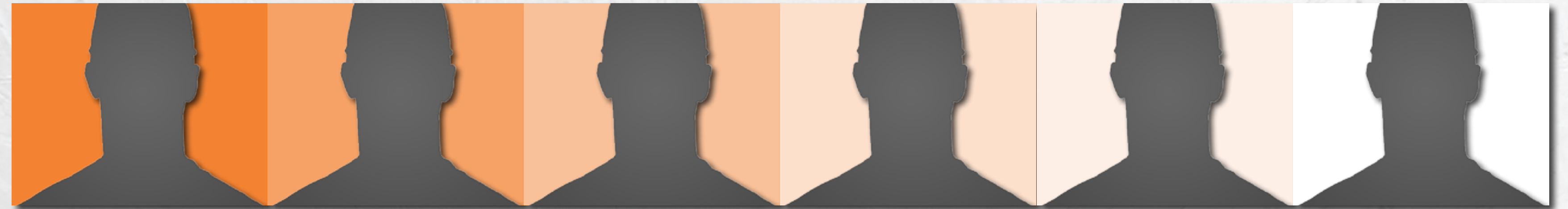
Kohl Stewart  
AA

Fernando Romero  
AA

Randy LeBlanc  
AA

Dereck Rodriguez  
Free Agent  
AA

Matt Tracy  
Free Agent  
AA



Lewis Thorpe  
A+

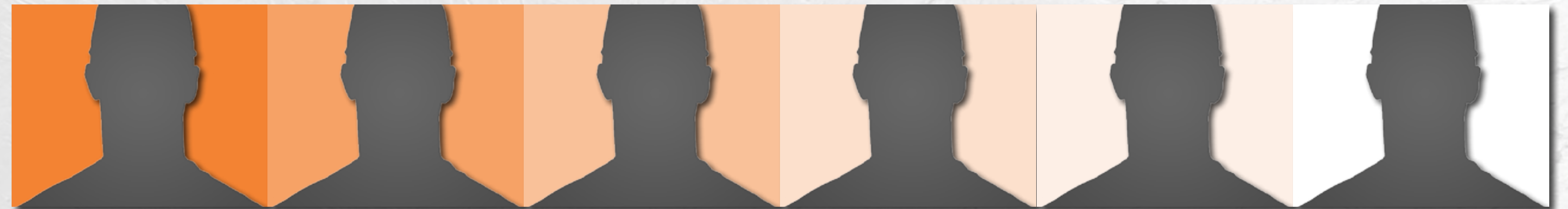
Lachlan Wells  
A+

Sean Poppen  
A+

Cody Stashak  
A+

Anthony Marzi  
A+

Brady Anderson  
A+



Eduardo Del Rosario  
A

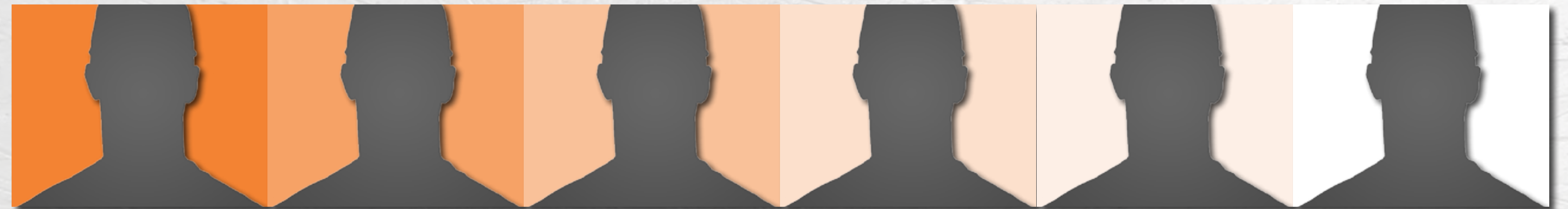
Clark Beeker  
A

Tyler Beardsley  
A

Tyler Wells  
A

Charlie Barnes  
A

Tyler Watson  
A



Edwar Colina  
Rk

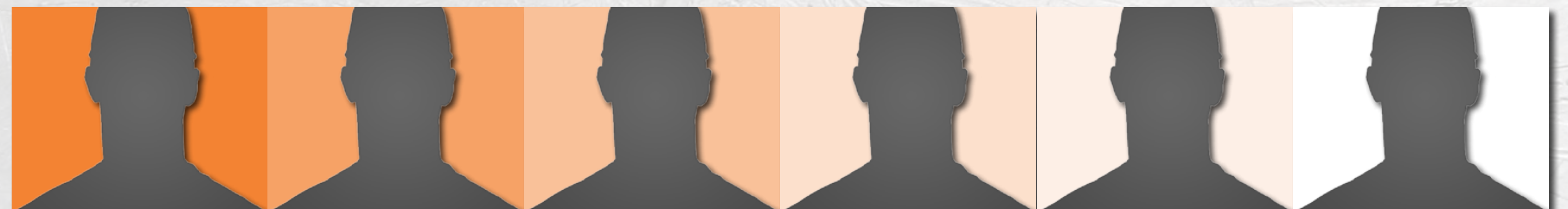
Melvi Acosta  
Rk

Ryley Widell  
Rk

Bailey Ober  
Rk

Brusdar Graterol  
Rk

Moises Gomez  
Rk



Carlos Suniaga  
Rk

Jordan Balazovic  
Rk

Blayne Enlow  
Rk

Tyler Benninghoff  
Rk

Pedro Garcia  
Rk

Taylor Clemensia  
Rk



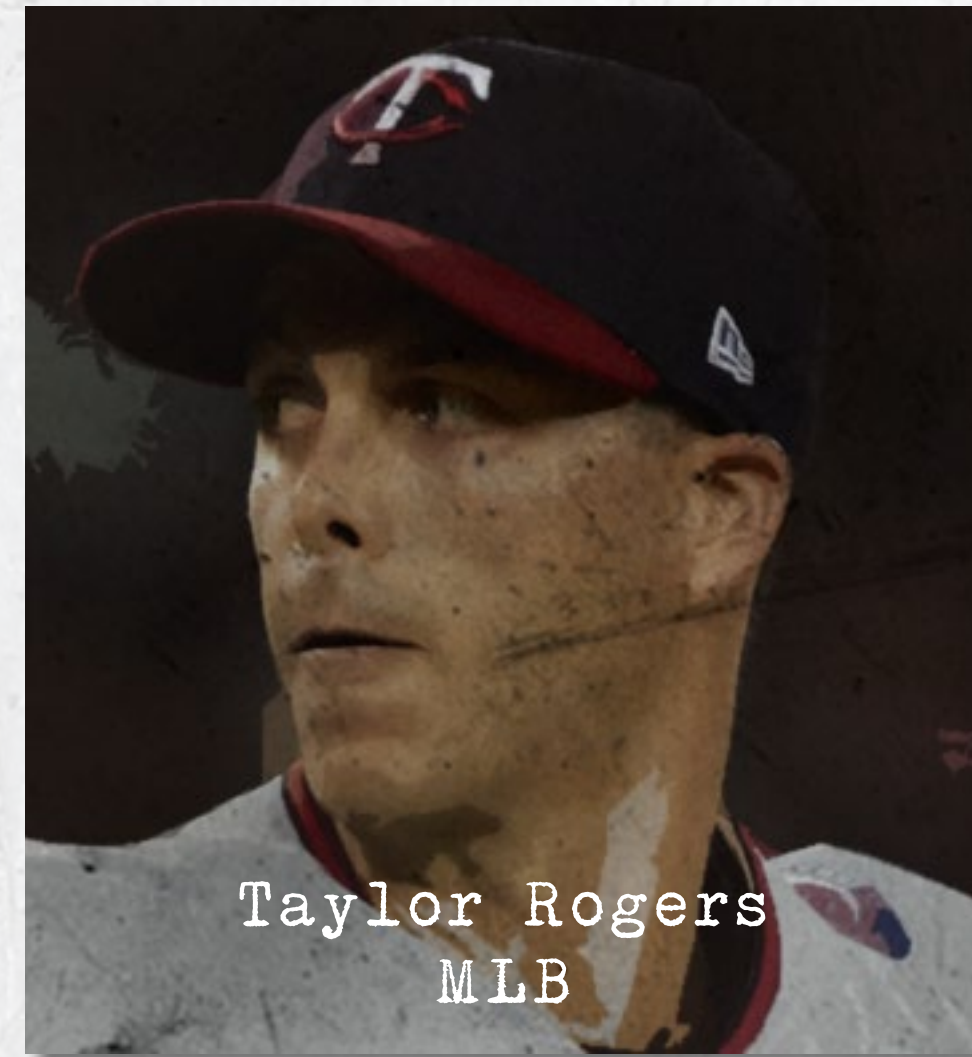
# Organizational Depth Chart



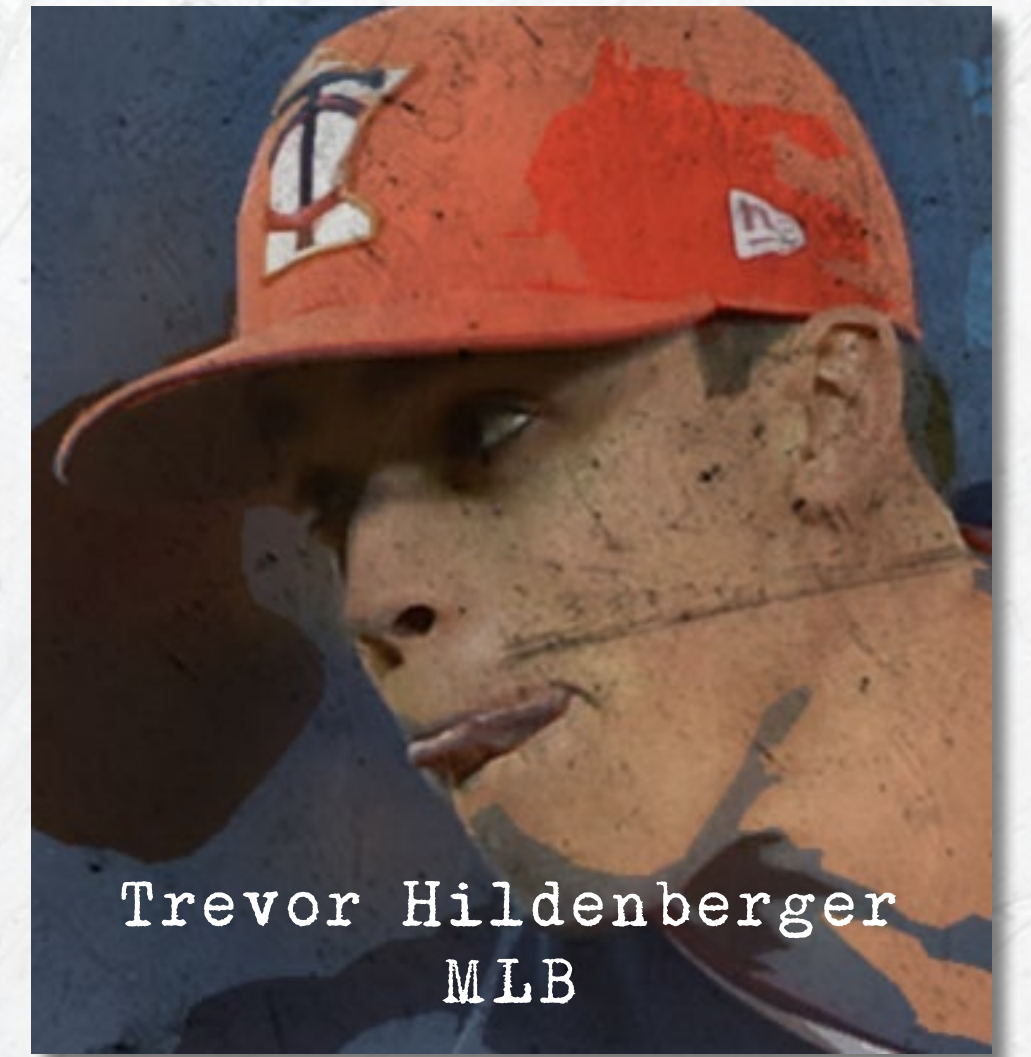
## Relievers



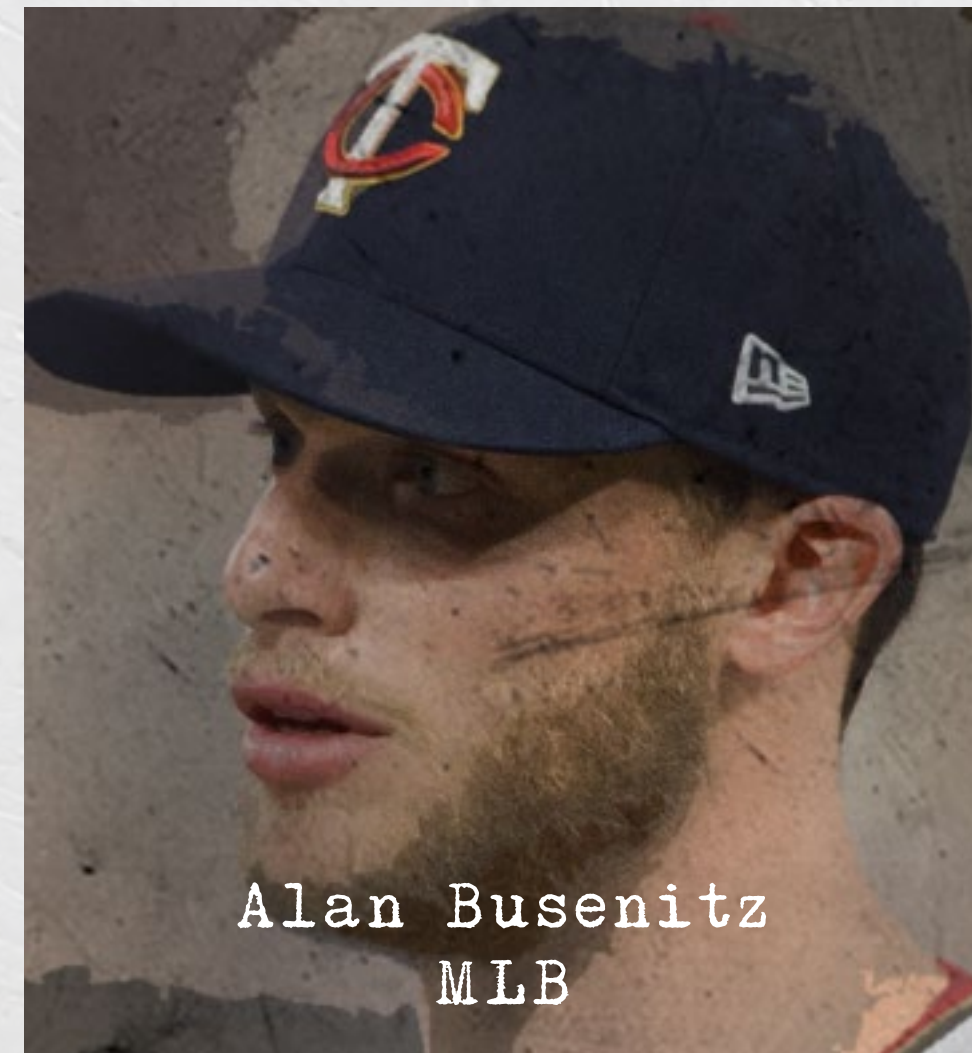
Matt Belisle - FA  
MLB



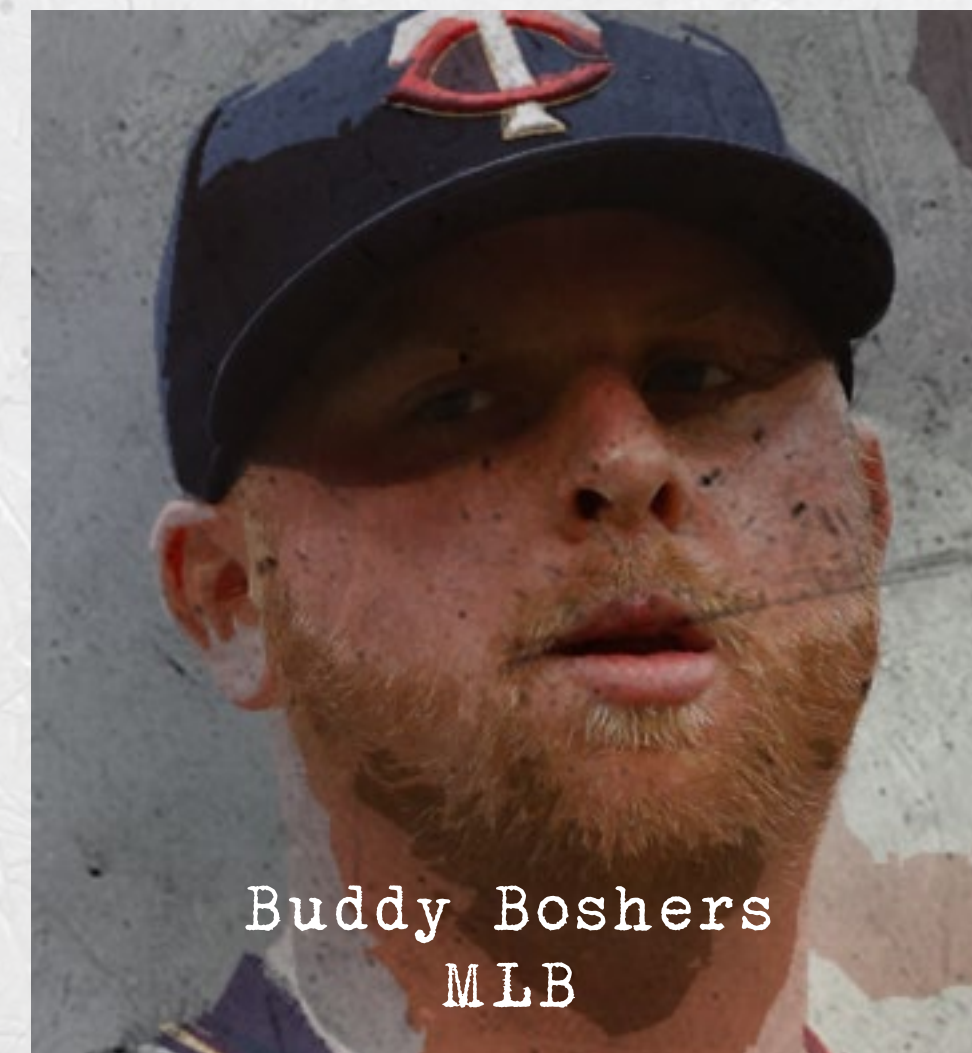
Taylor Rogers  
MLB



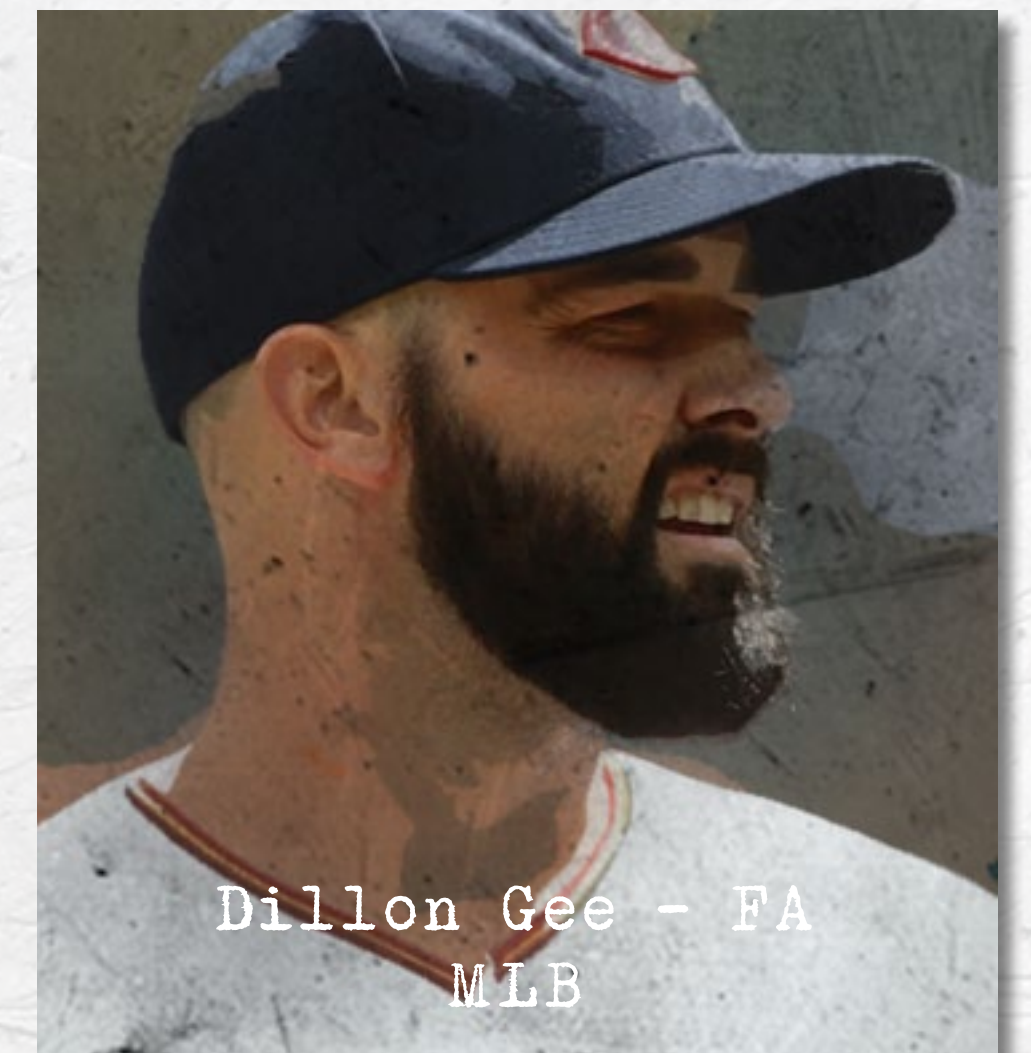
Trevor Hildenberger  
MLB



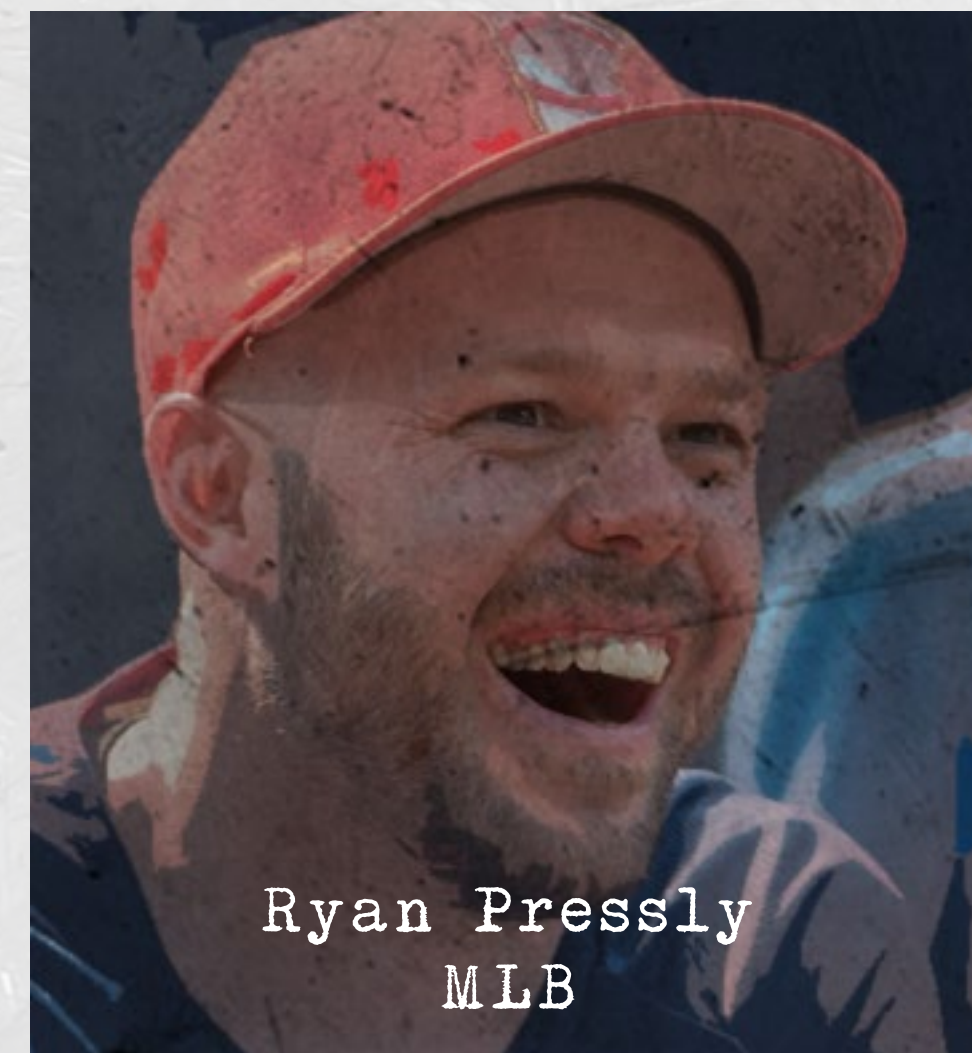
Alan Busenitz  
MLB



Buddy Boshers  
MLB



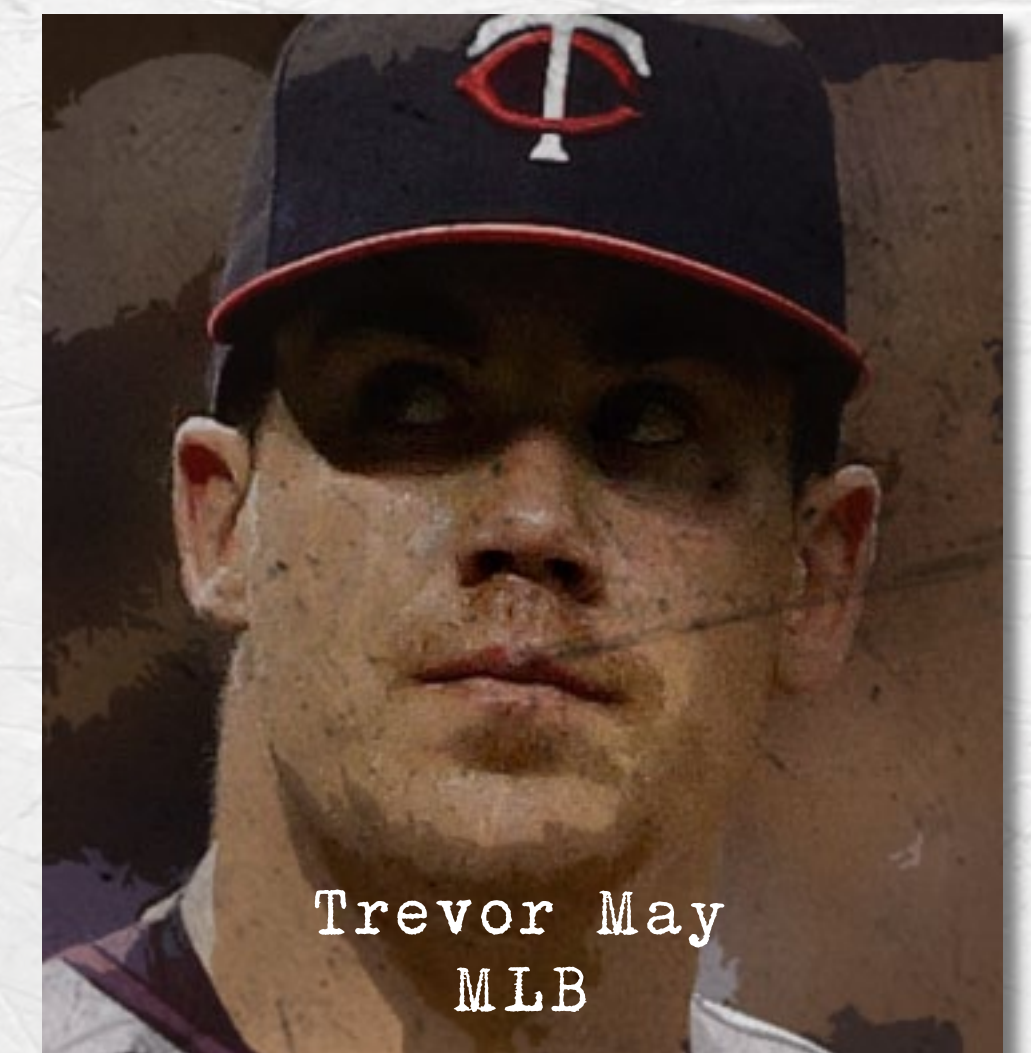
Dillon Gee - FA  
MLB



Ryan Pressly  
MLB



Phil Hughes  
MLB



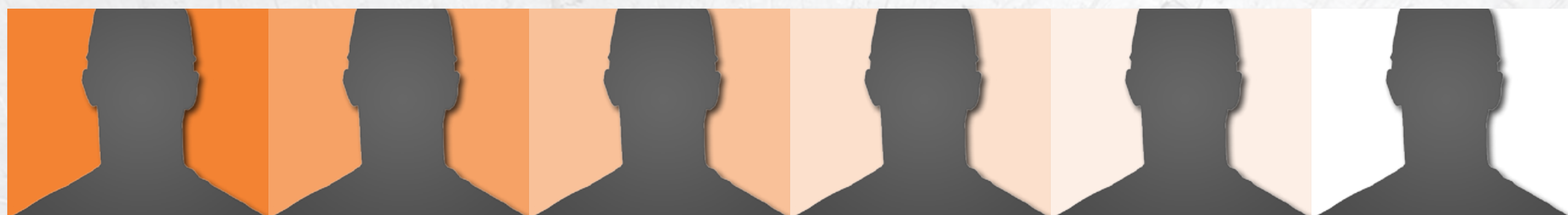
Trevor May  
MLB



# Organizational Depth Chart



## Relievers



Drew Rucinski  
Free Agent  
AAA

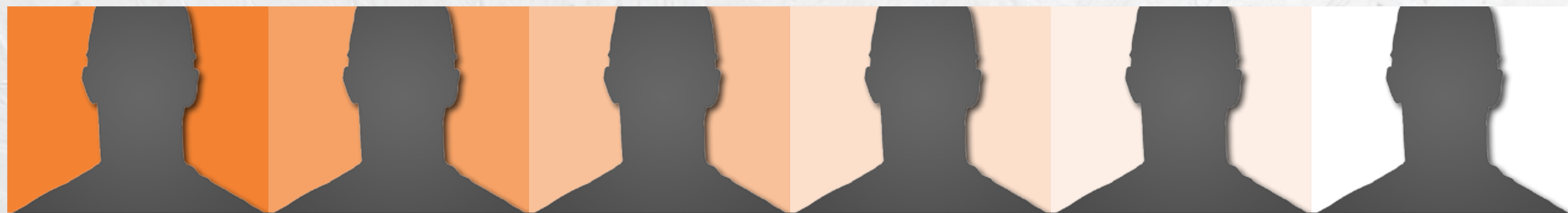
Alex Wimmers  
Free Agent  
AAA

Michael Tonkin  
Free Agent  
AAA

John Curtiss  
AAA

Jake Reed  
AAA

Mason Melotakis  
AAA



Mik Turley  
AAA

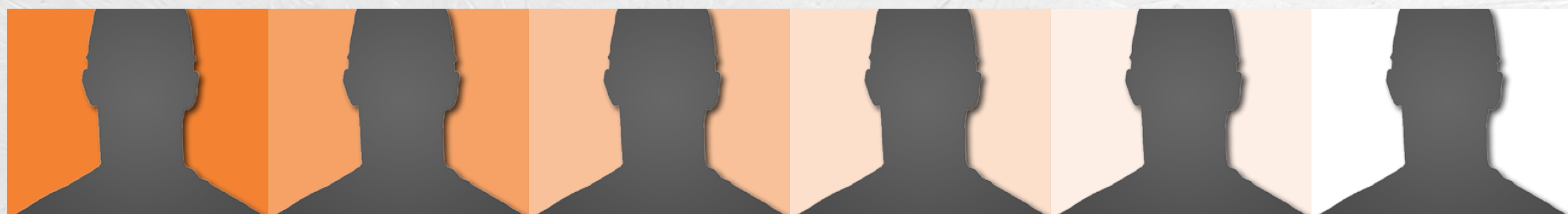
Yohan Pino  
Free Agent  
AAA

Luke Bard  
AAA

Kam Mickolio  
AAA

JT Chargois  
AAA

Michael Kohn  
AAA



DJ Baxendale  
AA

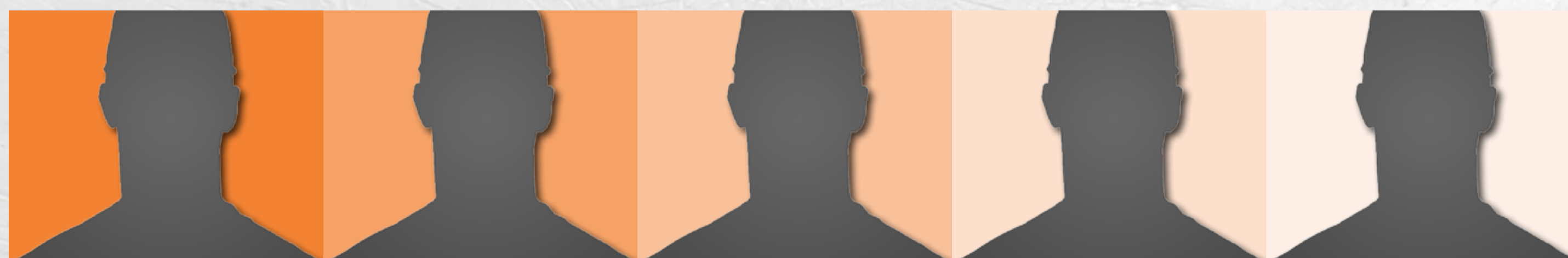
Ryan Eades  
AA

Todd Van Steensel  
AA

Randy Rosario  
AA

Nick Anderson  
AA

Gabriel Moya  
AA



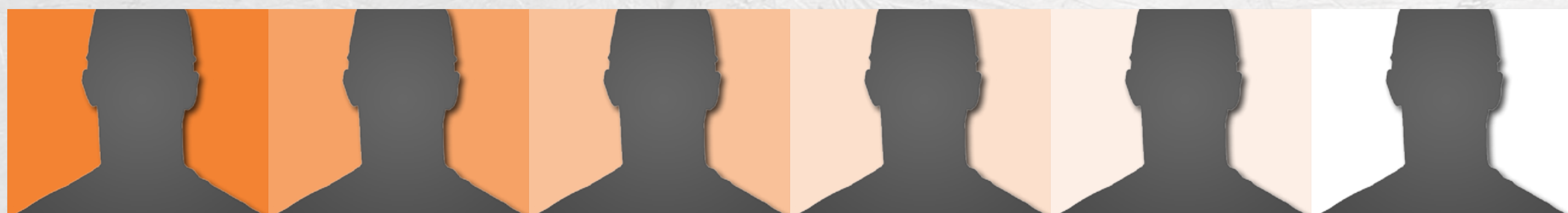
Nick Burdi  
AA

Alex Muren  
AA

Tyler Jay  
AA

Anthony McIver  
AA

Zack Jones  
AA



Sam Clay  
A+

Williams Ramirez  
A+

Michael  
Theofanopoulos  
A+

Tom Hackimer  
A+

Andrew Vasquez  
A+

Keaton Steele  
A+



# Organizational Depth Chart

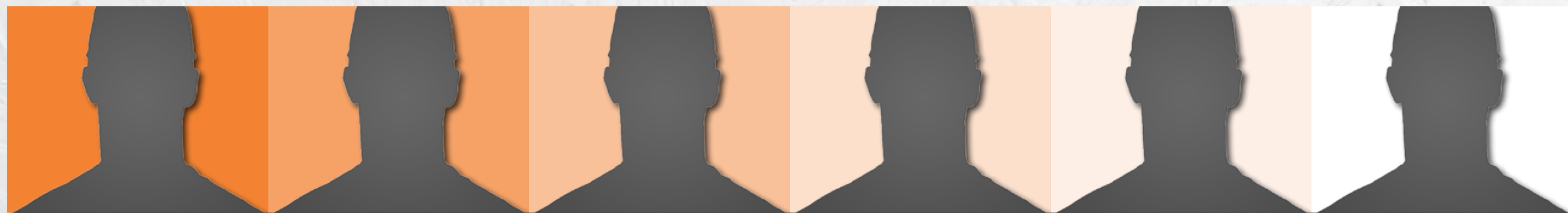


## Relievers



Alex Robinson  
A+

Cam Booser  
A+



Colton Davis  
A

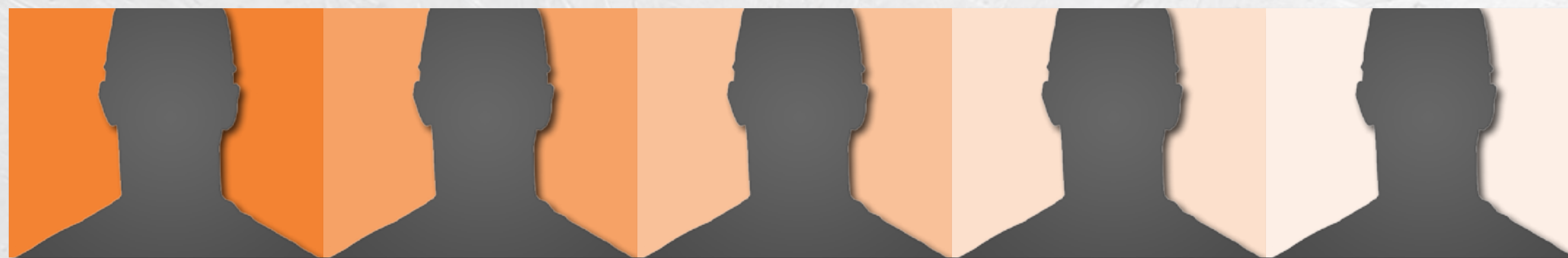
Hector Lujan  
A

Max Cordy  
A

Logan Lombana  
A

Ryan Mason  
A

Patrick McGuff  
A



Evan Sanders  
A

Bryan Sammons  
A

Randy Dobnak  
A

Alex Schick  
A

Griffin Jax  
A



Jared Finkel  
Rk

Jose Martinez  
Rk

Blair Lakso  
Rk

Juan Gamez  
Rk

Rickey Ramirez  
Rk

Jovani Moran  
Rk



Calvin Faucher  
Rk

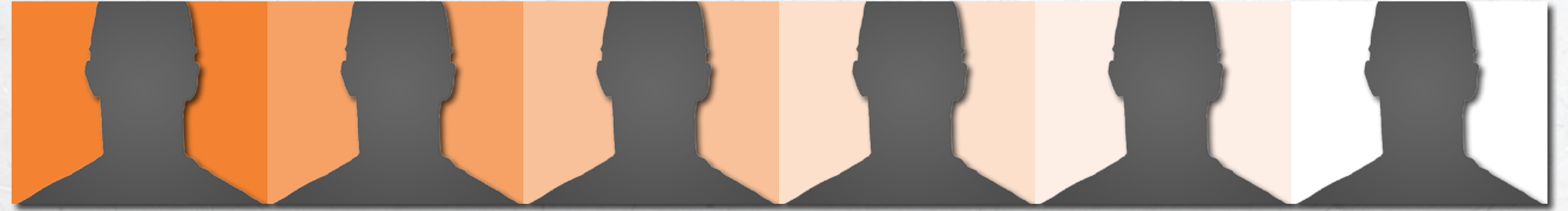
Christian Broussard  
Rk



# Organizational Depth Chart



## Relievers



Amilcar Cruz  
Rk

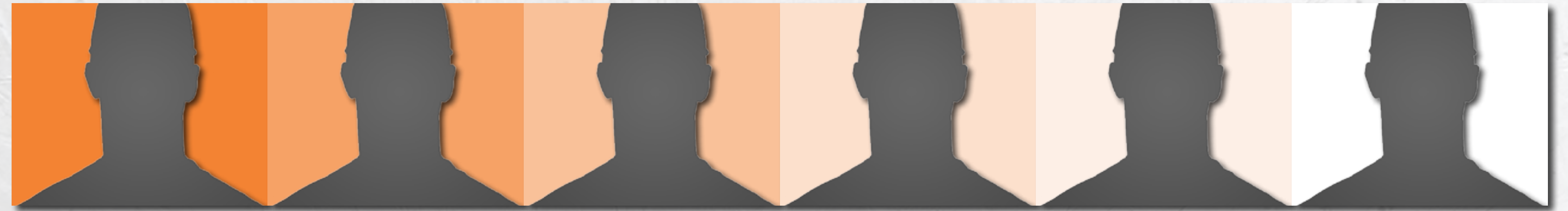
Zach Featherstone  
Rk

Matt Jones  
Rk

Derek Molina  
Rk

Petru Balan  
Rk

Vadim Balan  
Rk



Jose Bermudez  
Rk

Juan Mojica  
Rk

Austin Bizzle  
Rk

Kevin Marnon  
Rk

Joe Rosenstein  
Rk

Matz Schutte  
Rk



David Gerics  
Rk







## Twins Daily's Blueprint: 4-Step Plan for a World Series Contender

The goal: Build a championship-caliber roster for 2018, while staying within realistic payroll constraints and avoiding off-the-wall decisions. Here's our attempt, using the preceding information found within this Handbook:

**1) Offer arbitration to Eduardo Escobar (\$5 million), Ryan Pressly (\$2 million), Kyle Gibson (\$5.5 million), Robbie Grossman (\$2 million), Trevor May (\$1 million), Ehire Adrianza (\$1 million). Non-tender Chris Gimenez.**

For a little under \$20 million, we lock up a number of solid complementary pieces. Gimenez is replaced by Mitch Garver (\$500K) as the backup catcher.

**2) Trade SP Ervin Santana to Cincinnati Reds for RHP Robert Stephenson plus additional prospects.**

"What?? Trading the team's reigning best pitcher is your solution to get over the hump??" Hear us out. Santana has been excellent for the Twins and was an absolute stud in 2017, but he greatly outperformed his peripherals and he turns 35 in December, with a ton of innings logged on that arm. Controllable at a fairly reasonable price in 2018 and 2019, he has plenty of value to a team like the Reds, who are mired in an extended rut and would love to slot Big Erv atop a young rotation starring Luis Castillo. In return, the Twins get a chance to figure out the uber-talented yet erratic 24-year-old Stephenson, plus additional prospects and salary relief, which they turn around and use to...

**3) Sign SP Yu Darvish for 5 years, \$135 million.**

The sum result here is that you are swapping out two years of the 35-year-old Santana in exchange for five years of the 31-year-old Darvish, a superior pitcher





with elite stuff that shined on the big stage in October. Then it's up to someone like Stephenson or Berrios to emerge as that legit No. 2, and others to step as well. It's a potentially very good rotation.

#### **4) Sign RP Jake McGee for 3 years, \$21 million**

There are some high-upside young arms already present and in the pipeline for this bullpen, but it could use a proven high-quality veteran. McGee is just that. The 31-year-old has been steadily effective throughout his career with a 3.15 ERA, 1.10 WHIP and 11.1 K/9 rate. He's a lefty but gets right-handers out. He excelled even in Coors Field this year. It's a hefty price for a reliever but McGee's a bullpen anchor.

#### **SUMMARY**

Okay, we pressed payroll (\$118.5 million) to the upper limit of the range posed in our earlier section on the subject, but we're selling ownership on the plan with two key points: 1) This is the last year with Joe Mauer and Brian Dozier under contract, so it's worth making an emphatic push to win it all with them, and 2) With those salaries, and some others, slated to come off the books after 2018, payroll relief is on the way.

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