

This Week In Baseball Debuts: The Week Of June 3, 2018

Welcome to the fourth issue of the This Week In Baseball Debuts newsletter. Inspired by an episode of Effectively Wild, the purpose of this newsletter is to highlight the MLB debuts that have occurred in the past week. Our goal is to not only inform you about the top prospects you already know but give you some insight into some of the lesser know players who may only be up for a single cup of coffee.

In addition to this newsletter, a version of these profiles will also appear at Banished To The Pen.

Jefry Rodríguez, SP

Born: July 26, 1993 (Age: 24)

Hits: Right Throws: Right

Team: Washington Nationals Debut: June 3, 2018

Jefry Rodríguez grew up in the Dominican Republic playing shortstop, but he became a pitcher in 2012, shortly before the Nationals signed him for \$75,000 as an amateur free-agent at the age of 18. In 2013, Rodríguez made 12 starts for the Gulf-Coast League Nationals, going 3–0 with an ERA of 2.45, 43 strikeouts, and 20 walks in 47.2 innings. The GCL Nationals led the minor leagues with a .845 winning percentage and won the league championship

After spending the 2014 and 2015 seasons shuttling between Single-A Hagerstown and Low-A Auburn, Rodríguez spent all of 2016 with Hagerstown, even earning a spot on the South Atlantic League All-Star team.

Last season while playing for the High-A Potomac Nationals, Rodríguez was named Carolina League Pitcher of the Week for the first week in May, but then on May 16 he was suspended for 80 games for testing positive for Clomifene, a drug designed to treat female infertility. The

Washington Post wrote, "The suspension comes as a particularly harsh blow given Rodríguez's success early in the 2017 season. The 23-year-old recently carried a no-hitter into the eighth inning and is pitching to a 3-2 record and 3.51 ERA. Opposing hitters are batting .228 against him, and he has compiled a strikeout-to-walk ratio of nearly four to one." The Post did not say whether or not Rodríguez was pregnant at the time of the suspension. Following his suspension Rodríguez went 4–3 with a 3.32 ERA, 51 strikeouts, and 19 walks in the 57 innings.

During Spring Training Baseball America reported, "Rodríguez throws a plus fastball, a curveball that flashes plus and an improved changeup. He has been able to hit the high 90s with his fastball for the past five years, and now it has more movement. Meanwhile, his changeup has more deception and separation from his fastball."

This season Rodríguez started the year at Double-A and got called-up to the majors on May 19 to be the 26th man for a doubleheader against the Dodgers, however he was optioned back to Harrisburg the next day without having pitched. Rodríguez got his second call-up when Tim Collins went on paternity leave and made his major league debut when starter Jeremy Hellickson had to leave the game after two batters because of a hamstring injury.

Federal Baseball reported, "Rodríguez was sitting 93-95 with his two and four-seam fastballs, mixing in his slider and his changeup as he recorded two quick outs in the first," and noted in the third inning his fastball was at 95-97 and touched 98 mph in the fourth inning."

Rodríguez was optioned back to Double-A Harrisburg the day after his debut.

Fun Fact: The Nationals used Rodríguez to pitch to their major league regulars as part of a simulated game before the 2017 playoffs.

Debut Game

4.2 IP | 4 H | 0 ER | 2 BB | 3 K

Player Pages

Baseball Reference

Fangraphs

Prospect Rankings (Team / Overall)

MLB Pipeline: 16 / NA

Fangraphs: NA / NA

Baseball Prospectus: NA / NA

Sandy Báez, SP

Born: November 25, 1993 (24)

Throws: Right Hits: Right

Team: Detroit Tigers Debut: June 4, 2018

Báez signed with the Detroit Tigers as an international free agent in October 2011 out of the Dominican Republic. After a rocky debut season in 2012 going 0-3 with a 5.21 ERA in ten games (nine starts), he made improvements in 2013 to the tune of an 8-1 record and 2.05 ERA in 14 games (ten starts). He worked his way through the rookie leagues until getting his call up to single A in 2016 where he was 7-9 with a 3.81 ERA in 21 starts. He was added to the 40 man roster after that season, and spent 2017 between high A and AA compiling a combined 6-8 record and 3.92 ERA in 19 starts between the two teams.

Baez is known for his fastball, Tigs Town blog rated it the best fastball in the Tigers' organization, "Most evaluators expect Baez to eventually move into the bullpen, but there's little debate about his fastball, which is a blistering offering that sits in the mid-90s, hits the high-90s multiple times a game, and stays firm late into his outings. If and when he moves to relief his fastball could play up even more and be a borderline elite pitch." Tigers blog Bless You Boys writes, "Multiple sources...have noted that Baez's fastball develops a bit more movement at lower velocities, which might be a point in his favor toward sticking in the rotation. That Baez is able to maintain his velocity deep into starts is testament to his sturdy build. Standing 6'2 and weighing 180 pounds, Baez should be able to stand up to the rigors of a full MLB season as a starter... He is a good athlete as well, though that hasn't quite translated to smooth, repeatable mechanics quite yet."

Báez was called up as the 26th man as part of a double header and was thrown right into the fire against the Yankees, he was sent back to AA after the second game. Regardless of his expected demotion he will always be able to tell his friends and family that he struck out Aaron Judge and Giancarlo Stanton back to back in his major league debut. The Yankees sluggers were not the only ones that took notice of Sandy's pitching, catcher John Hicks said Baez used all three of his pitches effectively. "It was pretty impressive for a guy making his debut," Hicks said. "He kinda came the first couple innings and was 92, 93 with his fastball, and as he got deeper in the game, he was hitting 97, 98 maybe. And he used all three of his pitches, his change-up is kind of his go-to offspeed pitch and he used it very well. Kind of the same thing with his slider. Early in the game, it was 76, 78, and towards the end, he was 83, 84 with it and it was sharper and I felt like it got better as he stayed in there."

Debut Game

4.1 IP | 0 H | 0 ER | 3 BB | 4 K

Player Pages

Fangraphs

Baseball Reference

Prospect Rankings (Team / Overall)

MLB Pipeline: 19 / NA

Fangraphs: NA / NA

Baseball Prospectus: NA / NA

Zack Littell, SP

Born: October 5, 1995 (22)

Throws: Right Hits: Right

Team: Minnesota Twins Debut: June 5, 2018

Zack was drafted out of high school by the Seattle Mariners in the 11th round of the 2013 Draft. Littell made his professional debut with the Arizona League Mariners and pitched to a 5.94 ERA in 33.1 innings. Following the 2016 season the Mariners traded him to the New York Yankees in exchange for Jeff Pazos. He split his time with the Yankees between High-A Tampa and Double-A Trenton.

At the 2017 the trade deadline the Yankees traded him and another minor league pitcher to the the Twins in exchange for Jamie Garcia. The Twins assigned Littell to the Chattanooga Lookouts (AA) where he found his groove. In 27 total games (25 starts) between Tampa, Trenton and Chattanooga, he went 19–1 with a 2.12 ERA and 1.12 WHIP. As result of his strong 2017 Littell was named to the Baseball America Minor League 2nd Team All-Star Team and he was added to the Twins 40-man roster.

This season before being called up as the 26th man as part of a double header against the White Sox, Littlell was 1-1 with a 2.57 ERA in five outings for including four starts for Triple-A Rochester. In 28 innings he has 30 strikeouts and has allowed 20 hits and 10 walks. After his debut game Littell told reporters, “Obviously the results weren’t great, but it was one of the most fun nights of my life,” later adding, “You expect the adrenaline, but dealing with it is a whole different story.” One scout with the Yankees had this to say about Littell last year, “Armed with a pinpoint fastball that regularly sits between 91-94 mph, Littell is currently refining an at-times unhittable slider to go along with his changeup and curveball.”

Fun Fact: Littell made his MLB debut 48 years to the day that Hall of Famer and fellow Minnesota Twin, Bert Blyleven made his.

Debut Game

3 IP | 6 H | 6 ER | 4 BB | 1 K | 1 HR

Player Pages

Fangraphs

Baseball Reference

Prospect Rankings (Team / Overall)

MLB Pipeline: 15 / NA

Fangraphs: 20 / NA

Baseball Prospectus: NA /NA

Austin Wynns, C

Born: December 10, 1990 (27)

Hits: Right Throws: Right

Team: Baltimore Orioles Debut: June 05, 2018

Austin Wynns was drafted in the 10th round of the 2013 MLB Draft from Cal State Fresno as a senior. Wynns had significant playing time in each of his 4 college seasons, playing in 32 games during his freshman season.

Wynns was promoted, in part, to help the Orioles patch the hole at catcher left by Caleb Joseph's struggles. The first replacement by Baltimore, Andrew Susac, hit just .115 in nine games before the Orioles sent him back down to Triple-A Norfolk. Wynns was promoted in Susac's place.

Wynns joins Chance Sisco as the second rookie catcher on Baltimore's big league roster, the first time that has occurred for Baltimore since tracking began in 2003. Wynns' debut was delayed by a day when Sunday's game was rained out. The extra day allowed Wynns to have a special guest at his first major league game. Wynns' hit in his major league debut makes him only the 5th catcher in Orioles history to do so, and the first since Willie Morales on April 9, 2000, per @oriolesfactoids on Twitter.

Debut Game

3 PA | 3 AB | 1 H | 1 K

Player Pages

Baseball Reference

Fangraphs

Prospect Rankings (Team / Overall)

MLB Pipeline: 22 / NA

Fangraphs: NA / NA

Baseball Prospectus: NA / NA

Diego Castillo, RP

Born: January 18, 1994 (24)

Throws: Right Hits: Right

Team: Tampa Bay Rays Debut: June 6, 2018

Castillo signed with the Tampa Bay Rays as an international free agent in March 2014 out of the Dominican Republic. Castillo spent his first 3 years between rookie ball and high-A.

In 2017, Castillo played for the Montgomery Biscuits and Durham Bulls. He was named the Rays minor league reliever of the year after posting a 2.76 ERA with 90 strikeouts and 15 saves in 71.2 innings pitched. He was added to the 40 man roster after that season.

Castillo was called up to take the spot of the injured Chris Archer. Prior to being called up, Castillo was 0-1 with a 1.03 ERA and four saves in 19 games this season in AAA.

Debut Game

1 IP | 0 H | 0 ER | 0 BB | 2 K

Player Pages

Fangraphs

Baseball Reference

Prospect Rankings (Team/Overall)

MLB Pipeline: 27 / NA

Fangraphs: 21 / NA

Baseball Prospectus: NA / NA

Caleb Ferguson, SP

Born: July 2nd, 1996 (21)

Throws: Left Hits: Right

Team: Los Angeles Dodgers Debut: June 6, 2018

As a high school senior in 2014, Caleb underwent Tommy John Surgery. Despite the injury, he was drafted by the Los Angeles Dodgers in the 38th round of the 2014 Major League Baseball Draft. He had a rough first professional season in 2015 pitching to a 0-3 record and 8.59 ERA in 14.2 innings. He worked his way to Double-A in 2018 and after 8 games was promoted to Triple-A.

He was called up to the Dodgers as a spot starter after 80% of their starting staff had gone down with injuries, even though he has thrown only 47 innings above Single-A baseball and made only two starts for Triple-A Oklahoma City. Ferguson posted a 1.38 ERA in eight starts for the Drillers with 9.2 strikeouts per nine innings.

Since he grew up in the suburbs of Columbus, Ohio he expected a fleet of 40 friends and family members to make the three-hour trek to Pittsburgh for Wednesday's game, asking his dad to help handle tickets for the large group.

Ferguson primarily pitches off of his high spin four seam fastball, which sits around 92 mph in the early innings but he can reach 94 mph when he needs it. His velocity did tend to tail off to 90-91 mph in the middle innings but he didn't show signs of laboring in his mechanics or command. Ferguson's primary strikeout pitch is a high-spin curve ball that is more notable for

its tremendous depth than it's velocity. His curveball sat between 73-76 mph but broke late and steeply on hitters. Ferguson has a change up but uses it sparingly and throws it quite firm in the mid to upper 80s. The change up was also the pitch hitters were most likely to put in play.

After a disappointing start Ferguson was sent back down to AAA Oklahoma City.

Debut Game

1.2 IP | 2 H | 4 ER | 3 BB | 3 K

Player Pages

Fangraphs

Baseball Reference

Prospect Rankings (Team / Overall)

MLB Pipeline: 15 / NA

Fangraphs: NA / NA

Baseball Prospectus: NA / NA

Nick Martini, OF

Born: June 27, 1990 (Age: 27)

Hits: Left Throws: Left

Team: Oakland A's Debut: June 6, 2018

With Matt Joyce going on the 10-DL, the Oakland A's decided to SHAKE things up by promoting Nick Martini. Unfortunately Martini came-up DRY in his first game going 0-for-2.

The A's signed Martini in the off-season as a minor league free-agent. Before signing with the A's, Martini had been part of the St. Louis Cardinals organization. The Cardinals selected Martini in the 7th round of the 2011 MLB Amateur Draft. Being selected by the Cardinals was

a TWIST for Martini since he grew-up rooting for the Chicago Cubs.

Martini played college baseball at Kansas State. While at Kansas State, Martini created quite a STIR reaching base in 93 consecutive games from 2009-2011. In 2010 he was name co-Big 12 Player of the year.

In 2015 while playing for the Springfield Cardinals (AA), Martini was named to the midseason Texas League All-Star team. In 2016, KATOH Projects: St. Louis Cardinals Prospects Chris Daniel ranked Martini the Cardinals 21st best prospect, writing, "Nick Martini succeeded in Double-A and Triple-A as a 25-year-old last year. He walks as often as he strikes out, and has also shown a hint of power." This season at Nashville, Martini was hitting .299/.417/.390 with 7 doubles, 3 homers and 5 steals in 177 at-bats.

Fun Fact: If I couldn't make bad puns about Martini's last name, I would joke about how he is from Crystal Lake, IL. The town has the same name as the setting of the first four Friday The 13th movies.

Debut Game

2 PA | 2 AB | 0 H

Player Pages

Baseball Reference

Fangraphs

Prospect Rankings (Team / Overall)

MLB Pipeline: NA / NA

Fangraphs: NA / NA

Baseball Prospectus: NA / NA

Jake Bauers, 1B/OF

Born: October 6, 1995 (22)

Throws: Left Hits: Left

Team: Tampa Bay Rays Debut: June 7, 2018

Bauers is generally regarded as a well-rounded first base prospect, without the power ceiling that typically accompanies the position. Fangraphs' Eric Longenhagen grades his hit tool as above average to plus, with above average raw power that hasn't yet translated to game play. He also sees Bauers as an above-average defender at first, with an average arm, although Bauers has also played some outfield this year in the minors.

Bauers, who came to the Rays as perhaps the least prominent piece in the Wil Myers trade, has blossomed into a top-100 prospect. Prior to his promotion, he was slashing .279/.357/.426 at AAA, with a 10.4% walk rate and 21.2% strikeout rate, which is in line with his career numbers so far in the minors.

Bauers was hitless in his debut, but did contribute a nifty catch in foul territory, and, with the DFA of Brad Miller, looks to have a chance to prove his worth to the big league club.

Debut Game:

4 PA | 4 AB | 0 H | 1 K

Player Pages:

[Fangraphs](#)

[Baseball Reference](#)

Prospect Rankings (Team / Overall)

MLB Pipeline: 5 / 55

Fangraphs: 4 / 43

Baseball Prospectus 6 / NA

Jalen Beeks, SP

Born: October 10, 1993 (24)

Throws: Left Hits: Left

Team: Boston Red Sox Debut: June 7, 2018

Beeks is a smallish (5'11") lefty from University of Arkansas. He was drafted by the Red Sox in the 12th round of the 2014 draft. He's listed by Fangraphs' Eric Longenhagen as the Sox' 6th best prospect, with the potential to develop a plus curve and changeup. Longenhagen sees him as a future #4 or #5 big-league starter. In his debut, Beeks averaged 92.9 mph on his fastball. In 2017, Beeks played for Portland (AA) and the Pawtucket Red Sox of the Class AAA International League. The Red Sox named him their Minor League Pitcher of the Year after he posted a combined 11–8 record, 3.29 ERA, and 1.21 WHIP in 26 games started between the two teams.

Prior to his promotion, Beeks had been dominating AAA, averaging better than 12 strikeouts, and fewer than 3 walks per nine innings, and pitching to a 2.56 ERA and 2.98 FIP.

Beeks was sent back down to AAA immediately after his debut. After giving up 5 earned runs in the first inning but settled down after that allowing only 1 in the next 4.

Debut Game:

4 IP | 7 H | 6 ER | 3 BB | 4 K | 1 HR

Player Pages:

Fangraphs

Baseball Reference

Prospect Rankings: (Team / Overall)

MLB Pipeline: 15 / NA

Fangraphs: 6 / NA

Baseball America: NA / NA

Ben Meyer, RP

Born: January 30, 1993 (Age: 25)

Hits: Right Throws: Right

Team: Miami Marlins Debut: June 7, 2018

Ben Meyer was drafted out of the University of Minnesota in the 29th round of the 2015 MLB Draft.

In this year's Fangraphs' Top 29 Prospects: Miami Marlins, Meyer was listed as both an "Other Prospect of Note" and blessed (or cursed) as "Cistuli's Guy." Longenhagen writes, "[Meyer] A low-slot righty who will touch 96, [his] fastball/breaking-ball combination could play in relief, probably as a righty specialist." Cistuli compares Meyer to fellow Marlin Trevor Richards, "While Richards appears to succeed largely on the strength of his changeup and command, however, Meyer actually possesses some physical talents uncharacteristic of a 29th-round pick. Standing at 6-foot-5 and possessing room for positive development, Meyer ventures into the mid-90s with some frequency and sat at just over 93 mph during this year's Arizona Fall League." In one of his "Fringe Five" columns last year Cistuli noted that Meyer had the 2nd best K%-BB% in the Florida Stat League and "has some of the qualities typically associated with late-developing pitchers. Specifically, he's (a) tall and (b) from a cold-weather climate."

The Marlins had Meyer skip Double-A and start the season with Triple-A New Orleans. Fish Stripes reports, "Ben Meyer had a fantastic April in New Orleans with a 2.30 ERA through 27 1/3 innings pitched. This May, the narrative has been entirely different with a bloated 6.17 ERA, giving up 18 runs through 23.1 innings pitched. His last start was pretty good, however (6.1 IP, 1 ER)."

Meyer is the second player from University of Minnesota to debut this season. D.J. Snelten (see newsletter issue 1) of the Giants is the other. He is also the 36th former Golden Gopher

to make it to the majors, include Hall of Famers, Dave Winfield and Paul Molitor.

Fun Fact: Meyer's brother, and current Gopher, Reggie Meyer was drafted on Wednesday in the 38th round by the Texas Rangers.

Debut Game

1 IP | 0 H | 0 ER | 0 BB | 0 K

Player Pages

Baseball Reference

Fangraphs

Prospect Rankings (Team / Overall)

MLB Pipeline: NA / NA

Fangraphs: NA / NA

Baseball Prospectus: NA / NA

Jose Fernandez, 1B

Born: April 27, 1988 (30)

Throws: Right Hits: Left

Team: Los Angeles Angels Debut: June 8, 2018

Born in Cuba, Jose Fernandez first garnered attention in the 2013 World Baseball Classic, where he took 21 turns at the plate, batting .524 with a .545 OBP and .667 SLG without striking out. In the 2014-15 season playing in the Cuban National Series, he batted .326 with a .482 OBP, .456 SLG, 65 walks and 10 strikeouts in 314 plate appearances, ranking second in the league in OBP. Baseball America ranked him as the #3 Cuban player in April 2015.

In 2015 he didn't play any games because he was suspended for previously attempting to defect from Cuba and remained under heavy police guard. On December 2, 2015, reports

emerged that he had defected from Cuba. However, at that time, he had yet to establish residency in another country, and still required clearance from Major League Baseball to sign a free agent contract with a major league club. On January 11, 2017, it was officially announced that he had signed a minor league contract with the Los Angeles Dodgers.

The Dodgers assigned him to the Double-A Tulsa Drillers of the Texas League to start the 2017 season. He played in 90 games for them, with a .306 average, 16 homers and 64 RBI. He was released by the Dodgers on November 14, 2017. The reason for the Dodgers' decision to release Fernandez is unclear, though his age and the season-injury he suffered stand out as possible factors. Six weeks later he signed with the Angels.

Before finally getting his call up to the majors this year, he was slashing .345/.412/.562 with ten home runs and a 19:20 K/BB ratio over 226 plate appearances at the Triple-A level. He has split his time evenly between first, second, and third at Salt Lake, so he'll be another option around the diamond.

Debut Game

3 PA | 1 H | 1 K

Player Pages

Fangraphs

Baseball Reference

Prospect Rankings (Team / Overall)

MLB Pipeline: NA / NA

Fangraphs: NA / NA

Baseball Prospectus: NA / NA

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email.

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