



Society for American Baseball Research

San Diego Ted Williams Chapter

# PADRES 2023

## A Chapter Report

**BASEBALL PREVIEW 2023**  
**NL WEST OUTLOOK**  
 PREDICTED ORDER OF FINISH

**1. SAN DIEGO PADRES**

2022 finish: 89-73 (second in NL West, lost in NLCS)  
 Manager: Bob Melvin (89-73)



*World Series*  
**YANKEES over PADRES**

**MACHADO LEADS THE WAY**

**SAN DIEGO PADRES MEDIA GUIDE**  
2023 SEASON

*Big enough sample size, Padres stink*

**NICK CARP**  
Columbus



**CAPITOL COMEBACK**

8 6  
Padres down to final out when Otor belts

**PADRES MIRED IN A CONFOUNDING SEASON**

**DANGLING BY A THREAD**

**LEADERSHIP VOID?**

**WASTED OPPORTUNITY**  
Padres players lament that the collection of talent like they had this season doesn't happen very often

**A MYSTERIOUS MELTDOWN**

**SEIDLER: 'FULL SUPPORT'**

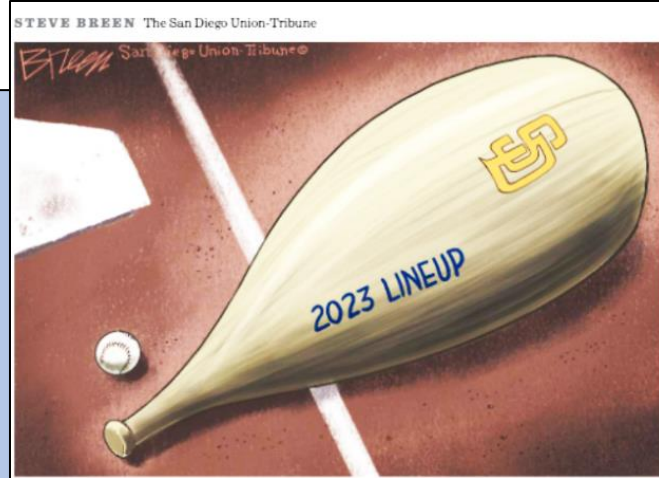
**STREAK AND HOPE END**



**BIG FOUR'S FAILURE**

Starting to believe in S.D. Sports Curse

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## INTRODUCTION

The last time our chapter reviewed a Padres season was in 2020. It was that notable shortened baseball season caused by the advent of COVID-19. It was a memorable season, not only because of the unique delayed start and 60-game schedule, but also because the Padres made the playoffs. The season was filled with unique memories, and the playoff-bound Padres added to an excitement not often felt in San Diego.

Unfortunately, the 2020 excitement didn't extend into 2021, as the team finished in third place with a 79-83 record. Then, in 2022, the excitement renewed, as the team finished in second place with a record of 89-73 and made the playoffs. They went on to win two memorable playoff series against the Mets and Dodgers but then came up short in the National League Championship Series against the Philadelphia Phillies.

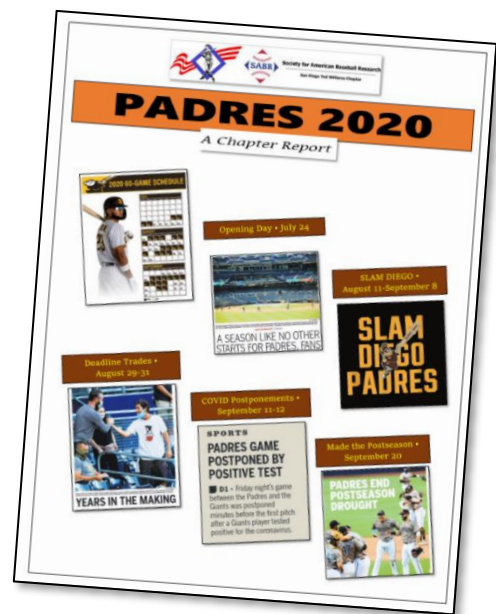
The 2022 gave impetus to an active “hot stove” off-season. The 2023 season seemed loaded with promise. There were the midseason trades that brought outfielder Juan Soto and closer Josh Hader aboard. Fernando Tatis Jr. would eventually be playing again. Our chapter members and most sports pundits judged the team's offense to be “loaded” and relief pitching solid. Add a couple of good starting pitchers and the team couldn't miss.

We Padres' fans were ready for 2023! We decided to conduct an Opening Day survey of our members asking their predictions for the 2023 team. Who better to ask than those who know the most about the status of the San Diego Padres: members of the San Diego Ted Williams SABR chapter. Right?

In a summary of the survey by **Dan Boyle** in our June 2023 Newsletter, he reported that our members predicted that the team would post 94 wins.<sup>1</sup> Playoffs were guaranteed, at least in the minds of this astute group of baseball minds who reside as members in our distinguished chapter.

Well, we blew it! Actually, the team blew it...but we confirmed that making predictions can be risky even with odds in one's favor.

So we decided to explore what happened in 2023 with the Padres. Boyle added two more surveys, one in the summer and another after the close of the season. His report on these surveys leads off a series of viewpoints composed by several of our members. Contributors include:



<sup>1</sup> Author's Note: I can't remember what number I entered into my survey form, but it had to be around 94. I do remember making sure that I remain realistic and not going too high in my estimate.

- A conversation with **Bob Chandler**, who offers his viewpoints influenced by over 60 years of watching San Diego Padres baseball (PCL and NL).
- Super fan—attended all Opening Days since 1969 (even was standing outside the gate in 2020)—and baseball trivia aficionado **Greg Funk** offers his “two cents.”
- On the topic of relief pitching, our resident expert, **Wayne Towers**, provides his conclusions.
- Then, I will engage you with some of my thoughts on “what happened.”

Another contributor, albeit behind the scenes, is **Geoff Young**, who keeps us on the straight and narrow with his editing expertise.

Our report concludes with two appendixes. The first features several statistical tabulations that offer some insight into what happened in 2023 as it relates to team and player performance. It will provide a handy reference for you whenever you want to look back at the Padres 2023 season. The second appendix provides short bios on each of the report’s contributors.

We hope that you enjoy the report. Feel free to send me any comments ([Lar.11@cox.net](mailto:Lar.11@cox.net)). In the meantime, Merry Christmas and best wishes for your 2024, with fingers crossed for our 2024 Padres!

--Tom Larwin  
December 4, 2023



June 16, 2023, San Diego Union-Tribune, p.B4

## VIEWPOINTS

# 1

## MEMBER SURVEYS: OPENING WEEK, LATE SUMMER and POSTSEASON

*Chapter Member Predictions and Opinions*

*by Dan Boyle*

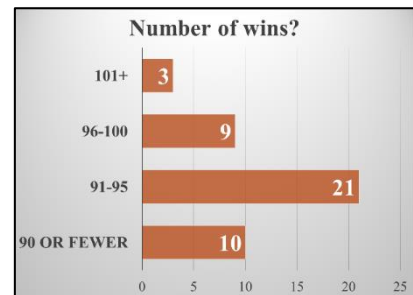
The results are in! A season that began with excitement but not wild-eyed optimism regarding the 2023 Padres ended in a less happy spot. First, we review the opening week and late summer responses. After that, we summarize postseason survey results.

The opening week survey included 43 responses. Interest ebbed as the season progressed, with 25 responses for the late summer survey and 23 for the postseason survey.

### THE TEAM

#### *Opening week:*

- Survey respondents see a successful season ahead, between 89 and 104 wins, with an average of 94, which is also the median number of predicted wins.
- Most respondents see a National League West pennant in the Padres near future, but not necessarily a World Series triumph.



#### *Late summer:*

- Only a few wild-eyed optimists saw a third-place finish with 76 wins, with most (84%) expecting fourth place, but the optimists prevailed thanks to a hot September.

### THE PLAYERS

#### *Opening week:*

- **Xander Bogaerts** will provide the pure hitting, while **Manny Machado** will lead the way in home runs and runs batted in.
- Look for **Fernando Tatis** in the leadoff spot and **Jake Cronenworth** at first base.
- **Yu Darvish** will lead in wins and **Josh Hader** will be the bullpen ace.
- The Padres MVP? **Manny Machado**.

#### *Late summer:*

- **Ha-Seong Kim** was favored to lead in average,
- **Juan Soto** was picked to lead in home runs, and **Machado** in RBIs, with **Kim** hitting leadoff and **Cronenworth** at first base.
- **Kim** was the choice for team MVP.

- As predicted in the opening week poll results, **Bogaerts** led the team in average and **Cronenworth** played the most games at first base. **Soto** led in both home runs and runs batted in.
- **Kim** led off in 73 games, followed by **Tatis** (45), **Bogaerts** (23), **Grisham** (15, none after June 4), and **Cronenworth**, **Odor**, and **Profar** with 2 apiece (courtesy of [Baseball Reference](#)).
- **Blake Snell** was predicted to lead in wins (he tied with **Michael Wacha** at 14), and **Josh Hader** to lead in saves (**Hader** saved 33 games, or 32 games ahead of the second-place finishers).

## RULES

### *Opening week:*

- Respondents showed strong support for the **pitch clock** and restrictions on **defensive shifts**, as well as favorable reactions to **larger bases** and restrictions on **pickoff attempts**.
- On the flip side, they gave a loud **no** to the **automatic runner** at second base in extra innings, even with a year to get used to the idea.

### *Late summer:*

- Percentage of respondents saying “definitely yes” to new rules increased for **pitch clock** (up from 72% to 85%), restrictions on **defensive shifts** (61% to 65%), limits on **pickoffs** (33% to 55%), and **larger bases** (25% to 50%).
- Percentage of respondents saying “definitely no” to the **automatic runner** at second base in extra innings rule decreased from 47% to 30%.

## TRADES/DEALS, ETC.

### *Opening week:*

- General managers stick around longer than managers, and **A.J. Preller** will outlast **Bob Melvin**.
- Respondents were not sad to see **Wil Myers** head off to Cincinnati and thought it somewhat unlikely, but not impossible, that we will see a new superstar in a Padres uniform at the trade deadline.

### *Late summer:*

- Respondents were much less likely to envision either **A.J. Preller** or **Bob Melvin** staying for more than two years (20% for both, versus 88-92% on opening week) and continued to not miss **Wil Myers**.

## THE POST-SEASON SURVEY

- **Ha-Seong Kim** was the leading MVP candidate for the Padres, chosen by 45% of all respondents.
- The group was very evenly split regarding what the Padres should do with **Juan Soto** (trade, sign, or keep).
- Respondents strongly recommended trading **Trent Grisham**, and a majority favored keeping **Jake Cronenworth**.
- Recommendations regarding free agents included re-signing both **Michael Wacha** and **Seth Lugo**.

- There was an even split on **Gary Sanchez**, while 57% favored letting **Josh Hader** go, possibly due to salary concerns.
- Half of respondents favored signing a seasoned closer if **Hader** leaves, while 40% preferred relying on **Robert Suarez**.
- Take a chance on **Shohei Ohtani**? No! 70% said that the Padres should **not** pursue the two-way free agent in the offseason.
- A slight majority were not pleased with **Bob Melvin's** departure from the Padres, although 30% were undecided.
- Regarding **A.J. Preller**, 45% wanted to fire him, while only 15% wanted to keep him, with 40% unsure.
- Starting pitching was rated as the team's most critical need for next season.

### RATING OF IMPORTANCE OF PADRES 2024 NEEDS

Rating of Importance	Need	Average Rating
<b>Most</b>	<b>Starting Pitching</b>	<b>5.58</b>
↓	<b>Relief Pitching/Closer</b>	<b>4.83</b>
	<b>Offense-Center Field</b>	<b>4.32</b>
	<b>Offense-First Base</b>	<b>4.19</b>
	<b>New GM</b>	<b>3.85</b>
	<b>Offense Catcher</b>	<b>2.62</b>
<b>Least</b>	<b>Team Defense</b>	<b>1.83</b>

Note: 7=most important, 1=least important



October 4, 2023, San Diego Union-Tribune

September 28, 2023, San Diego Union Tribune

## VIEWPOINTS

# 2

## PADRES 2023: WHAT HAPPENED?

*An Informal Chat with Bob Chandler*

Bob was his usual affable self when we talked on November 8. We proceeded to a Q&A discussion during which he proceeded to answer my questions without hesitation. Reciting crisp facts surrounding events that reminded me of how Ted Leitner referred to Bob: as “B-C-P-C”, “Bob Chandler, Personal Computer.”

Pick a year in San Diego Padres history, and Bob can fill you with reminisces, facts, and stories. In this case, I asked him about the year 2023.<sup>2</sup>

***Q1: What are your feelings about the new rule changes, e.g., pitcher’s time clock, limited pickoff attempts, larger base size, restricted infield defensive shifts?***

When this season started, I was curious as to how the changes would work out. I knew they all had been tested in the minor leagues. And, I did think that the game was starting to drag too much. Baseball games that last three and a half hours are too long.

I think that the pitch clock did the job as expected. It was the primary factor that games this past season were shortened by 24 minutes.<sup>3</sup> That’s significant. As the season progressed it appeared that the pitchers and hitters adjusted to the clock and you heard very few complaints. So, I think that the clock is here to stay.

There were more stolen bases this season, about 40 percent more than in 2022.<sup>4</sup> It’ll be interesting to see if the number of stolen bases increase next season after the kind of year that the Arizona Diamondbacks had. They didn’t have a ton of power, but boy, they had speed on the bases. They were fun to watch play and gave the Texas Rangers a good battle in the World Series. So, you may see teams running even more next year.

I didn’t miss seeing pickoff throws to first base. I watched a lot of baseball and I don’t recall seeing a pickoff violation occur, where the pitcher threw over a third time.

As for the bigger bases, I didn’t know what to expect, but it did shorten the distance between bases a little bit. You can’t deny that the two changes, the pickoff limitation and bigger bases, contributed to the stolen-base success percentage being higher this past season than in the past.

I hated the shifts that were going on in baseball through the 2022 season. I mean, it didn’t look like baseball to me. They had fielders all over the place. You probably remember Padres third baseman, Manny Machado, catching a fly ball in foul territory down the right field line! I always

<sup>2</sup> This interview was conducted by Tom Larwin on November 8, 2023.

<sup>3</sup> The average length of an MLB game in 2023 was 2:39. In 2022 it was 3:03.

<sup>4</sup> The total number of stolen bases in MLB in 2023 was 3,503. In 2022, it was 2,486. In 2023 the overall stolen base success rate was 80%. In 2022 it was 75%. From 2000 through 2022, the range was 68% to 76%. The average over this period was 72%.



thought that it's not fair to the hitter. I'm glad that the shift is gone. I like it with the two infielders on the right side of second base, two on the left side. Plus, I thought eliminating the shift resulted in more really good defensive plays by infielders, and it put more emphasis on athleticism and range, particularly of second basemen.

I understand the reason behind the shifts. However, I agreed with Theo Epstein, who employed those shifts as much as anybody and ended up winning the World Series with the Red Sox and the Cubs. He said he finally became convinced that analytics were sucking some of the soul out of the game of baseball. I thought that was a good way to describe the shifts.

***Q2: Do you think the season and/or playoff structure should be tweaked somehow to reward the season's Division winners?***

It seems to me that the team that ends up winning the World Series is the one that gets hot at the right time. For the Padres, it was a year ago...they got hot and beat the Mets, who had won over 100 games, and then they beat the Dodgers, another team that had won over a hundred games. And, then the Padres met an even hotter team, the Phillies, who beat them in the National League Championship Series. It's similar in college basketball, where you have your conference champion, but then you have a league tournament and the tournament champion is the team who gets the bid to the NCAA tournament, not the regular-season champion.

***Q3: What do you feel is the most important takeaway from the team's performance in 2023?***

Well, you know, you can certainly make an argument that money certainly doesn't buy championships by itself, because of the top three teams in terms of salary, none of them made the playoffs.<sup>5</sup>

The number one team was the New York Mets with a salary at \$100 million more than the Padres, and then the Yankees. So, the Mets, the Yankees, and the Padres, the three highest teams in terms of salary, none of them made the playoffs.

The Mets ended up with a losing record, although they got rid of a lot of their players in the second half of the season when in the midst of a disappointing season. For the Padres, the team was built around the offense of the "Big Four" of Machado, Tatis, Soto, and Bogaerts. From my point of view, none of them had a great season. In particular, Machado was below what you would expect from him. Tatis did well considering he had missed over a year of play. Soto padded his numbers the last month of the season and ended up looking better. So did Bogaerts. The team was built around these guys producing, and they didn't really produce.



<sup>5</sup> Here are the top five: 1. New York Mets-\$354 million, 2. New York Yankees-\$277 million, 3. San Diego Padres-\$249 million, 4. Philadelphia Phillies-\$243 million, 5. Los Angeles Dodgers-\$223 million.

Compare them to the Dodgers’ “first five”...for instance, four of the Dodgers’ first five in their batting order drove in over 100 runs.<sup>6</sup> The fifth Dodger was Will Smith, the catcher who didn't play as many games as the other four yet was an offensive force with 76 RBIs.

For most of the season the Padres “first five” included Jake Cronenworth but, despite his big contract, he also had a poor season.

Maybe the worst decisions that A.J. Preller made in putting the team together were the guys he chose to be the designated hitters, Nelson Cruz and Matt Carpenter. They were subpar. Nelson Cruz had his day and you can make an argument for him being in the Hall of Fame, but he was 43 years old and couldn't run at all. He could pop one every now and then, but they released him during the season. Matt Carpenter was an absolute flat-out disaster. Yeah. I mean, their only job is to hit. They didn't hit. Contrast that to the Dodgers, who picked up JD Martinez, and he was one of their four who drove in over 100 runs.

Then, for the first third of the season the Padres were not getting any offense at catcher from Austin Nola. Add to that, center fielder, Trent Grisham, who was batting under .200, and it was almost like you were giving away three innings of at-bats with the bottom third of the lineup because they didn't hit.

During the season, one of the best moves Preller made was taking a chance on Gary Sanchez. And boy, did that work out great. I mean, Sanchez played in only 72 games, and he hit 19 home runs. You know, if you project what he did in 72 games, over a 162-game season, you're getting around 40-plus homers and well over 100 RBIs. It shows you the pace at which he was hitting. Plus, defensively, he was more than adequate and had a strong arm.

Add to that the performance of Luis Campusano over the last two months of the season. Campusano had been a top prospect for several years and finally showed promise. And, in doing so, he presented the Padres with an interesting dilemma at the catching position. Campusano ended up batting .319. It was over only 49 games, but it looks like he can offer some offense at the position. I'm guessing that Sanchez probably played himself into a nice free agent contract somewhere. Although, you know what? He was better than any designated hitter the Padres used all season.



September 11, 2023, San Diego Union-Tribune

One of the bright spots in the Padres 2023 lineup was Ha-Seong Kim. I think you could make an argument for him as the team’s most valuable player this year. His defense was extraordinary wherever he played, and he turned out to be a really effective leadoff hitter. In addition, he started to show some of the power that he had in South Korea. I mean, what a valuable player he turned out to be.<sup>7</sup>

So, when looking at the foundation of a 2024 Padres lineup you have the Big Four, add Kim as number five, add the catching spot at six, and then improve the DH, that's seven.

Then there is center field and I think the team has to do something about Trent Grisham. My suggestion? Move Tatis to center field. I mean, he turned out to be the best right fielder in

<sup>6</sup> The four Dodgers were: Mookie Betts-107, Max Muncy-105, J.D. Martinez-103, Freddie Freeman-102.

<sup>7</sup> At 6.0, Blake Snell had the team’s highest WAR (Wins Above Replacement). Second, was Kim at 5.8. Soto and Tatis were next at 5.5.

baseball this season. He won a Gold Glove with 29 runs saved above average, the best in all of baseball. And if he's that good in right field, he could be even better in center.

I think if they can find a center fielder who can play defense and provide a little more offense than Grisham then, okay, leave Tatis in right. Otherwise, it is probably easier to find a corner outfielder who can give you offense and let Tatis roam in center.

As a second baseman, Jake Cronenworth was an all-star. He was terrific, and his offense was good enough. But when he was moved to the first base the team lost too much offense. They have to get a better offensive player at first base in my view. As good a defender as Cronenworth is, while not as good as Kim, he could play third, and he could play short. While I thought he was really good when he played second base, I also thought that he was not as good at first base. They've got a dilemma there because he's got a seven-year contract.

What's it mean for next year? Well, if you move the players to where they should be, you're going to leave Machado at third. You've got to play Kim at short, he's your best shortstop. Second base, go with Cronenworth, and probably first base is the best spot for Bogaerts because he does have a good bat.

So, I don't know what the Padres are going to do. I know they've talked to Bogaerts about switching positions, and if he does switch, I understand that he'd rather play second than first. That would leave Cronenworth at first base, and I don't think that will be the team's best lineup.



February 15, 2023, San Diego  
Union-Tribune

***Q4: Based on your 60 years of watching the Padres, and being behind-the-scenes for many of those years, what do you hope that the (new manager) will bring to the team?***

You know, the one thing that I'm totally convinced of when it comes to a manager is that you can't judge them until after they have actually managed.

To me, head and shoulders above all the others, was Bruce Bochy. When Bruce was a player, he was kind of a practical joker. He obviously was soaking up a lot of baseball knowledge, but I didn't notice it until he got a chance to manage. After his playing career he needed a job in baseball and the Padres gave him a shot to manage a low minor-league team in 1989, and that team did well. Over several years the Padres kept moving him up. Finally, he got to the big leagues as a coach and became the Padres manager in 1995. In my view he's by far the best overall manager the Padres have had.

Next best would be Dick Williams. Although he had a totally different style than Bochy, Dick was able to get the most out of his players even though they might not have liked him. In contrast, Bochy also got the most out of his players, but most of them liked him.

I thought Bob Melvin was a perfect choice for the Padres when they hired him. I'm sorry that he and A.J. Preller probably didn't see eye-to-eye on a lot of things. And that's too bad. You know, Bochy and Kevin Towers didn't see eye-to-eye on a lot of things either, but they were good

friends. They'd argue it out over a few beers and come to a consensus. They remained great friends until the day Kevin died.

As for Melvin and Preller, I would really like to know what kind of issues they differed on. My guess is that I would agree with Melvin more than I would Preller.

I don't know any of the guys being mentioned as candidates for the position. But Mike Shildt seems to me to be the obvious front-runner.<sup>8</sup> He's been around the team. He was successful as a manager in St. Louis. He believed in the Cardinals way of doing things. And...when you look the recent history of all of the MLB franchises the Cardinals have been one of the most successful along with the Dodgers and the Yankees. Shildt was stunned when he got fired in St. Louis. He had won three straight division titles and thought he was going to get a big raise. Instead, they fired him because he supposedly wasn't into the analytics.

So, Shildt has been a successful manager...been around big leaguers...and been around dugouts. Plus, he knows the Padre players.

Another in-house candidate is Ryan Flaherty. I don't know much about him but he's never managed in the big leagues.

As for Benji Gil, I hear nothing but good things about him. If hired, it would be his first time at the major-league level.

### ***Q5: Were you surprised when the Padres signed Xander Bogaerts?***

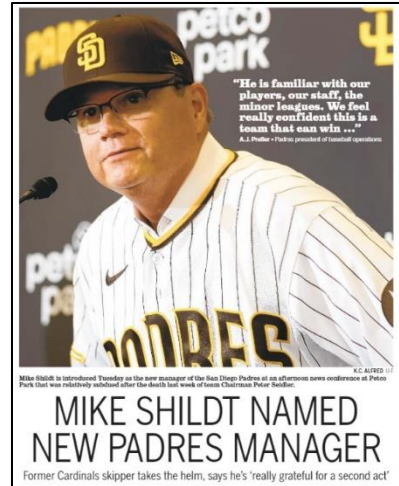
Yeah, I was. I think Bogaerts is a really good player, but to me he didn't really fit into this team, and then to give him the contract they did at the age of 30 seemed unwise.

Now they are talking about switching him to a different position—this, after one year. It tells me that they made a mistake there. I mean, he's a good player, but it's not what the team needed. It might have been better to have used some of that money for guys in backup roles on the team that would have added depth. Melvin liked to play guys in different spots, give them some rest, and keep them at their best when they play. He couldn't do that too much because of the composition of the team...and bringing in Bogaerts to play at shortstop screwed up the rest of the infield.

The Padres have him for nine more years so now they need to make the best of it.



February 17, 2023, *San Diego Union-Tribune*



November 22, 2023, *San Diego Union-Tribune*

<sup>8</sup> Ed. Note: This interview with Bob was conducted on November 8, 2023. Shildt was subsequently introduced as the Padres manager for 2024 on November 21, 2023.

**Q6: Keep Soto for 2024? Or, trade him? Or, sign him to a long-term deal?**

You know, I saw a story where Bob Melvin had recommended that the Padres trade Soto. After watching Soto for a full season, it was an uneven performance, yet his numbers at the end were really good. No doubt, I think the talent is there. However, to compare him to Ted Williams is a huge reach in my view. I'm not sure he is a guy that's a difference-maker on a team.

I think for financial reasons and for the betterment of the whole roster, it would be better to trade Soto. I'd love to see two other teams get in a bidding war with the result that the Padres get the biggest haul possible. I mean, Preller is going to have to rebuild the pitching staff. You would hope that you could get at least one decent starter and a couple of good minor-league prospects that can help your depth.

I just don't think Soto's the kind of guy that can lead a team to a championship. Although I did think he was that guy when he was with Washington, and they won the World Series there. I remember thinking, my God, they can't get this guy out. It didn't matter what they threw him, he hit it. But, that was the best that I've seen him play. In 2022, he was disappointing. This season he finally came around, but his defense was below average, and he doesn't have a great arm. His baserunning certainly could use improvement. However, he does play hard. and he seemed like a good teammate. There are no problems with him as a player, but to sign him it's going to cost a half billion dollars. I see his contract to likely be in the range of 10 years and \$500 million—\$50 million a year! If the Padres do keep him this year, he'll go through arbitration and probably end up make something in the range of \$30 million or more.

If the team is trying to reduce the payroll, then these two options—either a long-term contract or a one-year contract—would certainly not be the way to do it.

It's a tough spot...he's a good player. Overall, you'd like to have him stay with the Padres but at the right price. I don't think they will be able to sign him at the right price, especially with Scott Boras as his agent.

**Q7: What are your feelings about other roster moves for these positions: catcher, first base, and center Field?**

When the season started, Austin Nola was their catcher. And I thought, well, he's okay, but you'd like the performance to be better. And now I think the catching spot looks really strong. You have Campusano coming on, and you have Sanchez there...however, we just don't know if they're going to be able to keep him. And then you've got this 17-year-old kid, Ethan Salas, who started out at Lake Elsinore and moved up to Double-A ball by the end of the season. It looks like they've got a terrific prospect there. Everybody who's seen him play puts him in the future superstar category. So it looks to me like they're pretty well set at catcher.

Center field, of course, I gave my opinion earlier. I'd prefer Tatis there depending on who else they might get for the outfield.

**GRISHAM BETTER, BUT ENOUGH?**



Gold Glover again batting below .200; will he return in '24?

BY JEFF SANDERS

Trent Grisham has two Gold Gloves. He has power. He has speed. And yet perhaps the best way to explain how he's managed to find himself in the same position he was in late September last year — out of the lineup more and more as a disappointing year all around in San Diego wears on — is to look at one nite appearance earlier this

**Padres at Giants**



**Today:** 6:45 p.m., Oracle Park, San Francisco

**Pitchers:** Padres RHP Matt Waldron (1-3, 4.58 ERA) vs. Giants LHP Sean Manaea (7-6, 4.51)

**On the air:** Cox Ch. 4, Spectrum 305, DirecTV 6943, AT&T U-verse 781/1781, 97.3-FM, 850-AM

September 27, 2023, *San Diego Union-Tribune*

They've got to do something at first base to generate more offense. I mean, if you move Cronenworth back to second base and switch Bogaerts to first with Kim at Short and Machado at third, to me, that's your best defensive infield. And I think Bogaerts would develop into an acceptable defensive first baseman, and you'd get the offense out of him, too. So that would be a really good infield. Although, as an alternative, if you could trade Cronenworth and play Bogaerts at second and get some power at first base, that would work, too.

**Q8: Do you feel it is time to rely more on the farm system for roster development?**

The answer is yes. One thing you have to give Preller credit for is the great job he and his scouting staff do in recognizing talent. Once again, the farm system is ranked among the best in baseball, and that's after trading away MacKenzie Gore, CJ Abrams, and a couple of others to get Soto. So, I have to give them credit there. The team's draft picks now are so much better than in the earlier years.

**CATCHER SALAS HEADS PROSPECTS**

Both for financial reasons and for building a team, I think it best if you can feed in one or two guys each year from the farm system. They have two top 10 position players on the rise (Salas and Jackson Merrill) and several pitchers who look like they should be able to help as early as next year, or 2025. You really need to always have pitchers coming up.



February 21, 2023, San Diego Union-Tribune

## VIEWPOINTS

# 3

## PADRES 2023: WHAT HAPPENED?

by Gregory Funk

As a follower of the Padres for their entire 55-year existence, this was easily their most disappointing season ever, at least from an expectations standpoint: a projected season record of 95+ wins that wound up at 82-80. And that spread doesn't really tell the story, because the reality was that they ranged from being three games over .500 to 11 games under .500, and were never over .500 after May 10 until the last two days.

In many ways this felt like the opposite of 1984, their 16th season. I had naively caught Padre fever each of their first 15 seasons, of which only one was over .500, and none of the first six over .400. So I decided during the spring of 1984 that something was intrinsically wrong with the organization, and they were never going to win, despite acquiring Goose Gossage and Graig Nettles, and signing Steve Garvey a year earlier. Oh, and by the way, even Dick Williams couldn't get this team to clear .500. Well, we all know what happened: a trip to the World Series.

So, if 1984 outperformed expectations, the converse was true in 2023. Discussion and opinions abound. I drew up a list of reasons a team might underperform:

1. **Apathy, complacency.** I didn't see much complacency other than some shoulder shrugs when things didn't go well.
2. **Stress, choking.** There was clearly a lack of clutch hitting. But did the batters choke? Did winning 14-of-16 to end the season (which was the first time they won more than three straight) support the fact that they could play well once the pressure was off?
3. **Management, coaching.** Was the Preller/Melvin discord a factor? Not sure about that one, but the 12 consecutive extra-inning losses were a concern. With the 10th-inning ghost runner rule, I question a strategy where a visiting team uses outs in an extra inning to score one run. But Bob Melvin is a respected manager who has had success.
4. **Not adapting to new rules.** The new rules could definitely pose a problem to a particular player, especially one who needs time to think about an upcoming pitch or to adjust those batting gloves to the right feel before every pitch.
5. **Unexpected decline in ability.** An unexpected decline would not be a 38-year-old going downhill, but more like a Cody Bellinger or a Chris Davis suddenly unable

Tm	W	L	W-L%	GB
SDP	7	5	.583	--
ARI	7	5	.583	--
LAD	6	6	.500	1.0
SFG	5	6	.455	1.5
COL	5	7	.417	2.0

April 11, 2023, West Division Standings (this was the last day in 2023 that the Padres were in 1st Place)

to hit, or Rick Ankiel or Steve Blass failing to throw strikes. Injuries are often involved, but not always evident until later.

- 6. **Luck, coincidence.** Luck? A ball that is fair or foul by a few inches can be a difference maker in a single game. So when do things even out, or do they?

All these considered, I believe the two most apparent factors affecting the Padres were numbers 2 and 6. An example: Xander Bogaerts had a typical year in most categories, with the



exception of his 58 RBIs. His 19 home runs accounted for 33 of those RBIs. In his other 646 plate appearances, he drove in 25 runs, batting fourth or fifth most of the time. In fact, 10 of those 25 RBIs came in the 23 games he batted leadoff. This means he had an incredible *fifteen* non-HR RBIs in the 132 games in which he batted third through sixth. For the year, he batted .191 with runners in scoring position, after hitting .284 lifetime with RISP in Boston.

Of course, hitting well or poorly with RISP doesn't address to what extent the game was on the line during those situations. I looked at the Leverage Index (which rates each plate appearance as low, medium, or high in leverage, and which is explained at [fangraphs.com](http://fangraphs.com)) for the seven Padres with over 520 plate appearances (no one else had more than 260). Checking primarily their OPS, only Ha-Seong Kim and Juan Soto performed well in the clutch. The other five—Bogaerts, Manny Machado, Jake Cronenworth, Trent Grisham, and Fernando Tatis Jr.—were at their poorest in high leverage situations. In 2022, all except Tatis (who did not play) were significantly better in high leverage situations.

Another example: San Diego's W-L record in one-run games was 9-23, and in extra-inning games, 2-12. With two one-run victories and two extra-inning victories in their last four games, they barely avoided these two records: worst W-L record in one-run games in the 30-team era, which began in 1998, and worst W-L record in extra innings in MLB history.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	R	H	E
San Diego Padres	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	3	5	10	0
San Francisco Giants	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	5	3
WP: Josh Hader (2-3) • LP: John Brebbia (3-4) • SV: Tom Cosgrove (1)													

September 27, 2023, Padres win their first extra-inning game of 2023

Finally, some more stats: A run differential of +104 (752 runs scored, 648 runs allowed) put the Padres third in the NL behind LA and Atlanta. Their Pythagorean W-L projection (a formula using the run differential) of 92-70 is 10 wins higher than the actual 82-80, the biggest difference in the league. They were sixth in runs scored and second in run prevention. These kinds of numbers rarely have such poor showings in the standings.

This is strong evidence that the Padres' main problem was either falling to pressure in the clutch or bad luck, or, of course, a combination of both.

In 2022, the Padres went 34-17 in one-run games. Did things just even out?

So, what happened in 2023? Here is a prediction that the dice will roll differently in 2024, and I will plan on catching a positive dose of Padre fever next year.





## VIEWPOINTS

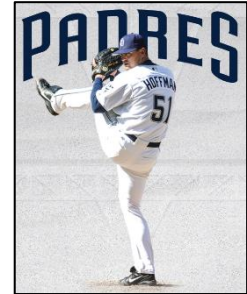
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# PADRES 2023 RELIEF PITCHING:

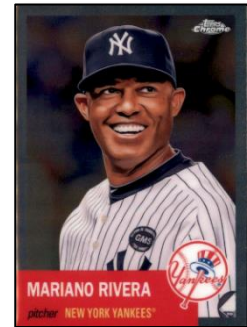
## *Judging Performance with APBA Grades*

by Wayne Towers

Relief pitching at Petco Park can be a daunting task. Just beyond the outfield wall, an outsized statue of Hall of Famer Trevor Hoffman (1993-2010)<sup>9</sup> reminds visitors that 554 of his 601 career saves were earned for the Padres. Additionally daunting was that Hoffman’s regular season ratio of converting Save Opportunities (SVO)<sup>10</sup> into Saves (SV) exceeded nine out of 10 (601 SV/ 649 SVO = 0.926), slightly higher than fellow Hall of Famer Mariano Rivera’s (1995-2013) regular season ratio of (652 SV / 714 SVO = 0.913).



As a broad perspective, versions of the APBA baseball simulation game<sup>11</sup> assign A to D letter values to pitchers, with A as the highest, down to D representing below average (reference Table 1). A grading scale common in local community colleges, the 0.9 or higher SV/SVO ratio would be an A-grade in the 90%-range; 0.8 to 0.894 SV/SVO would be the 80%-range B-grade; 0.7 to 0.794, a 70%-range C-grade; and 0.694 or lower would be a D-grade, plus a good chance at moving to a different role, or even out-of-town.



Both Hoffman and Rivera would rate as career A-level relievers.

**TABLE 1: APBA-SUGGESTED ACADEMIC GRADING**

	APBA Categories:				Trevor Hoffman	Mariano Rivera
	A	B	C	D		
Save (SV) / Save Opportunity (SVO) =	9/ 10=	8/ 10=	7/ 10=	6/ 10=	601/ 649=	652/ 714=
<b>Ratio:</b>	<b>0.900</b>	<b>0.800</b>	<b>0.700</b>	<b>0.600</b>	<b>0.926=</b>	<b>0.913=</b>
	or more			or less	<b>(A)</b>	<b>(A)</b>

Source(s):

1. APBA products: <http://apbagames.com>
2. Saves data (SV / SVO) from [www.mlb.com/\[team\]/stats/pitching/\[year\]](http://www.mlb.com/[team]/stats/pitching/[year]).
3. Player data from [www.mlb.com/player/\[firstname-surname\]](http://www.mlb.com/player/[firstname-surname])

<sup>9</sup> Player data from [www.mlb.com/player/\[firstname-surname\]](http://www.mlb.com/player/[firstname-surname]).

<sup>10</sup> Saves data (SV / SVO) from [www.mlb.com/\[team\]/stats/pitching/\[year\]](http://www.mlb.com/[team]/stats/pitching/[year]).

<sup>11</sup> APBA products: <http://apbagames.com> [APBA was an acronym for an American Professional Baseball Association baseball simulation, but only the acronym was retained when their simulations expanded to include sports like football, soccer, hockey, and golf].

Josh Hader (2017-) joined the Padres midway in 2022 after offseason acquisition Taylor Rogers (2016-) stumbled erratically to a low B-grade (28 SV / 35 SVO = 0.800) with five losses before being traded (reference Table 2). When Hader arrived in San Diego, he was a career B-level reliever (125 SV / 143 SVO = 0.874). He muddled through the rest of 2022 as a C-grade (7 SV / 9 SVO = 0.778), but still maintained a B-level career (132 / 152 = 0.868). Since the 2022-time frame was short and the sample was small, 2023 became a wait-and-see season for him.

**TABLE 2: ROGERS AND HADER ONLY**

	Taylor Rogers 2022	Josh Hader Before Padres	Josh Hader Padres 2022	Josh Hader Career Thru 2022
<b>Grade:</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>B</b>
Save (SV) / Save Opportunity (SVO) =	28/ 35=	125/ 143=	7/ 9=	132/ 152=
<b>Ratio:</b>	<b>0.800</b>	<b>0.874</b>	<b>0.778</b>	<b>0.868</b>

Source(s):

1. Saves data (SV / SVO) from [www.mlb.com/\[team\]/stats/pitching/\[year\]](http://www.mlb.com/[team]/stats/pitching/[year]).
2. Player data from [www.mlb.com/player/\[firstname-surname\]](http://www.mlb.com/player/[firstname-surname])

The 2023 results were not Hoffmanesque (reference Table 3). The B-grade (33 SV / 38 SVO = 0.868) season left fans wishing to hear Hoffman's walk-on music just one more time. Coincidentally, Hader's career record fell to exactly the same B-level (165 SV / 190 SVO = 0.868) as his 2023 season and his career through 2022, all three at the B-level of 0.868. To be fair, even B-level relievers are not exactly abundant in MLB.

**TABLE 3: HADER**

	Before Padres	Career Thru 2022	Padres 2023 Only	Career Thru 2023
<b>Grade:</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>B</b>
Save (SV) / Save Opportunity (SVO) =	125/ 143=	132/ 152=	33/ 38=	165/ 190=
<b>Ratio:</b>	<b>0.874</b>	<b>0.868</b>	<b>0.868</b>	<b>0.868</b>

Source(s):

1. Saves data (SV / SVO) from [www.mlb.com/\[team\]/stats/pitching/\[year\]](http://www.mlb.com/[team]/stats/pitching/[year]).
2. Player data from [www.mlb.com/player/\[firstname-surname\]](http://www.mlb.com/player/[firstname-surname])

Hader's overall 2023 performance<sup>12</sup> was a B-level roller-coaster (33 SV / 38 SVO) (reference Table 4). He was actually an A-level reliever in April (10 SV / 10 SVO), June (5/5), and September/October (4/4), plus a B-level in July (7/8). But May (3/6) and August (3/5 with back-to-back blown saves in St. Louis on 8/29 and 8/30) were D-level disasters. In addition to this inconsistency, questions emerged regarding the durability of an arm turning 30 years old (b. 4/7/1994) in 2024. Optimistically, Hader made 55 or more appearances in all five of his full MLB seasons and could again. Also, historically, some other relievers enjoyed continued success well into their thirties.

**TABLE 4: HADER 2023**

	Season						
	Total	April	May	June	July	August	September-October
<b>Grade:</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>A</b>
Save (SV) /	33/	10/	3/	5/	7/	3/	4/
Save Opportunity (SVO) =	38=	10=	6=	5=	8=	5=	4=
<b>Ratio</b>	<b>0.868</b>	<b>1.000</b>	<b>0.500</b>	<b>1.000</b>	<b>0.875</b>	<b>0.600</b>	<b>1.000</b>

Source(s):

1. Saves data (SV / SVO) from [www.mlb.com/\[team\]/stats/pitching/\[year\]](http://www.mlb.com/[team]/stats/pitching/[year]).
2. Player data from [www.mlb.com/player/\[firstname-surname\]](http://www.mlb.com/player/[firstname-surname])

In retrospect, a key contributing factor to missing the 2023 Playoffs was that the rest of bullpen was D-level (3 SV / 26 SVO = 0.115), including veteran Nick Martinez (2014-) (1 SV / 7 SVO = 0.143) and three who were 0-for-2023 (0 SV / 3 SVO = zero): journeymen Luis Garcia (2013-) and Tim Hill (2018-), as well as fledgling Robert Suarez (2022-) (reference Table 5). (The remaining two saves and 10 opportunities were scattered among seven other relievers.) The save rule technically kicks in after the starter has thrown one pitch because that's the start. If a subsequent pitcher blows a lead, that's a blown save.

**TABLE 5: PADRES 2023 BULLPEN**

	Padres Relief 2023 Only							
	Padres Relief Total	Josh Hader Only	Middle Relief Only	Padres 2023 Middle Relief				
				Nick Martinez	Luis Garcia	Tim Hill	Robert Suarez	Other Seven
<b>Grade:</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>D</b>
Save (SV) /	36/	33/	3/	1/	0/	0/	0/	2/
Save Opportunity (SVO) =	64=	38=	26=	7=	3=	3=	3=	10=
<b>Ratio</b>	<b>0.563</b>	<b>0.868</b>	<b>0.115</b>	<b>0.143</b>	<b>zero</b>	<b>zero</b>	<b>zero</b>	<b>0.200</b>

Source(s):

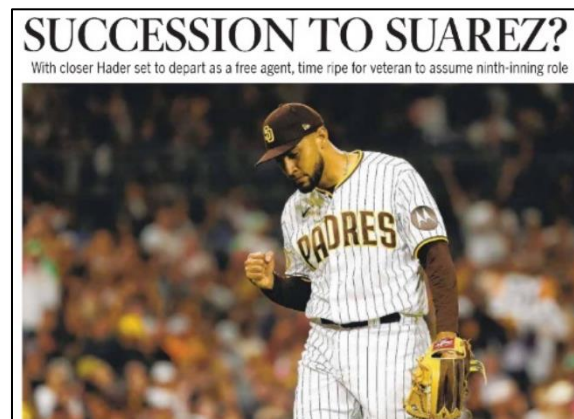
1. Saves data (SV / SVO) from [www.mlb.com/\[team\]/stats/pitching/\[year\]](http://www.mlb.com/[team]/stats/pitching/[year]).
2. Player data from [www.mlb.com/player/\[firstname-surname\]](http://www.mlb.com/player/[firstname-surname])

<sup>12</sup> Game Log data from [www.mlb.com/player/josh-hader-623352?season=2023&=135&stats=gamelogs-r-pitching-mlb&year=2023](http://www.mlb.com/player/josh-hader-623352?season=2023&=135&stats=gamelogs-r-pitching-mlb&year=2023).

That being said, the Padres overall SV% of 56% was tied with the Cardinals for second worst in the NL, above only 48% for the Rockies. Amusing side note: the Rockies shared the worst SV% in MLB with one other team, World Series champion Texas Rangers.<sup>13</sup> Maybe if you're strong enough everywhere else, you don't need a great bullpen especially if you have extremely effective starting pitchers. Although Hader was not blameless, missing the 2023 Playoffs was a team effort, particularly from middle relief very much in need of upgrading.

The 2023-24 offseason presents a unique challenge. Premium closers are a necessity for a contending team, but a luxury for a developing team. These premium closers look for a high salary and teams with a batting order, starting pitching, and middle relief maximizing save opportunities. How a team approaches structuring its bullpen is a harbinger of whether the team sees itself as contending or developing.

During the 2023-24 offseason, Hader and 25 other relievers<sup>14</sup> stand to be potential free agents. Subject to marketplace conditions like trades, extensions, and contract options, efforts in the offseason market for a closer and shoring up their relief pitching will be a clear indicator of how the Padres view their chances in 2024.



September 22, 2023, San Diego Union-Tribune

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.baseball-reference.com/leagues/majors/2023-reliever-pitching.shtml>

<sup>14</sup> List included three former Padre relievers: Craig Kimbrel, Mark Melancon, and Kirby Yates: [www.mlb.com/news/baseball-s-next-free-agent-class](http://www.mlb.com/news/baseball-s-next-free-agent-class).

## VIEWPOINTS

# 5

# PADRES 2023: WHAT HAPPENED?

by Tom Larwin

What happened? We really do know what happened! The Padres finished the season with a record of 82-80, good for third place in the National League Western Division and “only” two games behind the Arizona Diamondbacks. And, it was “only” the 17th time in 55 seasons that the team finished with a record above .500.

So ... we expected more, didn't we? Like 90+ wins, first place in the division, and maybe a World Series berth. What went awry?

### FACING OFF AGAINST A JINX

The 2023 team might have been jinxed from the start. In our chapter's *Padres 2020* report we noted that *Sports Illustrated* might be reading the tea leaves in its Spring 2019 “MLB Preview” issue when it featured a cover showing Manny Machado and newcomer Fernando Tatis Jr.

Inside that issue *SI* teased us with the following forecast featuring Tatis:

*“With Machado, 26, joining him on the left side of the infield, the future in San Diego looks sunny. The Padres have the game's most loaded farm system; Nine of their prospects made Baseball America's latest Top 100 list, the most in MLB. Machado is ready for that youth movement to begin now, lobbying hard for Tatis—who has yet to play above Double A—to make the Opening Day roster. ‘If he's in there, we're going to be a dangerous team.’ Machado told reporters after his first spring game.”<sup>15</sup>*

Now, four years later the cover reminds me of the so-called “*Sports Illustrated* cover jinx.”<sup>16</sup> The more you think about it, the more sense it makes that the team has had a curse against it and that *SI* cover might be the culprit.

The jinx is pervasive and perhaps why the preseason predictions were too high, why the team seemed beset by bad luck, and why some of its players seemed to underperform.



March 25-April 1, 2019, *Sports Illustrated*

<sup>15</sup> Jon Taylor, *Sports Illustrated*, March 25-April 1, 2019: 53.

<sup>16</sup> Wikipedia, “[Sports Illustrated cover jinx](#).”

## PRESEASON EXPECTATIONS WERE HIGH–TOO HIGH

Predictions are tricky, especially if betting money based on them. This year serves as a good example, with the Baltimore Orioles having the best record in the American League with 101 wins, 19 more than the New York Yankees.

In the National League you had the Arizona Diamondbacks, finishing with a record of 84-78, with only two more victories than the Padres, but getting into the playoffs and making it to the World Series.

Baltimore's and Arizona's 2023 performances were not predicted by most (all?) preseason baseball analysts. This ties into the subject at hand: the 2023 performance of the Padres and the preseason predictions. Not only did our chapter get it wrong, but so did most of the other experts, i.e., those who are not members of our chapter.

It is instructive to examine some of these predictions to gain a sense of what was being said about the Padres' chances in 2023. Following is a summary of predictions from sources available in March 2023.

- **San Diego Ted Williams SABR Chapter**  
Our members predicted that the Padres would finish in first place in the NL Western Division and win 94 games.
- **San Diego Union-Tribune**

**"OUR" PREDICTIONS FOR  
2023 PADRES  
94 Wins...1<sup>st</sup> Place...Machado MVP**



March 26, 2023,  
San Diego Union-  
Tribune

Nine of the *SDU-T*'s sports staff participated in making 2023 predictions.<sup>17</sup> Here is a summary:

- Seven of nine picked the Padres to win the NL West.
- Seven of nine picked them to be in the World Series, and three of those seven had the Padres winning the World Series.
- Six of nine picked Juan Soto to be the NL MVP, and one picked Manny Machado.
- **ESPN**  
*"2023 World Series Champions: "Our pick: San Diego Padres (7 votes), Atlanta Braves (7 votes)"*

It was a tie vote, with both teams favored above the other 28. One of its writers took the side of the Padres and said this:

*"The Padres are the most intriguing, most compelling and most combustible team in the major leagues. By late October, they might be the best team in the game. They have a terrific rotation, and elite closer, a great manager, and potentially the best lineup in baseball. Their success likely will hinge on Fernando Tatis Jr. He'd rather play shortstop or center field, but if he can play right field effectively and*

<sup>17</sup> San Diego Union-Tribune, March 26, 2023: D14-15.

be a dynamic leadoff guy, 1-5 looks like this: Tatis, Juan Soto, Manny Machado, Xander Bogaerts, Jake Cronenworth. Wow." (Tim Kurkjian)<sup>18</sup>

- **Baseball Prospectus**<sup>19</sup>

*"World Series Winner...San Diego Padres"*

There were nine votes for the Padres, and second were the Toronto Blue Jays with seven votes.

- **FanGraphs**<sup>20</sup>

The Padres were rated third of the 30 MLB teams, after the Atlanta Braves and New York Yankees, with a won-loss record predicted to be 90-72.

- **Sports Illustrated**

*SI* predicted that the Padres would advance to the World Series but lose to the Yankees. The magazine also selected Juan Soto to be the league's MVP.

*SI* had these prognostications:

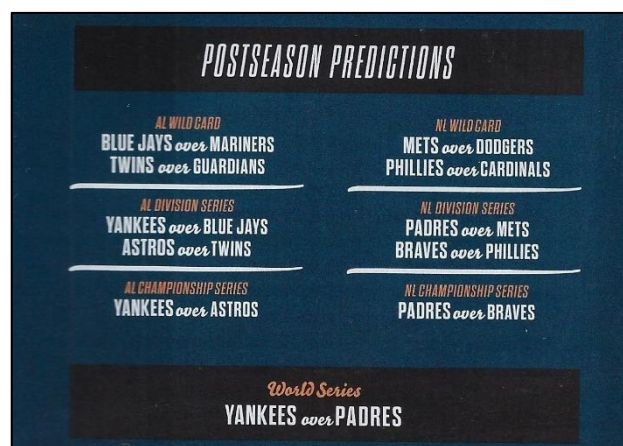
*"Over the past four seasons, Machado has turned the club from a perennial basement dweller into a juggernaut ready to slay the L.A. dragon."*

Regarding the Dodgers, *"The Padres try not to make them too much of a focus, but 'we know that we gotta go through them,' Machado says. And suddenly. They believe they can. Their lineup looks stronger than the Dodgers', their rotation deeper, their bullpen more electric. And after last October, the Padres know what it takes."*<sup>21</sup>

How did that go in 2023? The Padres did not "go through them" and ended up winning only four of 13 games played against the Dodgers.

*SI* picked the Padres to beat out the Dodgers and finish in first place with a record of 96-66. *SI* offered the following observation: *"With a full season of deadline pickup Juan Soto, plus DH Nelson Cruz—still a fearsome slugger at 42—the Padres lineup should terrify opposing pitchers...The Padres' players openly compare themselves to their rivals to the north, this could be the year they finally take them down."*<sup>22</sup>

The *SI* jinx is pervasive.



*Sports Illustrated*, April 2023: 61

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.espn.com/>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.baseballprospectus.com/>

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.fangraphs.com/>

<sup>21</sup> Stephanie Apstein, *Sports Illustrated*, April 2023: 50-59.

<sup>22</sup> Apstein.

- **Emil Rothe (Chicago) SABR Chapter Newsletter**

Rothe Chapter member Joe Book offered an article predicting the MLB races from the point of view of a horse handicapper:

**NL West** – SAN DIEGO was fractious in gate and was off slowly, made a quick move after the 1/4, loomed boldly, rushed to the lead, and finished fully extended. LOS ANGELES drew off early then flattened out before being carried out in a good effort. SAN FRANCISCO held position in the middle of the pack for the entirety, showed little and was no factor. ARIZONA and COLORADO were no threat. COLORADO disliked half the track and ran with ARIZONA far back.

In other words, he predicted that the Padres would win the Division (but fail to reach the World Series).<sup>23</sup>

It seemed that every source consulted was very optimistic about the Padres' chances in 2023.

Obviously, those of you who relied on these predictions and bet on the Padres in March 2023 received no return.

Years ago, famous baseball philosopher Yogi Berra cautioned us about relying on predictions when he said the following:

*"It's tough to make predictions, especially about the future."*

## THE TEAM WAS UNLUCKY

Baseball can be a game of inches in so many ways, e.g., a fair/foul ball, a ball/strike call, a ball hit just in/out of the reach of the defender. In this way, luck is always present during the course of a game.

But how is luck to be measured? Plus, good luck at the right time is far more important than luck that occurs with no observable benefits to a win or loss.

Branch Rickey, legendary executive from the 1920s to 1950s, took a stab at defining luck with this observation:<sup>24</sup>

### Luck Is the Residue of Design

Things worthwhile generally just don't happen. Luck is a fact, but should not be a factor. Good luck is what is leftover after intelligence and effort have combined at their best. Negligence or indifference or inattention are usually reviewed from an unlucky seat. The law of cause and effect and causality both work the same with inexorable exactitudes. Luck is the residue of design.

The last six words have become a well-known phrase that summarizes the connection between design (e.g., preparation, seizing opportunities) and luck.

<sup>23</sup> Joe Book, "2023 MLB Horse Race," *Emil Rothe Chapter Newsletter*, March-April 2023: 12.

<sup>24</sup> *Branch Rickey's Little Blue Book, Wit and Strategy From Baseball's Last Wise Man*, Edited by John J. Monteleone, Macmillan, Inc., 1995: 11.



Another legend, this one in baseball analytics, Bill James, took a stab at quantifying luck as it related to team performance in baseball. He developed a formula for predicting the winning percentage of a team (translated into “wins”). Based on two inputs, runs scored and runs allowed, it is termed the “Pythagorean winning percentage.”<sup>25</sup> Baseball-Reference shows these estimates of wins for each team during the season.

The estimated wins for the 2023 NL playoff teams and two also-rans are shown in Table 1. The formula finds that the Padres were the “unluckiest” team of the group (actually they were the unluckiest of all MLB teams). James’ formula, based on runs scored and runs allowed, estimated 92 wins for the Padres, 10 more than actual. In the National League the Chicago Cubs were also unlucky, with actual wins being seven less than estimated. Five of the six NL playoff teams had positive run differentials, meaning each won more games than were estimated by formula.

**Table 1. N.L. PLAYOFF TEAMS: ACTUAL VS. PYTHAGOREAN**

N.L. Team	Number of Wins		Diff. Col.1-Col.2
	Actual Col.1	Pythago- rean Col.2	
<b>Playoff Contenders</b>			
Atlanta Braves	104	101	+3
Los Angeles Dodgers	100	100	0
Milwaukee Brewers	92	90	+2
Philadelphia Phillies	90	89	+1
Miami Marlins	84	75	+9
Arizona Diamondbacks	84	80	+4
<b>Also-Rans</b>			
Chicago Cubs	83	90	-7
<b>PADRES</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>-10</b>

Source: Baseball-Reference.com

There you have it, folks; one conclusion can be reached about the Padres 2023 season and that is: they were simply unlucky! How do the Padres work on that in the offseason? Whatever, the answer is in the design!

**THE PADRES’ PLAYERS UNDERPERFORMED (Non-pitchers)**

This is another area that gets tricky with the many ways to judge performance. In addition, for position players there is offense and defense.

For this analysis, two measures will be examined: (1) WAR, Wins Above Replacement<sup>26</sup>, and (2) OPS, the addition of player’s on-base average and slugging percentage. For each statistic the analysis only compares the eight Padres’ position players plus two primary DH players who were expected to fill those positions in 2023:

Xander Bogaerts   Matt Carpenter   Jake Cronenworth   Nelson Cruz   Trent Grisham  
 Ha-Seong Kim   Manny Machado   Austin Nola   Juan Soto   Fernando Tatis Jr.

**WAR.** The WAR numbers for the 10 players compared 2023 performance with career, through the 2022 season) and the 2022 season, itself.<sup>27</sup> Coming into the 2023 season it was these numbers that would have significantly influenced analysts making predictions about the team.

<sup>25</sup> (Runs Scored) ^1.83 / [(Runs Scored) ^1.83 + (Runs Allowed) ^1.83]

<sup>26</sup> Here is how [MLB defines WAR](#): “WAR measures a player's value in all facets of the game by deciphering how many more wins he's worth than a replacement-level player at his same position (e.g., a Minor League replacement or a readily available fill-in free agent). For example, if a shortstop and a first baseman offer the same overall production (on offense, defense and the basepaths), the shortstop will have a better WAR because his position sees a lower level of production from replacement-level players.

<sup>27</sup> Author’s note: Since Tatis did not play in 2022, his 2021 numbers are used to reflect his prior year WAR and OPS.

The WAR numbers for the 10 players compared 2023 performance with career, through the 2022 season) and the 2022 season, itself.<sup>28</sup> Coming into the 2023 season it was these numbers that would have significantly influenced analysts making predictions about the team.

Table 2 shows the WAR numbers<sup>29</sup> for each player and the comparisons with the past. Following are observations:

- The table lists the players in order of their 2023 WAR number. Kim led the team with 5.8, followed by Soto and Tatis (both at 5.5). (Note, the league leader was Mookie Betts at 8.8.)
- Only one player, Kim, showed a positive improvement in performance compared to both career and 2022.
- This means that nine of the 10 players had lower WAR numbers in 2023 than in 2022. The largest decreases were with Machado (-3.9), Cronenworth (-3.1), Carpenter (-2.7), and Nola (-2.5).
- Four players—Kim, Soto, Tatis, and Bogaerts—showed performance improved in 2023 compared to their career numbers.

The numbers also highlight the problem that the Padres had with the bottom half of their lineup, with Grisham, Cronenworth, Cruz, Carpenter, and Nola all having WAR numbers lower than they had in 2022 and had averaged in their career. They all underperformed. Added to this were the off-years in WAR (compared to 2022) for Soto, Tatis, Bogaerts, and Machado.

**OPS.** The OPS comparisons for the 10 players are shown in Table 3. The players are listed in order of their final OPS for the 2023 season. The comparisons reflect the difference with their 2022 OPS and career average OPS.

**Table 2. WAR NUMBERS: CAREER VS. 2023**  
(Listed in order by 2023 WAR)

Player	2022 WAR	2023 oWAR	2023 dWAR	2023 WAR	Career Ave. WAR	Career	2023
						WAR-	WAR-
Kim	5.0	4.2	2.1	<b>5.8</b>	3.5	2.3	0.8
Soto	5.6	6.1	-1.2	<b>5.5</b>	4.6	0.9	-0.1
Tatis (2021)	6.6	2.8	2.3	<b>5.5</b>	4.5	1.0	-1.1
Bogaerts	5.9	4.8	0.4	<b>4.4</b>	3.5	0.9	-1.5
Machado	6.8	2.5	0.4	<b>2.9</b>	4.7	-1.8	-3.9
Grisham	2.6	1.9	0.5	<b>2.0</b>	2.2	-0.2	-0.6
Cronenworth	4.1	0.8	-0.3	<b>1.0</b>	3.5	-2.5	-3.1
Cruz	0.1	-0.3	-0.4	<b>-0.3</b>	2.4	-2.7	-0.4
Carpenter	2.4	-0.2	-0.6	<b>-0.3</b>	2.4	-2.7	-2.7
Nola	2.0	-0.4	0.2	<b>-0.5</b>	1.4	-1.9	-2.5

Sources: Baseball-Reference.com and ESPN

■ - Highlights the positive comparisons

■ - Highlights the negative comparisons

oWAR-Offensive/Batting WAR; dWAR-Defensive/Fielding WAR

**Table 3. OPS STATS: CAREER VS. 2023**  
(Listed in order by 2023 OPS)

Player	2022 OPS	Career OPS	2023 OPS	Career	2023
				OPS-	OPS-
Soto	.853	.950	<b>.930</b>	-0.020	.077
Bogaerts	.833	.815	<b>.790</b>	-0.025	-.043
Machado	.898	.833	<b>.782</b>	-0.051	-.116
Tatis (2021)	.975	.965	<b>.770</b>	-.195	-.205
Kim	.708	.679	<b>.749</b>	.070	.041
Cronenworth	.722	.770	<b>.689</b>	-.081	-.033
Cruz	.651	.859	<b>.681</b>	-.178	.030
Grisham	.626	.711	<b>.666</b>	-.045	.040
Carpenter	1.138	.825	<b>.641</b>	-.184	-.497
Nola	.649	.731	<b>.452</b>	-.279	-.197

Source: Baseball-Reference.com

■ - Highlights the positive comparisons

■ - Highlights the negative comparisons

<sup>28</sup> Author's note: Since Tatis did not play in 2022, his 2021 numbers are used to reflect his prior year WAR and OPS.

<sup>29</sup> The WAR numbers being compared include both batting and fielding.

Following are observations:

- Soto led all Padres position players with a 2023 OPS of .930. Next, but significantly below, were Bogaerts (.790), Machado (.782), and Tatis (.770).
- In comparing 2023 with both 2022 and career, again, Kim was the only player who outperformed his prior numbers.
- There were four players who outperformed their 2022 numbers: Soto (+.077), Kim (+.041), Grisham (+.040), and Cruz (+0.30). For Grisham and Cruz, this comparison is misleading since each had a subpar year in 2022. The same applies to Soto, who had a significant drop in his OPS in 2022.
- Those players who had significantly underperformed their 2022 numbers were Carpenter (-.497), Tatis (-.205), Nola (-.197), and Machado (-.116).

The OPS analysis also confirms the difficult year for the Padres lineup, with nine of the 10 underperforming. Despite Soto's high OPS, he underperformed what would have been expected based on his career average.

**Conclusion.** In attempting to understand the reasons for the Padres lower than expected performance, these WAR and OPS numbers are more telling than luck. By and large, of the 10 position players the Padres were counting on to have average or better years (i.e., as compared to their career experiences), only Kim performed better than expected.

Forecasting team performance in advance of the season will be affected by numerous factors and influenced by luck, and perhaps even a jinx. However, team performance will mainly be predicated on cumulative player performances. Unfortunately for the 2023 Padres, the 10 key position players they were counting on underperformed as a group.

The good news: the Padres finished over .500 for (only) the 17th time in the team's history.



STEVE BREEN The San Diego Union-Tribune



April 30, 2023, *San Diego Union-Tribune*

# APPENDIX: Padres 2023 Team and Players Statistics



**Table A1. NATIONAL LEAGUE 2023 AWARDS WON BY PADRES**

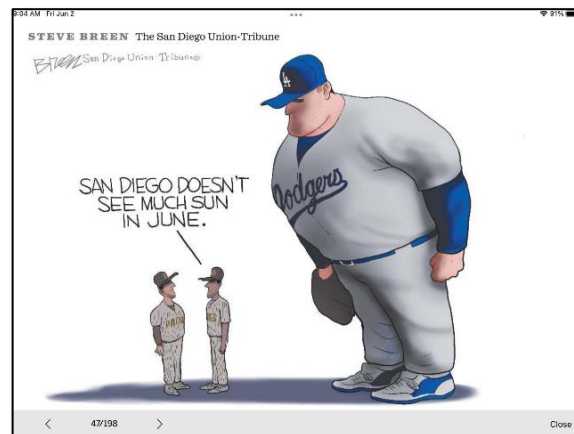
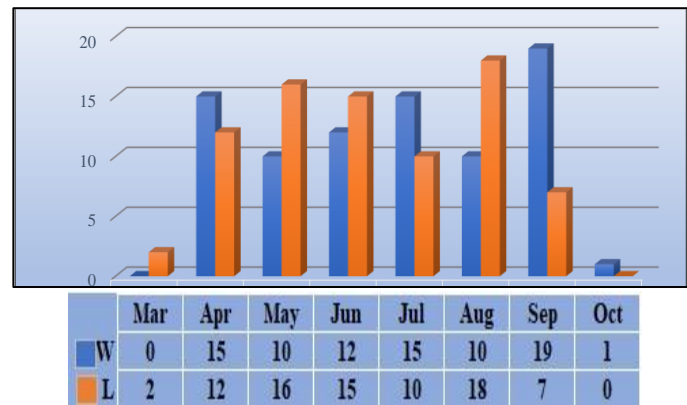
Award	Player
N.L. Silver Slugger (Offense)	<b>OF Juan Soto</b>
N.L. Gold Glove (Defense)	<b>RF Fernando Tatis, Jr.</b> <b>Utility Ha-Seong Kim</b>
N.L. Platinum (Overall Fielding)	<b>Fernando Tatis, Jr.</b>
Cy Young (Pitching)	<b>Blake Snell</b>

**Table A2. 2023 PADRES' WON-LOST RESULTS FOR A VARIETY OF SITUATIONS**

SEASON FINAL			
	W	L	W-L%
	82	80	.506
Home/Road			
	W	L	W-L%
Home	44	37	.543
Road	38	43	.469
Extra-Innings			
	W	L	W-L%
9-Inning Games	80	68	.541
Extra Inning	2	12	.143
One-Run Games			
	W	L	W-L%
	9	23	.281
Blowouts (5+ Runs)			
	W	L	W-L%
	33	20	.623

Source: Baseball-Reference.com

**Table A3. 2023 PADRES' WON-LOST RESULTS BY MONTH**



June 1, 2023, San Diego Union-Tribune

## Some Numbers

**56**

The number of players who played in at least one game for the 2023 Padres

**30**

The number of pitchers on the 2023 Padres. This includes 1B/OF Brandon Dixon who pitched in one inning.

**4**

Number of MLB players who played in all of their team's 162 games. Juan Soto was one of the four.

**132**

Juan Soto's number of walks in 2023. It was the most in MLB. Second, with 126, was Kyle Schwarber (Philadelphia).

**33**

Number of doubles by team leader, Fernando Tatis Jr. Also, the number of MLB players who had more than Tatis.

**Table A4. 2023 PADRES: NUMBER OF GAMES BY PLAYER AND POSITION PLAYED**

Name	G	GS	P	C	1B	2B	3B	SS	LF	CF	RF	DH	PH	PR
Pedro Avila	14	6	14	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
José Azocar	55	24	0	0	0	0	0	0	9	17	21	2	7	10
Scott Barlow	25	0	25	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Matthew Batten	43	33	0	0	6	17	17	2	0	0	0	2	3	2
Xander Bogaerts	155	154	0	0	0	0	0	146	0	0	0	9	1	0
Luis Campusano	49	41	0	42	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	5	0
Drew Carlton	11	0	11	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Matt Carpenter	76	58	0	0	13	0	0	0	0	0	0	55	17	0
José Castillo	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ji Man Choi	16	12	0	0	10	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	3	0
Garrett Cooper	41	29	0	0	31	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	9	0
Tom Cosgrove	54	0	54	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Nabil Crismatt	7	0	7	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Jake Cronenworth	127	124	0	0	106	35	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0
Nelson Cruz	49	33	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	42	16	0
David Dahl	4	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	1	0
Yu Darvish	24	24	24	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Brandon Dixon	33	23	1	0	16	0	0	0	2	0	9	7	4	5
Adam Engel	5	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	3	0	0	0	2
Jose Espada	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ben Gamel	6	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	1	1	1	1
Luis García	61	0	61	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Trent Grisham	153	142	0	0	0	0	0	0	153	0	0	0	6	1
Josh Hader	61	0	61	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Nick Hernandez	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Rich Hill	10	5	10	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Tim Hill	48	0	48	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Brent Honeywell Jr.	36	0	36	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Alek Jacob	3	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ray Kerr	22	0	22	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ha-Seong Kim	152	144	0	0	0	106	32	20	0	0	0	1	4	2
Reiss Knehr	4	1	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Taylor Kohlwey	5	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	1	1	1	0
Seth Lugo	26	26	26	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Manny Machado	138	138	0	0	0	0	105	0	0	0	0	33	0	0
Nick Martinez	63	9	63	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Adrián Morejón	8	1	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Joe Musgrove	17	17	17	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Austin Nola	52	45	0	52	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Rougned Odor	59	35	0	0	1	30	9	0	0	0	9	9	14	3
Jurickson Profar	14	10	0	0	5	1	0	0	6	0	2	1	4	0
Alfonso Rivas	8	5	0	0	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Eguy Rosario	11	9	0	0	0	1	11	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Gary Sánchez	72	62	0	63	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	7	7	0
Chandler Seagle	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0
Blake Snell	32	32	32	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Juan Soto	162	160	0	0	0	0	0	154	0	0	0	7	2	0
Robert Suarez	27	0	27	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Brett Sullivan	33	24	0	31	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	4	1
Domingo Tapia	15	0	15	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Fernando Tatis Jr.	141	140	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	5	137	3	1	0
Michael Wacha	24	24	24	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Matt Waldron	8	6	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ryan Weathers	12	10	12	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Steven Wilson	52	0	52	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Jackson Wolf	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Source: Baseball-Reference.com

■ - Highlights the highest number of games played at that position.

**Table A5. 2023 PADRES: BATTING STATISTICS BY PLAYER**  
(Listed in order by OPS)

Name	G	PA	AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	SB	CS	BB	SO	BA	OBP	SLG	OPS	GDP	HBP	SH	SF	IBB
Juan Soto	162	708	568	97	156	32	1	35	109	12	5	132	129	.275	.410	.519	.930	18	2	1	5	11
Luis Campusano	49	174	163	27	52	7	0	7	30	0	0	7	21	.319	.356	.491	.847	8	3	0	1	0
Gary Sanchez	72	260	234	33	51	9	0	19	46	0	0	21	64	.218	.292	.500	.792	3	4	0	1	0
Xander Bogaerts	155	665	596	83	170	31	2	19	58	19	2	56	110	.285	.350	.440	.790	21	7	0	6	0
Manny Machado	138	601	543	75	140	21	0	30	91	3	2	50	109	.258	.319	.462	.782	20	2	0	6	1
Jurickson Profar	14	49	44	4	13	2	0	1	7	0	0	5	4	.295	.367	.409	.776	2	0	0	0	0
Fernando Tatis Jr.	141	635	575	91	148	33	1	25	78	29	4	53	141	.257	.322	.449	.770	17	3	1	3	0
Eguy Rosario	11	37	36	6	9	1	1	2	6	0	0	1	12	.250	.270	.500	.770	1	0	0	0	0
Ha-Seong Kim	152	626	538	84	140	23	0	17	60	38	9	75	124	.260	.351	.398	.749	7	3	5	5	1
Garrett Cooper	41	133	117	14	28	7	0	4	15	0	0	14	35	.239	.323	.402	.725	6	1	0	1	0
Matthew Batten	43	139	120	19	31	6	0	2	11	2	2	17	30	.258	.355	.358	.713	0	1	1	0	0
Jake Cronenworth	127	522	458	54	105	24	7	10	48	6	1	46	97	.229	.312	.378	.689	8	11	1	5	2
Nelson Cruz	49	152	143	9	35	5	1	5	23	1	0	6	46	.245	.283	.399	.681	2	2	0	1	1
Trent Grisham	153	555	469	67	93	31	1	13	50	15	3	75	154	.198	.315	.352	.666	7	5	4	1	0
Rougned Odor	59	157	138	21	28	9	0	4	18	2	1	17	37	.203	.299	.355	.654	2	2	0	0	0
Matt Carpenter	76	237	188	18	33	12	0	5	31	1	0	41	67	.176	.322	.319	.641	2	2	0	5	0
Jose Azocar	55	102	91	16	21	6	0	2	9	8	2	4	24	.231	.278	.363	.641	2	2	5	0	0
Alfonso Rivas	8	17	15	2	3	2	0	0	1	0	0	2	7	.200	.294	.333	.627	0	0	0	0	0
Brandon Dixon	33	86	79	10	16	4	0	2	9	1	0	1	31	.203	.244	.329	.573	1	4	0	2	0
David Dahl	4	9	9	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	2	.111	.111	.444	.556	0	0	0	0	0
Brett Sullivan	33	86	81	7	17	3	0	1	6	0	0	4	19	.210	.244	.284	.528	1	0	0	1	0
Ben Gamel	6	15	15	2	3	1	0	0	2	0	0	0	2	.200	.200	.267	.467	0	0	0	0	0
Austin Nola	52	154	130	9	19	3	0	1	8	0	0	18	31	.146	.260	.192	.452	5	2	4	0	0
Ji Man Choi	16	41	31	3	2	1	0	0	2	0	0	8	8	.065	.268	.097	.365	1	1	0	1	0
Taylor Kohlwey	5	13	13	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	.154	.154	.154	.308	0	0	0	0	0
Adam Engel	5	6	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	.000	.000	.000	.000	0	0	0	0	0
Chandler Seagle	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	.000	.000	.000	.000	0	0	0	0	0
1660 6180 5401 752 1316 273 14 205 719 137 32 653 1311 .244 .329 .413 .742 134 57 22 44 16																						
G PA AB R H 2B 3B HR RBI SB CS BB SO BA OBP SLG OPS GDP HBP SH SF IBB																						

Source: Baseball-Reference.com

█ - Highlights the highest number in the category (column), except for BA (minimum of 3.1 plate appearances per team game played =502 PA minimum)

September 18, 2023, San Diego Union-Tribune

September 25, 2023, San Diego Union-Tribune

September 19, 2023, San Diego Union-Tribune



## APPENDIX: Author Roster



**Dan Boyle** moved to San Diego in 1995, just in time for the Padres' unexpected Western Division title in 1996 and NL Championship in 1998. He is eagerly awaiting the team's first world championship, and betting the Padres will win the World Series before his beloved Mets.

**Bob Chandler** has relied on SABR for baseball facts and historical information since becoming a member in 1978. A San Diego resident he has been active as a sports broadcaster for several radio and TV stations since 1961. Chandler's specialty is baseball; before 1969 he covered the PCL Padres and then was part of the National League Padres' broadcasting team for 31 years. An authority on Padres' history he authored a book entitled *Bob Chandler's Tales from the San Diego Padres*.

**Gregory Funk** joined SABR in 1981 and serves on the steering committee for the local Ted Williams Chapter. He prepares tax returns and plays the organ for his living, but his passion has been baseball and its statistics, strategy, and trivia. He is a lifelong Padres fan who has held a season ticket since 1972.

**Tom Larwin**, a retired transportation engineer, grew up in Chicago as a die-hard Cubs fan. After a move to San Diego in 1976 he gradually shifted allegiance to the home-town Padres. His first SABR essay was about Walter Johnson and the 1907 San Diego Pickwicks published in *The National Pastime* (1999). His baseball research passion is with the history of baseball in San Diego from 1870 to 1936.

**Wayne Towers** is a retired data analyst and college teacher. He grew up with the Pittsburgh Pirates of Bill Mazerowski, Roberto Clemente and Roy Face, but has adopted the Padres as his home team. His baseball research interest is relief pitching, which has resulted in articles in SABR's *The National Pastime* on the history of Padres relief pitching (2019) and Stu Miller (2020).

**Geoff Young** is the founder of the Padres-focused blog Ducksnots, having written thousands of articles and three books under that moniker from 1997 to 2011. He was a columnist for The Hardball Times from 2006 to 2011 and for Baseball Prospectus from 2010 to 2013, also contributing to several Baseball Prospectus books from 2012 to 2018.

