

PROSPECT INSIDER PROSPECT REPORT 2009

The Seattle Mariners farm system and overall collection of young, developing talent – including those on the current 25-man roster – has improved dramatically since Jack Zduriencik took over as the club's V.P. and G.M. His hiring of self-clone Tom McNamara as scouting director ensures that Zduriencik will typically get his kind of player, even if McNamara is making the decisions, much like draft day last month.

A year ago the system was leaning heavily on international signees that were two-to-four years from the big leagues, and was void of legit high-probability big-league talents in the upper minors, sans two medium-risk, medium-reward domestic acquisitions. And, as one rival club's scouting director put it before this year's draft, "there's just no pitching – none."

And while there still isn't any pitching, the ballclub is now in a position to simply make personnel choices based on what's best for the big-league club during a three-year period – now, next year and the year after, and in that order -- rather than taking an all-in approach, or simply attempting to sell the fans on a long-term rebuild.

How did the Mariners go from the 22nd best system in baseball to one of the top 15 in just six months? They made one smart trade, signed last year's first-round pick and had a good enough draft. And with that draft, which added two outfielders – one low-risk, one high – making other young talents such as Greg Halman, Michael Saunders and Wladimir Balentien as much as expendable (perhaps to fill the holes in the rotation in 2010?) a bat and a potential regular at second base or shortstop.

Seattle now has a different farm system, a better one that gives them flexibility rather than immediate impact help. But assets are assets, and the more you have, the better your chances at knocking off the Texas Rangers, Los Angeles Angels and Oakland Athletics in a mediocre, albeit improving American League West.

After starting the season with a C- or D+ grade, the M's system is about average as we stand, and is about to get a little bit better, depending on what Bob Engle and his staff are able to get done on the international scene this week.

The following Top 30 Prospects includes draft picks that I am almost certain will sign, and any player in the organization qualifies if they have retained rookie status at the big-league level. For example, Matt Tuiasosopo qualifies, while Ryan Rowland-Smith does not.

No. 1 – DUSTIN ACKLEY, CF

TOOLS

Tool	Present	Future
On-Base Skills	50	60
Hitting for Power	45	55
Speed & Baserunning	65	65
Fielding Range	45	55
Arm Strength	40	45

Ackley gets top billing due to his polished plate skills, timetable and the probability that comes with his overall package of physical tools and abilities, in the batter's box, on the bases and in the field.

If he's signed by early August, the left-handed hitter should see time in Everett late this summer. Either way, he's likely headed for the California League to start 2010 with an outside chance to be a September call-up, though that may be too aggressive.

I'd put his ETA as a regular on the 25-man roster at mid-to-late 2011 and project his ceiling as a .300/.370/.450 bat with above-average defensive value. He's not a great base stealer despite 65-70 speed, but could swipe 15-20 bags per year and provide savvy baserunning. His home-run power is likely to max out in the 15-20 range.

Ackley's cellar is as an on-base guy with some speed, and there's no guarantee that all of the power he's displayed this season at North Carolina will ultimately translate to the pro game, which would make him more of a .750 OPS bat -- led largely by his on-base percentage.

No. 2 – CARLOS TRIUNFEL, 2B

TOOLS

Tool	Present	Future
On-Base Skills	45	50
Hitting for Power	50	55
Speed & Baserunning	55	55
Fielding Range	50	50
Arm Strength	70	70

If Triunfel projected as a plus defensive shortstop, we'd be talking about the best position prospect in the game. But his range and average actions at short probably warrant an early move to second base, despite the plus-plus throwing arm, and that's what the Mariners had in store for him in 2009 before he broke his fibula.

Long term, there's a chance Triunfel grows out of the middle of the diamond altogether and ends up at third base or the outfield, but his bat should be at least average at those spots if he reaches his full potential.

At 19, he's still a couple of years away from the big leagues, but the loss of 2009 as a developmental season hurts. It certainly doesn't strip Triunfel of much of his prospect status, however, as long the returns on his rehab are positive – and they are, through the month of June.

Expect the Dominican native to miss the rest of this season, but to take part in the club's instructional leagues, now being called the Advance Development League.

I still see Triunfel as a future .280/.350/.460 bat or better, and the better part may come in the power department. Safeco may pin his power totals, but in a neutral park he could max out at 25 or more homer to go with 30-40 doubles annually. He possesses above average speed now, but will probably plateau as an average runner as he continues to fill out. He's a decent base stealer and could pop 15-20 a year if he can harness his aggressive nature a bit.

NO. 3 – ADAM MOORE, C		
TOOLS		
Tool	Present	Future
On-Base Skills	45	50+
Hitting for Power	45	50+
Speed & Baserunning	35	35
Fielding Range	45	50
Arm Strength	50	50

Moore didn't spend much time back in Double-A West Tenn and didn't waste any time impressing the player development department upon his arrival in the PCL. He immediately showed the ability to work the count, take some walks and make consistent contact. Despite the lack of power early, Moore's swing is conducive to doubles, and he goes the other way with power, too.

His bat speed is about average and there are no major concerns with his swing mechanics, though one scout thinks he could get more power if his feet weren't quite as wide. His average power should play well at Safeco despite being right-handed, due to Moore's ability to use the whole field, much like that of Matt Tuiasosopo.

Defensively, Moore should have no problems becoming at least average in all areas, including accuracy, blocking pitches in the dirt and receiving. He already gets rave reviews for his leadership skills and game calling. His arm strength grades as a 50 and his release has improved each year.

Former Seattle Mariners Dan Wilson has spent time with Moore in Tacoma recently, working on all of the above, particularly his throwing technique.

Moore is a below-average runner, but grades about average for the position. I'd set the Texas-Arlington product's offensive ceiling at .270/.340/.440.

No. 4 – MICHAEL SAUNDERS, LF

TOOLS

Tool	Present	Future
On-Base Skills	45	55
Hitting for Power	45	50+
Speed & Baserunning	50	50+
Fielding Range	55	55
Arm Strength	45*	55

Two things keep Saunders from ranking No. 2 here; contact rates and the concern over the long-term health of his throwing arm.

The 22-year-old has improved his strikeout rates this season without sacrificing power, but more of the same is necessary for the alarms to be put on snooze. The surgery he had on his right shoulder inserts some natural anxiety about his arm strength, though he's already shown that some of the strength is back.

Without any further issues with the shoulder, Saunders is big-league ready right now with an offensive ceiling in the .280/.350/.450 range -- the power numbers dependent on the Victoria, B.C. native's continued progress in terms of pulling the ball with more authority.

At 6-foot-4 and 210 pounds, Saunders is a very good athlete with above-average speed, suggesting more power is in the offing with more refinement. One scout thought he saw a lot of Nate McLouth in Saunders, and meant it as a compliment, though he did say Saunders has a better understanding of the strike zone and the ultimate numbers should reflect as such.

Defensively, Saunders is an ideal candidate to man left field for Seattle, covering almost enough ground to play center field regularly, with the arm to play right. That, and the fact that he bats left-handed, is enough to love the thought of a Saunders-Gutierrez-Ackley outfield for years to come.

No. 5 – RICH POYTHRESS, 1 B

TOOLS

Tool	Present	Future
On-Base Skills	45	50
Hitting for Power	60	65
Speed & Baserunning	30	30
Fielding Range	35	35
Arm Strength	40	40

Poythress is a big, strong right-handed power bat with pretty solid skills at the plate. He makes enough contact, controls the strike zone and has good bat speed. He's not going to offer a lot on the defensive side of things, nor will he be an asset on the bases, but he moves well for a 240-pounder and should hit for enough average to stave off the "pure slugger" tag.

There's a chance he'll move pretty quickly, too, due to his advanced approach, and his power should profile well with wood bat -- even at Safeco where his right-center field tendencies will play better than pull-power.

Had Poythress been the club's pick at No. 27 or 33 overall, not many of us would have had much of a problem with the M's draft this year, and his bat could prove to be enough to make fans forget they passed on better talents in the top 33.

No. 6 – PHILIPPE AUMONT		
TOOLS		
Tool	Present	Future
Fastball	65	65+
Slurve	50	55
Changeup	35	40
Command & Control	45	50
Delivery/Mechanics	40	50

As a pure reliever, Aumont would fall as far down this list as No. 15, but despite his current role in the bullpen and no indication from the organization that he's headed back to the rotation at any point in his career, I just don't believe Jack Zduriencik and the player development department is that shortsighted.

Aumont still lands with a stiff and straight front leg, adding some stress to his upper body and arm, but his arm speed is very good on his fastball, curve ball and change. He has had problems repeating his delivery this year, however, and as late as early June had not made progress with that or with the landing leg.

If he's to start games in the big leagues, he'll need to smooth out his arm path, eliminate the stiff left leg and repeat his delivery to be effective long term. But he's just 20 years old and has logged less than 100 innings as a pro, and a year in the West Tenn rotation in 2010 would provide ample opportunity for the staff to make the necessary adjustments.

The pitches are there, the physical makeup is there... it's just a matter of getting Aumont the required reps as a starter to work out the kinks.

His arm slot is no longer a concern for me, as he's typically staying on top of his pitches and still gets the sink on his fastball. If he loses the sink and is not staying on top, his curve ball will flatten out and his mid-90s heater will become a lot more hittable as he progresses through the minors.

If all goes well and he's eventually returned to the rotation, Aumont has the stuff and physical tools to become a No. 1 starting pitcher capable of 200 innings per season, very much like Toronto's Roy Halladay, though asking Aumont to bring Halladay's command to the ballpark everyday is not reasonable.

I'd put his ETA at 2012, with a chance at a late-season call-up in both 2010 and 2011, as he's still very raw due to a lack of experience.

No. 7 – JUAN RAMIREZ, RHP

TOOLS

Tool	Present	Future
Fastball	55	55
Slider	45	55
Changeup	35	45
Command & Control	45	50
Delivery/Mechanics	55	60

The right-handed Ramirez is the best pure starting pitching prospect in the system with Aumont being currently relegated to the bullpen, and the Nicaraguan native continues to impress the M's and rival scouts with his smooth delivery, loose arm action and easy low-90s velocity.

He's survived in the California League this season by keeping the ball down, which is a testament to Ramirez repeating his delivery and maintaining a consistent release point – something not many young pitchers master. His slider is inconsistent, though good enough for Class A ball, which is why I still believe Ramirez is at least two-and-a-half years from the big leagues, if not three or more.

And his changeup has made very little progress, which keeps him from dominating, but left-handed batters don't square up his fastball much -- .387 slugging. Right-handed batters, while batting just .255 off him in 2009, are slugging .510, and though some of that is about the environment, that number suggests his command and slider just aren't where they need to be.

One scout recently called Ramirez a "good but not elite" pitching prospect, but also opined that "there's more there, he's got more to show. There's too much left for him to do physically; more velocity – he can throw harder than that and deep into games, too. He's just not a kid who is going to land in the big leagues at 20 or 21 years of age. Not as a starter anyway. Think of him as a Francisco Carmona, Jeremy Guthrie, James Shields type."

Ramirez, like most pitching prospects not destined for stardom or fresh off a cashing a huge signing bonus check, is probably going to spend a full year in High Desert, and then do the same at Double-A in 2010 as he works on his secondary pitches.

I'd be surprised if he wasn't at least a No. 3 starter, and if his slider is sharpened and his change turns into anything useful, he can be more than that.

Ramirez's smooth delivery caught the eye of ESPN.com's Keith Law this past spring. The right-hander draws comparisons to former Mariners reliever Rafael Soriano for his easy velocity and simple mechanics. One scout who saw Ramirez blow up a little bit in one July start said "he's really handling this well and sticking to the game plan. That's one check on the must-have list."

No. 8 – JOSH FIELDS, RHP

TOOLS

Tool	Present	Future
Fastball	60	65
Curveball	55	60
Changeup	--	--
Command & Control	40	50
Delivery/Mechanics	50	55

When Fields was the name called last June, I think M's fans all died a little inside, knowing that the consensus was that there were better players on the board at the time. The player they should have taken – I said on draft day, 2008 – was left-hander Christian Friedrich, who as of June 30 of this season is a combined 4-3 with a 2.34 ERA and 86-20K/BB ratio in 65 1/3 innings between both levels of Class A ball. Friedrich would rank in the top five if he were property of the Mariners.

But all is not lost on Fields. He owns the best fastball-curveball combination of any arm in the system, and despite some inconsistencies with his control, the right-hander is still flashing filthy stuff in Double-A West Tennessee, pitching at 92-94 and touching 96.

His approach on the mound is fitting for a setup or closer role in the future and there's no reason why Fields can't be the heir apparent to either role in Seattle. Ignoring his June 28 outing, Fields has gone 10 innings over his last nine appearances and has given up just two earned runs on four hits and two walks. He struck out 10 and touched 97 at least two times.

His most recent outing, the disaster on June 28, was all about command – he had none of it, and his delivery got all out of whack, too. He served up four hits and four earned runs without recording an out. And according to one scout in attendance, he was 90-92, too, which isn't normal for him.

Once he's right for a long period of time – if he gets back on track right away this week – he's probably not long for West Tenn, and it's possible he skips Tacoma altogether if he's throwing enough strikes to help the big club.

Fields has the stuff to be a closer, but his control has never been even average and his command is spotty, too. If he's unable to improve both enough, he may ultimately end up an 8th inning arm, instead. But a good one at that, one that misses bats and can go multiple innings with a strikeout pitch to get out of jams and strand inherited runners.

Unlike Aumont, who has the pitches and physical makeup to be an effective long-term starter in the big leagues, Fields is a pure reliever. Signing him was the right thing for the M's to do, even if drafting him last June was not. Hindsight says they could have selected a better player than Fields in this year's draft, such as Indiana's Eric Arnett, Lipscomb's Rex Brothers or a couple of prep bats, but none would be able to help fill the gap left by the declining and since-traded J.J. Putz and the absence of Brandon Morrow, who is rightfully being groomed as a starter.

No. 9 – MATT TUIASOSOPO, 3B

TOOLS

Tool	Present	Future
On-Base Skills	45	50
Hitting for Power	45	50+
Speed & Baserunning	50	50
Fielding Range	45	45
Arm Strength	50	50

Tuiasosopo's report for 2009 is currently incomplete due to the right elbow injury that sprung up on the 23-year-old during spring training. He went north with the big club as the M's awaited the return of Ichiro from the disabled list but Tui was only there in spirit because he was unable to throw, and as the organization discovered in April, he wasn't able to swing the bat comfortably, either.

After 14 whiffs in 28 plate appearances, Tuiasosopo went on the disabled list and has been there ever since, effectively removing him from potentially being the short-term answer at third base while Adrian Beltre recovers and rehabs from shoulder surgery.

Tui began a throwing program in late June and could begin a rehab assignment sometime in July and might have a shot at the 25-man roster – in legitimate fashion – next spring if he's healthy, hitting and shows more improvement with the glove.

No. 10 – GABRIEL NORIEGA, SS

TOOLS

Tool	Present	Future
On-Base Skills	40	50
Hitting for Power	35	45
Speed & Baserunning	55	55
Fielding Range	55	55
Arm Strength	50	50

Noriega is one of my favorite prospects in the system, and has been since seeing some amateur video of him last spring. In the video, Noriega ranged quickly, smoothly and confidently to both directions to snag ground balls, and showed off a good arm with a quick release.

Defensively, all the physical tools are there; if he's unable to stick at the position, it won't be due to range, arm strength or a lack of hands or footwork. His above-average speed doesn't play much in the stolen base category at this stage, and his offense is behind his defense in terms of how much more work needs to be done to become big-league ready.

Noriega is a switch hitter with gap power, and he could develop a little bit more as his swing gets more consistent. He's much more polished from the left side, but his swing is too long for a bat

without big power, and that's led to high strikeout rates during his limited plate appearances in pro ball.

He does display the ability to work counts regularly, but his plate discipline is currently below average and he will get too aggressive in streaks and get himself out. But he's just 18 and recently impressed one scout who caught the tail-end of the Danville-Pulaski series.

"Noriega stood out for me," he said. "(He's) pretty good athletically, showed some range and turned two pretty well. At the plate he's just inexperienced, and it shows. But physically, he's got the build you like in good shortstops."

No. 11 – JHARMIDY DE JESUS, 1B		
TOOLS		
Tool	Present	Future
On-Base Skills	40	50
Hitting for Power	45	55+
Speed & Baserunning	40	40
Fielding Range	45	45
Arm Strength	50	50

De Jesus reminds me a little bit of former Atlanta Braves prospect Andy Marte in terms of his swing and physical likeness, and his raw tools are somewhat similar at the same age, too. But the Dominican product is unlikely to stick at third base, and has been playing primarily first base since his first professional season ended last September.

A right-handed hitter, De Jesus has good pull power, but does possess good habits when it comes to hitting the ball where it's pitched and has enough raw power to suggest he'll develop big-league power from alley to alley.

Like most young hitters, the 19-year-old De Jesus will chase balls out of the zone, but he's shown improvement in that area since spring of 2008, which is why he ranks as high as he does. He can get a little pull happy, but that can be said about even the better teenage prospects in the game, and nobody in the organization appears too concerned about entering 2009.

De Jesus is a slightly below-average runner and may fall into the 35 or 40 range long term as he adds weight naturally. Most of his skills remain raw, but he's displayed enough feel for the game to expect him to start moving through the system level to level, year to year starting with '09.

Putting an MLB ETA on De Jesus at this stage is probably silly, but he's at least three or four years away, possibly more, as he's on a similar early-career track as was Balentien at the same stage.

The goal should be to get De Jesus into Advanced-A ball before he turns 21, and it wouldn't surprise if he went from Pulaski to Everett to Clinton all between now and the end of the minor league season.

De Jesus was one of 11 internationally signed prospects in the mid-season Top 30, joining 17 draft picks and two acquired via trade. Of the 17 draft picks, five are from the '09 class, four are from the 2008 group, three apiece were produced by the '06 and '07 drafts, and two came from the '04 class.

NO. 12 – MARIO MARTINEZ, 3B

TOOLS

Tool	Present	Future
On-Base Skills	40	45
Hitting for Power	40	50
Speed & Baserunning	50	50
Fielding Range	50	55
Arm Strength	50	50

NO. 13 – JAMES JONES, RF

TOOLS

Tool	Present	Future
On-Base Skills	40	45+
Hitting for Power	40	55
Speed & Baserunning	55	55
Fielding Range	50	50+
Arm Strength	60	60

Jones is very raw at the plate but has plus physical tools, including above-average speed, and a plus arm – he was clocked as high as the mid-90s on the mound. His instincts are good in the outfield, but he's probably a corner defender due to a lack of quickness and below-average routes and jumps.

He reminds many of the Mike Cameron and Adam Jones mold athletically, but I tend to see him more as a left-handed hitting Matt Kemp -- at his peak -- or a mix of Cliff Floyd and a young Jermaine Dye. He's probably three years away at least.

He grades high in character and work ethic and receives raves about his makeup and leadership, all of which bode very well when assessing the probability in his raw skills.

As the M's 2009 4th round pick, Jones joins left-hander Justin Thomas ('05), right-handers Ricky Orta ('06), Nolan Gallagher ('07) and Steve Hensley ('08), as well as catcher Rob Johnson ('04) as fellow fourth-round selections currently in the organization. Orta and Hensley just missed the Top 30 and Thomas made the cut a year ago.

No. 14 – GREG HALMAN, RF

TOOLS

Tool	Present	Future
On-Base Skills	35	40
Hitting for Power	60	60
Speed & Baserunning	60	60
Fielding Range	55	55
Arm Strength	60	60

Halman is the epitome of an enigma. One night he has five scouts drooling over his physical tools and power projection, and the next night he's got the same group of talent evaluators shaking their heads and wondering "what if."

Halman, still just 21 years of age, is having a nightmare of a season, regressing in areas in which he showed promise a year ago – plate discipline and pitch recognition. He's fanned 116 times in fewer than 300 plate appearances at Double-A West Tennessee this season, with eight of those coming on a rehab stint in Peoria in late June. He's walked just 17 times and is hitting under .200 as a result.

He's still hitting for power – 15 home runs, 12 doubles, .232 IsoP – but the contact rates are so poor at this stage, I had to talk myself into putting him in the top 15.

His age and athletic ability made the difference for me, as he remains a plus runner with good defensive range and a strong enough arm to play right field regularly. But he'll have to come out of his current funk to break the Top 20 this winter, and at that point he'll be in danger of completely losing his prospect status.

No. 15 – JULIO MORBAN, CF

TOOLS

Tool	Present	Future
On-Base Skills	45	55
Hitting for Power	35	50
Speed & Baserunning	55	55
Fielding Range	55	55
Arm Strength	45	45

Morban possesses an advanced approach at the plate and above-average physical tools, including foot speed, defensive range and the chance to hit for average power. At 6-foot-1 and 190 pounds, he profiles well as a multi-tooled center fielder with solid plate skills.

Latin scouting coordinators and area scouts liked Morban's feel for the game and how quickly he took to instruction, which bodes well for his future. And unlike the majority of the M's recent international signings, the Dominican native does have quick-twitch actions to go with strength and baseball skills beyond most 17-year-old athletes.

“I think he’s a pretty good candidate to hit leadoff,” said one club’s former South African scout now serving as their Latin Coordinator. “Those are the kinds of skills you see on a lot of Latin shortstops that end up playing third or the outfield, but he’s got a jump on them since he’s been playing center field his whole life.”

No. 16 – MICHAEL PINEDA, RHP		
TOOLS		
Tool	Present	Future
Fastball	50	55
Slider	40	50
Changeup	50	55
Command & Control	55	60
Delivery/Mechanics	45	50

Pineda is among the favorite prospects by most readers, judged by how much he’s asked about, and rightfully so. The 6-foot-5, 190-pound Pineda offers a fastball in the 89-92 mph range, but has touched 95 in the past and sat 92-95 in both of his spring tune-ups in March.

His slider, at 76-80 mph, is a bit slow for a true slider and it flattens out as a result and lacks as much bite as Pineda does a feel for the pitch. The 20-year-old gets out with plus command and occasional sink and run on his four-seamer, and a good changeup that grades at least average at present.

His delivery is a little deliberate and the club may choose to speed it up to help him repeat it, and his arm action is anything but clean. That, combined with his present lack of a good breaking ball, is what leads some scouts to believe he’s a future relief pitcher. But we’ve witnessed far too many breaking balls come out of nowhere on young pitchers to give up on Pineda this early.

He’s currently on the disabled list with a sore elbow – and has been for the past six weeks – but the club is simply being careful with Pineda and he is expected to pitch again sometime after the big-league All-star break.

Pineda’s ceiling remains as a No. 3 starter, but is probably at least a strike-throwing back-end arm with some upside.

No. 17 – KYLE SEAGER, 2B		
TOOLS		
Tool	Present	Future
On-Base Skills	40	50
Hitting for Power	40	50
Speed & Baserunning	50	50
Fielding Range	45	45
Arm Strength	50	50

Seager's best attribute is the way he approaches every at-bat – like a professional and with a game plan. He played a lot of third base at North Carolina but has played second in the past and if he's to see time in the big leagues, it will have to be at second since the left-handed hitter is without the kind of power that profiles in a corner.

Scouts love his approach but contend that there's only limited power in his swing due to its level plane. He doesn't have great bat speed, but makes a lot of contact, and there are some present examples of capable hitters making swing adjustments that have greatly enhanced their power outputs, namely Ben Zobrist in Tampa Bay.

During his time at second, Seager showed adequate range to his right but according to one scout "needs some help going to his glove side," but has the arm and baseball acumen to learn the position and just enough athleticism to get by.

At worst, Seager is probably a Mark Loretta or Mike Fontenot type player, with an ETA of late 2011 or 2012.

Seager is one of three players selected by Seattle from the University of North Carolina, and joins 42 others as college products taken, the most college players the organization has taken in the draft since 1991 when the draft went 96 rounds. The nine high school picks are the lowest in team history, and the lowest in baseball since 2000.

NO. 18 – MIKE CARP, 1B

TOOLS

Tool	Present	Future
On-Base Skills	55	60
Hitting for Power	45	50
Speed & Baserunning	25	25
Fielding Range	30	30
Arm Strength	35	35

Carp brought his hitting eye and plate discipline to the M's organization and got the call-up in June because of his advanced plate skills.

There's not much more than average power in that swing, as it's engineered for consistency and line drives and is backed by average bat speed. But Carp controls the zone and rarely offers at pitches he can't handle.

All of his value is in what he brings to the batter's box, however, as he's a well below-average runner and at best is below-average at first base. But his ability to work counts and lace line drives to all fields is a valuable set of skills, and Carp did show a little more power in Triple-A Tacoma than expected.

No. 19 – NICK FRANKLIN, SS

TOOLS

Tool	Present	Future
On-Base Skills	35	45
Hitting for Power	35	45
Speed & Baserunning	55	55
Fielding Range	45	50
Arm Strength	55	55

Franklin's physical skills won't blow anyone away, but as one scout put it "he'll fill out your report card with a lot of positive marks." Nothing spectacular, but he also comes without a glaring weakness, with the exception of the power in his bat. But that could be hidden if the rest of his plate skills max out and he turns into a legit defensive shortstop.

But that is one of the biggest questions that surround most prep shortstops – will he stick? Franklin reminds me of the way many assess Chicago White Sox 2008 first-round selection Gordon Beckham's future in the field. "He probably won't hurt you there, at the very least. So if he hits at average or better levels, he's probably an above-average shortstop. If he lands at second, he might be really good there, too," said one area scout.

But the same scout also added that Franklin is pretty risky because there's a chance he has Adam Everett's bat and is more like Ryan Theriot in the field. He brings no plus tools to the table except for his makeup and a slightly above-average throwing arm, and riding on either to carry him to the big leagues as a first-round pick isn't usually what smart ball clubs do. But clearly it was a financial selection at No. 27 and aside from his draft status; Franklin is a good talent to have in the system and watch grow.

No. 20 – GUILLERMO PIMENTEL, LF

TOOLS

Tool	Present	Future
On-Base Skills	35	50
Hitting for Power	40	55+
Speed & Baserunning	50	50
Fielding Range	50	50
Arm Strength	55	55

No. 21 – STEVE BARON, C

TOOLS

Tool	Present	Future
On-Base Skills	30	40
Hitting for Power	35	45
Speed & Baserunning	35	35
Fielding Range	60	60
Arm Strength	65	65

NO. 22 – DENNIS RABEN, RF/1B

TOOLS

Tool	Present	Future
On-Base Skills	45	50
Hitting for Power	50	55
Speed & Baserunning	30	30
Fielding Range	40	40
Arm Strength	50	50

Like Triunfel, Raben's 2009 season is a wash, and it never got started, thanks to a micro fracture in his right knee. After a strong showing last summer, Raben figured to enter the year with a chance to progress all the way to Triple-A Tacoma with his patient approach and above-average power from the left side.

He's probably going to have to eventually move to first base from his natural right field, but he does have the arm to stick in the outfield if his knee and back hold up.

If healthy, Raben could head to instructs this fall, or perhaps see time in one of the winter leagues before reporting to spring training in February.

NO. 23 – MAURICIO ROBLES, LHP

TOOLS

Tool	Present	Future
Fastball	50+	50+
Curveball	45	50
Changeup	35	40
Command & Control	40	45
Delivery/Mechanics	45	50

NO. 24 – TYSON GILLIES, CF

TOOLS

Tool	Present	Future
On-Base Skills	45	50+
Hitting for Power	40	45
Speed & Baserunning	60	60
Fielding Range	55	55
Arm Strength	55	55

Gillies is the top fourth outfielder prospect (if you want to call a reserve a prospect) in the system, with better speed, defense and arm strength than Ezequiel Carrera. His gap power comes from average bat speed and a good understanding of the strike zone, aiding him with solid contact. But his contact rates are not great, which suggests his approach is not consistent and his overall discipline still needs work.

But his speed and defensive package, including a plus throwing arm and above-average instincts and feel for the game, make Gillies one to watch. He bunts a little too much, but it shows he can handle the bat and is a four-second runner to first. He will work counts and take walks, too.

If he developed average power and/or cut the strikeouts down to average or better levels, the 20-year-old Gillies would have a shot to play every day.

No. 25 – MAIKEL CLETO, RHP		
TOOLS		
Tool	Present	Future
Fastball	60	60
Slider	40	45
Changeup	35	40
Command & Control	40	50
Delivery/Mechanics	50	55

Cleto's spring ordeal in the Dominican Republic held him out of action until June, robbing him of valuable developmental time. But the 6-foot-3, 220 pounder has his 2009 season underway, giving M's fans their first chance to check him out after the right-hander was acquired in the three-team trade in December.

Cleto offers a fastball in the low-to-mid 90s and possesses average control but below-average command. But at 20 years of age and with fastball that has reached 97 mph, Cleto is an intriguing arm to say the least.

Many scouts believe he's a reliever, due to the lack of a breaking ball, but there's time to develop his slider, and he does show good feel for a changeup that flashes as average – he just has yet to throw it much.

If he wants to start, better fastball command, further development of the change and some semblance of a breaking ball are all necessary, but his delivery is fine and he already throws a lot of strikes.

It's more than conceivable that this time next year Cleto will be right there with Ramirez and Aumont as the top arms in the system, and he could have ranked higher had he began the year in April and had a chance to perform. One NL scout that loves Cleto called him "the starting pitcher version of Guillermo Mota."

One former Mets scout was sad to see him go, saying that "he was one of those arms that comes out of nowhere, reaches Double-A and Triple-A ahead of schedule because of his velocity, helps in the bullpen for a few years while he polishes off the secondary stuff."

No. 26 – JOSE FRANCISCO VALDIVIA, RHP

TOOLS

Tool	Present	Future
Fastball	50	55+
Slider	45	55
Changeup	35	45
Command & Control	40	50
Delivery/Mechanics	40	50

Granted, just about everything appealing in a young arm is wrapped up in projection and a lot of hope, and Valdivia is no different. Already touching the low 90s with his four-seam fastball, Valdivia looks the part at 6-foot-4 and just under 200 pounds, and is just 17 years of age as he begins his journey to the big leagues.

M's international scouting director Bob Engle called Valdivia "the best pure arm in the July 2nd international market," but also acknowledged that the young right-hander will have to make a few major adjustments in his delivery, which isn't uncommon for pitcher that age.

"I had him at 90-91 mostly," said one scout who was in Peoria for the opening week, "but he was up to 93." Valdivia has made two relief appearances for the Arizona League Mariners, allowing two hits and two earned runs while striking out one.

Because of his power delivery, it's likely that he develops a slider or power curveball to some extent, but his mechanics and proper workload will be the focus of the organization for his first few seasons as a pro.

No. 27 – ALEX LIDDI, 3B

TOOLS

Tool	Present	Future
On-Base Skills	40	45
Hitting for Power	40	50+
Speed & Baserunning	50	50
Fielding Range	50	50
Arm Strength	50	50

Liddi has rebounded from two mediocre years in the Midwest League to take full advantage of the hitter-friendly confines of the California League this season, tallying 47 extra-base hits through the month of June after totaling just 36 in a full season a year ago.

He's hitting .347/.396/.646 in 73 games, and leads the circuit with 19 home runs and 68 RBI. But what is it about Liddi outside the numbers?

He's got average bat speed, perhaps slightly above average, but chases pitches out of the strike zone and is not adept at working the count and taking a fair share of walks. He's below average defensively at third base, and may have to eventually move to left field.

His performance this season isn't entirely about the environment, as Liddi's pitch recognition has taken a rather large step forward since the start of last season. He does have problems with hard stuff in as he likes the ball out over the plate but will go the other way with gap power and has been turning on breaking balls with power. Liddi has always been able to hit the fastball with authority.

The real challenge will be when Liddi is again in a more neutral setting and facing pitchers with better breaking balls and command.

The solid draft the M's had in '06 reminds of the 2005 draft as a whole. The top pick, Justin Upton, is already a superstar, while several of the first rounders are succeeding either in the majors or greatly as big-time prospects, including Ryan Zimmerman (WAS), Ryan Braun (MIL), Jay Bruce (CIN), Matt Garza (MIN), Andrew McCutchen (PIT), Colby Rasmus (STL), Ricky Romero (TOR), Chris Volstad (FLA) and Troy Tulowitzki (COL). Only Alex Gordon (No. 2 to KC), Wade Townsend (No. 8 to TB) and Jeff Clement (No. 3 to Seattle) have been Top 10 disappointments. Only nine of the 30 first round picks have not made an appearance in the big leagues.

No. 28 – JUAN DIAZ, 2B/SS

TOOLS

Tool	Present	Future
On-Base Skills	35	45
Hitting for Power	35	40
Speed & Baserunning	50	50
Fielding Range	50	50
Arm Strength	50	50

Diaz came into the organization as a defense-first shortstop and has done nothing to change that assessment, though he's showing a little bit of improvement with plate coverage and is hitting the ball the other way more than he did a year ago.

Diaz still profiles better at second base, but has adequate range, is sure-handed and has enough arm to stick at shortstop. Offensively, his swing is not engineered for power leading to a lot of ground balls, which would partially explain his lack of home run power, even in the Cal league and at Mavericks Stadium.

He's adept from both sides of the plate, but shows better discipline and a more consistent effort from the right side. He's 6-foot-3 and 185 pounds and certainly looks the part of the long-term shortstop, but whether he plays every day or is limited to a reserve role depends greatly on his ability to develop more power at the plate.

No. 29 – EFRAIN NUNEZ, OF		
TOOLS		
Tool	Present	Future
On-Base Skills	35	45
Hitting for Power	35	50
Speed & Baserunning	50	50
Fielding Range	50	50
Arm Strength	50	50

Nunez is a switch-hitting corner outfielder with average power and decent athleticism – enough to send him out to center field on occasion. His swing is smooth, but his load is high and long, creating a long swing, which opens him up to good velocity and changeup combos.

He's better from the left side, showing good discipline and better power, but he does make better contact as a right-handed hitter. At 18, there's plenty of time to ride out the switch hitting aspect of his game, but he'll have to shorten his swing and eliminate the extra movements in his setup.

He does run well, about average, but isn't likely to steal many bases. Nunez is a long-term prospect and makes this list with no major weaknesses physically or athletically.

No. 30 – NOLAN DIAZ, RHP		
TOOLS		
Tool	Present	Future
Fastball	40	45
Curveball	40	45
Changeup	40+	45
Command & Control	50	55
Delivery/Mechanics	45	50

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Additions

Pimentel, Martinez, Baron, N. Diaz, Robles

Ousted

Dunigan, Lorin, Pribanic, Adcock, Almonte

August 1, 2009