



Baseball America NEWS ESPN

[SCOREBOARDS](#)
[STATS](#)
[FEATURES](#)
[COLUMNISTS](#)
[NEWS](#)
[DRAFT](#)
[MINORS](#)
[COLLEGE](#)
[HIGH SCHOOL](#)
[STORE](#)
[CONTACT US](#)
[HOME](#)

Prospect Pulse

Compiled By John Manuel

September 23, 2005

Kenny Perez was taking batting practice, J.J. Furmaniak had just arrived at the park and Zach Miner had just walked into a Charlotte Applebee's.

The minor leaguers all found out they had been traded just before the July 31 deadline in different ways, but they all had two things in common: They started 2005 ranked by Baseball America among their organization's top 30 prospects, and they all ended up leaving the organizations they had spent their entire professional careers with. Perez and Furmaniak had been with the Red Sox and Padres organizations for six seasons, while Miner was in his fifth year with the Braves.

They were each assigned to their new teams for about six weeks, and in that time they were expected to learn new signs, new routines and figure out where they ranked on the organization's depth chart.

But first, Perez had to make his way from Portland, Maine, to Lancaster, Calif.; Furmaniak had to get from Portland, Ore. to Indianapolis (with stops in Syracuse and Buffalo), and Miner had to report to Toledo from Richmond. As he drove almost 600 miles northwest, Miner said he had a slew of anxious thoughts.

"I was about as nervous as I've ever been," he said. "Not knowing how they were going to use me, and I wanted to make a good impression since the team traded for me. I wanted to go over there and help them win, and I didn't want to slow up what they were doing."

A few weeks after their trades, all three players realized they may have become complacent with their roles in their old organizations. They all were motivated to show their new

SCOUT'S VIEW

Yuliesky Gourriel, 3b, Cuba

Age: 21. **Ht.:** 6-1. **Wt.:** 180. **B-T:** R-R.

(All grades on the 20-80 scale, with 20 the worst, 80 the best, and 50 major league average)

	Present	Future
Hitting	50	60
Power	40	50
Speed	50	40
Defense	55	60
Arm	55	55

Gourriel has developed into more than Cuba's best young player; he's the island's best player period. A member of the national team since the 2002 Intercontinental Cup (when he was 18), Gourriel broke in as an outfielder and second baseman before taking over at third base, where Omar Linares starred as Cuba's top hitter for 14 years. One scout who saw Gourriel at the 36th World Cup in the Netherlands said he is inheriting Linares' mantle nicely.

"He's the No. 1 guy on their team, no

bosses they had acquired good players.

"It's a situation where for four years I was getting the ball every fifth day pitching in the Braves organization, and I had a comfort level going and pretty much knew where I stood," Miner said. "Even if I was struggling sometimes, I still knew they were going to keep giving me the ball."

Perez, a shortstop, said while he was prepared for a trade-- he and his teammates in Portland had been hearing their names in various rumors-- it was still a wake-up call.

"I pretty much grew up with Boston, played at every level and it was like a home feeling. With a new team you have to start from scratch, it kind of worried me at first," he said.

After the dust settled, the players made sure to check out their competition with their new teams and organizations and compare it with what they had left.

"I look up where I'm going, who's there," Perez said. "Anywhere you go, you're always going to have competition and you have to prove yourself everywhere you go. With Boston I had a couple guys in front of me and I'm always in the shadow, and here they have Stephen Drew and Justin Upton (if he signs)."

In fact, before he even put on a uniform, Perez was dealing with Drew's shadow. Even though Perez was hitting .285 in Double-A with the Red Sox, the Diamondbacks assigned him to Class A Lancaster to replace Drew, who'd been promoted to Double-A Tennessee.

Furmaniak, an infielder, realized the Padres didn't have big plans for him when he wasn't promoted after both Khalil Greene and Mark Loretta went down with injuries earlier this season. And once he had arrived in Indianapolis, he recognized he might get to the majors sooner with the Pirates, even after he had batted .266-14-47 for the Triple-A Beavers.

None of the players felt like their new teams' on-field routines were significantly different from workouts they had seen anywhere else, but Furmaniak noticed that Indianapolis manager Trent Jewett allowed his players to play cards and ping-pong after taking infield, which was different from his experience in Portland. The games were different, too. He said he saw more live arms in his first series against Buffalo than he was accustomed to in the Pacific Coast League, where pitchers used more offspeed stuff.

The new league and new organization helped Furmaniak reach the big leagues. He put together a 16-game hitting streak with Indianapolis, rapped 40 hits in 36 games with the Indians (batting .288-2-21) and earned a September callup.

The new organization also agreed with Miner, who went from a last-place team in Richmond to the eventual International League champion in Toledo. He helped the Mud Hens reach the playoffs by going 3-1, 2.36 in six starts, after going 2-7, 4.23 for Richmond.

doubt about it. He could play in the major leagues for a lot of teams. I know people sometimes say, 'When they leave Cuba, they lose the passion.' I'll take my chances with this guy.

"He's athletic with above-average tools —arm, defense, an awkward approach at times but real good bat speed. He fits the corner infielder profile. His hands really work on both sides (offense and defense). He has fast, strong hands and some real juice in his bat. The other thing you notice with him is he plays with this air about him, this confidence."

--JOHN MANUEL

Some of the changes caused by trades are subtler. Perez, who is from Miami and played his entire career on the East Coast, appreciated the low humidity in the West. Furmaniak had an opposite reaction after having spent two years in the PCL.

"After the first week or so, I was like, this is unbelievable. My body was actually wearing down quicker in the two weeks (after the trade) than the first five months of the season," Furmaniak said.

Perez, playing for his third team of the season, worried about missing signs. "Thank God I didn't miss any," Perez said, laughing. "The first week I was in Lancaster, I was totally confused. I would be at first base and the coach would be telling me what to do."

When the Braves played the Mud Hens shortly after Miner arrived in Toledo, no one asked him for a scouting report on his ex-teammates.

"I was shocked," Miner said. "I don't whether it's some unwritten rule, because I haven't been traded before, but nobody really quizzed me on anything. I know Richmond changed their signs for the series because they figured that I would tell them, but they didn't even ask me."

In the end, Furmaniak, Miner and Perez all said they saw their trades as opportunities, not setbacks. Still, they were surprised to experience such strong post-trade emotions, having grown close to so many players and coaches over the years. Miner, for example, talked about his friendship with first baseman Scott Thorman.

"It goes a lot farther than the baseball relationship where I'm a pitcher, he's a first baseman, we're on the same team, so everybody's friendly," Miner said. "For those of us who don't go to college, it's like the years we spend in the minor leagues, those relationships, over four, five years, last forever."

Even after a trade.

--DAN FRIEDEL

September Callup Surprises

The most talked-about September callups in 2005 were the ones that didn't happen. The Devil Rays focused on the bottom line as their reason for not promoting B.J. Upton and Delmon Young from Triple-A Durham. Both are on the 40-man roster already, but the Rays' ownership transition and muddled front-office future prompted them to keep their top young talent out of the big leagues for now, as the organization hopes to lessen the impact of arbitration for the duo on their future payroll. (See Page 3.)

While Upton and Young didn't make it to the majors in 2005, here are some other players you may have missed who did make it:

Matt Capps, rhp, Pirates: A seventh-round pick in 2002, Capps posted an ERA above 10 in 2004 at low Class A Hickory and was sent back to short-season ball in the second half. In other words, this was the first time he spent an entire year in full-season leagues. He just happened to finish the year in the National League.

Capps struggled as a starter with command of his secondary pitches and with confidence. According to Hickory pitching coach Ray Searage, the Pirates tried to simplify things for him this year, and he responded. He gained control of his fastball, which went from the 90-91 mph range up to touching 95 out of the pen. He walked just five and struck out 39 in 54 innings and had 14 saves, earning a promotion to Double-A Altoona. He was actually better there, with 26 strikeouts and only one walk in 20 innings, before joining Indianapolis for the IL playoffs.

Then it was off to Pittsburgh, an unlikely ending for a player who began the year by repeating the Sally League.

Chris Denorfia, of, Reds: Denorfia earns Brady Clark comparisons because they have similar tools and the Reds originally signed and developed both players. Denorfia, a 19th-round pick out of tiny Wheaton College in Connecticut, has done nothing but hit in the minors, and his combined numbers this season between Double-A Chattanooga and Triple-A Louisville were impressive: .317-20-87, a .507 slugging percentage and 68 walks (with 92 strikeouts in 511 at-bats).

The Reds already have too many outfielders, but Denorfia's presence and ability to play all three outfield spots make him a cheap, attractive fourth outfielder, meaning the Reds should be able to trade at least one of the quartet of Adam Dunn, Ken Griffey Jr., Austin Kearns and Wily Mo Pena.

Jermaine Van Buren, rhp, Cubs: Some Cubs fans wondered what took so long. Van Buren knows about waiting, though, considering he was a second-round pick of the Rockies in 1998. While in the Rockies organization, he never rose above Class A. He regrouped in the independent Central League in 2003, and the Cubs signed him for the 2004 season. They moved his 90-91 mph fastball, deceptive delivery and above-average breaking balls (a slider and a curve) to the bullpen, and Van Buren racked up 45 saves over the last two seasons.

Copyright 2005 **Baseball America**. All rights reserved.
This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed.
[Site Map](#) | [FAQ/Troubleshooting](#)