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Ranking the top prospects (76-100)

By Keith Law
ESPN Insider

Welcome to ESPN Insider's 2012 ranking of the top 100 prospects in baseball.

This is the fifth year I have done these rankings for Insider, and for the first time, we have a repeater at No. 1 (and, as it turns out, at No. 2). There were still a number of high-profile graduations from last year's list, starting with [Eric Hosmer](#) at No. 5 and [Dustin Ackley](#) at No. 7, and a trade that saw last year's No. 4 and 21 prospects, [Jesus Montero](#) and [Michael Pineda](#), respectively, exchanged for each other earlier this offseason. This year's list benefits from a major infusion of high-end talent from the 2011 Rule 4 draft, one of the strongest draft classes in years.

The Guidelines

- The rankings are limited to players who still have rookie eligibility; that means they have yet to exceed 130 at-bats or 50 innings pitched in the majors and have not yet spent 45 days on the active roster of a major league club, excluding call-ups during the roster expansion period after Sept. 1.
- Only players who have signed professional contracts are eligible.
- I do not consider players with experience in Nippon Professional Baseball "prospects" for the purposes of this exercise, which means no Yu Darvish.
- When ranking players, I consider scouting reports on players -- usually my own, supplementing with conversations with other scouts and front-office executives as needed -- as well as performance, adjusted for age and context. I've made one adjustment in my ranking philosophy in recent years, favoring higher-upside prospects over lower-ceiling prospects who are closer to the majors. This better reflects how these players are valued now by front offices and scouting departments, and gives me a chance to deliver more information on prospects whose names or scouting reports might be new to you.
- I use the 20-80 grading scale in these comments to avoid saying "average" and "above average" thousands of times across the 100 player comments. On that scale, a grade of 50 equals major league average, 55 is above average, 60 is plus, 45 is fringy or below average and so on. [Mike Stanton](#) has 80 raw power. [Bengie Molina](#) has 20 speed. An average fastball for a right-hander is 90-92 mph, with 1-2 mph off for a lefty.
- I've included last year's rank for players who appeared in the top 100 last offseason. An "ineligible" player (IE) was still an amateur at this time last January, whereas an "unranked" player (UR) was eligible but didn't make the cut. I've also tagged players who were on last year's sleepers list or list of 10 players who just missed the cut.

Law's complete top 100: [Index](#) | [1-25](#) | [26-50](#) | [51-75](#) | [76-100](#)

Rank**Player**

Rank**Player****76 Trevor May****Age:** 22 (DOB: Sept. 23, 1989)**Bats:** Right **Throws:** Right**Position:** Pitcher**Organization:** Philadelphia Phillies**Top '11 Level:** A (Clearwater)**2011 ranking:** 93

May's return engagement in the Florida State League went much better than the first go-round, cutting his walk rate nearly in half while striking out 208, a third of the batters he faced. May has above-average velocity at 91-95 mph and his curveball, while still not above-average, at least improved last year. The same applies to his changeup, which is slightly ahead of the curve but still isn't a real weapon for him yet.

The scary aspect of May's success is that he gets a lot of swings-and-misses on the fastball up in the zone, which works in the minors but is harder to pull off in the majors with a higher penalty for failure. He was a pretty severe flyball guy in the FSL, which is a pretty tough league on home runs. May has made strides in becoming more of a pitcher than a thrower, thinking ahead and developing a pitching plan, and the missed bats are a huge positive. He'll just need to work down in the zone or otherwise change eye levels so home runs don't swallow him alive at higher levels.

Rank**Player****77 Michael Choice****Age:** 22 (DOB: Nov. 10, 1989)**Bats:** Right **Throws:** Right**Position:** Outfield**Organization:** Oakland Athletics**Top '11 Level:** A (Stockton)**2010 ranking:** UR

Oakland has done a nice job cleaning up Choice's lower half to the point that, while far from quiet, it's at least playable and should allow him to make enough contact for his plus raw power to play. He keeps his weight back better now and has less extraneous leg movement to disrupt his timing. Choice gets good hip rotation and is very strong, top to bottom, so he can drive the ball to all fields.

He did improve his contact rate in the second half, although that could partly be a function of mid-year promotions diluting the talent. He played center last year but will probably end up in left or right, where he should be above average. I think he's a three true outcomes player who'll draw walks, hit 25-35 homers and strike out a lot, but feel more confident in his hit tool today after seeing these mechanical changes than I did a year ago.

Rank**Player****78 Jarred Cosart****2011 MINORS STATS**

- GM27
- IP151.1
- W10
- L8
- ERA3.63
- SO208
- BB67
- H121
- HR8
- BAA.221

2011 MINORS STATS

- GM118
- AB467
- HR30
- RBI82
- SB9
- SO134
- BB61
- AVG.285
- OBP.376
- SLG.542

Age: 21 (DOB: May 25, 1990)
Bats: Right **Throws:** Right
Position: Pitcher

Organization: Houston Astros
Top '11 Level: AA (Corpus Christi)
2011 ranking: 34

Cosart, whom the Astros acquired from the Phillies in the Hunter Pence trade, actually had a good year, but drops in the rankings because more exposure has raised skepticism about his ability to stay healthy as a starter.

His fastball and breaking ball are no-doubters that, in a vacuum, give him a No. 1 starter ceiling; he's 95-98 as a starter with a very hard, 11-to-5 curveball in the mid-70s that can miss bats, as well as a solid-average changeup that might be a little slow relative to the fastball. Cosart's problem stems from a strongly cross-body delivery that gives him some deception but puts stress on his arm, typically the shoulder. Cosart did miss time with a sore shoulder in 2009, and elbow trouble knocked him out for half of 2010 but never required surgery.

The Astros' new regime hasn't had a chance to get their hands on him yet, but I'd expect them to work with him on staying online to the plate and reducing or eliminating that cross-body issue, since he has already had arm trouble. Power reliever isn't a bad downside if Houston can't clean up his delivery, but I'd expect them to exhaust the possibility he's a front-line starter first.

2011 MINORS STATS

- GM27
- IP144.1
- W10
- L10
- ERA4.12
- SO101
- BB56
- H131
- HR11
- BAA.241

Rank

Player

79 Nate Eovaldi

Age: 21 (DOB: Feb. 13, 1990)
Bats: Right **Throws:** Right
Position: Pitcher

Organization: Los Angeles Dodgers
Top '11 Level: MLB
2011 ranking: UR

Eovaldi was a great find in the 11th round of the 2008 Rule 4 draft, a projectable guy who now has a plus fastball and will flash a plus slider. He'll sit 93-97 mph as a starter, working heavily with the fastball but not locating it quite well enough to put him into a big league rotation yet. His slider varies a lot with its velocity. At 85-87 mph, the slider has some tilt and he can bury it on a left-handed hitter's hands. But when he revs it up to 88-89, it is more like a cutter that breaks almost straight down and isn't that sharp.

He has a changeup but it's a show-me pitch at this point, slow enough out of his hands for hitters to potentially pick it up. He has a hook in the back of his delivery, but once he gets moving he has good leverage from his shoulder tilt and accelerates his arm quickly once he strides.

2011 MINORS STATS

- GM20
- IP103
- W6
- L5
- ERA2.62
- SO99
- BB46
- H76
- HR3
- BAA.203

Rank

Player

80 Aaron Hicks

Age: 22 (DOB: Oct. 2, 1989)
Bats: Switch **Throws:** Right
Position: Center field

Organization: Minnesota Twins
Top '11 Level: A (Fort Myers)
2011 ranking: 10

It was quite a fall for Hicks, who didn't just fail to perform but didn't look good in not performing, leading many pro scouts to head for the exits. That's bad news for a kid who was in high Class A at age 21 and really wasn't that polished or instinctive (I say this in hindsight) coming out of high school. The one thing Hicks could, and still can, do well is work the count and have good at-bats, but the rest of his game has lagged. His tools are still strong -- he can run and throw and there's power there in BP -- so it's hard to see him developing into less than an average everyday player.

Hicks' main problem is that he doesn't recognize breaking balls well, despite his strong ball-strike recognition. His right-handed swing is much stronger and more balanced than his left-handed swing, but the Twins feel he's making enough progress left-handed to continue hitting from both sides of the plate. I still see a potential star here, since Hicks is the same age as most college seniors, but expectations of fast progress based on his patient approach turned out to be way too optimistic.

Rank **Player**

81 John Hellweg

Age: 23 (DOB: Oct. 29, 1988)

Bats: Right **Throws:** Right

Position: Pitcher

Organization: Los Angeles Angels

Top '11 Level: A (Inland Empire)

2011 ranking: Sleeper

Hellweg has always had a huge fastball but couldn't locate anything, walking more than a man an inning from his pro debut until the Angels moved him from the bullpen to the Inland Empire rotation in early June. After the transition, he wasn't exactly Greg Maddux, but his control went from grade-20 to 45, to the point that he's now a real prospect instead of a curiosity. He'll pitch at 97-98 mph with a hard curveball that also misses bats, although his changeup at 91-92 is more like a BP fastball at this point because it doesn't have much action.

He's huge -- 6-foot-9 and 210 pounds -- and despite a fair degree of athleticism has had trouble keeping his delivery in sync, although he's been better at that as a starter, which allows him more time to work it out. He barely pitched at what was then known as Florida Community College, but the Angels took him in the 16th round of the 2008 draft to gamble on his arm strength. And now -- with just 28 walks and 80 punchouts in 63 innings as a starter last year -- they may have found a top-end starter as a result.

Rank **Player**

82 Matt Davidson

Age: 20 (DOB: March 26, 1991)

Bats: Right **Throws:** Right

Position: Third base

Organization: Arizona Diamondbacks

Top '11 Level: AA (Mobile)

2011 ranking: 86

2011 MINORS STATS

- GM122
- AB443
- HR5
- RBI38
- SB17
- SO110
- BB78
- AVG.242
- OBP.354
- SLG.368

2011 MINORS STATS

- GM28
- IP89.1
- W6
- L4
- ERA3.73
- SO113
- BB59
- H75
- HR2
- BAA.229

Davidson has one of the best-looking right-handed swings in the minors, a swing built for contact but one that generates power because Davidson is so strong up and down and rotates his hips well to get his lower half involved. He's not likely to draw a slew of walks, but his approach is sound and his ability to track the ball and let it travel leads me to think he'll have at least an average walk rate.

Davidson's lower half isn't quick but he has worked himself up to an average glove at third base with plenty of arm, and there is some chance he could even be worth a few runs above average each year with the glove. He's been young for his levels since entering pro ball and will be just 21 all of 2012, starting in Double-A. Even with an average glove, a .280 hitter with 60 walks, 40 doubles and 20-plus homers a year is going to make some All-Star teams as a third baseman.

2011 MINORS STATS

- GM135
- AB535
- HR20
- RBI106
- SB0
- SO147
- BB52
- AVG.277
- OBP.348
- SLG.465

Rank

Player

83 Dellin Betances

Age: 23 (DOB: March 23, 1988)

Bats: Right **Throws:** Right

Position: Pitcher

Organization: New York Yankees

Top '11 Level: MLB

2011 ranking: 73

At 6-foot-8, 260 pounds, Betances is huge, throws hard and has a history of missing bats since coming back from Tommy John surgery. But there's still a strong sentiment among pro scouts that he ends up in the bullpen long-term because of command questions. He'll pitch in the low 90s but runs it up to 97 mph and would likely sit 94-97, if not better, in relief. The curveball remains wildly inconsistent, with outings when he doesn't have it at all and outings when it looks like an above-average pitch.

Betances is not a good athlete and struggles to maintain a consistent delivery. When he's in sync, he takes a good, long stride to the plate with a mild shoulder tilt but only a little bit of torque from his hips, generating velocity from his stride and arm. He's also a below-average fielder for a pitcher, not a critical flaw but something you'd rather not see. He's 23 now, still not very experienced, but he has size and velocity you can't teach. The lack of progress and athleticism make a bullpen role more likely than a spot in the top half of a rotation.

2011 MINORS STATS

- GM25
- IP126.1
- W4
- L9
- ERA3.70
- SO142
- BB70
- H102
- HR9
- BAA.217

Rank

Player

84 Enny Romero

Age: 21 (DOB: Jan. 24, 1991)

Bats: Left **Throws:** Left

Position: Pitcher

Organization: Tampa Bay Rays

Top '11 Level: A (Bowling Green)

2011 ranking: UR

The Dominican-born Romero broke out in his full-season debut in 2011, racking up a ton of strikeouts with a plus fastball and an athletic

2011 MINORS STATS

delivery. Romero sits 91-96 mph as a starter, but mostly 93-94, with two above-average secondary pitches in the curveball and changeup. He's athletic with room to fill out his 6-foot-3, 165-pound frame, potentially adding velocity but more likely just becoming more durable.

His main issues, of course, are command and control, walking more than a guy every other inning last year and still generally working on the art of pitching. But if you want a low-minors lefty with the potential to go all Matt Moore in 2012, this is him.

- GM26
- IP114
- W5
- L5
- ERA4.26
- SO140
- BB68
- H104
- HR9
- BAA.245

Rank

Player

85 Oswaldo Arcia

Age: 20 (DOB: May 9, 1991)

Bats: Left **Throws:** Right

Position: Right field

Organization: Minnesota Twins

Top '11 Level: A (Fort Myers)

2011 ranking: 74

Arcia got off to a terrific start in his full-season debut in 2011, then missed almost eight weeks after surgery to remove bone chips from his elbow. He turned 20 during the layoff and moved to high Class A after his return, hitting for power but showing his youth in his approach and allergy to the base on balls. Arcia has huge raw power with a classic left-handed swing that should allow him to hit for average as well.

He showed a large platoon split for the second year in a row with better plate discipline and more power against right-handers. He should be above-average in right field between his range and arm if he can stay healthy, but the elbow problem last year followed a knee injury the year before. Staying healthy and working the count are huge for Arcia during the next year or two, but he has middle-of-the-order upside if he can do those two things.

2011 MINORS STATS

- GM81
- AB292
- HR13
- RBI51
- SB3
- SO70
- BB18
- AVG.291
- OBP.335
- SLG.531

Rank

Player

86 Robbie Grossman

Age: 22 (DOB: Sept. 16, 1989)

Bats: Switch **Throws:** Left

Position: Outfield

Organization: Pittsburgh Pirates

Top '11 Level: A (Bradenton)

2011 ranking: UR

Signed for \$1 million out of high school, Grossman labors to some degree under the label that he was a "tools guy" when, in fact, his game is much more about polish and instincts than raw physical ability. Grossman has an outstanding eye at the plate -- although he was repeating the Florida State League last year -- with the hand-eye coordination and direct path to make hard contact from both sides of the plate.

2011 MINORS STATS

- GM134
- AB490
- HR13
- RBI56
- SB24

He's an average runner with good instincts on the bases and should be above-average defensively in either corner outfield spot -- most likely right. He is more of an emergency guy in center. His power ceiling is limited, although he has good hip rotation hitting left-handed. He's most likely a good corner outfielder with OBPs in the high .300s and 15-20 homers a year, with some upside in both of those offensive categories.

- SO111
- BB104
- AVG.294
- OBP.418
- SLG.531

Rank

Player

87 Mikie Mahtook

Age: 22 (DOB: Nov. 30, 1989)
Bats: Right **Throws:** Right
Position: Center field

Organization: Tampa Bay Rays
Top '11 Level: College (LSU)
2011 ranking: IE

Mahtook should have gone higher in the draft but fell to the Rays with the 31st overall pick despite a massive junior year at LSU, when he hit for more power just as power numbers across the country were down. He's a plus runner with an above-average arm who made great strides in his play in center field. I can't see him moving, but if he has to he can certainly handle right.

At the plate, he's a little late getting his front foot down, but he has the hand acceleration and great hip rotation to drive the ball with good extension. He also has solid plate discipline. On top of that, he's a high-energy player with great makeup who leaves no question that he'll get the most out of his tools. And since his tools are pretty good, I like his chances to be an above-average everyday player in the big leagues.

2011 AFL STATS

- GM18
- AB68
- HR3
- RBI14
- SB5
- SO16
- BB7
- AVG.338
- OBP.410
- SLG.544

Rank

Player

88 Taylor Guerrieri

Age: 19 (DOB: Dec. 1, 1992)
Bats: Right **Throws:** Right
Position: Pitcher

Organization: Tampa Bay Rays
Top '11 Level: High School
2011 ranking: IE

Guerrieri may have had the best raw stuff of any high school pitcher in last year's draft, although there are two kids from Oklahoma who might beg to differ. He also has an easy delivery and smooth, low-effort arm action. Guerrieri would mostly sit 92-97 mph all spring with heavy sink on the pitch, and his curveball has very tight rotation with well-defined break, more than enough to miss bats in low Class A even though he doesn't really command either pitch yet.

He struggles with his landing point and with getting his front foot down consistently and early. Staying on line to better command the ball and developing a third pitch will have to be major developmental goals for him in the next year or two. Guerrieri also faced major questions about his makeup, more off-field than on, that he'll have to resolve to reach

2011 MINORS STATS

- GM
- IP
- W
- L
- ERA
- SO
- BB
- H
- HR
- BAA

his full potential as a pitcher. If he does, there's No. 1 starter ceiling here.

Rank

Player

89 Brett Jackson

Age: 22 (DOB: Aug. 2, 1988)

Bats: Left **Throws:** Right

Position: Center field

Organization: Chicago Cubs

Top '11 Level: AAA (Iowa)

2011 ranking: Ten who missed

Jackson has solid tools across the board, but they're mitigated by a longstanding problem with contact that really limits his offensive upside. Jackson has some bat speed with very little load, getting his weight settled late and not letting the ball travel that well. So despite his size and athleticism, he doesn't project for more than average power. He's an above-average runner who can handle center field and could be worth five runs a year or so there in a full season, or he could move to left and potentially be plus there.

But he punched out in more than 30 percent of his plate appearances in Triple-A, and only two big leaguers qualified for the batting title in 2011 with that kind of strikeout rate -- Drew Stubbs and Mark Reynolds, who had a combined OBP of .322. If Jackson can't figure out how to make better contact, he's probably a solid-average regular; but he could be a grade better if his hit tool improves.

Rank

Player

90 Jedd Gyorko

Age: 23 (DOB: Sept. 23, 1988)

Bats: Right **Throws:** Right

Position: Third base

Organization: San Diego Padres

Top '11 Level: AA (San Antonio)

2011 ranking: UR

Gyorko is tough to love as a prospect because of his body type, especially the thick, slow lower half. The potential of maintaining conditioning will be harder for him than for most other prospects. But he's demonstrated too strong an ability to barrel up the ball to overlook him, even with his deficiencies. He turns his front leg in early without a stride, so there's not much weight transfer and he stays extremely balanced.

He rotates his hips with his swing to keep his timing, yet sacrifices torque and will have to produce more power with his upper half. He has a very strong approach at the plate and is agile for his size, with soft hands that allow him to stay at third base even with a frame that looks made for first. He's probably a solid-average regular with a chance to be a little more because of the hit tool, which should make up for his fringy defense and lack of power.

Rank

Player

2011 MINORS STATS

- GM115
- AB431
- HR20
- RBI58
- SB21
- SO138
- BB73
- AVG.274
- OBP.379
- SLG.490

2011 MINORS STATS

- GM140
- AB576
- HR25
- RBI114
- SB12
- SO114
- BB64
- AVG.333
- OBP.400
- SLG.552

Rank**Player****91 Chad Bettis****Age:** 22 (DOB: April 26, 1989)**Bats:** Right **Throws:** Right**Position:** Pitcher**Organization:** Colorado Rockies**Top '11 Level:** A (Modesto)**2011 ranking:** UR

I still think of Bettis as a future reliever, but his performance this year and quality of his off-speed pitches give him a better chance to start than what I saw from him as an amateur. He showed in 2011 that he could maintain his stuff for 100 pitches, with a solid-average fastball, an improved changeup, and a curveball he uses in addition to the hard-biting slider that was his out pitch when he'd relieve at Texas Tech.

In school he tended to get his front side very low and give the hitters a longer look at the ball, but the Rockies have him more upright and hiding the ball better. He can still cut himself off a little, but his command and control were both far better in 2011 than his college delivery or performance would have led you to believe they'd be. Given the multiple weapons and aggressive approach, there's reason to think he can become a No. 4 starter even with very little improvement over what he is today.

Rank**Player****92 Jordan Swagerty****Age:** 22 (DOB: July 14, 1989)**Bats:** Switch **Throws:** Right**Position:** Pitcher**Organization:** St. Louis Cardinals**Top '11 Level:** AA (Springfield)**2011 ranking:** UR

Swagerty was a two-pitch reliever at Arizona State who became a scouts' favorite for his high-energy style and aggressive approach to attacking hitters. Since then, he has showed four pitches all projecting as average or better and now projects as a potential mid-rotation starter who could always return to the pen if he can't handle the workload. Swagerty sits at 90-94 mph with that same out-pitch breaking ball he showed in college, but his changeup is improving with use and he has the feel to mix up all four offerings, throwing any pitch in any count, all of them for strikes.

He's tall enough to get plane on the fastball, but his frame isn't broad like most workhorse starters', so there's still some skepticism about his ability to handle 180-plus innings, and he'll need to get left-handers out more consistently. He's strong and athletic with feel, and I hate consigning guys with all of that and at least three pitches to the bullpen, especially since that will always be there as a fallback option if starting doesn't work out.

Rank**Player****2011 MINORS STATS**

- GM27
- IP169.2
- W12
- L5
- ERA3.34

- SO184
- BB45
- H142
- HR10
- BAA.225

2011 MINORS STATS

- GM36
- IP93.2
- W5
- L3
- ERA1.83

- SO89
- BB23
- H68
- HR4
- BAA.204

Rank**Player****93 Derek Norris****Age:** 22 (DOB: Feb. 14, 1989)**Bats:** Right **Throws:** Right**Position:** Catcher**Organization:** Oakland Athletics**Top '11 Level:** AA (Harrisburg)**2011 ranking:** 33

Norris can catch, throw, hit for power and take a walk. But for two years now he hasn't hit for average in the minors, remaining on the prospect radar primarily because he plays a position at which the bar is so low that any offense at all is welcome. Behind the plate, his hands aren't the softest but they're playable, and he has a plus arm, consistently under 1.9 seconds from home to second. Pitchers in the Arizona Fall League liked throwing to him, and he has always controlled the running game.

He has worked on lessening a hip glide that left him vulnerable to breaking balls moving away from him, showing progress in that department in Arizona. The trade to Oakland gives him a better path to the majors, and I think he'll hit enough -- at least .250 or so -- to let his other skills play and make him at least a solid-average big league catcher, if not more.

2011 MINORS STATS

- GM104
- AB334
- HR20
- RBI46
- SB13
- SO117
- BB77
- AVG.210
- OBP.367
- SLG.446

Rank**Player****94 Christian Bethancourt****Age:** 20 (DOB: Sept. 2, 1991)**Bats:** Right **Throws:** Right**Position:** Catcher**Organization:** Atlanta Braves**Top '11 Level:** A (Lynchburg)**2011 ranking:** UR

Bethancourt can really catch and throw. He was perhaps the best pure defensive catching prospect in full-season ball last year, with enough arm strength that you could easily see him on a mound if he didn't play the toughest position on the diamond. Behind the plate, he's everything you want in a catching prospect, from soft hands to arm strength to accuracy, and pitchers like working with him.

It's a long swing starting with a near arm-bar and a hip leak that gives him trouble with off-speed stuff, but he's strong enough and gets his hips rotated enough to show you plus-power in BP. I don't know if he'll hit, but he's here because if he hits even a little bit, the other tools make him an everyday player.

2011 MINORS STATS

- GM99
- AB387
- HR5
- RBI53
- SB9
- SO62
- BB11
- AVG.289
- OBP.304
- SLG.385

Rank**Player****95 Javier Baez****Age:** 20 (DOB: Dec. 1, 1992)**Organization:** Chicago Cubs

Bats: Right **Throws:** Right
Position: Shortstop

Top '11 Level: A (Boise)
2011 ranking: IE

Baez became a top-10 pick largely on the strength of an explosive bat that produces plus power and very loud, hard contact. But he's a better athlete than he's given credit for with very strong instincts on both sides of the ball. He does have a hard time keeping that swing under control, with a tendency to overswing even though he naturally produces power through torque from his hips. His hand acceleration produces tremendous bat speed and he's an average or better runner.

He has the feel for defense and arm strength to play almost any position -- he even caught a little in high school and looked good doing so -- meaning the only questions about him at shortstop are whether he'll outgrow the position and whether he'll put in the work to become an above-average fielder there. If not, third base is an obvious next stop, while he could handle second or, at the absolute worst, right field. If he can cut the swing down when he's not in a fastball count, he has All-Star potential at any infield position.

Rank

Player

96 Aaron Sanchez

Age: 19 (DOB: July 1, 1992)
Bats: Right **Throws:** Right
Position: Pitcher

Organization: Toronto Blue Jays
Top '11 Level: A (Lansing)
2011 ranking: 99

It wasn't quite the pro debut I'd expected from Sanchez, but after struggling with his control in his first two outings, he implemented an adjustment at Toronto's instruction to keep his front side more closed and produced much better results for the rest of the summer. Sanchez topped out in the mid-90s in just about every start, with an average curveball in the upper-70s and an improving changeup. His arm action is clean and easy, and his body is very projectable, so he could easily sit in the mid-90s in a few years once his body has matured.

He'll need to refine the off-speed pitches and improve his command, which still needs work even with his delivery more on line to the plate. Sanchez, control artist Justin Nicolino and hard-throwing Noah Syndergaard should all start 2012 in Lansing in what will be one of the minors' best prospect rotations, with all three guys strong candidates for next year's list.

Rank

Player

97 Addison Reed

Age: 23 (DOB: Dec. 27, 1988)
Bats: Left **Throws:** Right
Position: Pitcher

Organization: Chicago White Sox
Top '11 Level: MLB
2011 ranking: UR

2011 MINORS STATS

- GM5
- AB18
- HR0
- RBI1
- SB2

- SO4
- BB0
- AVG.278
- OBP.278
- SLG.389

2011 MINORS STATS

- GM14
- IP54.1
- W3
- L3
- ERA5.30

- SO56
- BB26
- H53
- HR4
- BAA.255

Reed was a solid college starter at San Diego State with an average fastball and no projection who suddenly started throwing 95-99 mph when the White Sox moved him to the bullpen last year. Between that pitch and a wipeout slider that became harder and sharper when he moved to relief, he raced through the minors and ended up in the big leagues, showing the the White Sox enough to make them feel comfortable trading closer Sergio Santos (for about 50 cents on the dollar, as it turns out).

Reed's lack of a usable changeup always gave him trouble against left-handed hitters in college, and that and some delivery flaws make a return to the rotation very unlikely. But he could have immediate impact in relief because he can dominate right-handed bats with the stuff he has right now.

Rank

Player

98 Randall Delgado

Age: 22 (DOB: Feb. 9, 1990)
Bats: Right **Throws:** Right
Position: Pitcher

Organization: Atlanta Braves
Top '11 Level: MLB
2011 ranking: 50

One thing that became clear during the 2011 season about Atlanta's troika of top pitching prospects is that Delgado, while a strong prospect in his own right, didn't belong in the same discussion as Julio Teheran or Arodys Vizcaino. He didn't possess Teheran's stuff and projection, or Vizcaino's control and plus breaking ball. While those two arms progressed last year, Delgado remains as he was, with a solid-average fastball that will touch 96 mph and an above-average changeup that won't miss enough bats on its own, especially without another pitch to move away from right-handed hitters and keep them honest.

He is still projectable with a loose arm, but the upside of his two system-mates hasn't rubbed off on him. There's a good enough chance that Delgado ends up in the bullpen because of the lack of a third pitch to drop him a level on these rankings, as he's more like a No. 3 or a No. 4 in a rotation or a setup man if he goes to the pen.

Rank

Player

99 Neil Ramirez

Age: 22 (DOB: May 25, 1989)
Bats: Right **Throws:** Right
Position: Pitcher

Organization: Texas Rangers
Top '11 Level: AAA (Round Rock)
2011 ranking: UR

Ramirez took a huge step forward in 2011 that was short-circuited temporarily by some shoulder trouble that cropped up in mid-summer. He'll sit 93-94 mph when fully healthy and reached 97 in big league camp last spring with a plus curveball and solid-average changeup.

2011 MINORS STATS

- GM43
- IP78.1
- W2
- L1
- ERA1.26
- SO111
- BB14
- H43
- HR3
- BAA.157

2011 MINORS STATS

- GM25
- IP139
- W7
- L7
- ERA1.83
- SO135
- BB57
- H135
- HR15
- BAA.255

2011 MINORS STATS

- GM25
- IP98

When he had the chance to jump up to Triple-A for a spot start midyear, he threw well enough that Texas decided to leave him there the rest of the year.

- W5
- L3
- ERA3.12

He has cleaned up his delivery substantially since high school, with a slightly long but smoother arm swing that puts less stress on his shoulder and none of the former cross-body action that plagued him before he signed. He seemed fully recovered in the Arizona Fall League, and with a full, healthy season he would be a top 50-60 prospect if he's not already in the majors by then.

- SO119
- BB44
- H77
- HR7
- BAA.215

Rank

Player

100 Blake Swihart

Age: 19 (DOB: April 3, 1992)

Bats: Switch **Throws:** Right

Position: Catcher

Organization: Boston Red Sox

Top '11 Level: Rookie (Gulf Coast)

2011 ranking: IE

Swihart is raw on both sides of the ball but extremely athletic with the bat speed and arm strength to profile as a potential All-Star at a number of skill positions. As a hitter, he can get out on his front foot early and doesn't finish rotating his hips to produce the power his swing should allow, but the bat speed is there and he has a decent feel for the strike zone. As a catcher, he can throw and has already improved his release time since signing with Boston.

Having played a number of positions in high school, Swihart needs to work on receiving and game-calling. Given time and regular reps behind the plate, he could be similar to Matt Wieters, a switch-hitting catcher (perhaps with less power) who can add value through catching and throwing. If he has to move to another position, such as third base, he could still end up an above-average big leaguer but would obviously lose a good bit of his value.

2011 MINORS STATS

- GM
- AB
- HR
- RBI
- SB

- SO
- BB
- AVG
- OBP
- SLG

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Keith Law, formerly the special assistant to the general manager for the Toronto Blue Jays, is the senior baseball analyst for ESPN Insider.