This is the fifth annual edition of “[The Most Valuable PEBA Players](http://pebabaseball.com/index.php/news-archive-pebalinks-56/1703-the-most-valuable-peba-players)” and there are some interesting changes.  From surprising breakouts to unappreciated stars, there's something here for everyone.  There's also plenty to get upset about if you're looking for it.  2017 was a tremendous year for young players, many of whom do not make the list because of their brief track record.  Injuries, which typically are a major influence on the rankings, didn't seem to come into play quite as much as in past seasons.  Instead, it was more about inconsistency and expectation that had some players on the move.

For a lengthier description of the methodology, reread the [original listing](http://pebabaseball.com/index.php/news-archive-pebalinks-56/1703-the-most-valuable-peba-players), but the short of it is this: More often than not, a higher ranked player would not be traded 1-for-1 for a lower ranked player. Each player’s ability, contract, and age are taken into account, but actual performance at the [PEBA](http://www.pebabaseball.com/reports/news/html/leagues/league_100_home.html) level is weighed the most. Each of the top 25 players have been ranked and commented upon. The remainder of the top 50 will also be presented, although not ranked in order. The age listed for each player is their age for the upcoming season (age on July 1st). Previous rankings are listed in order starting with most recent (e.g. Prev: 2017 rank, 2016 rank, and so on).

**The List**

25. 2B [León Valentín](http://www.pebabaseball.com/reports/news/html/players/player_8055.html) ([REN](http://pebabaseball.com/reports/news/html/teams/team_98.html)) – 29 – Valentín’s ability to get on base has always been his ticket in the PEBA, but his inability to stay on the field has held him back. When the Longshoremen signed him last year to a 1 year $14.5 million contract, it was a superb gamble for a team that was unlikely to be all that good anyway. He did everything he was expected to do, leading the SL with 198 hits and drawing 79 walks for a PEBA bronze medal worthy 287 times on base. SL pitchers let out a collective moan after the Zephyrs have signed him to a 5 year $57.5 million contract. The league’s highest OBP team added a guy who frequently expects to be on base in front of the league’s top home run hitter. (UP – Prev: NR)

24. SP [Francisco Encarn](http://www.pebabaseball.com/reports/news/html/players/player_9691.html) ([NJ](http://pebabaseball.com/reports/news/html/teams/team_81.html)) – 28 – One of the less well known pitchers around the league, Encarn has been a big contributor to the Hitmen’s success over the past two years. He’s lowered his walk rate each of his four seasons in New Jersey and is a combined 31-9 over the past two years. He’s locked up for another four seasons and might actually be the team’s best starter despite being penciled in behind [Roberto Rodríguez](http://www.pebabaseball.com/reports/news/html/players/player_3066.html). (UP – Prev: NR)

23. RF [Ricardo Longoria](http://wikipeba.com/statslab13/player.php?player_id=3959) ([CL](http://pebabaseball.com/reports/news/html/teams/team_90.html)) – 29 – Longoria’s lofty expectations, Crystal Lake’s fall from grace, and a career low .259 BABIP all contributed to a hugely disappointing 2017. However, positives are there to be found. His 32 home runs look rather unimpressive but it was second in the SL. His 301 total bases was 4th in the league, while his 80 extra base hits were 2nd in the entire PEBA. The two conspirators against him were a huge drop in batting average and walks. (DOWN – Prev: 6, 7)

22. DH [Carlos Guerera](http://wikipeba.com/statslab13/player.php?player_id=3599) ([GLO](http://pebabaseball.com/reports/news/html/teams/team_82.html)) – 32 – Gloucester’s short, 2 season pact with Guerera is a solid signing of an above average hitter. Those who’ve been longing to see his bat freed from the offense stifling [Chocolate Factory](http://wikipeba.com/statslab13/parks.php?park=22) are going to be disappointed, though, as [Dockside Coliseum](http://wikipeba.com/statslab13/parks.php?park=6) hasn’t been much friendlier. Don’t expect him to suddenly become a 30 HR hitter, he’s usually been in the mid to lower 20’s, but do expect him to continue to rack up the hits. Since 2011, [no PEBA hitter has more](http://wikipeba.com/statslab13/leaderboards.php?view=players&scope=career&sub_league_id=ALL&listing=top100&team_id=ALL&split=regular&stat=h&who=ALL&pos=ALL&from=2011&to=2017&ageFrom=15&ageTo=45&draftFrom=1&draftTo=20&draft_team_id=ALL&minStat2Lbl=&minStat2) of them. (DOWN – Prev: 16, 15, Top 50, Top 50)

21. 1B [Decheng Wen](http://wikipeba.com/statslab13/player.php?player_id=4391) ([LON](http://www.pebabaseball.com/reports/news/html/teams/team_79.html)) – 30 – Wen’s not among the elite first basemen but he’s close behind. He’s good for about 30 HRs, 100 RBI, and 100 BB’s. Unlike many of the others at his position, he can also steal upwards of 20 bases. What he lacks in making it to the next level is the ability to hit closer to .300. If he were to raise his average .030 from the .260 range he might very well win a Royal Raker for his efforts. He’s got 3 years remaining on his current contract at $6.3, $7.3, and $8.3 million, a nice bargain indeed. (UP – Prev: 24, Top 50)

20. [Adrian Peterson](http://wikipeba.com/statslab13/player.php?player_id=1795) ([YUM](http://pebabaseball.com/reports/news/html/teams/team_100.html)) – 24 – Peterson is the first Yuman we’ve ever ranked in these pages and he’s a worthy candidate for the honor. The former 1st overall pick and #1 prospect was 11-7 with a 2.78 ERA for the Bulldozers. He was 2nd in the SL in strikeouts and 3rd in WHIP. For all that he earned a 4th place finish in Golden Arm voting including 3 first place votes. Oh, and he’s still got 5 years left under team control. (UP – Prev: NR)

19. LF [Albert Oliveira](http://wikipeba.com/statslab13/player.php?player_id=10425) ([WV](http://pebabaseball.com/reports/news/html/teams/team_87.html)) – 27 – Oliveira seemingly snuck up on people in 2016. Yes, he had been a relatively high draft pick, going 27th in the 2012 draft, and he had been ranked near the middle of the Top 100 Prospects lists, but he was so much better than his rookie campaign that it was still a shock. Any doubts about his improvement were dispelled this past year, with a 4th place finish in Royal Raker voting. From an absolute perspective, the big difference between the two seasons was an increased hit rate. He raised his average from .286 to .315, but two weeks after winning the August IL Batter of the Month award, he was injured and wound up missing the postseason. How he recovers in 2018 will be one of the big questions for the top heavy Allegheny offense. (UP – Prev: NR)

18. LF [Javier Soto](http://www.pebabaseball.com/reports/news/html/players/player_4565.html) (NJ) – 26 – Soto fell off his Royal Raker pace of 2016 but still managed 200 hits and 29 home runs on the year in 2017. His reward was a large arbitration pay day to the tune of just over $8 million. He’s very much a free swinger, drawing just 16 walks in 691 trips to the plate. In other words, he’s the new [John Gustafson](http://wikipeba.com/statslab13/player.php?player_id=573) – the only other player with multiple seasons of comparable [walk per plate appearance futility](http://wikipeba.com/statslab13/leaderboards.php?view=players&scope=season&sub_league_id=ALL&listing=top100&team_id=ALL&split=regular&stat=pa&who=ALL&pos=ALL&from=2007&to=2017&ageFrom=15&ageTo=45&draftFrom=1&draftTo=20&draft_team_id=ALL&minStat2Lbl=bb&minSt). Soto’s career will likely, then, be defined by how well he can keep his power and average up. As long as it’s good, he will be, too, but if it goes, he’s got nothing to fall back on. (DOWN – Prev: 13, NR)

17. C [Ramiro Fonseca](http://wikipeba.com/statslab13/player.php?player_id=13733) ([FLA](http://pebabaseball.com/reports/news/html/teams/team_85.html)) – 24 – While some scouts still aren’t convinced Fonseca is a long term hitting superstar, the Featherheads’ young backstop has hit at every professional level. Last year he belted 32 home runs and tallied 99 RBI in just 125 games while hitting close to .300. One of the few defensive liabilities on the team due to a relatively weak arm, his hitting should keep him in the lineup for some time. He just signed a 4 year extension that means the Featherheads won’t have to worry about arbitration. (UP – Prev: NR)

16. 3B [Mario Tessier](http://wikipeba.com/statslab13/player.php?player_id=9731) (NJ) – 28 – Having now added an All-Leather award to his previously won batting title, Tessier’s power stroke was in force in 2017. While his 18 home runs were less than the 20 he hit in 2014, they were more than double what he’s done since then. He also added a career high 46 doubles and finished second in batting. His contract is an interesting one to analyze. When he signed it after the 2016 season, it made him one of the few players around the league to have secured a 7 year deal. As such, each annual salary can be looked upon as a tremendous bargain given his current rate of production. Heck, he’d be a very comfortable contract even if he was merely a decent hitter instead of the league leader he is. The risk, of course, is if he gets hurt or otherwise loses his ability to hit for average. At his age, we’d certainly take that risk, and as long as the Hitmen want to, they can keep him through his age 33 season in 2023. (UP – Prev: Top 50, Top 50)

15. SP [Alfredo Velázquez](http://wikipeba.com/statslab13/player.php?player_id=12149) (CL) – 29 – One of these days, Velázquez is going to win a Golden Arm strictly because his defense stepped up. He strikes out batters, he doesn’t walk many, and he keeps the ball in the park. Over the past two seasons, his BABIP of .306 ranks 11th in the PEBA, and no other pitcher with a worse BABIP has a lower WHIP or anywhere close to as few home runs allowed. Last year didn’t look as good as his previous years, and his BABIP was up. He just signed a 6 year $85 million extension that is guaranteed through his age 34 season. Even if his BABIP doesn’t help him out, he should easily be worth the lower salaries at the start of the contract. (UP – Prev: 23, NR)

14. 1B [Ángel Cortéz](http://www.pebabaseball.com/reports/news/html/players/player_3111.html) ([DUL](http://www.pebabaseball.com/reports/news/html/teams/team_91.html)) – 29 – Cortéz wasn’t nearly the same hitter in 2017 as he was in his amazing 2016 Royal Raker year, but he was still quite good. Pitchers avoided him to the tune of a league leading 17 intentional walks, and he wasn’t quite able to respond. As a result, his home run total was down quite a bit and he was unable to maintain his hit rate. On the other hand, he is signed to an incredibly team friendly contract. How the Warriors convinced him to sign a 4 year $25 million deal AFTER his Royal Raker season is something that other GM’s would love to know. (DOWN – Prev: 8, NR)

13. SP [Miguel Cantú](http://wikipeba.com/statslab13/player.php?player_id=1920) (FLA) – 26 – One might’ve thought that a 17-7, 3.33 ERA season in 2016 would be Cantú’s coming out party, but in 2017 he improved in every aspect of his game. He struck out more, gave up fewer home runs and walks, pitched more innings in fewer starts, and lowered his ERA by a full run to 2.32. He finished 2nd in IL Golden Arm voting and was an All-Star for the first time. The Featherheads were very quick to sign him to a 3-year extension last winter, and their foresight seems to have paid off as they won’t have to go through the arbitration process with him at all. (UP – Prev: NR)

12. SP [Félix Maese](http://wikipeba.com/statslab13/player.php?player_id=4690) ([BAK](http://pebabaseball.com/reports/news/html/teams/team_96.html)) – 26 – It’s a bit of a challenge to decide exactly how to rank Bakersfield’s starters as they’re all so good. Maese was superb in 2017, but not quite as good as his 2016 campaign. Maese isn’t as much of a strikeout pitcher as his more famous rotation mates, but relies on his defense. The secret to his success is extreme stinginess with the long ball and the walk. He’s locked up for the next two seasons at very affordable rates. (UP – Prev: 11, NR)

11. 1B [Ronald Harmon](http://wikipeba.com/statslab13/player.php?player_id=4264) (WV) – 31 – In 2017, Harmon finally won the Royal Raker award that West Virginians have been clamoring for. The voting [wasn’t particularly close](http://wikipeba.com/statslab13/awVotingHist.php?sub_league_id=0&award=5&year=2017&league_id=100), and it was heavily weighed by the 141 RBI he racked up with 2 of the other top 4 vote finishers batting alongside him in the lineup. The problem with ranking Harmon any higher on this list is that he’s not different enough from a number of other first baseman who a team might replace him with. One of the most flummoxing decisions of the 2017 season for the Alleghenies was the decision last April to give Harmon a 1 year extension at $12 million. That contract is a huge bargain from a monetary standpoint, but it also means that they now have to negotiate a new deal with him this year if they want to keep him. At the time, it was a completely defensible choice, but now, they’ll probably have to pay him a lot more or risk losing the face of the franchise. (UP – Prev: 12, 14, 20)

10. SP [Manuel Corona](http://wikipeba.com/statslab13/player.php?player_id=9652) (GLO) – 28 – What happened to the Mayor in 2017? In our opinion, the answer is bad luck. Consider the following. In his 2015 Golden Arm season, Corona stuck out batters at a lower rate, he walked batters at a higher rate, and he gave up home runs at a higher rate. Yet he posted an era of 3.56 in 2017 versus 2.30 in 2015. Chalk that up to a .291 average against him on balls in play. Whether that’s because of defensive changes or other factors, Corona gave up hits at a higher rate than he ever has, and that resulted in his worst season ever. The good news for Fishermen fans is that he looks like he’s still got all the skills to be the pitcher he was prior to his injury, and barring a trade, they’ve got 3 more seasons to enjoy watching him prove it. (DOWN – Prev: 2, 11, 2, 4)

9. SP [Hiroyuki Nii](http://wikipeba.com/statslab13/player.php?player_id=3972) (LON) – 29 – Nii has been teasing observers with his potential for a few years now, and 2017 was when it all came together for him to the tune of a 19-6 record with a 2.83 ERA and falling just one strikeout shy of his 3rd consecutive 230 K season. The Underground have him locked up for 3 more years at below market rates, but probably the most intriguing thing about him is that he’s never had a significant injury as a professional. (UP – Prev: Top 50, Top 50)

8. DH [Luis Torres](http://wikipeba.com/statslab13/player.php?player_id=4948) (FLA) – 28 – Despite missing the final month of the season, Torres managed his 7th consecutive 30 HR campaign. The injuries kept him from attaining the century mark in any of runs, RBI, and walks, the first time in 5 years that he hasn’t done that in all three of those categories. For the rest, it was business as usual, with a career high .288 average meaning he was actually on pace for the highest hit total of his career (he had 160 or 161 each of the previous 4 seasons), but finished with 154. Doctors have cleared him for another year, which is perfect timing for the Featherheads who will have a chance to see how he performs before looking to extend the possible free agent. Those contract status doubts are the reason for his slight drop. (DOWN – Prev: 5, 3, 4, 3)

7. CF [Ieyoshi Ishikawa](http://wikipeba.com/statslab13/player.php?player_id=9885) (NJ) – 28 – Ishikawa’s placement on this list will probably surprise some people, but only Ronald Harmon has posted a higher VORP over the past two seasons combined than New Jersey’s centerfielder. He’s not a prototypical superstar, but he’s extremely productive. He’s got solid power both to the gaps and over the fences, but he’s not regularly among the league leaders for either. He’s not the fastest player, and while he’s a solid outfielder, he’s unlikely to win an All-Leather award. However, what he does really well is get on base. He’s been in the top 5 in batting each of the past two seasons and knows how to draw a walk. Considering that center field is one of the weaker positions in the league offensively, and that Ishikawa is locked up for the next 5 years at a very reasonable rate, Ishikawa is far more valuable than one might initially think. (UP – Prev: 22, NR)

6. SS [Ronald Lowry](http://wikipeba.com/statslab13/player.php?player_id=4180) ([CON](http://pebabaseball.com/reports/news/html/teams/team_78.html)) – 30 – Lowry wasn’t as good as his 2016 Royal Raker winning season in 2017, and he had some minor injuries that kept him out of the lineup more than the past few years. He fell 2 home runs shy of his 5th straight 30 home run season, and his numbers didn’t give any indication that he’s starting to slow down yet. If he stays healthy, he’ll be in the Royal Raker hunt yet again. From a contract perspective, he’s got two years left on his contract at a rate well below market value. (DOWN – Prev: 4, 4, 7, 10)

**Players Ranked 26-50, In Alphabetical Order**

Before we finish out the list with the top 25, here are the *next* 25! These are the players that for one reason or another, perhaps an injury or high salary or age or simply the depth of quality players in the league, aren’t quite worthy of the top 25. These players aren’t ranked in order, so you’re welcome to place them in whatever order you like. Perhaps the real debate begins with the players not listed at all.

LF [Chris Allen](http://wikipeba.com/statslab13/player.php?player_id=534) ([FAR](http://www.pebabaseball.com/reports/news/html/teams/team_92.html)) – 32 – After a healthy 2016, Allen was hoping for more of the same but wound up on the DL yet again. He managed 25 home runs in 125 games, but it’s getting harder for the Dinosaurs to be able to rely on him. (DOWN – Prev: 19, Top 50, Top 50, Top 50)

1B [Mike Arnopp](http://wikipeba.com/statslab13/player.php?player_id=4299) (FAR) – 32 – Arnopp was essentially the same hitter last year that he was the year before, and moved up to 3rd in the Royal Raker voting as a result. He’s got a team friendly contract that puts him under team control for another four years. (NC – Prev: Top 50, NR)

SP [Dave Barker](http://wikipeba.com/statslab13/player.php?player_id=3136) (DUL) – 28 – Last year we asked if Barker was at the point where significant improvement is unlikely to occur, and in 2017 he answered that question with a rather unenthusiastic “Yes”. Now Barker was, by some measures better in 2017 than 2016, but in others he was virtually identical. His ERA was a bit lower, but his FIP was almost exactly the same. He walked fewer and struck out more, but gave up more hits on a rate basis and more of them went out of the park. Barker’s a very good pitcher. He’ll make an All-Star team now and then when things break right. His 1.10 WHIP is nothing to sneeze at. Just realize that this is where it’s at with him. (NC – Prev: Top 50, Top 50)

SP [Avery Carson](http://wikipeba.com/statslab13/player.php?player_id=11299) (FLA) – 26 – The 2nd pick of the 2013 draft progressed a level each year in the minors and found himself pitching for the Featherheads by the second half of 2016. That’s pretty much the minimum trajectory needed out of a college pitcher drafted that high, and while he hasn’t developed into an ace yet, he fits comfortably in the IL’s best rotation. He just signed a 4 year extension that means the Featherheads won’t have to worry about arbitration. (UP – Prev: NR)

SP [Martín Francisco](http://wikipeba.com/statslab13/player.php?player_id=3203) ([AUR](http://pebabaseball.com/reports/news/html/teams/team_95.html)) – 29 – A ruptured tendon in his finger derailed what was a fine 2017 season for Francisco in which he was 8-4 with a 2.72 ERA. The Borealis have a ton of questions on their roster, and Francisco’s health will be one that lingers all season long. (NC – Prev: Top 50, 24)

SP [Luis Gusmán](http://wikipeba.com/statslab13/player.php?player_id=11843) (CON) – 25 – The first 6 picks of the 2014 draft were all pitchers, with Gusmán going second. Signing a major league contract straight out of the draft pushed him to the bigs before he was truly ready, but in 2017 he lived up to the billing. He went 14-8 with a 3.22 ERA for the Nutmeggers, but still has some work to do before he shows he belongs in this group. His home run and walk rates are too high, but he strikes people out when he needs to. (UP – Prev: NR)

SP [Armando Gallegos](http://wikipeba.com/statslab13/player.php?player_id=1253) (FAR) – 33 – Starting this year, Gallegos will finally start to be paid a small portion of all the money he earned over the life of his previous contract. Previously signed to the league’s friendliest contract, he signed a 4 year $72 million extension that will pay him through his age 37 season. To this pont, he’s still a dominant pitcher. He did finish as runner-up in the Golden Arm voting and lead the league in innings. (DOWN – Prev: 18, 12, 5, 7)

C [Samuel Kettley](http://wikipeba.com/statslab13/player.php?player_id=4700) (CON) – 28 – Kettley’s been quite inconsistent throughout his career, but in 2017 he had the type of year that people had been expecting of him for some time. He posted career highs in almost every offensive category, hitting .286 with 23 HR’s. Defensively, he was second among qualifiers in throwing out 39.4% of would be base stealers, and for all of this, he was paid just under $5 million. He’ll be playing the final year of his current contract this year, which would normally make him less desirable in trade, but his current salary is low enough that any team looking to trade for him could reasonably expect to sign him to a below market deal. (UP – Prev: NR)

SP [Bill Lewis](http://wikipeba.com/statslab13/player.php?player_id=4599) (FAR) – 26 – Lewis was the 1st overall pick in the 2010 draft and has since become a strong pitcher for the Dinosaurs. He struck out 200 batters for the first time in his career this past season, and went 14-7 for the second straight year. While his strikeout rate is among the highest in the league, his walk rate jumped up this past season to heights that will have him falling off this list quickly if he doesn’t correct it. (UP – Prev: NR, NR, Top 50)

SS [Chris Long](http://wikipeba.com/statslab13/player.php?player_id=4850) (LON) – 26 – Long is an average first kind of hitter, and it all came together from him in 2018 as he won the IL batting title with a .345 average. This was the highest average in the IL since 2012, but he does have some pop in his bat, too. He has yet to hit 20 home runs, but he’s been in the top 10 in doubles each of the past two seasons. He’s not bad with the glove, having won the 2015 All-Leather award, but he was hurt last year by only appearing in 125 games. If that trend continues, his batting title hurts the team, as he was awarded a hefty $8 million contract in his first visit with an arbitration panel. (UP – Prev: NR)

SP [Félix Ortega](http://wikipeba.com/statslab13/player.php?player_id=4884) ([ARL](http://www.pebabaseball.com/reports/news/html/teams/team_77.html)) – 28 – Injuries held Ortega to 23 starts in 2017, and he wasn’t as effective as he had been in the past. All his peripherals were affected by his injury. His strikeout rate was down, and his walk and home run rates were up. However, all of these were not significantly worse than before, and it would not be surprising at all if Ortega returned to form in 2018. A healthy season would likely include 200 IP and an ERA near 3.50. (DOWN – Prev: 25 9, 16, 17)

1B [William Peterson](http://wikipeba.com/statslab13/player.php?player_id=579) (FLA) – 30 – Peterson struggled with injuries in 2017 that kept his counting stats down to about half of what they were in 2016. On top of that, most of his rate stats also took a nose dive. If he’s healthy this year, it wouldn’t be a stretch to expect a big bounce back all around. (DOWN – Prev: 17, Top 50)

LF [Cory Pierce](http://wikipeba.com/statslab13/player.php?player_id=4484) (AUR) – 32 – It’s hard to tell if anyone remembered Pierce existed in 2017. He had his best year since his 2014 Royal Raker and actually finished 2nd in the Royal Raker voting, but the amount of discussion surrounding his year was almost non-existent. Aurora’s fall from the playoffs was a much bigger story. Pierce is signed affordably for two more years, which is probably wise given his injury history, but when he’s healthy and playing he’s one of the more productive hitters around. (DOWN – Prev: 21, 13, 6, 9)

CF [John Prentiss](http://wikipeba.com/statslab13/player.php?player_id=4710) ([CST](http://pebabaseball.com/reports/news/html/teams/team_83.html)) – 26 – Prentiss put some injuries behind him and hit 38 home runs in 2017. His uppercut swing means he doesn’t hit a lot of doubles but he does supplement his home runs with a fair amount of walks. Defensively, his natural position would be right field but the Statesmen don’t really have a good option for center and Prentiss is the best of the bad ones. (UP – Prev: NR)

1B [Rob Raines](http://wikipeba.com/statslab13/player.php?player_id=2317) (ARL) – 32 – The 2017 story of Rob Raines was one of redemption. After his hugely disappointing 2016 (only because of his own lofty standards), he rebounded in 2017 to once again record 100 RBI, 100 R’s, and 100 BB’s while belting 32 home runs. Collectively, the league yawned. This was not vintage Rob Raines where he dominated his peers. The Bureaucrats were lousy, and Raines finished 8th in Royal Raker voting. It seems perfectly reasonable to expect a similar rate of production in 2018, but this season will also mark the last time for the next 6 years that he’ll be paid less than $20 million. At his previously dominant form, that’s an easy contract to swallow. As one of the best rather than *the* best, that’s a tough contract to move. Particularly when one considers how age might slow him down. That said, it’s a short, [cheaper contract](http://wikipeba.com/statslab13/payroll.php?player=2317) than [Tony Carmona](http://wikipeba.com/statslab13/payroll.php?player=7103). (DOWN - Prev: 7, 2, 3, 2)

CL [Jim Ratzlaff](http://www.pebabaseball.com/reports/news/html/players/player_4506.html) (GLO) – 26 – The Fishermen finally made Ratzlaff their full time closer in 2017 and he responded with 36 saves and a 1.84 ERA to earn the IL Shutdown Reliever award. Oh, and he struck out 91 in 73 1/3 innings. He allowed 2 home runs and 8 walks on the year. (UP – Prev: NR)

SP [Carlos Rivera](http://wikipeba.com/statslab13/player.php?player_id=10036) – (CON) – 25 – The Nutmeggers were hoping that Rivera would take a step forward in 2017 but instead he treaded water. Yes, his ERA was up to 3.93, but his FIP was almost identical and it seemed as though opponents simply timed their hits more effectively against him. He’s got two more years under team control, and this year will have a big impact on the team’s intentions for retaining him long term. (NC – Prev: Top 50)

SP [Francisco Robles](http://www.pebabaseball.com/reports/news/html/players/player_4813.html) (CL) – 27 – Robles didn’t change much last year. 33 starts? Check. 14-10 record? Check. ERA just over 3.50? Check. Just over 230 innings? Check. Some of the detail about how he got there was different, but in the end, he was essentially the same pitcher. (NC - Prev: Top 50, 6, 8)

SP [Roberto Rodríguez](http://wikipeba.com/statslab13/player.php?player_id=3066) (NJ) – 31 – An 18-6 record, 3.06 ERA, and the IL’s best strikeout to walk ratio has Rodríguez back in the driver’s seat for the Hitmen and back in these rankings. He signed his current deal with the Hitmen after his disappointing 2016 season, which will make him a bargain if he continues to pitch at his 2017 rates. (UP – Prev: NR, 30, 10)

SP [Miguel Rosa](http://wikipeba.com/statslab13/player.php?player_id=3310) (LON) – 30 – Rosa was a bit of a late bloomer, but he’s quietly emerged as a steady force in the Underground rotation. Rosa was 3rd in the IL in walk rate in 2017, which is a far cry from the rookie pitcher who gave up 82 walks in 2012. He’s been in the IL’s top 10 in complete game percentage and quality start percentage during 3 of the past 4 seasons. (UP – Prev: NR)

SP [Javier Sáenz](http://www.pebabaseball.com/reports/news/html/players/player_10106.html) (FAR) – 29 – Arlington traded Sáenz to Fargo last summer and he proceeded to go 15-4 with a 3.17 ERA after the trade. He’s a well rounded pitcher who’s best skill is avoiding free passes. He’s not particularly great at preventing the long ball or striking people out, but he’s good enough with those to be extremely effective. (UP – Prev: NR)

2B [Rafael Suárez](http://wikipeba.com/statslab13/player.php?player_id=4315) (WV) – 31 – Suárez put up numbers in 2017 as if the nightmare of 2016 had never happened. He hit for average again, batting .311, and hit exactly 23 home runs for the 3rd time in the last four years en route to the highest OPS of his career. He did suffer from a couple of smaller injuries that kept him to just 124 games, and at this point in his career has to be considered an injury risk. He’s in the final year of his contract, a deal which will pay him $17 million this year. It seems unlikely that the Alleghenies can trade him and contend for another playoff spot. The volatile nature of the IL wild card race also makes it seem unlikely the Alleghenies will be out of if before the trade deadline, so the real question is whether or not he’ll be headlining next year’s free agent class. Just bear in mind that in the PEBA, West Virginia is not a small market. (NC – Prev: Top 50, 5, 17)

3B [Alfredo Vega](http://wikipeba.com/statslab13/player.php?player_id=3705) (BAK) – 31 – Vega made his annual trip to the disabled list during Spring Training, which resulted in a career high 153 games played during the regular season. He belted a career high 17 home runs, but saw his average dip from around .300 to the .260’s. He’ll need to get is average back up and stay healthy for the Bears this year. (DOWN – Prev: 20, Top 50)

LF [Newton Wilcox](http://wikipeba.com/statslab13/player.php?player_id=11359) (FLA) – 26 – We’re just waiting for Wilcox to put together a season in which he hits for average, as the power is clearly there. He led the IL with 46 home runs and has been an All-Star in each of his first three seasons. He’s really only known for hitting with a lot of power, but he’s actually somewhat athletic. He’s a good defender with an All-Leather award in his past, and he can steal some bases, too. (NC – Prev: Top 50)

DH [Sok-man Yi](http://wikipeba.com/statslab13/player.php?player_id=1549) (TEM) – 33 – Yi was nearly dropped from this list due to the contract he signed with Tempe, but his bat is still very good. He led the SL with a .404 OBP in 2017, and posted the highest BABIP of his career. That said, his OBP was a product of hitting and discipline, as he also led the SL with 94 walks. His 24 home runs were the fewest since his rookie year, and his home run rate has never been this low. The final year of his 3 year deal contains a vesting option, that the team will have some control over. Still, Yi needs to buck the trend of PEBA hitters starting to go into rapid decline around his current age. The Knights are hoping he can stave it off for at least one full season as they hope to sneak into the SL Wild Card hunt. (NC - Prev: Top 50, 16, 23, 13)

And now …

**The Top 5**

5. SP [Fred Benjamin](http://wikipeba.com/statslab13/player.php?player_id=9714) (BAK) – 28 – Benjamin was so good in 2016 that he took a significant step back in 2017 and still finished as the SL Golden Arm runner-up. The main problem for him was a large increase in batting average against on balls in play, although the only thing he was better at was keeping the ball in the park. No one can truly be disappointed with that type of performance, though, and his tantalizing 2016 leaves one perpetually expecting. He’s got two more seasons under team control. (UP – Prev: 9, NR)

4. SP [Avery Parkinson](http://wikipeba.com/statslab13/player.php?player_id=4602) ([KEN](http://www.pebabaseball.com/reports/news/html/teams/team_86.html)) – 25 – Parkinson is just 25 years old but has already spent parts of four seasons in the PEBA and never posted an ERA over 3.18. He’s been an All-Star each of the past two seasons and been in the running for Golden Arm honors both years. He could stand to be a little more stingy with the long ball, but with his track record and the fact that he just went through arbitration for the first time, it’s hard to think of too many other pitchers you’d pick ahead of him if you were building a club from the ground up. (UP – Prev: 14, NR)

3. 1B [Ramón Leach](http://wikipeba.com/statslab13/player.php?player_id=11154) (REN) – 26 – For a variety of reasons, we kept trying to find reasons to rank Leach behind more players, but simply couldn’t do it. In 2017, he became just the 4th player to ever hit 50 home runs in a season, but he actually did something even more impressive than that. After posting the 10th 30-30 season as a rookie in 2016, he posted the league’s first 40-40 season last year. He led the SL in HR’s, RBI, R’s, and triples. He also added 33 doubles en route to 91 extra base hits, which has only been done 4 other times, and not in the last 5 years. Only once before has any player with 75 extra base hits in a season stolen 20 bases, let alone the 42 that Leach stole. Naturally, he’s still making the league minimum and despite being listed here as a first baseman, is good enough with the glove that he’s spent significant time all over the infield. (UP – Prev: NR)

2. SP [Markus Hancock](http://wikipeba.com/statslab13/player.php?player_id=3343) (BAK) – 32 – Truth be told, there really wasn’t anything that Hancock could have done differently to retain the top spot. He won his 6th Golden Arm in the past 8 years while posting his lowest WHIP in 5 seasons. He didn’t lose the top spot so much as a younger player took it from him. That said, he is getting paid quite a bit and a look inside his numbers from last year will make one start to wonder how the last two years of his contract will play out. His strikeout rate dropped a bit and he finished outside the SL top 10, 30th in the PEBA overall in K/9IP. He maintained his standards by lowering his walk rate to 0.75 BB/9IP. That was the best number in PEBA history, and while he’s historically been stingy, he’s never come close to being this stingy before. At the end of the day, he’s still very good, but expect 2018 to look more like 2016 than 2017. (DOWN - Prev: 1, 1, 1, 1)

1. SP [Chris York](http://wikipeba.com/statslab13/player.php?player_id=4293) (FLA) – 28 – York didn’t dominate the 2017 Golden Arm voting quite like he did in 2016, but he was still clearly the IL’s best pitcher. His 286 K’s was the third highest total in PEBA history and he just turned 28. From a contract standpoint, York’s playing the coming season on an inexpensive deal but will be a free agent if the Featherheads are unable to sign him to an extension at some point during the year. It’s almost a foregone conclusion that they’ll retain him at less than market value, though. They have the money to pay him whatever he wants, and it seems unlikely they’ll pass up that chance. (UP – Prev: 3, 21, NR)

*Samuel Platt covers the Nutmeggers for the Connecticut Post*

C [Bob Keller](http://wikipeba.com/statslab13/player.php?player_id=4262) (AUR) – 31 – Keller’s reduction in performance despite not suffering a serious injury has us worried. (DOWN – Prev: 10, 8, Top 50)

3B [Corbin Hickman](http://wikipeba.com/statslab13/player.php?player_id=hickman) (FLA) – 29 – Hickman needs to keep his average up to be a valuable contributor, and that didn’t happen in 2017. It didn’t help that he missed a third of the season, either. (DOWN – Prev: 15, Top 50, Top 50)

2B [Steve McDonald](http://wikipeba.com/statslab13/player.php?player_id=118) (AUR) – 31 – His ranking is dependent on signing an affordable contract and bouncing back. (NC – Prev: Top 50, 19, 12, 16)

10 Young Players We Think Will Make The List Next Year:

SP [Leonard Carver](http://wikipeba.com/statslab13/player.php?player_id=12104) (LON)

SP [Carlos Fernández](http://wikipeba.com/statslab13/player.php?player_id=11247) (DUL)

SP [Conner Hurst](http://wikipeba.com/statslab13/player.php?player_id=12087) (CST)

SP [Gunner MacGruder](http://wikipeba.com/statslab13/player.php?player_id=10635) (YUM)

SS [Emílio Manuel](http://wikipeba.com/statslab13/player.php?player_id=8181) (YUM)

RF [Gilbert Murray](http://wikipeba.com/statslab13/player.php?player_id=12395) (REN)

3B [Javier Padilla](http://wikipeba.com/statslab13/player.php?player_id=1115) (TEM)

SP [Davis Sutherland](http://wikipeba.com/statslab13/player.php?player_id=4888) (DUL)

C [Jesús Téllez](http://wikipeba.com/statslab13/player.php?player_id=3248) (NJ)

C [Harry Crawford](http://wikipeba.com/statslab13/player.php?player_id=9737) (FAR) – 28 – The catching position is one of the weakest around the league right now, not because there aren’t intriguing players but because they’re inconsistent, expensive, or have varying levels of commitment to the defensive demands of the position. Crawford sort of falls in the middle of that group, and as a result, makes it to this list. Unlike some of his competitors, Crawford is locked into a reasonable contract for the next few years. He’s got a solid bat which was good in 2017 and there’s reason to expect he may not have displayed his full potential. We’ll ignore his defense for now. (UP – Prev: NR)