



## Atlanta Braves Clippings

Thursday, November 5, 2015

### Braves.com

#### **Inbox: Will Olivera switch positions?**

Beat reporter Mark Bowman answers fans' questions

By Mark Bowman / MLB.com | @mlbbowman | November 4th, 2015

#### **What position do the Braves see Hector Olivera playing throughout most of his career?**

-- Todd K. Alpharetta, Ga.

As I reported last week, Olivera will play both left field and third base as he spends the next few weeks playing in Puerto Rico. But there is no doubt that the Braves are hoping that he proves comfortable enough in left field to give them the confidence that he can fill that position at the start of next season.

Olivera had been primarily used as a second baseman before he came to the United States this year. The 30-year-old Cuban's inexperience at third base was obvious, as he looked stiff and lacked range while manning the position for the Braves in September.

If Olivera makes the successful transition to left field, the Braves will have an immediate need to find a short-term fix at third base. There is a chance No. 8 prospect Rio Ruiz could fill the position by 2017. But regardless of whether or not Ruiz pans out, No. 16 prospect Austin Riley is certainly capable of becoming Atlanta's third baseman before Olivera's contract expires at the end of the '20 season.

The Braves have long known Olivera might soon need to transition to left field. Now, it just appears that they are ready for him to make the move a little earlier than expected.

#### **Do you think Fredi Gonzalez will be the Braves' manager when they move into the new stadium in 2017?**

-- Michael W., Nashville, Tenn.

Multiple members of the Braves organization have continued to say they hope Gonzalez remains their manager for many years to come. But at the same time, it's never wise to make any assumptions regarding this role.

Ned Yost and Terry Collins were the only Major League managers working this past weekend. But at some point over the course of the past 15 months, there had been reason to speculate about the long-term futures of those two with their respective clubs.

If the Braves were to reach a point where they were looking for a different manager, Mark DeRosa will likely be one of the top candidates. DeRosa does not possess any coaching experience. But he has remained close to the game with his MLB Network duties, and his communications skills have been lauded dating back to his earliest days as a utility man in Atlanta.

#### **Why does there appear to be only lukewarm interest in keeping Cameron Maybin after his productive season?**

-- James D., Atlanta

After acquiring him as essentially the throw-in portion of the trade that sent Craig Kimbrel and Melvin Upton Jr. to San Diego, the Braves platooned Maybin in April and then seriously contemplated trading him after he proved productive as an everyday player in May.

The Braves understandably thought it would be wise to sell high on the talented outfielder, who hit .289 with a .356 on-base percentage and .418 slugging percentage before the All-Star break. Then, after holding onto him, they saw Maybin hit just .240/.289/.311 as he battled a number of ailments and raised more injury concerns after the break.

If Maybin remains healthy and matches this year's first-half success, his \$8 million salary might be viewed as a wise investment. It's certainly a cost that is much more attractive than the \$14 million that Michael Bourn is owed next year.

Either Maybin or Bourn will man the center field position until No. 13 prospect Mallex Smith is deemed ready at some point next year.

In the meantime, the Braves will at least look at ways to potentially cut some of the costs of the salaries owed to Maybin, Bourn and Nick Swisher (\$15 million). Unfortunately, it will not be easy to trade any of these three outfielders.

### **Will Braves management go all out to win in 2016, or is the plan to once again look competitive in the first half and sell off players after the All-Star break while looking ahead to '17?**

-- Lou P. Seattle

This offseason will provide some indication of how different the totality of the 2016 season might be. Last winter, the Braves removed significant pieces and filled them with temporary fixes that we all anticipated might be replaced by the end of July. Everything went according to plan -- minus the fact that August and the first half of September proved to be much uglier and intolerable than the Braves had envisioned.

There was nothing fake about the pain or embarrassment of which team president John Schuerholz and president of baseball operations John Hart spoke about during this year's second half. They certainly do not want to relive that experience -- especially as they are attempting to drum up excitement while preparing to move into SunTrust Park.

So, expect this winter's moves to be aimed more toward generating long-term value. If the young starters take a step forward and the bullpen is strengthened, next year's second half might provide a glimpse of what could come in 2017. The Royals won 72 games in '12 and then went 43-27 during the second half of their 86-win '13 season. This is the kind of progression the Braves hope to begin to make next year.

## **Atlanta Journal-Constitution**

### **Liberty: Braves' revenue drops \$16 million, but income increases**

By Tim Tucker - The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

Braves owner Liberty Media provided an interesting financial scoreboard on the team this morning.

In a filing with the Securities and Exchange Commission, Liberty said the Braves' revenue dropped \$16 million this year through Sept. 30 "primarily due to lower game attendance and decreased concession sales."

However, despite the revenue drop, the Braves were more profitable, according to Liberty's filing. The company said the Braves' operating income — revenue minus expenses — before depreciation and amortization actually increased by \$9 million through Sept. 30, compared to the first nine months of 2014.

Liberty said that increase was "primarily the result of a decrease in operating costs due to lower player salaries and game operating costs."

While the team's operating income was up \$9 million for the year through Sept. 30, it was up \$18 million in the last three months of the period, Liberty said. And while revenue declined \$16 million through Sept. 30, it dropped only about \$1 million in the final three months of the period — apparently reflective of the fact attendance also fell late in the 2014 season.

Regarding construction of the new SunTrust Park in Cobb County, Liberty said the Braves closed on a \$345 million term loan in September. Also in September, the Braves received \$103 million from Cobb County bond proceeds "as reimbursement for project costs paid for by (the Braves) prior to the funding of the bonds," Liberty said. Through Sept. 30, approximately \$274 million had been spent on the stadium project, with about \$149 million provided by Cobb, according to Liberty.

The Braves this season had their lowest attendance since 1990. Attendance fell by 4,048 per home date from last year, the second largest drop in MLB.

Please check back to MyAJC.com later today for more on this story.

### **Atlanta pro teams led nation in taxpayer-funded military tributes**

By Daniel Malloy

**WASHINGTON** — Atlanta is ground zero for taxpayer-funded military tributes, according to a new U.S. Senate report out today showing that the Falcons, Braves and Hawks took in the most money in their respective leagues to put on displays honoring soldiers.

The Georgia National Guard said tonight that it no longer will pay for such things.

The report from Arizona Republican Sens. John McCain and Jeff Flake blasts the feel-good events as "paid patriotism," a misuse of legitimate recruiting funds for the Department of Defense. It's a more detailed version of what was first reported about NFL teams by

NJ.com earlier this year. And it shows that from 2012-2015, all of Atlanta's pro sports franchises took in the biggest contracts that included some kind of recognition for troops.

The NFL's Atlanta Falcons brought in \$879,000 from the Georgia Army National Guard for events including a color guard detail and a "military appreciation day" at training camp with giveaway hats and rally towels.

The Atlanta Braves led Major League Baseball with \$450,000 from the Georgia Army National Guard in that span, including "military appreciation game" sponsorships and video board recognition for soldiers.

Basketball's Atlanta Hawks took in \$225,000 from the Georgia Army National Guard and another \$5,000 from the U.S. Air Force, once again leading the league.

Not having a National Hockey League or Major League Soccer franchise — yet — kept Atlanta from topping those leagues. In all, according to Flake and McCain, \$6.8 million worth of recent DOD contracts had "some form of paid patriotism."

The military's sports marketing has long been a controversial topic, with military leaders saying it's an important part of their recruiting efforts and Congress should not unnecessarily tie their hands.

**Update: 6:20 p.m.** NFL commissioner Roger Goodell sent a letter to McCain and Flake saying that he, too, is concerned about the commingling of funds for recruitment activities and simple recognition of the troops. He said the league is auditing all DOD contracts and will pay back money improperly allocated for such events. Wrote Goodell:

*"We strongly oppose the use of recruitment funds for anything other than their proper purpose. As you know, on July 2, 2015, the NFL issued guidance to each of its 32 clubs to make clear that any on-field recognition, community events, or other activities that are not specifically in the form of recruitment or advertising should never be included in contracts or otherwise performed for payment."*

**Update: 9:50 p.m.** Thomas J. Lesnieski of the Georgia National Guard said it has put in place a new policy to no longer pay for events honoring troops:

*"Sports marketing has been an important element in Army National Guard recruiting efforts, to include those of the Georgia National Guard. Sports marketing and sports-related activities are essential means for engaging with qualified youth (18-24 year old demographic) regarding awareness of and potential service in the Georgia Army National Guard. Sports marketing specifically aims to recruit men and women who, having participated in sports, are likely to exhibit traits desired in the military, such as physical fitness, dedication, and an appreciation for team work."*

*"The Director of the Army National Guard has recently implemented interim guidance to ensure no sports marketing programs include requirements for patriotism/salutes and a long-term policy is being developed at the national level. As such, there are no 'paid patriotism' events in our current contracts with any sports team."*

## Fox Sports

### Youth Movement: 5 prospects that could join Braves roster in 2016

*The 2016 Atlanta Braves will not feature near as many rookies as the 2015 team, but a few under-the-radar prospects could make their MLB debuts next season.*

By Tyler Duke

After major roster turnover and numerous trades, 15 different players made their MLB debuts with the Atlanta Braves in 2015. All signs point to that number taking a dive next season as the 2015 rookies look to establish themselves as mainstays with the big-league club.

There are still questions marks on the Braves roster that could be answered with prospects in the farm system, though. While a majority of the top prospects in the organization are still in minor leagues' lower levels and have a few years until they're ready for the majors, there are a couple lower-tier players that could make the jump, along with a few premier prospects that could make their highly anticipated debuts in Atlanta.

Here are five prospects who have a good opportunity to make their first appearance with the Braves in 2016:

#### 5. Lucas Sims, Starting pitcher

Just a couple months ago, Sims making the parent club in 2016 would've looked like a long shot.

The former first-round pick injured his hip in the Carolina Mudcats' bus crash in early May 2015 and was placed on the disabled list until late June. Sims came back and struggled in his first few starts, but he ended the season on an absolute tear with Double-A Mississippi.

Over his final five starts, Sims allowed just three earned runs over 30 1/3 innings pitched while striking out 33 batters and walking just 12. That hot stretch has now extended into the Arizona Fall League where Sims has allowed just one run and five hits over his past nine innings thrown with eight strikeouts and two walks. Sims' fastball has been clocked as high as 98 miles per hour in Arizona while consistently sitting in the mid-90s.

Once considered the top prospect in the Braves organization and a top-100 prospect in all of baseball, Sims is starting to show flashes of the talent that made him a popular choice as a future top-of-the-rotation arm. If the Braves are in need of a starter to fill a rotation spot at some point during 2016 due to injury or production, Sims could be the name called if he keeps building on his recent success.

#### **4. Cedric Hunter, Outfielder**

He may not be a high-profile option or someone who is on many prospect radars, but Hunter has quietly put together a few highly productive seasons in the minors.

With Triple-A Gwinnett last season, Hunter posted a .283/.331/.420 slash line and an impressive 117 weighted runs created plus (wRC+). His 12 home runs topped Gwinnett's leaderboard and his 77 RBIs led the organization across all minor league affiliates.

Hunter was once the Padres top prospect in his early minor-league years due to a bat that projected really well among scouts. That bat seems to have found its groove in the Braves' system, and though he's now 27 years old, Hunter could be a nice option as a bench bat and fourth outfielder at some point in 2016.

#### **3. Jason Hursh, Relief pitcher**

As the Braves' first-round draft pick in 2013, it's not ideal that Hursh's potential might already be capped as a reliever, but the 24-year old hard-throwing righty struggled throughout the 2015 season as a starter. The Braves made the decision to move Hursh to Triple-A later in the year despite his underwhelming performance in Double-A, and he was used exclusively out of the bullpen in Gwinnett. Based off that move, the front office may be looking at him as a potential middle relief option down the road.

Hursh does have the makeup to be a successful relief pitcher: He throws hard and is seen as a ground ball pitcher while not displaying the topline control that you want out of a starter.

While he could get the opportunity to be a Triple-A starter in the early stretches of 2016, Hursh will likely be an option as a midseason call up if the Braves need relief help at any point.

#### **2. Mallex Smith, Outfielder**

Smith possesses everything the Braves could possibly want in an everyday leadoff hitter. His speed is elite, he hits for contact and he gets on base at a high rate. All of those tools were showcased in 2015 and he subsequently catapulted up through the franchise's prospect rankings.

After he tore up Double-A pitching in the first half of the year, Smith was called up to Triple-A to see if he could handle better pitching. Despite a slow start for Gwinnett, he finished the season strong and provided evidence that he could even jump to the MLB club as soon as 2016.

Combining his stints with Mississippi and Gwinnett, the 22-year-old center fielder posted a .306/.373/.386 slash line with 57 stolen bases, 17 doubles and eight triples. He stole 34 bags in just 69 games in Triple-A.

With his speed, Smith's range is viewed as elite, which projects him as a good defensive center fielder at the next level.

Smith may be given a chance as early as spring training to compete for an outfield spot in 2016.

#### **1. Tyrell Jenkins, Starting pitcher**

Though Jenkins isn't looked at as the highest-upside starting pitcher in the Braves' farm system, the 23-year old right-hander acquired in the Jason Heyward trade appears to be the furthest along among pitching prospects that have yet to make their debut for the Braves.

Jenkins started the 2015 season with Double-A Mississippi and, after a very successful stint, finished the campaign in Triple-A.

Combining his numbers at both levels, Jenkins compiled a 3.19 ERA and 1.36 WHIP over 138 1/3 innings pitched. That performance was strong enough to earn him Minor League Pitcher of the Year honors in the Braves' system.

His stuff isn't electric, but Jenkins has relied on weak contact in his career to get batters out, and it hasn't failed him to this point. At 6-foot-4, Jenkins uses a high leg kick and overhead release to get a heavy, sinking action on his pitches.

With the back end of the Braves' rotation being a question mark and completely open to competition at this point, Jenkins is the safest bet to be the starter that debuts for Atlanta in 2016. While he has a great opportunity to win the job outright in spring training, he should at least be in line as one of the first guys the Braves would look at for a spot start next season.

## What could Olivera's move to outfield mean for Braves?

*The Atlanta Braves acquired Hector Olivera primarily for his bat. However, the 30-year-old's pending transition from third base to left field could alter the franchise's offseason plans.*

By Zach Dillard

The crux of the Atlanta Braves' offseason is Hector Olivera.

There are pressing issues across the board for the rebuilding franchise — one that posted a 67-95 record with baseball's lowest-scoring offense and a historically young pitching staff suffering through growing pains — but the development of the 30-year-old semi-prospect is destined to become a tipping point in John Hart's tenure. The Braves gambled on Olivera at the trade deadline when the Dodgers offered to foot the bill for his signing bonus, at the price of promising young players Alex Wood and Jose Peraza, and made good on their long-standing fascination with the Cuban product.

Following an injury-riddled MLB debut season, expectations are high. Time is not on Atlanta's side in this deal, and if Olivera can not significantly improve upon his .253/.310/.405 slash line in 2015 and protect the likes of Freddie Freeman in the lineup, the Braves are going to need to spend significant money addressing the offense prior to 2017. The Braves have shown they are heavily invested in Olivera by having two coaches, Kevin Seitzer and Bo Porter, staying with him during his winter ball stint in Puerto Rico.

The first step in slotting Olivera into the everyday lineup is to make sure he can hold his own in the field, notably at third base, where he started 21 games last season and, at least originally, where the team envisioned him as the final answer to a position that has proven problematic in the post-Chipper era.

That may no longer be the case.

Following a week's worth of reports that Olivera would be splitting time between third and left field, ESPN's Buster Olney reported on Wednesday morning that the Brave's newcomer was working exclusively in left field, under Porter's guidance, during winter ball.

Olney made it clear that Olivera is no longer splitting time between the two positions, and though other reports have stated that third base is not entirely out of the question, for argument's sake let's work on the assumption that Atlanta has a new left fielder.

What could this transition mean for the Braves?

First, if Olivera is now an everyday outfielder, it says more about the franchise's confidence in his ability to handle third base, which has given him trouble ever since coming over in the Dodgers deal, than it does about his defensive ability in left. This is not necessarily a surprising move, though. A move to left field has long been rumored with Olivera, even dating back to his pre-signing days, as he's shown limited range and ability as a corner infielder. The goal was still for Olivera to man third base — that was priority No. 1 for sending to Braves coaches down for long-term stays in Puerto Rico.

The fact that the team has already shifted gears speaks volumes about the early winter ball progress reports.

Now, if Olivera hits, none of this will be a major issue — his primary value stems from his bat — but the team's quick trigger is noteworthy.

The move will also change how Atlanta approaches its outfield this offseason. The team featured one of the five worst outfields in baseball in 2015, and now it's paying more than \$56 million to Olivera, Cameron Maybin, Nick Markakis, Nick Swisher and Michael Bourn ... without any definitive answers.

Markakis enjoyed a solid, singles-heavy season at the plate in Year 1 of his four-year deal, but he provides little power or speed and his defensive ability has gone downhill. Maybin was valuable in the first half of last season before tapering off down the stretch. Swisher and Bourn are the \$29 million price tag for unloading Chris Johnson's contract to Cleveland.

Even before the Olivera move, there was a logjam at the corner outfield spots, and as highly rated prospect Mallex Smith pushes for time the transition could take away the team's flexibility in looking at the likes of Markakis or Maybin in left field. (On the other hand, this could give Smith more time to develop at Triple-A Gwinnett or make Maybin a viable offseason trade piece.)

Then there's the question of third base, which, barring an offseason trade or signing, could fall to Adonis Garcia. Olivera's fellow 30-something rookie led the team with 345 1/3 innings played at third base last season, posting a team-worst minus-3 defensive runs saved. He did, however, make up for it at the plate. Garcia flashed surprising power — he was one of four MLB players to hit double-digit homers in fewer than 200 plate appearances; this coming after hitting 21 shots total in nearly 1,200 plate appearances in the minors — and should have a legitimate chance to secure more playing time in 2016.

There was also the possibility that Garcia was the one that could move to the outfield. Maybe his and Olivera's roles have simply flipped.

The farm system likely will not provide much help here, either, as top third-base prospects Rio Ruiz and Austin Riley are not expected to make their MLB debuts until the team moves to SunTrust Park.

A full-time move to the outfield likely alters the Braves' free agency options as well. With left field being arguably the biggest problem area in last year's lineup, and with an extremely deep free-agent market at that position at a variety of price ranges (Alex Gordon, Justin Upton, Yoenis Cespedes, Colby Rasmus, Gerardo Parra, etc.), the Braves could have been active there. The third-base market — should they choose to go that route — is not nearly as impressive.

Fourteen third basemen posted a 3.0 WAR or better last season, an approximate baseline of success that Olivera should be expected to match starting in 2016, and not a single one is an unrestricted free agent. Perhaps a 32-year-old David Freese (2.2 WAR, 110 weighted runs created) or the return of veteran Juan Uribe could help in the short term, but at what cost? The Braves already had plenty of money wrapped up in the outfield in 2016, but at least there were more options in that market.

This could all be much ado about nothing. If Olivera hits at a high level, providing some much-needed pop for baseball's least productive offense over the past two seasons, Fredi Gonzalez & Co. will find a spot for him.

Perhaps Olivera becomes a quality left fielder. Perhaps Garcia provides enough power to make up his defensive shortcomings at third. Perhaps the front office will explore trade options at the Winter Meetings. (John Coppolella is the GM. Go ahead and expect this to happen.) Still, if Olivera is incapable of manning the everyday third-base spot in 2016, the move likely alters Atlanta's offseason plans.

## Atlanta Business Chronicle

### Braves more profitable in 2015

Mark Meltzer - Executive Editor - Atlanta Business Chronicle

The Atlanta Braves were more profitable in the third quarter of 2015, despite lower revenues, according to a filing by its parent company, Liberty Media Corp.

The Braves took in \$1 million less in the July-September quarter, compared to the third quarter of 2014, Liberty (Nasdaq: LMCA) said in its 10Q filing with the Securities and Exchange Commission. But the team's operating profit (revenue less expenses) grew by \$18 million in the quarter, versus a year ago.

For the first nine months of 2015, the Braves had a \$16 million decline in revenue, compared to January-September 2014, but had an increase of \$9 million in operating profit.

Liberty said the decline in revenue was "primarily due to lower game attendance and decreased concession sales," while the increased profit "is primarily the result of a decrease in operating costs due to lower player salaries and game operating costs."

The Braves had revenues of \$225 million for all of 2012, \$261 million in 2013 and \$251 million in 2014.

Liberty also said it closed in September on a \$345 million, five-year loan to help fund construction of SunTrust Park and The Battery, the adjacent mixed-use development.

Approximately \$274 million has been spent, as of September 30, on the baseball facility and mixed-use development. The stadium is expected to cost \$672 million, plus \$50 million in other costs and equipment. The Battery is expected to cost \$452 million, of which the Braves and affiliated entities are expected to fund approximately \$363 million through a mix of debt and equity, Liberty said.

Liberty CEO Greg Maffei addressed the loan in a conference call on Wednesday.

"Our stadium and mixed use development is progressing well," Maffei said. "In September, we closed on a stadium construction loan of \$345 million to fund the remaining Braves portion of the stadium parking and plaza, and we officially named the new mixed-use development adjacent to SunTrust Park The Battery Atlanta."

As far as salary obligations from guaranteed contracts, Liberty said the Braves are committed to pay \$87 million in 2016, \$59 million in 2017, \$60 million in 2018 and \$121 million thereafter.

### Report: Falcons and Braves paid more than peers for patriotic events

Phil W. Hudson - Staff Writer - Atlanta Business Chronicle

The Department of Defense paid the Atlanta Braves and the Atlanta Falcons more money than any other Major League Baseball or National Football League team, USA Today reported Wednesday.

According to the paper, the Braves scored \$450,000 and the Falcons landed \$879,000 to "stage 'paid patriotism' events" from the Pentagon.

"The Atlanta contracts included a 2013 event during which a roaring crowd cheered as the Falcons welcomed 80 guard members who unfurled an American flag across the Georgia Dome's turf," the article states.

The Atlanta Falcons told Atlanta Business Chronicle in May "The Armed Forces have long worked with teams in all sports on year-round advertising and marketing programs as a way to reach important audiences. From 2011 – 2014 the Atlanta Falcons were compensated, although at a cumulative figure less than first reported [by separate media outlets], by the National Guard for executing rights and benefits focused on National Guard marketing, branding and recruiting initiatives. I'd suggest contacting the National Guard for specifics regarding their strategy with NFL teams and other sports entities."

The club added team community relations events such as the annual "Fishing with the Falcons" initiative, which takes place every year on Lake Lanier, where players and coaches spend the day fishing and grilling with wounded military veterans are a huge part of our community outreach efforts.

"These initiatives and programs are separate from any marketing/sponsorship deal we have with the National Guard, and there is no compensation for players or coaches who participate," said Brian Cearns, director of football communications for the Falcons.

The Braves told Atlanta Business Chronicle there is a separation between the funds and nods to the military.

"All of our military activities on the field are not paid for with any military dollars," the Braves said. "We honor our military in many ways as a gesture to thank them for all they do."

On a pro-bono basis the Braves have recognized and honored the military through its Hometown Hero program, Military Appreciation Days, "saluting" those who served or are serving prior to the anthem at every game, Heritage Weekends, its support of United Military Care and Operation Homefront, the Braves Country Caravan that stops at 2 two or three military bases each year, and the club's on-going military ticket discount at each game.

The Braves said the team does have a corporate partnership with the National Guard that started with 2014 season, "but their [National Guard] sponsorship doesn't dictate what we [Braves] do on the field."

The National Guard sponsorship includes:

Three upper level concourse signs

Exposure at all Military Appreciation Games

National Guard Logo placement on Braves players' head shots on BravesVision during Military Games

Two pre-game BravesVision interviews (for recruiting)

Two pre-game radio interviews (for recruiting)

Opportunity to greet fans at the gates on Military Games

Playbill advertisement

One on-field experience for each Military Game (first pitch, honorary team captain, etc.)

Opportunity to set-up and activate during each Military Game