

## A Look at this Year's Non-Tenders

Written by Paul Swydan

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Following up [last week's article on arbitration eligible players](#) , let's take a look at the players who were non-tendered by their clubs and turned into free agents (

***Editor's Note:***

[A complete list of players that were non-tendered at the deadline](#)

can be found on the Biz of Baseball website.

[Discuss this year's crop of non-tenders here on the Biz of Baseball forums](#)

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Each year, there are a few notable players. However, the wackiness of the free agent market held down the number of non-tenders this off-season. Last season, a total of 50 players were non-tendered. Among them were some fairly interesting players, including **Eric Byrnes, Chad Bradford, Endy Chavez, Josh Fogg, Dan Kolb, Joe Borowski, and Miguel Olivo**

. While Fogg and Kolb pretty much held to their career paths, Byrnes, Bradford, Chavez, Borowski, and Olivo all had strong campaigns. One aspect of the non-tender process that was true both in 2005 and 2006 was the type of player most frequently non-tendered – relief pitchers. This makes implicit sense, since reliever performance is notoriously volatile. Let's take a look at some of the players in this year's group, looking at the potential reward for each player's new club.

***High Reward:***

At the front of this year's pack is second baseman **Marcus Giles**. Giles had fallen out of favor

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with the Atlanta brass before, when they tried to move him during the 2002 Winter Meetings, and it was possibly the worst kept secret in baseball that they were once again trying to move him at this year's Meetings. With the Braves displeasure of him so well documented, it is no wonder that no team was willing to take a bite at the apple and trade for him. Though we may see the best of Giles' career, he would have easily been worth the money he earned in arbitration this season. However, with the Braves working on a hard budget these days, and Willy Aybar and Martin Prado pushing for playing time, the Braves made a defensible decision to finally cut Giles loose.

**Brandon Claussen** is another player that has a high upside, and as such his non-tender is a bit more curious. For Cincinnati, he presented a great opportunity to keep a good pitcher at a low cost. His raw stats, a 16-27 record with a 5.04 ERA, are not all that impressive, but that is tempered by a couple of factors. First, he is a fly ball pitcher in an unfriendly park for fly ball pitchers. Second, and more importantly, he has been saddled with a defense that has been well below average his entire career. His rate stats actually improved in 2006 from 2005, and though he will start the season on the disabled list recovering from shoulder surgery, he represents an excellent gamble for the right club.

Most pitchers are not capable of striking out more than one batter per inning pitched. But that is exactly what Jason Bulger has done over five professional baseball seasons, striking out 282 batters over 273 innings pitched. In a market where mediocre relievers are earning between \$4-\$5 million per year, Bulger represents a fantastic option.

What do you look for in a fourth outfielder? Hopefully, you get someone who can play all three outfield positions competently, and someone that brings at least one offensive weapon to the table. **Jayson Werth's** career ISO of .166 is pretty good for a fourth outfielder, and in the past he has shown the ability to play plus defense at all three outfield spots. If he rebounds well from his wrist surgery, he could represent a good low cost player who won't kill you if he has to start for a few weeks.

### ***Low Reward:***

One of the pitchers garnering the most publicity for being non-tendered is **Joel Piniero**. Always a bit overrated, Piniero did have two good seasons as a pitcher. Unfortunately, those years were 2002 and 2003. Over the past three seasons, Piniero has been awful. He has pitched to a 21-35 record, with a declining strikeout rate and an increasing walk rate. Though he has played

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in front of a good defense, he has allowed 577 hits in 495 1/3 IP. Some team will likely pick him up on an incentive heavy deal, but in no way was he going to be worth the \$6 million plus the Mariners would have had to shell out for him.

Time will tell the story, but one day the name **Victor Zambrano** may cause Mets fans as much pain as **Larry Andersen** causes Red Sox fans. In the time Zambrano spent in Flushing, he spent half on the disabled list, and half walking every batter he faced. Okay, that's a mild exaggeration, but the fact remains Zambrano hasn't been any good for a while now. Save for his rookie season, a body of work that was only 51 1/3 innings, Zambrano has never registered a sub-4.00 ERA. In 2006, he endured his second elbow surgery, and he would not have earned the money he made in arbitration. He may end up back with the Mets on a reduced deal, but even before the injury he was not supposed to be featured in the Mets rotation. Zambrano figures to ride the AAA shuttle for the rest of his career.

Like **Jason Bulger**, **Scott Dohmann** has proven to be a strikeout per inning pitcher. Unlike Bulger, Dohmann has consistently coughed up walks and homers by the bushel. There is always the chance that with the right pitching coach, Dohmann will finally learn how to control his nasty slider, but in all likelihood he will continue to frustrate. He was picked up last year in the Jeremy Affeldt trade by the Royals, a team who is always in need of inexpensive arms to fill out its bullpen. Dohmann only made \$333,000 last season, so he would seem to fit the bill. However, he wasn't non-tendered for financial reasons, and that says a lot about his outlook for 2007.

After the 2005 season, it would have been hard to imagine **Jorge Sosa** being discarded by two teams in 2006, but that is exactly what happened. Always a scouts dream with his 90's heat, Sosa finally put it all together for one glorious run in 2005, with a 13-3 record and 2.55 ERA. There will likely be someone who will gamble on those numbers this off-season, picking up Sosa from the scrap heap. They will be disappointed. Sosa's value has always been in shutting down righties, but last year even that faded him, as righties hit him for a .818 OPS. If he can't shut down righties, he is essentially useless. Sosa walks almost as many as he strikes out, and though he has that heat, it has always been hittable heat – 585 hits allowed in 579 1/3 innings. Sometimes that is just bad luck, but when you have now pitched for three organizations and the tune is the same, well then it's time to call a spade a spade.

To be certain, some of these players were non-tendered with the hopes that they will resign with their former clubs for less money than they would be owed in arbitration. Nevertheless, some players will change teams, and some will be prizes while others will be pitfalls for their new

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clubs. While there might not be anyone in this class who nets his new team 36 saves for \$327,000 like **Joe Borowski** did in '06, there will be someone in this class who gives his next club significant value. Who that player or players will be is one of the many reasons to look forward to the 2007 season.

**Paul Swydan** is a contributor to *The Biz of Baseball*. To read more of his writing, you can access them in the [Articles and Opinion section](#) of the site.