MONEYBALL WEEKLY:

The Padres and the aftermath of buying without regard

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The San Diego Padres used to be a bottom-budget team in baseball, operating like the modern-day Guardians or Rays do — without the success. The way of operation felt like further insult to the city with the Clippers and Chargers both departing for Los Angeles.

The root in changing that was planted with the 2012 sale of the team, largely due to Peter Seidler, a part of the ownership group. The other piece of the puzzle was the 2014 hiring of A.J. Preller as general manager. The team signed Eric Hosmer in 2017 as its first huge move but the real impact was when Manny Machado signed a monster deal in 2019. Seidler would eventually become chairman in 2020 and the new age only became clearer from there.

The team instantly became one without regard for the long-term future. Young star Fernando Tatis Jr. signed a 14-year deal in 2021 and free agent Xander Bogaerts received a massive deal after 2022. The team also made one of the biggest deadline deals in sports history in 2022, trading a six-player package for superstar Juan Soto and star closer Josh Hader in another move. When Soto wouldn't re-sign after 2023, they moved him for a package which included starting pitchers Michael King and Drew Thorpe, the latter of whom would be quickly flipped for Dylan Cease.

At some point, the need to spend and win switched from methodical chaos to seemingly an addiction to spend. Hader's departure post-2024 led the team to send MLB number one prospect Leo De Vries in a major package for superstar closer Mason Miller at the 2025 deadline, where they'd also pick up Ryan O'Hearn and Ramón Laureano from Baltimore.

The future already looked shaky by then but has only continued to drop off, with the team trading for Robbie Ray and Casey Mize at this year's deadline to fix a rotation which was near the bottom of the league.

None of it worked well enough. The team never advanced further than their 2022 NLCS exit, and the years have passed without a World Series title to their name.

Though Seidler passed after 2023, Preller's habits still reflect the way Seidler allowed him to operate.

The problem is in the present-day situation of the team. The disregard for the future seems to be catching up with the friars. The structure of the team is crumbling, and the routes for escape are all risky.

King and Nick Pivetta, the top two of the rotation, will both be on the market, and while Ray and Mize didn't perform in San Diego, they'll also be up for grabs. The rotation of the team was already near the bottom of the league and now may get considerably worse.

Adrian Morejon and Jason Adam, two crucial parts of the Padres' excellent bullpen, are also set to expire. First baseman Ty France will also be available for anybody following a great bounce-back in his return to San Diego. The list of additional depth players expiring is almost endless.

San Diego's contract situation is what makes it tough to retain their talent. Bogaerts, Jackson Merrill, Tatis and Machado are all signed for a long time, with the latter three seeing a jump in salary that totals around $25 million between them.

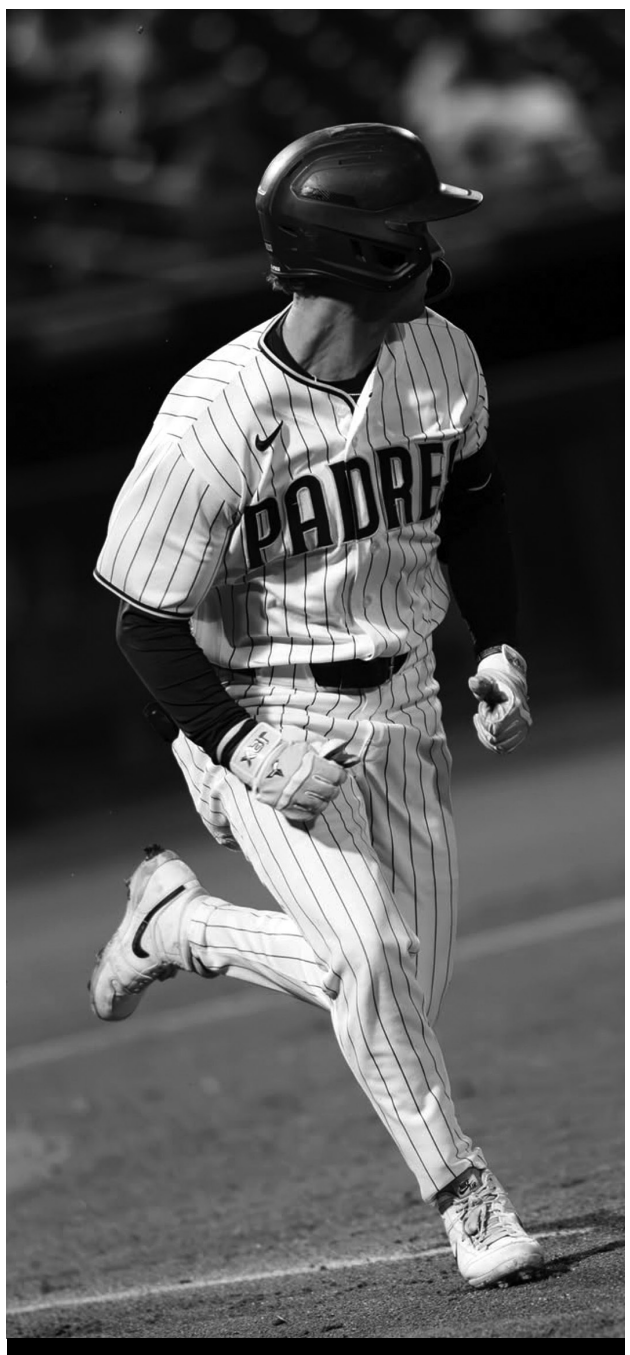
Merrill had a shaky season, and Machado's start to the year was abysmal. Bogaerts hasn't been good since signing. The tendency to backload deals makes the concern in the contract situation even worse.

The August sale of the Padres at $3.9 billion makes it tough to know how Preller will be permitted to operate. But without significant assets to trade and contracts which will only get worse, he must be careful in operations this offseason. Bringing in pitching is a necessity, but any long-term deal must succeed, or the team runs the risk of making their awful contract situation worse. Building offense may come as an expense of this.

There's an argument to be had that since the team is already headed for an awful future given their bloated contracts, Preller should go all-in with whatever's left. While it would be tough to do with the lack of capital in the system, it's certainly possible that the remaining amount could be sent off for whatever the team can scrounge up.

There is no ideal option for San Diego, but by now, almost every option ends in a future hindered by the current contracts of the roster. With the success of some prospects given up, specifically of CJ Abrams and James Wood in Washington following the Soto trade, one of the league's greatest "what-ifs" remains what would've happened if San Diego held onto their young talent just a little longer.

As with all teams, every confusing situation always has one main and undeniable takeaway. For the San Diego Padres, that takeaway is that when you disregard the future, it can come back to bite you, no matter how you handled the present. The city of San Diego has had its fun, but the writing may already be on the wall for what's to come.



Justin DeCriscio of the San Diego Padres running the bases during a game. The Padres highlighted their prospect's performance in the AFL Championship.

PHOTO COURTESY OF @PADRES ON INSTAGRAM

NWSL championship dreams stay alive for Washington and Kansas City

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Four teams entered the weekend with hopes of reaching the National Women's Soccer League Championship. Only two left with that opportunity.

The NWSL semifinals delivered a weekend of record-breaking performances, costly mistakes and late-game heroics as the league's championship matchup took shape.

Washington Spirit vs. Utah Royals FC

The semifinals kicked off with No. 3 Washington defeating No. 7 Utah, 2-1, in front of a crowd of 19,215 at Audi Field in Washington, D.C.

It has been a historic postseason for the Royals, who earned the franchise's first playoff win in their quarterfinal victory over Angel City FC. Before their semifinal elimination, Utah added another piece of history to its record: the fastest goal in NWSL playoff history.

At 1:57, Utah forward Cloé Lacasse scored directly off a corner kick, recording the league's first Olimpico in postseason play.

The Spirit gave Utah little time to bask in the lead, scoring the equalizer in the eighth minute. Washington forward Sofia Cantore converted a cross with a backheel finish inside the goal area.

Cantore's goal was assisted by forward Trinity Rodman, who leads the Spirit with 24 goal contributions this season.

Washington continued to punish Utah with persistent attacking pressure. The first half ended in a draw, but the Spirit controlled the pace and crowded the Royals' back line.

In the 56th minute, Utah's defense finally cracked. After a wayward back pass between defenders, Washington forward Clara Luvanga intercepted the ball.

Luvanga's interception forced goalkeeper Mandy McGlynn off her line, leaving the net exposed. Luvanga capitalized on the one-on-one opportunity, sending the ball skimming over McGlynn to give the Spirit their first lead.

Washington maintained control of the second half, holding the majority of the possession and continuing to pressure Utah's backline. Unfortunately for the Royals, their Cinderella story comes to an end. Utah's defensive error proved costly, sending Washington one step closer to its championship dream.

"Trying not to cry; this is insane," Rodman said to CBS. "This is a dream come true and I'm so happy we're heading back to the final."

Washington's work is far from over as the Spirit advances to their third consecutive NWSL championship match. After losing 1-0 each of their previous two championship appearances, the Spirit will battle for a new ending.

"This team right here, I would do anything for them. And it's been a long season, we've dealt with a lot of injuries, so I just think we're fighting for each other," Rodman said after the match, reflecting on this year's championship-contending roster.



Gabrielle Carle and Lucia Di Guglielmo of Washington Spirit celebrating their win together over Utah Royals FC. The Washington Spirit won 2-1 against Utah Royals FC on Nov. 14, 2026.

PHOTO COURTESY OF @WASHINGTONSPIRIT ON INSTAGRAM

Is the third time the charm? Only time will tell.

Gotham FC vs. Kansas City Current

During last year's NWSL postseason, Gotham traveled to Kansas City to upset the Current on their home field. This weekend, the Current came to New York to return the favor.

No. 4 Kansas City clinched its spot in the NWSL Championship with a 2-1 victory over No. 1 Gotham.

Both teams brought an aggressive approach, creating a physical match from the start. Kansas City had an early offensive presence, putting pressure on Gotham's defense.

Kansas City midfielder Croix Bethune opened the scoring in the 19th minute. On a free kick, she sent a ball curving around Gotham's wall and past goalkeeper Ann-Katrin Berger.

"I've been working on free kicks all season," Bethune said during ABC's halftime coverage. "Practice makes perfect."

Down 1-0, Gotham began the second half with a surge of energy. The boost of intensity came with the introduction of midfielder Rose Lavelle, who was limited by an ongoing neck injury.

Gotham's offense maintained consistent pressure, but they struggled to create chances. In the 68th minute, Current defender Laney Rouse scored an own goal to level the match.

Gotham ended its playoff run without recording a shot on target. Own goals kept the defending champions in contention but weren't enough to carry them all the way.

In the final minutes of regulation, the match appeared to head toward extra time. But the Current didn't need more time; they just needed one moment.

Their opportunity came in the 88th minute. A handball by Gotham gave Kansas City a direct free kick.

Defender Izzy Rodriguez stepped up to take the kick but delivered a pass into the penalty area. Forward Haley Hopkins finished the assist with a goal off the crossbar.

Hopkins' game-winner marked the first postseason goal of her career. After the match, she spoke with reporters during ABC's postgame broadcast.

"This playoff run was definitely built in the first week of preseason," Hopkins said when asked about building confidence and mentality during the postseason. "The grit and resilience of this team was evident in the game tonight."

Both Washington and Kansas City have reached the NWSL Championship before, though their most recent championship appearances ended in defeat. Next week, both will battle for a different ending.

The Spirit and the Current will return to Audi Field for the NWSL Championship on Nov. 21. Kickoff is at 8 p.m., with the match airing on CBS and streaming on Paramount+.