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CALGARY PITCHER SPARKS 'BABY BRAVES'

The latest Canadian to make a big splash in Major League Baseball is part of one of the best early stories of 2018 — the Baby Braves.

Mike Soroka of Calgary, all of 20 years old, made his major league debut May 1 and came away a winner, going six innings and giving up only one run in an eventual 3-2 victory by visiting Atlanta Braves over star pitcher Noah Syndergaard and the New York Mets.

Soroka, picked from Canada's junior national team in the first round of the amateur draft by Atlanta in 2015, is one of three Braves who comprise the youngest trio in all of baseball — the others being outfielder Ronald Acuna, 20, and infielder Ozzie Albies, 21.

All three have been highly touted for the last couple of seasons, and Braves fans have been eagerly anticipating their arrival with the big club. That all three of them have apparently matured enough to make the team in 2018 has been a surprise, but not totally unexpected.

Acuna has been the No. 1 rated prospect for the past 12 months and was called up in late April from AAA Gwinnett. Through his first nine games, Acuna was batting .342, showing power, base-running skills and speed in the outfield. Albies, the old guy of the three at 21, has been with the Braves all season and the 5-foot-8 165-pounder pounded 10 home runs by early May, two off the league lead. Overall, the Braves were leading the entire National League in almost every offensive category, with veterans Freddie Freeman, Nick Markakis and Ender Inciarte joining with the kids to beat up on opponents. Their team batting average of .275 on May 5 was 20 points higher than next-best. Soroka joined the Braves on the first day of May, and stymied the Mets, and if he carries on as he did in his debut, the Braves' starting rotation (Julio Teheran, Brandon McCarthy, Mike Foltynewicz and Sean Newcomb are the others) would rank among baseball's best.

"He (Soroka) was really good. It's not like it shocked me," Braves manager Brian Snitker told Mike Fitzpatrick of the Associated Press. "The stuff, the composure, how he went about it was all very impressive."

Atlanta management has been promising fans that the current 'rebuild' would bear playoff fruit by 2019 or 2020 at the latest. From the looks of things after the first month (the Braves overtook the Mets for top spot in the NL East on May 2), that rebuild might find success in 2018.

- **Dwight Perry** of the Seattle Times: The two youngest players in Major League Baseball — **Ronald Acuna Jr.**, 20, and **Ozzie Albies**, 21 — both homered for the Braves in a win over the Reds. Not that they're young or anything but ... after the game teammates took them to Dairy Queen."
- TC in BC: "**Colin Kaepernick's** tryout was cancelled at the last minute by the Seahawks. His agent wanted Colin to be in the game only when Seattle was up by more than 17 points inside the two-minute warning, and he could just come in and take a knee."
- Hall of Fame golfer **Sandra Post** in Scoregolf Magazine, on golfers coping with age: "Don't confuse yourself with wine, you don't get better as you get older."
- **Randy Turner** of the Winnipeg Free Press, on Twitter: "I'm cool with Preds fans throwing catfish on ice because it finally means there's something in arena with worse whiskers than **Patrik Laine**."
- **Norman Chad** of the Washington Post, on the NFL draft: "I last watched the NFL draft in 2005; after intense therapy, doctors removed **Chris Berman's** voice from my head by 2009."
- Comedy writer **Alex Kaseberg**: "A 20-year-old Colorado man has been bitten by a rattlesnake, a bear and a shark. My advice to him is to avoid the Westminster Dog Show at all costs."
- Headline at the onion.com: "Bears GM Wavering Between Drafting Good Player Or Bad Player."
- Headline at sportspickle.com: "**Teddy Bridgewater** announces retirement: 'I didn't do all this rehab to play for the Jets' "
- **Janice Hough** of leftcoastsportsbabe.com, after **Carmelo Anthony** said he'll refuse to play a bench role for the Thunder next season: "Proving once again: Maybe you can't cure cancer, but you can sometimes trade it."
- New Raiders coach **Jon Gruden**, to reporters, on critics who panned him for using first- and third-round draft picks on offensive tackles: "We're not playing seven-on-seven here. We don't get to count steamboats or three-Mississippi before they rush."
- **RJ Currie** of sportsdeke.com, after Bleacher Report called the UFC heavyweight championship 'the hardest title to keep': "For my money it's world's oldest man."
- Comedy writer **Jim Barach**: "The NBA has warned **Drake** about using 'bad language' after an incident with Cleveland's **Kendrick Perkins**. How white is NBA Commissioner **Adam Silver** to actually tell a rapper with a straight face to watch his language?"

Care to comment? Email brucepenton2003@yahoo.ca