

How Billy Brewer Helped the Kansas City Royals Win the World Series

Major League Baseball pitcher Billy Brewer was a pretty good pick in the Rule 5 draft by the Kansas City Royals before the 1993 season. Brewer was a solid left-handed pitcher who would throw for three seasons out of the Royals bullpen. Clearly, his work in the Montreal Expos farm system was good enough for the Royals to give him a flier.

In the Rule 5 draft, teams select a player from another team's farm system who meets a certain criteria. The upside is that you have a chance at getting a free talent, but the catch is that player has to remain on the active Major League roster, or on the disabled list, for the entire season.

While many Rule 5 picks don't have much of a MLB career, the scouts were absolutely correct about Brewer. Their confidence in his left arm was worth the investment, and he'd deliver positive value right away. But, neither Brewer nor the Royals knew that over time, the Royals would inevitably acquire a core of players to help them win it all. Billy Brewer, through his trade tree, would lead to the 2015 World Series win for the Missouri ball club.

Before we get into Billy Brewer's Major League Baseball career, you're probably wondering, what is a trade tree? Essentially, whenever a player is traded to another team, you begin what is known as a trade tree. Every move that follows that move involving any players in that trade becomes part of that player's trade tree; for example, Billy Brewer would eventually be traded for another player. If that player is eventually traded, or offers any sort of compensation with draft picks, Brewer's trade tree would grow.

So, what happened to Brewer and why would he ultimately be traded?

Brewer's Happy Days with the Kansas City Royals

In a November 2015 interview with Clubhouse Conversation, [the 6-foot-one Brewer talked about just how much he loved Kansas City](#) and what a shock it was for him to be drafted by them out of the Montreal Expos organization. He even revealed that while during his first spring training with the Expos, he dealt with extreme homesickness, and even considered quitting!

Both Brewer and the Royals are quite glad he didn't quit! In his first full season in Major League Baseball, 1993 with the Royals, he pitched in 46 games with 39 innings pitched. He ended up with 2 wins and 2 losses credited to his name, with a solid 3.46 ERA (34 percent better than league average in '93), a performance good for a Baseball Reference Wins Above Replacement of 0.8 WAR. That's a pretty solid Rule 5 pick.

The Royals would be happy to have Brewer return to the Major League bullpen in '94, and he wouldn't disappoint. In the strike-shortened 1994 season, Brewer was even better, pitching in 38 and two-thirds innings over the course of 50 games with a sparkling 2.56 ERA, good for an ERA+ of 197 or 97 percent better than league average. Baseball Reference credits the pitcher with 1.9 WAR, and he had 4 wins against just one loss credited to Brewer's name.

Considering that Brewer came in most often just to get out left-handed batters for those first two seasons, he was providing enormous value for the Royals. Strangely enough, despite that he was mostly deployed against lefties in his career, inevitably Brewer would finish his career actually better against right-handed batters than left-handed batters, as righties hit .244/.341/.387 against him, while lefties hit .269/.352/.483.

Living up to his task as a "lefty specialist," Brewer was quite excellent against lefties in 1993, allowing them to hit just .183/.286/.333 in 70 plate appearances VS righties hitting .267/.361/.467 in 87 plate appearances. So, the Royals deployed him correctly; it's just that there were a lot of righties he'd inevitably face due to pinch hitters or lineup construction.

In 1994, however, these left/right "platoon" splits dramatically flipped, with lefties suddenly hitting .237/.303/.475 in 66 plate appearances against him, while righties hit just .184/.292/.263 in 91 PA. Naturally, these splits led the Royals to think, hey, this guy is actually just good no matter who he's facing. Still, given the information at the time, it's not surprising that the Royals decided to lean on him more in 1995.

Unfortunately for Brewer, something very bizarre happened in 1995. Lefties not only hit better than righties off of him, they cleaned his clock. Left-handed batters hit a whopping .301/.376/.518 in just 93 PA against him in 1995. The story was slightly better against righties, with them hitting a collective .282/.357/.427 in 116 PA.

According to Baseball Reference, [lefties hit Brewer 14 percent better than average than other lefties, and righties hit 27 percent better than average against other lefties](#). Essentially, Brewer turned the left-handed hitters he faced into 1995 Bernie Williams and the right-handed hitters into prime David Segui, both star hitters at the time.

At this point, after running a clearly ineffective Brewer out there for 48 games, it was time for the Royals to move on from the lefty. In 1995, Brewer was "worth" -0.1 WAR, so while he didn't kill the team, it seemed he was about washed up. So, what would they get out of a Rule 5 pick who had already provided them two strong years with only one bum year?

One of the Best Trades in Kansas City Royals History?

What the Royals didn't realize was that trading Brewer to the Los Angeles Dodgers on December 17, 1995 would start an incredible chain of events that would inevitably lead to the Kansas City Royals

winning their 2nd ever World Series in 2015. Right away, though, the Royals made a very good trade, flipping Brewer for infielder Jose Offerman.

According to the website MLB Trade Trees, Brewer netted the Royals 9.7 WAR in this trade, as Offerman proved to be a well above average player for Kansas City for three seasons.

You might wonder, what the heck were the Dodgers thinking trading an All-Star infielder (Offerman was an All-Star in 1995) for a left-handed relief pitcher on the downswing? While Offerman later became famous for being extremely cranky, and even had an explosive temper at that point, for a time, Jose was actually a heck of a ballplayer. It was only his, let's call them character concerns, that gave the Dodgers pause in wanting to retain him. We'll get back to Offerman shortly.

As for Brewer, he never pitched for the Major League Dodgers, although he pitched to a solid 3.13 ERA in 31 AAA games for Albuquerque. In June, he was traded to the Yankees for pitcher Mike Judd. Indeed, Judd would pitch for the Dodgers, but not well, in coming years. Brewer pitched poorly for the Yankees Triple-A team, made four forgettable appearances with the Yankees, and was released after the season. Brewer's career wasn't over, though.

Meanwhile, Offerman would be an above average hitter, .303 batting average, .384 on-base percentage, and a .417 slugging percentage, good for an OPS+ of 104. Playing mostly first base, Offerman was worth 2.5 WAR, an above average regular overall.

Brewer would be signed by the Oakland A's before the 1997 season, but had two terrible innings before being released. Fortunately, Brewer would get a second chance in 1997 with the Phillies. Back to his old lefty specialist role, he made 25 appearances over 22 innings, and provided the Phils with 0.4 WAR of value.

Sadly, that would be the end of Brewer's effective pitching career. The Phillies would bring him back in 1998, but he only recorded one out between two appearances, and gave up four runs. It appears that he was hurt for most of that season, as he never pitched again that year. He'd return in 1999, but he spent most of the season stashed away at Triple-A. Brewer pitched fine at Triple-A, but when he did come up to the Majors, he was awful, pitching to a 7.01 ERA in 25 appearances.

Brewer hung on with the Baltimore Orioles organization, but after pitching OK for the Rochester Red Wings Triple-A squad, he was out of baseball after the 2000 season.

For the Royals, Offerman wasn't quite as good in 1997, but still recorded 1.9 WAR, rating him as about a league-average starter, now playing mostly second base. In 1998, however, Offerman had the best season of his career, garnering 5.3 WAR playing primarily second base. He couldn't have chosen a better time to "go off" as he was about to be a free agent.

It's mighty possible that Brewer doesn't realize that his trade to LA netted the Royals an above average starting player. But, he never could've known what Offerman *leaving KC* would bring the Royals further prosperity!

Would the Jose Offerman Compensation Draft Picks Pay Off?

After the 1998 season, Offerman became a free agent for the first time. Due to his breakout season, the current free-agent compensation system at the time was good enough to net the Kansas City Royals two compensation picks after he signed with the Boston Red Sox.

As the Royals weren't in a competing position, they were happy to take the free picks. This made the Billy Brewer return even better: they got two great seasons, plus a decent one, out of Offerman for Brewer, along with two additional lottery tickets.

After all, Offerman hit .306/.385/.419 in those three years with Kansas City, one of them being only 106 games, for an OPS+ of 108. While he wasn't the best defensive, he was above-average at first base and barely below average at second base, while being a bit scary at shortstop. All in all, this was the best Offerman ever played, and the Royals got him for just Billy Brewer

At first, the Royals may have appeared to be cheap and let go of a budding star. Offerman returned to the All-Star Game in 1999 with the Boston Red Sox. Just as he had been in KC, he was a solid on-base threat with speed, stealing 45 bases in 1998.

But, the Royals would look like geniuses in the long run. Offerman would have just that one All-Star quality season left in him before injuries torpedoed his ability to run, field, or hit for any kind of power. Inevitably, he'd run himself out of baseball with his growing dissatisfaction with watching his playing time evaporate. To be fair, teams didn't treat him all that well, either. Ultimately, Offerman's temper got the better of him.

So, what were the selections that the Royals made from their compensation draft picks from Offerman. The Royals made one good pick and one not so good pick. The not-so-good one was Jay Gehrke, who never played in the MLB. But, the other pick turned into a solid pitcher in Mike MacDougal. The right-handed pitcher would earn an All-Star appearance in 2003, alongside teammate and solid MLB player Mike Sweeney, although his overall season numbers weren't great.

In all, MacDougal was worth 2.4 WAR in exactly 162 games over his Royals career, which enjoyed its share of injuries. Coincidentally, that's perfect for a full season worth of games, and you can't argue with 2.4 WAR of production from any one player over that span of games. He was a perfectly fine pick. At this point, Billy Brewer had given the Royals both Offerman and MacDougal.

The Strange Trade History of Mike MacDougal

The story of Billy Brewer's trade history continues well past the lefty's own retirement after the 2001 season. It continues with the trade of Mike MacDougal to the Chicago White Sox in 2006. At first, this trade didn't look so good for the Royals, who would trade MacDougal for pitching prospect Tyler Lumsden, as well as Dan Cortes from the Seattle Mariners. Lumsden never reached MLB as the

promising pitching prospect imploded in 2007. Cortes never pitched for the Royals, although hilariously, he'd kick around long enough to make his Major League Debut in 2010... for the Mariners.

Meanwhile, MacDougal finished out the 2006 season with excellent numbers. He'd waffle back and forth between being effective and ineffective, but carve out a Major League Career through the 2012 season. But, the Royals would still yet get something out of MacDougal.

Believe it or not, it would be the Royals themselves that would get Cortes back to the Mariners; Cortes would be a part of Brewer's trade tree in an unexpected way! As it happened, Cortes pitched fairly well in the minors for the Royals. It's fair to say he pitched well enough to get a look in both 2007 and 2008, and never did get a shot with the MLB Royals. Cortes fell off a bit in 2009, before the Mariners suddenly called and were interested in having him back.

Soon enough, Cortes was traded back to the Mariners along with another guy who never made the majors, and pitched even worse for the rest of 2009 and 2010 in the Mariners system. Still, Cortes would eventually get to pitch a few Major League Innings for the Mariners over the next two seasons. Fortunately, the Royals got back a very interesting guy for Cortes and the other minor leaguer.

Giving up Cortes, the Royals acquired shortstop Yuniesky Betancourt, widely known as one of the worst full-time defensive shortstops in Major League history. However, Betancourt hit *just* enough as a shortstop that he was actually a league-average regular in 2006 and 2007 for the Mariners. But, his bat fell off a bit in 2008 and off a cliff in 2009.

After the trade, Betancourt would play even worse for the Royals in 2009, but rebounded in 2010. Unfortunately, while his bat returned, his glove was worse. In the end, it looked as if the Billy Brewer trade tree would end here with Betancourt. This is sad considering that Dan Cortes was probably wasted for the better part of three years in Triple-A, and had thrown many of his best bullets by the time he reached MLB in Seattle.

This is when the story takes an unexpected turn. Betancourt would be traded in the 2010 offseason to the Milwaukee Brewers, alongside ace pitcher Zach Greinke, growing too expensive for the Royals to afford. Who did the Royals get back?

The Best Trade in Kansas City Royals History?

In exchange for Zach Greinke and Yuniesky Betancourt, the Royals got back some interesting players. Their names were Lorenzo Cain, Alcides Escobar, Jeremy Jeffress, and Jake Odorizzi. In hindsight, you may think Betancourt was a bit of a throw-in, as Greinke was obviously the focus of the trade. However, in retrospect, we know that the Brewers saw Betancourt as a *starting shortstop* for 2011.

Perhaps the Brewers weren't wrong, because the Brew Crew rode Greinke and Betancourt's literal replacement level play to a playoff berth. Betancourt actually hit extremely well in the postseason, but was let go after the 2011 season. In December, Yuniesky signed with the... Kansas City Royals! He'd be dreadful in 2012 in limited action for the Royals, but still. So, Brewer's trade tree included Betancourt, who the Royals got right back.

Greinke did pitch two great seasons for the Brewers before they themselves needed to get something for the impending free agent. In the end, the Brewers got back only Jean Segura, a very good player, of course, but not at all reaching what the Royals ended up with.

Without Betancourt being involved in that Royals trade, it's likely that the Royals wouldn't have received the king's ransom that they did, although in retrospect, those four players for a season and a half of Greinke probably doesn't look so bad. How much of that trade could be attributed to Betancourt himself, and so the Billy Brewer trade tree, is nebulous, but it's an obvious connection that must be honored in the trade tree!

All four players would go on to solid MLB careers. Jeffress would be traded for cash in November 2012, but still pitch in MLB through 2020. Strangely, after an amazing stretch with the Cubs in 2020, Jeffress didn't make the Nationals in 2021, and wasn't resigned in 2022 for some reason. As it would turn out, Jeffress was the only guy from the Betancourt/Greinke trade that didn't work out for the Royals.

[MLB Trade Trees shows just how big of a trade Betancourt/Greinke was for the Royals](#), crediting them with 30.76 WAR from this trade. Lorenzo Cain would become one of the better center fielders in baseball before he left in 2017... going to the Brewers. Cain alone would be worth 24.7 WAR for KC, including a 7 WAR season in 2015, the year the Royals would win it all.

Alcides Escobar would be up and down during his Royals tenure, but overall, be worth 8.1 WAR over the course of 8 seasons as a regular starter at shortstop. In fact his one All-Star appearance was in 2015, in which he also won a Gold Glove. He was worth only 1.0 WAR that season, although the Gold Glove wasn't entirely unwarranted, as he did post 8 Defensive Runs Saved that year. Even if you consider that Betancourt as a straight swap for Escobar in that blockbuster trade, the Royals still won big time, doing justice to the Brewer trade tree. (Isn't it ironic that the Brewers would be so heavily involved in Billy Brewer's trade tree?)

Odorizzi didn't even stay that long, with only two mediocre starts before being traded to the Rays alongside Mike Montgomery and Wil Myers in 2012 for then ace James Shields, Wade Davis, and Eliot Johnson. While Johnson straight up stunk and got picked off waivers in August 2013, the other two became key pieces of the Royals ascent, although Shields would actually leave KC in the 2014-15 offseason. Meanwhile, Wade Davis would become the best closer in baseball for a few years.

In retrospect, the Royals won that Odorizzi-Montgomery-Myers trade, too, with MLB Trade Trees crediting them for about 7 WAR. Eventually, as Wade Davis started to show signs of decline, they flipped him to the Cubs in the 2016-2017 offseason for Jorge Soler. While Soler had a huge HR season with 48 in 2019, injuries hampered him in 2017, 2018, and 2020. This made Soler worth just 1.4 WAR over 4 seasons, although that included only 395 games and above-average offensive production in that span of games.

In 2021, the Royals decided to cash in on Soler's power potential by flipping him to the Braves for promising relief pitching prospect Kasey Kalich. The Braves won the World Series with some help from Soler; Kalich struggled in the latter half of 2021, but Soler's power bat helping towards the World Championship easily trumps any disappointments from him.

The End of the Billy Brewer Trade Tree

Sadly, the Billy Brewer trade tree ended in March 2023, with Kasey Kalich being released from the Royals farm system. This is too bad, as [FanGraphs rated Kalich as a 35+ Future Value going into the 2022 season](#). His fastball, curveball, and cutter all ranked as above average, and his strikeout to walk ratios were excellent to that point. Sadly, Kalich went backwards since then, thanks to the below-average command scouts saw as a potential breaking point. The trade tree is now complete with that release, with the Royals having nothing to show for their spoils any more.

In any case, the Royals fan-base has Billy Brewer to thank for this trade tree. Granted, his part in the tree led directly to Yuniesky Betancourt. But, without Betancourt, that Greinke trade is nowhere as incredible for the Royals. After all, the Brewers did value Betancourt as a starter!

The Royals only won 65 games in 2022, and the 2023 season started off with a similar pessimism. But, Royals fans don't have far back to look for happier times. In any case, thanks must be given to Billy Brewer. Your trade to the Dodgers set in motion a chain of events that helped bring the city you loved more than a few bright talents, and a World Championship, twenty years later.

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Also, for a laugh, check out this obviously very fake and hilarious piece from the [Catching Up with the 1994 Royals about Billy Brewer](#) selling his above-ground pool business and moving to Dubai with Suzanne Somers.