

## **AL Central: Who's buying, who's selling?**

By Jeffrey Flanagan MLB.com @FlannyMLB

The second quarter of the 2018 season is in the books, and by now, each team has a much clearer picture of whether it is a pretender or contender, and a seller or buyer come the non-waiver Trade Deadline.

Expect a lot of activity in the selling department from almost every team in the American League Central.

### **INDIANS**

What we've learned

Following a lineup-wide cold spell in April, the Indians' offense has been one of the top groups in the AL, led by the potent duo of Francisco Lindor and Jose Ramirez. The bullpen disarray that arrived in May has since been calmed via some unexpected sources (Neil Ramirez and Oliver Perez at the top of the list). The rotation has remained the roster's backbone, though now with rookie Shane Bieber at the back end.

The landscape of the AL Central has helped the Tribe overcome a heap of obstacles through the first three-plus months, but there are still areas of concern. The relief corps could still use some reinforcements (getting Andrew Miller back healthy for the second half will be key). The offense, while productive, is very top-heavy and has a few spots that could be strengthened (second base and the outfield).

Hope to accomplish

Adding an impact reliever is expected to be the priority for the July 31 Trade Deadline. Cleveland could also boost its lineup via help for center field or right field. With Ramirez able to move between second and third, the Indians also could target those positions for an upgrade.

Stock watch

The Tribe is buyers with prospects to offer. If the Indians want to take on a large contract, the team may need to shed some of the payroll already in place.

### **ROYALS**

What we've learned

The Royals struggled just as much offensively in the second quarter as they did in the first quarter. In fact, they went through a stretch in June during which they scored four or fewer runs in 19 consecutive games. They also set a club record with 23 straight games without a double-digit hit output. That added up to a franchise-worst 5-21 record in June. What we learned was that Kansas City, while knowing it would struggle as it launched the club's rebuild, is worse than even it imagined.

Hoping to accomplish

Fans can take some solace that the Royals' front office has the big picture in mind, having already dealt outfielder Jon Jay to the Diamondbacks for two prospects, one of which, right-hander Elvis Luciano, is already Kansas City's No. 27 prospect per MLB Pipeline. Closer Kelvin Herrera was dealt to the Nationals for three prospects, including outfielder Blake Perkins (Royals' No. 14 prospect) and third baseman Kelvin Gutierrez (No. 7). Deals such as those were the offseason goal for general manager Dayton Moore, whose mission was to restock the farm system. Add in the five college pitchers Kansas City got among the top 58 picks in the Draft, and the system is definitely on its way to being reloaded.

Stock watch

Let the fire sale begin. The Royals will be looking to move anyone finishing out a one-year deal -- third baseman Mike Moustakas, first baseman Lucas Duda, right-hander Jason Hammel, utility man Alcides Escobar, new closer Wily Peralta, backup catcher Drew Butera and so on. Obviously, the return will be marginal for most because they are rentals or are in the midst of subpar seasons, but there's no point in not trying as the team is on pace for a record-loss season anyway. Kansas City might also entertain offers on left-hander Danny Duffy and super utility man Whit Merrifield.

### **TIGERS**

What we've learned

While the Tigers overachieved early in the season, they're still a rebuilding club with growing pains. An 11-game losing streak over the second half of June was a reminder of that. Young hitters like JaCoby Jones and Jeimer Candelario, the latter of who was bordering on All-Star consideration for a stretch, still have growing pains. The bullpen remains a work in progress beyond Shane Greene and Joe Jimenez, and Greene is now injured. Miguel Cabrera's season-ending biceps injury gave Detroit a glimpse of how its lineup will have to transition as Cabrera ages and becomes less of a focal point in the middle of the order. The short-term result was a lineup that has become more aggressive manufacturing runs but could still use another young impact hitter or two.

Hoping to accomplish

The Tigers will continue trying to stockpile prospects, especially on the hitting side. They don't have to be Major League ready so much as they have to carry potential.

Stock watch

Detroit will be a seller. Veterans like Francisco Liriano and Mike Fiers will be obvious trade candidates, as would Greene if healthy. The real question will be whether the Tigers get the kind of offer that would convince them to trade Michael Fulmer with four years of control before free agency. They'll certainly listen.

### **TWINS**

What we've learned

Just like in the first quarter of the season, the Twins remained inconsistent and haven't been able to put together a run to get back into contention. They're coming off a rough six-day trip in Chicago, losing five out of six against the White Sox and Cubs. Minnesota has missed

players such as Byron Buxton, Miguel Sano and Ervin Santana, with Buxton out with fractured left big toe, Sano optioned to Class A Advanced Fort Myers to work on his conditioning and Santana still out after surgery to repair his right middle finger.

Hoping to accomplish

The Twins would love to find a way to get back into contention, much like August last season, when they went on a run even after being sellers at the Trade Deadline. But they've showed no signs of any kind of turnaround, so they're likely to be sellers at the Trade Deadline.

Stock watch

Barring a dramatic turnaround, Minnesota is poised to be a seller. The Twins have several players in the last year of their deal such as Brian Dozier, Eduardo Escobar, Fernando Rodney, Zach Duke and Lance Lynn. Logan Morrison hasn't played well enough to get traded, Joe Mauer has a full no-trade clause and Santana isn't expected to be back soon enough to be dealt. The most interesting decisions will be what they decide to do with Escobar and Dozier, who are both clubhouse leaders.

WHITE SOX

What we've learned

General manager Rick Hahn apparently was on the mark in saying Year 2 of the rebuild, the talent-development phase, could be the toughest. Top prospects such as second baseman Yoan Moncada and right-hander Lucas Giolito have struggled during their first full season in the Majors, while right-hander Carson Fulmer was sent to Triple-A Charlotte after his struggles in the rotation. Outfielders Eloy Jimenez and Luis Robert, the organization's No. 1 and No. 3 prospects, respectively, per MLB Pipeline, are also dealing with injuries.

The biggest need the team has is patience, something the White Sox have practiced since the rebuild began. Development isn't always linear, as Hahn has stated numerous times, and learning to fail at times becomes part of that development.

Hoping to accomplish

The Trade Deadline has a different feel in 2018 compared to '17 for Chicago, in that there's not as big of a focus upon talent acquisition. But the White Sox have players who could draw interest, such as rejuvenated starter James Shields and closer Joakim Soria, who did not allow a run over 12 June appearances. Chicago certainly will listen to offers on anyone, including Jose Abreu, but it seems unlikely any team will match the high value in which the White Sox hold their first baseman.

Stock watch

The White Sox most likely will be sellers. They also could be buyers if a young player becomes available who fits their big-picture rebuild plan. But Chicago certainly won't cut into anything it has painstakingly built up over the past two years.

### **Roberto Pérez details how he nabbed a wannabe base-stealer at a critical time**

**By Zack Meisel 3h ago**

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — Whit Merrifield was dancing, and Roberto Pérez knows a base-stealing two-step when he sees one.

Pérez dared Merrifield to take off for third base in the eighth inning Wednesday night. Merrifield obliged. Pérez erased him in a matter of seconds, with José Ramírez applying the tag on the tail end of the catcher's on-target throw.

Kansas City's potential tying run? Dismissed. Pérez pumped his right fist. Add another defeat to the Royals' long list.

Here's the scene: The Indians clutched onto a 3-2 advantage, but Merrifield opened the bottom of the eighth with a double to left field. After Rosell Herrera flied out, Salvador Perez approached the plate.

Allow the Tribe catcher to take us through how the play unfolded.

I was watching Merrifield since he got on second base. He gave me the sign, pretty much. He was being aggressive and faking like he was going to try to steal.

Salvador Perez, who had singled and struck out twice in his first three battles against Trevor Bauer, fouled off the first pitch of the encounter.

The first pitch was a cutter. I was going to call a curveball on the second pitch, but before I even started the sign, Merrifield got out there (pretty far off the bag). So, I took a chance.

Bauer throws a lot of breaking balls and I just called a fastball up and in. I thought, in that situation, he was going, so I called a fastball in and he hit me right in my chest and I got a snap throw.

Bauer wasn't thrilled with the location of his pitch — the 96 mph fastball sailed high and inside, far out of the zone — but it ended up working out to the Indians' advantage.

"It just happened to miss on a path that was really good for 'Berto," Bauer said. "The transfer was clean. The throw was right on the money."

He threw it to where my momentum was going, toward third base. Ramírez put the tag on him. I was fired up. That could've been a man on third base with less than two outs, so that was huge.

With Merrifield erased, the Royals had the bases empty and two outs. Salvador Perez grounded a single up the middle on the ensuing pitch, a 97 mph heater just off the outside part of the plate. Oliver Pérez — quite the popular surname in this tale — replaced Bauer and struck out Lucas Duda to push the game along to the ninth inning.

“That was a big, big play in the game,” Terry Francona said. “If he gets to third with less than two outs, we have to play the infield in. They have a good hitter up. That was a really good play.”

Pérez has had some issues with his transfers this season behind the plate. On occasion, he has risen from his crouched stance, only to have the ball squirt out of his hand as he readies to heave it toward second base. He had no trouble Wednesday night, as he threw out a pair of runners. Pérez has worked with Sandy Alomar Jr. to improve his transfer process and to avoid rushing.

If guys are having great jumps, you have the tendency as a catcher to try to do too much and try to throw a guy out before you catch the ball. Lately, I've been trying to wait for the ball and fire it to second base. So my transfer has been much better.

He had a seamless transfer in the eighth inning Wednesday, and only Miami's J.T. Realmuto has bested his pop time of 1.49 seconds on a caught stealing at third base this season, according to Statcast. A runner might think twice next time before dancing his way toward third base with the game on the line.

The way they get, even at first base — they give you that aggressiveness.

Pérez mimicked a runner's stance and took a few subtle steps to his right.

I pay attention to those small things. Those are details that, as a catcher, I can see. So I took a chance.

### **Rob Oller | Indians quietly turned around season, albeit in weak division**

Some of us hop in the car and drive 30 miles seemingly without time passing. We're here then there, not sure what happened between point A and B. Travel just happens. In a trance. It's a gift.

Apparently, the Cleveland Indians are equally gifted. On the morning of June 17, Cleveland was 36-33 (.522) and led Detroit by 2½ games in the American League Central. Travel three weeks ahead and the Indians are 48-37 (.565) and led Detroit by 11½ games entering Thursday's games.

How did we get here? The last I looked Cleveland was dragging along, losing every other game. The bullpen was a mess, the outfield was filled with replacement parts for replacement parts — OK, it still mostly is — and the postseason was hardly a certainty.

Then the bullpen began shaping up and ... well, who are we kidding? The Indians have been feasting on AL Central carcasses, which helps explain how they got from there to here with barely a notice. They have won 12 of their last 16 and are coming off a three-game sweep of Kansas City, which has lost six straight and 24 of 28.

The rest of the division is not much better, including the Tigers, who are second in the Central but would be last in the AL West and next to last in the AL East.

But, hey, Cleveland is not responsible for the Central's condition, so let's keep things positive. The Indians may not be ruling the American League, but as constituted they can cause problems in the playoffs, mostly because of their starting pitching.

Corey Kluber is 12-4 with a 2.64 ERA; Trevor Bauer (8-6, 2.45 ERA) has put much of his petulance on hold — for now — and is pitching better than ever; Mike Clevinger (7-3, 3.11) is dangerous in the No. 3 spot; Carlos Carrasco (8-5, 4.24) usually takes it up a notch in the postseason.

The bullpen is a different story, not horrific (anymore) but with a 5.01 ERA still needing improvement. Who would have thought the Indians would miss Bryan Shaw? Cody Allen remains a stellar closer (he just became Cleveland's all-time saves leader, with 140) and the duo of Oliver Perez and Neil Ramirez are solid, but Andrew Miller's health status remains iffy. The left-hander is expected to return after the All-Star break, but one wonders if pitching in multiple-inning, semi-save situations has taken a toll. The Miller of 2016 might never return.

Moving to offense, Cleveland has an All-Star tandem in third baseman Jose Ramirez (24 home runs) and shortstop Francisco Lindor (103 hits), who should be around for awhile. Ramirez is under contract through 2023, Lindor through 2021.

One could make the case for Cleveland to have six All-Stars: Kluber, Bauer, Allen, Ramirez, Lindor and Michael Brantley, who is hitting .306. Unfortunately for Indians fans, Brantley is the lone bright spot in the outfield. Right fielder Lonnie Chisenhall continues to deal with a sore calf and center fielder Bradley Zimmer remains a question mark after injuring his shoulder taking batting practice with the Clippers on June 14. Brandon Guyer suffered a deep bruise after fouling a ball off his left knee on Wednesday.

No telling what shape the outfield will be in come playoff time.

Finally, the Indians have Terry Francona, who remains among the best regular-season managers in baseball. The “regular season” distinction is important, because Francona's fondness for loyalty — at all costs — too often comes back to bite him. Think Jason Kipnis. Ah, but there we go again dwelling on the negatives. For the moment, it is enough that Cleveland is where it is. No matter how it got there.

## Clippers 6, Mud Hens 5 | Surging Clippers rally once again, gain ground on Mud Hens

By Mark Znidar

The Columbus Dispatch

It was hot and humid, and the Clippers were playing baseball for the 17th straight day. But when the game reached the later innings, their track record says they were just getting warmed up.

The situation looked grim when Columbus spotted Toledo a three-run lead and lost starting pitcher Mike Peoples to an injury with two out in the first inning.

But there was another happy ending when Nellie Rodriguez hit a two-run double to with two out in the eighth to give the Clippers a 6-5 victory over the Mud Hens on Thursday night at Huntington Park.

Columbus (45-40), which has won seven of its last eight games to pull within two games of Toledo in the International League West, is 12-7 in one-run games and leads the league with 27 wins after trailing.

"It's a great group of guys in here and everyone trusts one another," Rodriguez said. "We keep playing the games out. We're not done until the last out, so we're always grinding. We knew there was a lot of game left (after Peoples went out). We came up with a lot of clutch hits today."

Photos: Clippers 6, Mud Hens 5

With one out in the eighth, Yu Chang singled between the third baseman and shortstop, and Melky Cabrera reached on a single when his line drive glanced off the glove of second baseman Dawel Lugo.

The count was 1-and-2 when Rodriguez lined a shot off right-hander Drew VerHagen.

"I'm just trying not to chase, to stay calm, stick with my approach and get something I could handle," Rodriguez said. "I got something I could handle. Honestly, being a power hitter, you have to be comfortable to get a good at-bat."

Related content

Photos: Clippers 6, Mud Hens 5

Rodriguez clapped his hands and smiled at teammates in the dugout when he was standing on second base.

On Wednesday night, it was Brandon Barnes who drove in the winning run with a double off the fence in right-center in the eighth in a 5-4 victory over the Mud Hens.

"That was a big at-bat," manager Chris Tremie said of Rodriguez. "(The pitcher) got a breaking ball up, and he got a good swing on it. The way things are going, each night it's somebody different and they are finding different ways to win games."

None of it would have been possible without the bullpen giving up two runs and seven hits in 8 1/3 innings after Peoples walked off the mound with a possible elbow injury.

Tremie used six relievers: Luke Eubank, Stephen Fife, Jack Leathersich, Alexi Ogando, Jon Edwards and Ben Taylor. Taylor struck out Mike Gerber with a runner on second to end the game.

Fife, who is a starter, was making his first appearance since going on the disabled list May 28. He gave up two hits and struck out three in working three scoreless innings.

### Cleveland Indians, Oakland A's series preview, pitching matchups

CLEVELAND, Ohio -- Here is the series preview and pitching matchups for the Indians' series against the Athletics

Where/when: Progressive Field, Friday through Sunday.

TV/radio: SportsTime Ohio, WTAM/1100 and WMMS/FM 100.7 will carry the series.

Pitching matchups and starting times: RHP Paul Blackburn (2-2, 6.46) vs. RHP Carlos Carrasco (8-5, 4.24) Friday at 7:10 p.m.; RHP Edwin Jackson (1-0, 2.13) vs. RHP Corey Kluber (12-4, 2.64) Saturday at 4:10 p.m. and RHP Frankie Montas (4-2, 3.63) vs. RHP Shane Bieber (4-0, 2.97) Sunday at 1:10 p.m.

Series: The A's lead the Indians, 2-1, this season. The Indians lead, 1,033-911, overall.

Hot pitchers: Bieber has won four of his first five starts in the big leagues, striking out 29 in 30 1/2 innngs. Jackson has won 10 straight decisions against the Indians, including Saturday's 7-2 win at the Coliseum.

Hot hitters: Michael Brantley collected his 500th career RBI in the first inning Wednesday against the Royals. He is the first Indians' left-handed hitter to reach 500 RBI since Travis Hafner, who ended his Indians career with 688. Oakland's Jed Lowrie ranks second in the AL with 24 RBI in the seventh inning or later.

Team updates: The Indians, coming off a 5-4 trip, have won four straight games. Oakland took two out of three games from them last weekend with Blackburn and Jackson getting wins at the Coliseum. A's lead the big leagues with 72 home runs in 42 games on the road.

Disabled list: Athletics: LHP Brett Anderson (left shoulder), RHP Trevor Cahill (right Achilles tendon), RHP Jharel Cotton (right elbow), RHP Daniel Gossett (right elbow), CF Boog Powell (right knee) and RHP Andrew Triggs (right triceps) are on the disabled list

Indians - RHP Evan Marshall (right elbow), RHP Carrasco (right elbow), LHP Tyler Olsen (left lat), LHP Andrew Miller (right knee), RHP Nick Goody (right elbow), LHP Ryan Merritt (left shoulder), RHP Danny Salazar (right shoulder) and RHP Cody Anderson (right elbow) are on the disabled list. Carrasco will be activated for Friday's start.

Next: The Reds visit for a three-game interleague series starting Monday night.

#### **Connor Marabell has 4 RBI in Akron RubberDucks victory**

RICHMOND, Virginia -- Connor Marabell drove in four runs with a pair of doubles as the RubberDucks held on for their third straight victory with a 5-4 win over the Flying Squirrels.

Marabell's bases-loaded double in the third inning gave Akron a 4-1 lead and he made it 5-1 with another run-scoring double in the fifth inning. Marabell finished 3-for-4 with a walk.

Richmond kept things interesting with three runs in the sixth inning off Akron right-handed starter Dominic DeMasi.

Right-hander Jordan Milbrath pitched two scoreless innings and Argenis Angulo earned his sixth save with a hitless, scoreless ninth to preserve the win for DeMasi (6-2, 6.41 ERA).

The win was the third straight for Akron and fourth out of the past five games.

Go here to see a box score from the game.

#### **Cleveland Indians re-sign Melky Cabrera to minor-league deal; he'll report to Class AAA Columbus**

By Paul Hoynes, [cleveland.comphoynes@cleveland.com](mailto:cleveland.comphoynes@cleveland.com)

CLEVELAND, Ohio -- In the wake of Lonnie Chisenhall's left calf injury, the Indians have re-signed veteran outfielder Melky Cabrera and sent him to Class AAA Columbus on a minor league deal.

The Indians originally signed Cabrera to a minor league deal in April. They promoted him to the big leagues on May 20 and designated him for assignment on June 14 when Brandon Guyer came off the disabled list.

But with Chisenhall being lost for an undetermined amount of time with an injury to his left calf, and Bradley Zimmer sidelined in Columbus for four to six weeks with a right shoulder injury, the Indians need some outfield protection.

Cabrera, 33, hit .207 (12-for-58) with five doubles and 11 RBI in 17 games for the Indians. He hit .286 (12-for-42) with four RBI at Columbus.

#### **Cody Allen sets save record for Cleveland Indians by getting to his best stuff in a hurry**

By Paul Hoynes, [cleveland.comphoynes@cleveland.com](mailto:cleveland.comphoynes@cleveland.com)

KANSAS CITY - The sun was red in Oakland. There was a halfmoon in Kansas City. In St. Louis there was nothing but rain.

Through all that Cody Allen waited. He said he didn't think about it that much, but how could he not? Somewhere it had to be swirling inside him.

He needed two saves to become the Indians' franchise leader, but the team was so erratic on the first two stops of this just-completed nine-game trip that they didn't create a one save opportunity. His only appearance came on June 27 in a 5-1 win over the Cardinals as the Indians avoided a three-game sweep.

"We were scuffling as a club," said Allen. "I just wanted to be sharp when I went out there, because more often than not when I'm pitching we're in a tight game."

Allen's first chance at a save came Tuesday night against an overmatched Royals team. But Allen is the kind of reliever who needs to pitch and pitch and pitch. When he doesn't, things can go sideways quickly.

He came into the game in the eighth inning with a 6-4 lead, two out and runners on first and second. In Allen's words, Hunter Dozier, the first man he faced, "hit a rocket into center field." Lumbering Salvador Perez tried to score from second and almost did. Shortstop Francisco Lindor took the relay throw from center field with his back to the plate. He thought Perez would stop at third.

Perez, however, ran through the stop sign as Lindor turned and threw home. Plate umpire Chris Conroy called Perez safe, but Lindor and catcher Yan Gomes signaled to the dugout to challenge the call. A replay review quickly overturned the call on the field and Allen was out of the inning.

The ninth inning was just as tricky. Two of the first three Royals reached base. But Allen struck out Rosell Herrera and retired Perez to end it. That was save No. 139, tying him with Bob Wickman for the franchise record. After the game, manager Terry Francona congratulated Allen and said, "I hope Cody gets the record tomorrow."

That's exactly what Allen did. He was sharper Wednesday night and he didn't have to pitch in the eighth inning.

He started the ninth inning with a 3-2 lead and immediately struck out Jorge Bonifacio. But he hung a breaking ball to Alex Gordon, who doubled to right. Where Tuesday night was a grind, Allen felt a lot more comfortable on Wednesday. He struck out Dozier and Alcides Escobar for save No. 140 and the record.

"I wasn't worried about the double," said catcher Roberto Perez. "It was a hanging breaking ball. I liked our chances against Dozier and Escobar. Cody had a great fastball tonight and I made him use it."

Allen made his big league debut in 2012 under manager Manny Acta. Francona inherited him in 2013 and made him a wild card reliever because the seventh, eighth and ninth inning belonged to Vinny Pestano, Joe Smith and Chris Perez. He was at his best in the tightest spots.

"I saw Cody as a guy we could use as a wild card because of his youth," said Francona. "It worked well because he seemed to be at his best when there was traffic on the bases and he could get to his best stuff right away."

"He really took to it. Having a guy like that is so valuable and it made our bullpen way better. And because of the success he had, you're naturally going to gravitate toward him at the end of the game."

In 2014, Allen replaced John Axford at closer and made the job his over the last four months of the season. But there was no way he saw 140 saves and a 91 percent (140 saves in 154 chances) success rate coming when he Indians selected him in the 23rd round in 2011.

"Never, never," said Allen. "I think the organization probably believed in myself more than I did at the time. And I've had some very, very high character and great people within the organization help me get to this point. They saw potential in me and gave me the confidence I needed and helped my grind through some tough times. Honestly, I couldn't be more privileged to be in an organization like Cleveland. I can't imagine myself doing this anywhere else."

Allen's teammates love him, but that did not stop them from dousing him with blue Gatorade after his record-setting save. If former bullpen mate Bryan Shaw was still with the Tribe it would have been a beer shower.

"I haven't heard from Shaw, but I haven't checked my phone yet," said Allen, who also holds franchise records for appearances and strikeouts by a reliever.

The Royals sent Allen the lineup from Wednesday's game. "That was a classy thing to do," said Allen.

"He's been super dependable for us," said Trevor Bauer, who pitched 7 2/3 innings for the win on Wednesday night. "That's really what it's a testament to, durability and consistency. He hasn't hit the DL. He takes the ball every time. He does a tremendous job at the back end for us."

"When you have someone that stabilizes the last inning like that, it makes things earlier in the game a little easier because you only have to worry about covering two or three innings instead of four or five. . . As a group we couldn't be more happy for him."

Allen is 29. He said being the Tribe's franchise leader in saves is something that he'll be able to hang his hat on when his career is over. He called it a trademark moment. But as Francona said, "He's a long way from done."

But where will he be doing it? Allen is a free agent at the end of the season. The Indians in the past have talked to him about a multiyear deal, but Allen bet on himself and took it a year at a time. Now he's in line for a big payoff. He has club records, good health, postseason experience, and while last year's offseason left all sorts of free agents out in the cold, the market for late-inning relievers was red hot.

### **Rosenthal: Playing by the rules, here are my (sometimes cringeworthy) picks for the All-Star teams**

By Ken Rosenthal Jul 5, 2018 108

Here was the existential question as I made my All-Star picks, and it was most definitely not brought to you by Camping World or any other sponsor of Major League Baseball:

Should teams that stink get, uh, fewer selections?

The Miami Marlins, Pittsburgh Pirates and Detroit Tigers rebuilt over the last 12 months in part by trading former All-Stars. The Oakland Athletics, Tampa Bay Rays and Chicago White Sox built low payrolls in part because they would not pursue expensive All-Stars. The New York Mets, Baltimore Orioles, Toronto Blue Jays and Texas Rangers entered the season with ambition and flopped, and it sure does not seem like the incompetence of those clubs — and others — should be rewarded.

The players bear a measure of responsibility for the sports' current rich-man, poor-man state — the most recent collective bargaining agreement, crafted by MLB and the players' union, included no provision requiring clubs to spend at a certain minimum. But after careful consideration — ok, three minutes — I decided to follow my usual practice, picking the players on merit without holding the performances of their individual teams against them.

My magnanimous gesture somehow left me with two Mets and one Phillie — a cringeworthy outcome, if not a fireable offense. But hey, I'm playing by baseball's rules, assigning 20 position players and 12 pitchers to both the AL and NL rosters, and making sure each club, gulp, is represented.

As always, direct all of your righteous anger to the comments section below as well as to my Twitter account, @Ken\_Rosenthal. But do not — repeat, DO NOT — mention your favorite All-Star wanna-be and ask, "Not even an unfortunate omission?" The answer is, No, not even an unfortunate omission!

Oh, and don't worry: Once the withdrawals start, whether because of injury or some other unforeseen circumstance, virtually every deserving player will find his way onto the team, anyway.

Asterisks (\*) denote the starter.  
NATIONAL LEAGUE

Catcher

\*J.T. Realmuto, Marlins

Francisco Cervelli, Pirates

Yadier Molina, Cardinals

Unfortunate omissions: Willson Contreras, Cubs; Yasmani Grandal, Dodgers; Buster Posey, Giants.

Crowded position, especially considering how paper-thin the AL is at this spot. True, Molina missed nearly a month with — I can barely write these words — an awful pelvic injury, but he still leads all NL catchers with 13 homers. Then again, I would have no problem if his spot went to Contreras or Posey; Realmuto and Cervelli are their teams' only representatives.

First base

\*Freddie Freeman, Braves

Paul Goldschmidt, Diamondbacks

Max Muncy, Dodgers

Jesús Aguilar, Brewers

Unfortunate omissions: Brandon Belt, Giants; José Martínez, Cardinals; Joey Votto, Reds.

Heck, yes, Muncy and Aguilar make my team. Part of the magic of the ASG, as I wrote earlier this week, is when previously unheralded players erupt with monster first halves and prove worthy of the honor. That said, Belt, in particular, deserves better; he is enjoying his best offensive season.

Second base

\*Javier Báez, Cubs

Scooter Gennett, Reds

Ozzie Albies, Braves

Unfortunate omissions: None.

Albies and Báez are two of the most fun players to watch in the sport, and there is simply no denying Gennett, who leads the NL with a .331 batting average and ranks eighth with an .898 OPS.

Shortstop

\*Brandon Crawford, Giants

Trea Turner, Nationals

Unfortunate omission: Trevor Story, Rockies.

Story's .866 OPS is 105 points higher than Turner's, but his home-road splits (1.124-.662) are extreme, so I'm going with the greater stolen-base threat.

Third base

\*Nolan Arenado, Rockies

Eugenio Suarez, Reds

Unfortunate omissions: Kris Bryant, Cubs (injured); Matt Carpenter, Cardinals; Daniel Descalso, Diamondbacks; Anthony Rendon, Nationals.

Those omissions aren't that unfortunate. Carpenter got off to a horrible start, Rendon missed three weeks with a left toe contusion and Arenado and Suarez rank 1-2 in the NL in OPS.

I just wish I could find a spot for Descalso, who is one of the game's best utility men and a big part of the D-Backs' success.

Outfield

\*Lorenzo Cain, Brewers

\*Matt Kemp, Dodgers

\*Nick Markakis, Braves

Brandon Nimmo, Mets

David Peralta, Diamondbacks

Kyle Schwarber, Cubs

Unfortunate omissions: Albert Almora, Cubs; Bryce Harper, Nationals; Odúbel Herrera, Phillies; Rhys Hoskins, Phillies; Juan Soto, Nationals; Christian Yelich, Brewers.

Harper was practically born an All-Star and never mind his .840 OPS — I couldn't justify including him when he's batting .215. Schwarber's offense and defense have been impressive, and Peralta needs to be recognized. I struggled with including Nimmo over Yelich and the two Phillies outfielders, but Nimmo is a plus defender and sixth in the NL in OPS. It's not his fault the Mets drafted him.

Pitchers

\*Max Scherzer, Nationals

Patrick Corbin, Diamondbacks

Mike Foltynewicz, Braves

Jacob deGrom, Mets

Jon Lester, Cubs

Miles Mikolas, Cardinals

Aaron Nola, Phillies

Josh Hader, Brewers

Kenley Jansen, Dodgers

Jeremy Jeffress, Brewers

Kirby Yates, Padres

Sean Doolittle, Nationals

Unfortunate omissions: Kyle Barraclough, Marlins; Seranthony Domínguez, Phillies; Kyle Freeland, Rockies; Brad Hand, Padres; Adam Ottavino, Rockies; Richard Rodríguez, Pirates; Ross Stripling, Dodgers.

Freeland and Ottavino were particularly difficult to exclude; they deserve extra credit for pitching their home games at Coors Field, and I would be comfortable with both as injury replacements. Ditto for Barraclough and Domínguez.

## AMERICAN LEAGUE

Catcher

\*Wilson Ramos, Rays

Yan Gomes, Indians

Unfortunate omissions: None. Even the two choices are somewhat, "Meh."

First base

\*Mitch Moreland, Red Sox

José Abreu, White Sox

Unfortunate omissions: Matt Olson, Athletics; Justin Smoak, Blue Jays.

Not exactly a position of strength in the AL. Abreu's OPS in his last 150 plate appearances is .568. Olson and Smoak are good, but Moreland — while 19 plate appearances shy of qualifying for the league leaders — has both of them beat by more than 100 points in OPS.

Second base

\*Jose Altuve, Astros

Jed Lowrie, Athletics

Whit Merrifield, Royals

Unfortunate omissions: Gleyber Torres, Yankees.

Torres was on my team until he went on the disabled list on Thursday with a strained right hip. His injury opens a spot for Lowrie, who would make his first All-Star appearance at 34. I'm going with Merrifield over Mike Moustakas as my Royals rep.

Shortstop

\*Francisco Lindor, Indians

Manny Machado, Orioles

Jean Segura, Mariners

Unfortunate omissions: Xander Bogaerts, Red Sox; Carlos Correa, Astros; Andrelton Simmons, Angels.

I hate snubbing Simmons, who has never been an All-Star yet arguably is the best defender in the sport. To exclude him in the year

of his offensive breakout, even though he missed time with a right ankle sprain, seems patently unfair.

Maybe a spot will clear if Machado gets traded to an NL club before the ASG and becomes this year's Jeff Samardzija during player introductions — an official representative, but an All-Star without a country.

Third base

\*José Ramírez, Indians

Alex Bregman, Astros

Unfortunate omissions: Matt Chapman, Athletics; Eduardo Escobar, Twins; Mike Moustakas, Royals.

Escobar needs to be on the team. I just can't find a spot for him.

Designated hitter

\*J.D. Martinez, Red Sox

Shin-Soo Choo, Rangers

Unfortunate omission: Nelson Cruz, Mariners.

Cruz merits automatic consideration for his brilliant photo op with Cowboy Joe West at last year's game, and his numbers are slightly better than Choo's. Outfielder Nomar Mazara is the next most worthy Ranger, but Choo is a better choice — and he would be a first-time All-Star at 35.

Outfield

\*Mookie Betts, Red Sox

\*Aaron Judge, Yankees

\*Mike Trout, Angels

Andrew Benintendi, Red Sox

Nicholas Castellanos, Tigers

Eddie Rosario, Twins

Unfortunate omissions: Michael Brantley, Indians; Mitch Haniger, Mariners; Aaron Hicks, Yankees.

I was tempted to go with Hicks over Benintendi, but Hicks has made nearly 100 fewer plate appearances after missing the start of the season with a right intercostal strain. Benintendi is also 16-for-17 in stolen-base attempts, the best percentage in the majors.

Pitchers

\*Justin Verlander, Astros

Trevor Bauer, Indians

Gerrit Cole, Astros

J.A. Happ, Blue Jays

Corey Kluber, Indians

Charlie Morton, Astros



James Paxton, Mariners

Chris Sale, Red Sox

Luis Severino, Yankees

Blake Snell, Rays

Aroldis Chapman, Yankees

Edwin Díaz, Mariners

Unfortunate omissions: Dellin Betances, Yankees; Craig Kimbrel, Red Sox; José LeClerc, Rangers; Blake Treinen, Athletics; Collin McHugh, Astros; Lou Trivino, Athletics.

Treinen might be the most unfortunate omission on either of my rosters; he throws multiple innings often, his 0.84 ERA is the best of any AL reliever and his .446 opponents' OPS ranks sixth. I excluded him for Happ, who isn't quite at the level of the other AL starters but is the most deserving Blue Jay.