



# CHICAGO CUBS DAILY CLIPS

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## Daily Herald

'Tapping' into Cubs' recent hitting-coach history

By Bruce Miles

Chicago Cubs president Theo Epstein likes his team's hitters to grind out at-bats. Kind of like what Epstein and Co. to do with hitting coaches: Bring 'em in and grind 'em out.

Most hitting coaches employed during the Epstein era have done the equivalent of going down swinging at three pitches.

It was during a ticketholder event in the fall of 2014 when Epstein was asked about this upon the Cubs hiring John Mallee to be their third hitting coach in three years.

"We're aware of the turnover," Epstein said before delivering the punch line. "Our hitting-coach position is like the Spinal Tap drumming situation. We hope that John will solve that for us."

John did do that for the Cubs, and things looked to be going swimmingly until he was unexpectedly fired after the 2017 season because Epstein and manager Joe Maddon seemed to like Chili Davis better.

So Davis was hired as part of an entire coaching-staff purge-and-reset.

And all was well again. Until recently, when Davis was fired.

The Cubs since turned to Anthony Iapoce -- a close protégé of Mallee, of all people -- to come back to the organization and serve as hitting coach after three years in that job with the Texas Rangers.

How did we get here, and why has the volume of talk concerning the Cubs' hitting coach gone to 11, in Spinal Tap parlance?

Let's take a look.

The Jaramillo years:

The hitting-coach carousel actually got started in the fall of 2009, when former Cubs general manager Jim Hendry hired Rudy Jaramillo.

The Cubs' offense had just suffered a big fall after the 2008 team led the National League in runs scored, total bases, walks, on-base percentage, slugging percentage and victories.

"When you get an opportunity to put somebody in place that is so well respected and so universally considered at the top of his profession, you certainly jump at the chance, and that's what we did," said Hendry, who gave Jaramillo a three-year, \$2.4 million contract.

Hendry was fired during the 2011 season, and Epstein came aboard that fall. He kept Jaramillo, even talking about having the swing guru help author the "Cubs Way" manual.

But Jaramillo was fired in June 2012 as a woeful Cubs team failed to produce.

"I think it's more about philosophy going forward," Epstein said at the time. "Rudy's not to blame for the results. That's something that we're all accountable for. We put the roster together. It's probably more on us than it is on him."

To replace Jaramillo, the Cubs turned in house, to minor-league hitting coordinator James Rowson.

Rowson was a low-key hard worker whose tenure was pretty much nondescript over parts of two woeful seasons. Rowson left the organization after manager Dale Sveum was fired following the 2013 season.

The former batting champ:

The Cubs had a new manager, Rick Renteria, for 2014, and they brought in a familiar face as hitting coach.

Bill Mueller played for the Cubs in 2001 and part of 2002. The Cubs may have won a division in '01 had Mueller not suffered a gruesome knee injury in May of '01, when he slid into the wall in St. Louis trying to catch a ball.

His career recovered enough for him to win a batting title for Epstein's 2003 Boston Red Sox. He was a member of the '04 Red Sox team, which broke its own "curse" by winning their first World Series since 1918.

Mueller seemed happy to be back with the Cubs and even more happy that former Cub Mike Brumley was his assistant.

"I think it's wonderful because I was given the opportunity to pick the guy I wanted to work with," Mueller said that season. "It's been wonderful with Mike, and we have a great working relationship together. We have the same values and the same ideas and the same principles about hitting."

At the end of the season, the Cubs announced that all coaches would be welcome back for 2015 -- except for Brumley.

Mueller resigned.

Coming home to coach:

Renteria was still the manager when the Cubs turned to Mallee after Mueller resigned.

That changed a few days later when the Cubs hired Joe Maddon as manager. Even though Maddon by that time was a marquee manager and probably could have demanded more of "his" coaches, he inherited the staff, but he was allowed to bring in Dave Martinez as bench coach.

For Mallee, a native of Chicago's South Side and from a family of Cubs fans, the job was a dream come true after he had worked as the hitting coach of the Houston Astros and helped to turn Jose Altuve into an offensive force.

"I grew up a Cubs fan and always dreamed of standing on the field and representing this amazing franchise," Mallee said at the time. "I have been in professional baseball as a player or coach for more than 20 years and have never had an opportunity to see my family during the season until now."

With the Cubs, Mallee oversaw the rise of the core of young hitters assembled by Epstein and scouting chief Jason McLeod.

Part of Mallee's philosophy: "Obviously you don't want to hit the ball on the ground -- ever -- if you can help it because there's no slug (slugging percentage) there. You don't want to hit it too high especially here at Wrigley with the wind blowing in. So what we try to do is understand at what launch angle creates the hits. So anywhere between a 12- to 18-degree launch angle."

The Cubs offense dominated the NL in 2016, when the Cubs won their first World Series since 1908.

Things seemed fine at the end of the 2017 season, when Maddon and Epstein said the coaching staff would be welcomed back.

But Mallee was caught in the purge, and Maddon said it happened simply because Chili Davis became available.

He got launched, too:

During this past season, Maddon took every opportunity to downplay the "launch-angle revolution," which many interpreted as a shot at Mallee.

Mallee landed in Philadelphia as the Phillies' hitting coach, and when the team visited Chicago in June, he had good words for Epstein but barely acknowledged a question about Maddon.

Meanwhile, Cubs hitters got off to a good start and were atop or near the top of several key offensive categories at the all-star break.

Things went south in the second half. The Cubs had trouble scoring down the stretch. They lost their division lead and were quickly bounced out of the postseason.

Davis was the first to pay the price, and Epstein reaffirmed his belief that launch angle indeed is important.

What's ahead:

lapoce is friend and a protégé of Mallee, who coached lapoce in the minor leagues. Their philosophies are similar. lapoce was as a special assistant to Cubs GM Jed Hoyer while overseeing the club's minor-league hitting program from 2013-15. So he knows many of the young hitters he'll be coaching.

The Cubs have not make public comment on their coaching, saying they wanted to do so only when the staff has been finalized.

It will be interesting to see how both Maddon and Epstein spin things. And let's not forget the hitters, some of whom may not have responded to Davis' message and methods. Part of this on them, too.

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### **Daily Herald**

Rozner: Mourning the passing of a legendary Cubs doc

By Barry Rozner

When you talk about the greatest NFL coaching trees of all time, the conversation usually begins with Bill Walsh or Bill Parcells.

If there were such a conversation in sports medicine, the conversation might begin with Dr. Michael Schafer.

The Cubs' team surgeon for 25 years beginning in 1980, while also working at times for the Bears and Blackhawks, not to mention raising a family and holding down the fort at Northwestern as a professor and chairman of the Department of Orthopedic Surgery at the university medical school, Schafer passed away a few days ago at the age of 76, leaving behind quite a legacy.

As the news spread quietly within the baseball community, there was much sadness among his many friends, colleagues and former players.

"I bet the thing people don't realize about him is how many doctors he is responsible for that have gone on to have professional sports careers and private practices around the country," said John Fierro, the Cubs' trainer from 1987-96. "You would be hard pressed to find someone working in sports medicine who didn't work for, or with, Doc Schafer somewhere along the line, or worked for someone who learned from him.

"Doc's residents are all over the country working for sports teams, and several right there in Chicago right now.

"If you dug deep enough, there's probably a dozen branches, and off that dozen branches there's probably three or four dozen more branches filled with surgeons.

"That's the kind of impact he had on orthopedic surgery and sports."

Schafer's influence went beyond the operating room and classroom, as he was known for his affable demeanor and the calming effect he had on those who were ailing and those who attended to their patients.

"He was such a sweet man," said Andre Dawson, who mentioned Schafer in his Hall of Fame speech and had so many surgeries and procedures while with the Cubs that he couldn't guess on a number. "I never really looked forward to a doctor visit, but I will say Doc Schafer was one of my favorites. He was a genuinely good person.

"He had a very gentle way about him that would always make you feel better about your problem, encouraging you and letting you know it would be OK and he would get you back on the field.

"He always had a smile on his face and he could alleviate the uncomfortable feeling you had when you had an appointment to see him.

"He made you feel better. That's a skill."

Schafer was also an innovator in his field, discovering and refining surgical techniques that would help a professional or amateur return to action, but never at the cost of their long-term health.

"His surgical techniques made him one of the leaders in the country. I watched a couple. He was an artist," Fierro said. "As far as sports medicine is concerned, he was so progressive and such a great surgeon, but you judge by outcome, and he prolonged careers and saved players' ability to perform again.

"Beyond that, he always thought about a guy's ability to play with his grandkids. As far as outcomes, he was tremendously successful and a lot of that comes from staying ahead of the times.

"Every decision he made and every conversation we had was based on sound judgment, never emotion.

"Everything he did to keep Hawk on the field was just sound judgment."

And still, aside from Schafer's obvious ability, his genius was his bedside manner.

"His No. 1 attribute was his ability to connect with his patients, the athletes and co-workers," Fierro said.

"When you talk about good people, and how people say, 'You can't find someone who would say something bad about this person,' this is one of those guys.

"I've heard from so many former players, guys you would know and some you would never remember from the minor leagues, and you realize he touched so many people. They all talk about how he treated them with respect no matter who they were.

"You can't put a value on compassion, and he just had compassion for everyone. You just could not tell the difference in the way he treated a high-profile person from any other patient."

Schafer's teaching continues today, even though he is no longer among us.

"He was so humble, and that's something many of us tried to emulate," Fierro said. "I never sensed at any time that he would big-time someone, and that had a huge impact on our business.

"Sadly enough, I don't think he ever understood his impact. I don't think he ever knew how important he was. I don't think he wanted to know how important he was. That's what makes this so hard."

Godspeed Doc, and on behalf of all you have touched, thank you.

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### **NBC Sports Chicago**

Glanville: Fall to Spring - A player's offseason changes meaning with each changing season

By Doug Glanville

A few weeks after the we (the Cubs) were eliminated from the 2003 playoffs, I got a phone call from my college professor. Since it was officially the off-season, I was in the early stages of a break from following a pocket schedule to tell me where to be every day for nearly eight months.

But this was a man I could not refuse. I chose my college major to go into his field of transportation engineering and he was calling because he needed a teaching assistant to accompany him on his trip to South Africa.

One minute I could barely move off of my couch in my Chicago apartment after losing Game 7 against the Marlins. The next minute, I would be standing within miles of the Southern most point in Africa at the Cape of Good Hope. Why not? I needed the distraction so I agreed to go.

The offseason is its own transition. Leaving the regimen of routine, of batting practice and bus times, to an open ended world that you have to re-learn again. When I finished my first full major league season in 1997, I lived in Streeterville at the Navy Pier Apartments.

That offseason, I decided to stay an extra month in Chicago only to wake up panicked for the first two weeks because I thought I was missing stretch time for a home day game. A major league schedule becomes etched in your DNA after a while.

It is also a time that you get to reflect. The regular season does not give you a moment to really get perspective on what was just accomplished, what it all means, what you would change. I always joked about the T-shirt I wanted to a sell that listed all of the things a major league player figures out during the off-season. From the perfect swing to the ex-girlfriend you need to un-break-up with next week.

It all becomes so clear when a 96 MPH fastball isn't coming at you.

For years, I would arrange a training program to follow, but I quickly learned that I had to mix it up. There was only so much repetition I could stand in the off-season. So some years, I moved to the site of spring training and worked out early with the staff, other years I found a spot at home where I grew up or wherever I played during the season, to train.

I was single when I played, but now with a family, I have a better understanding of the challenges my teammates would express as they were re-engaging as a daily father again after this long absentee existence.

To keep it fresh and spicy, when I got older in the game, I enrolled in a dance studio and took a winter of dance lessons. Salsa, Foxtrot, Rumba, you name it. On Thursdays we had to dance for an hour straight, changing partners in the room every song change. Dancing with the Stars had nothing on me.

Of course, not every offseason is fun and games. There were years when I wasn't sure I would have a job the next year, or I was in the throes of a trade rumor. In 1997, I was traded from the Cubs to the Phillies two days before Christmas. In 2002, my father passed away on the last game of the season, leading the offseason to be a time of mourning.

By my final season in 2005, I thought I was officially on my couch forever. I was going to fade away into oblivion like many players do. No fanfare, the phone just would stop ringing and I would just let the silence wash over me. The Yankees had called earlier in that off-season, acting like they were doing me a favor which I turned down, then they called back later with a more open tone, seeing me as a potential key piece in their outfield with Bernie Williams slowing down quite a bit at that point.

I did get off that couch for that call, only to get released the last week of camp, so I was back on the couch, with a fiancé and some extra salt in the wounds after that final meeting with Brian Cashman and Joe Torre, who boxed me into the coaches office to tell me I was released. Released? Come on. Never had that happen before.

The Cubs players will go through all of this if they have the good fortune of playing a long time. The wave of uncertainty, the meaning of age in this game spares no one. Each offseason is a time to reset, a period where you get away, seemingly adrift from the game, then as spring gets closer, the shoreline comes up in the horizon once again, magnetically drawing you to its shores for another season.

Amazingly, you don't always know your age and what it has done to your body. 34 can't be that old, right? I can still run, or throw 95. Then those 23-year-olds in camp are the wake up call, or maybe you are that 23-year-old and can't believe your locker is next to Ryne Sandberg's.

Then you blink, and you are advising Jimmy Rollins about etiquette and realize you have become that guy, the seasoned vet, preaching about locker room respect.

For the 2018 Cubs, they fell short of their goal to repeat their 2016 magic. Failed to meet their singular destination that meant success over all else. Yet, those who come back for 2019, will not be the same player, the same person, that left the locker room at the close this season. They will have grown, changed, aged, wizened up, rehabbed, hardened. All of which means that new perspective is the inevitable part of this time off, whether you like it or not.

Baseball is a game that has this unique dynamic. The highest intensity rhythm of any sport. Every day you are tested. You are pushed to the brink by sheer attrition. According to my teammate Ed Smith, who was playing third base at the time when Michael Jordan reached third, Jordan, after playing well over 100 games in a row, said to him "Man, I have never been this tired in my entire life."

The grind.

Then it stops on a dime. Season over. Only on baseball's terms.

But you may be granted another spring. Another crack at it. Until one day, the baseball winter never ends and its time for you to plant your own spring.

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## **NBC Sports Chicago**

Report: People around baseball believe Joe Girardi is waiting for managerial job with Cubs or White Sox  
By Vinnie Duber

Joe Girardi won't be the manager of the Cincinnati Reds in 2019, perhaps because he has hopes of landing a gig in Chicago.

According to Fancred's Jon Heyman, Girardi was in the running for the Reds' managerial job (which went to former Cubs third-base coach David Bell this weekend) but pulled himself out, this after interviewing for but not getting the same position with the Texas Rangers. Heyman cites "industry speculation" that Girardi might want to remain a free agent so he can land the job of skipper in Chicago.

Heyman is of course not specific, listing a city with two major league teams, leaving this open for interpretation as either the Cubs or the White Sox.

Obviously Girardi has a history on the North Side. He had two stints there as a player, from 1989 to 1992 and again from 2000 to 2002. Joe Maddon has one year remaining on his contract, and Cubs president Theo Epstein said during his end-of-season press conference that the team has not had discussions with Maddon about an extension. After managing the New York Yankees to their most recent World Series championship in 2009, Girardi might again want a crack at managing a big-market contender.

But if Girardi is simply itching to get back to his home state — he was born in Peoria and graduated from Northwestern — perhaps he has the White Sox on his wish list, too. Rick Renteria has one year remaining on his current contract, as well, and should the rebuilding White Sox see all their young talent turn into the contender they've planned, the manager of such a team would be an attractive position to hold.

But just because folks believe Girardi wants to manage in Chicago doesn't mean there'd be mutual interest. Despite Epstein's comments that there have been no extension talks with Maddon, the president of baseball operations also backed his manager in that same press conference, refusing to blame Maddon for the team's "broken" offense down the stretch last month. And Rick Hahn and the rest of White Sox brass heap frequent praise on the job Renteria has done in his two years, describing him as an important part of player development and of establishing a culture hoped to spread throughout the organization.

Plus, it's worth mentioning that Girardi's decade-long tenure in the Bronx came to an end amid suggestion that he was unable to connect with his young players. It's unknown how much of a realistic concern that would be for any team thinking about hiring him. But the recently fired Chili Davis believed that very issue was part of the reason his time as the Cubs' hitting coach came to an end. And there are few teams out there younger than the White Sox.

Again, it's just speculation for now. But if for some reason one or both Chicago teams don't hand out new contracts to their current managers, perhaps Girardi would be interested in an opening on either side of town.

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## **NBC Sports Chicago**

There's more change coming for the Cubs this offseason, but in what form?  
By Tony Andracki



David Kaplan said it best on the most recent CubsTalk Podcast:

"I think it's gonna be the most impactful offseason since Theo and Jed have been here."

He's not wrong, which is saying something given the Cubs have had plenty of impactful offseasons in the tenure of Theo Epstein and Jed Hoyer. This is a group that added Joe Maddon and Jon Lester ahead of the 2015 season and then the next winter, added Jason Heyward and surprised everybody by bringing back Dexter Fowler a couple days into 2016 spring training.

Anytime a team sets World Series or bust expectations and instead is going home just one day into the MLB postseason, change is coming. That may be especially true with HOW the Cubs got knocked out — leading the division and boasting the best record in the National League from the All-Star Break all the way through Game 162...yet they didn't even make it to the NLDS.

It's impossible to predict exactly what changes will be coming for the Cubs because as of this writing, three teams still remain and some of the winter's biggest names (Manny Machado, Clayton Kershaw, Craig Kimbrel) have yet to begin their offseason. There's still so much that can change even before free agency opens.

So if you're looking for a bunch of predictions or projections about what is going to happen in the Cubs world this winter, you're in the wrong spot. But here's where change MAY take place over the next couple months:

#### Coaching staff

We'll start with the area that will probably have a resolution the soonest. Teams typically prefer to have their coaching staff settled as early as possible into the offseason so they can fill out the roster from there. An added bonus is the new coaches can start reaching out to players on the roster earlier in the offseason if they choose to, as well.

With the Cubs coaching staff, there very well may be more shakeup coming this fall even after Chili Davis was let go last week. All we know for certain is Anthony Iapoce will be the team's new hitting coach in 2019 on Joe Maddon's staff. Beyond that, the Cubs have not publicly confirmed that Jim Hickey or any the other coaches will 100 percent be back next spring.

#### Lineup

There's a potential the Cubs' 2019 Opening Day lineup will be far different from not only the 2018 Opening Day lineup, but also even the NL Wild-Card lineup.

Like their fans, the Cubs were unhappy with the way the offense performed in the second half, particularly in three of the final four games (the penultimate regular season contest, Game 163 and the Wild-Card game).

So much has been made of the Cubs' young core of position players over the last few years, but the evaluation has to change after a bunch of the members of "The Core" took steps back in 2018 (Willson Contreras, Addison Russell, Ian Happ, Albert Almora Jr.).

Kyle Schwarber enjoyed a bit of a resurgent season as he cut down on strikeouts, walked more and boosted his batting average while improving as a defender, but also saw a dip in power and still hasn't taken that big step forward toward one of the league's most feared run producers.

Kris Bryant also obviously experienced a dip in offensive production, but so much of that can be tied into the left shoulder injury that clearly affected his swing.

After a disappointing end to the season that highlighted the offensive shortcomings, Epstein was blatantly honest about how the evaluation of these players has to evolve:

"It has to be more about production than talent going forward," Epstein said. "And that includes our own assessments. Beyond that, it's also trying to understand why we're not where we should be with some individual players. In other words: If you look back, players who do certain things at 22 and 23 should be progressing into a better, more productive phase of their career at 24, 25 and 26.

"I'm the first one to talk about how development and progress — those aren't linear things all the time. There are a lot of ups and downs. But I think there's a trend where Javy took the big step forward, but there are other guys who went the opposite direction or have been trending the opposite direction a little bit. We have to get to the bottom of that.

"It's our job not just to assemble a talented group, but unearth that talent and have it manifest on the field. Because that's ultimately all that matters. It's an assessment on those two fronts. The talent that we have and who's going to be productive, who's not or where we can find that production. And then also understand the environment and are we doing everything that we can in creating just the right situation to get the most out of these guys."

And therein lies a perfect transition into the next category...

#### Potential trades

With that aforementioned core of young position players, the only former members of "The Core" that have been traded away are Jorge Soler and Starlin Castro. Year after year of trade rumors and yet as of this writing, guys like Schwarber and Russell and Happ remain in Cubs uniforms.

Will that change this winter? Obviously we don't know for sure, but it seems as likely as at any other point in the last few offseasons.

Reading the tea leaves, it would make sense for the Cubs to deal away at least one of those core members this winter to either bolster the bullpen or restock the farm system.

For starters, the offensive dip in the second half could portend the need for change. It's very hard for a big group of young hitters to all develop on the same path at the same pace, which means the learning curve can lead to prolonged slumps that occur all at the same time — which we've seen often the last few seasons.

Epstein was also candid about how the players aren't quite as happy with Maddon's ever-changing lineup as they once were which also means the Cubs probably have to shed some of their depth at some point if they truly want more stable playing time. Almora or Happ can't sit on the bench five times a week without completely inhibiting their development path.

The Cubs also showed exactly how they feel about this group of hitters when they went out and acquired Daniel Murphy in August, stressing the need for his "professional at-bats" in the lineup on a consistent basis at the most important time of the season.

#### Free agency

The Cubs will have World Series expectations in 2019, so once again, they figure to be big players in free agency. Even if they don't wind up with Bryce Harper or Manny Machado, they will at least kick the tires on the two superstars since they're clearly in the market for improved offense.

But beyond the big fish, the Cubs need to add to the bullpen, bolster the lineup, acquire some more shortstop depth and potentially even add a veteran backup catcher to help give Contreras more regular rest. All those moves could come from the free agent market.

#### Addison Russell

Will he be back? Even if he is still on the Cubs roster at the start of next year, would he make it through the year? The Cubs may eventually trade him, but why give up on him at a time when Epstein said it's important for the organization to support Russell and his value is also the lowest it's ever been? Strictly thinking in a baseball sense, he could be a perfect midseason trade piece.

Regardless of what happens with Russell, there is some change for the Cubs in that for the first time ever, Javy Baez will enter the official offseason as the clear starter at shortstop next year (at least for the first month).

#### Defensive puzzle

Whoever the Cubs add this offseason to help the lineup and subtract from the roster that ended 2018 will still have to fit in the same defensive puzzle somehow. For example, if the Cubs signed Machado, they could slot him in at shortstop a bunch, which opens up Baez to float and play second a bunch or third, which moves Bryant to the outfield, which moves Schwarber to the bench. And on and on with any potential move the Cubs make this winter.

On the other hand, taking guys away from the current defensive puzzle also would have ripples throughout the rest of the roster. For example, if Happ is traded away, that also removes a switch-hitter and a guy with a ton of defensive versatility away from the roster. What does that do to the depth chart in the outfield or at third base?

#### Starting Rotation

There might not be any change in terms of additions to the Cubs' rotation ahead of 2019, but that's not to say there won't be any movin' and shakin'.

Assuming the Cubs pick up Cole Hamels' \$20 million option — which they should and probably will — that will leave them with Jon Lester, Kyle Hendricks, Hamels, Jose Quintana, Yu Darvish, Tyler Chatwood, Drew Smyly and Mike Montgomery all under contract for next season and all projected to be healthy enough to pitch by the start of spring training. (Before you ask: yes, the Cubs are planning on Smyly as a starter right now; Epstein said as much in September.)

Lester, Hendricks and Quintana are locks for the Opening Day rotation, as is Hamels if that option is picked up. Darvish will surely be in the rotation, too, assuming he's fully over the elbow/triceps issue that limited him to only 40 innings in his first year in Chicago.

So what will the Cubs do with Smyly, Chatwood and Montgomery? Smyly will be on an innings limit in 2019 after missing the last two years due to Tommy John, so it's possible the Cubs opt to switch gears and just throw him in the bullpen to start the year. They may do the same with Montgomery, but will the veteran lefty be OK with that after publicly admitting he wants to start at various points over the last year-plus? Would Chatwood be OK in moving to the bullpen or would the Cubs just move him if he is still having command woes?

Epstein and Hoyer often remind you can never have too much pitching, but in a way, the Cubs may have too much starting pitching on their roster for 2019 taking up a big part of the team's payroll. Is it possible we'd see a guy get moved this winter as a result? You never know.

#### 40-man roster

This is the most mundane area, as every team makes pretty significant changes on their 40-man roster each offseason — even under the radar. There will always be shakeups with players getting DFA'd to create room for new additions, prospects added to the 40-man roster so as to be protected from the Rule 5 Draft, etc.

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### **NBC Sports Chicago**

2019 encore for Jesse Chavez?

By Chris Kamka

On July 15, Brandon Morrow recorded his 22nd save of the season with a scoreless inning in San Diego. It wound up being the last time he pitched in a game for the Cubs in 2018.

Four days later, during the All-Star break, the Cubs made a move to bolster their bullpen, acquiring Jesse Chavez from the Rangers in exchange for minor league hurler Tyler Thomas. It wasn't even the biggest trade they'd make with the Rangers that month — a little over a week later they dealt for Cole Hamels.

Despite pitching nearly half the innings, Chavez was almost as valuable as Hamels.

Chavez made his Cubs debut on July 21; from July 21 through the end of the season, 187 pitchers tossed at least 30 innings. 185 of them had a higher ERA than Chavez, while 184 of them allowed more baserunners per 9 innings.

#### Best ERA, July 21-end of season

(minimum 30 innings)	IP	ERA
Blake Treinen	32.1	0.56
Jesse Chavez	39.0	1.15
Blake Snell	61.2	1.17
Trevor Bauer	35.0	1.29
Trevor Williams	71.2	1.38
Robert Stock	6.0	1.50

#### Fewest baserunners per 9 innings, July 21-end of season

(minimum 30 innings)	IP	BR/9 IP
Blake Treinen	32.1	5.85
Blake Snell	61.2	7.15
Jesse Chavez	39.0	7.15
Jacob deGrom	93.2	7.49
Scott Oberg	30.2	7.63
Josh Hader	33.1	7.83

But how did Chavez transform into one of Joe Maddon's best bullpen arms down the stretch? According to Chavez, his own transformation started on Mother's Day.

Chavez entered a game in Houston with a 5.48 ERA in a dozen appearances, but pitched three innings with no hits, no walks and four strikeouts. From that point through the end of the season, he posted a 1.70 ERA and 0.892 WHIP.

Chavez points to a change in arm slot which resulted in better consistency and a slight jump in velocity. A glance at his release point charts show that consistency, and he added roughly one mile an hour to his fastball.

"It's kept me more consistent in the zone," Chavez said. "Things have been sharper, velocity has been a lot sharper. I was huffing and puffing trying to get a 92 (mph fastball) out there and it wasn't coming.

"Next thing you know, I dropped it and it's right there, and I'm like, 'something's wrong here.' But I just took it and ran with it."

Jesse Chavez 2018 four-seam fastball velocity

	Average	Max
Prior to May 13	92.6 mph	94.6 mph
May 13 on	93.6 mph	95.7 mph

Can Chavez be valuable in 2019? The 35-year old reliever posted the best ERA (2.55), WHIP (1.059) and walk rate (4.5% - nearly two percent better than his previous best) in 2018, and he continued to get better as the season went on.

He's a former starter who can pitch multiple innings if needed, and that's a valuable thing - especially for a manager like Joe Maddon, who uses his pitchers in a variety of ways. It's unlikely he'll have a second consecutive career year.

But he'll likely be well worth the price tag; he only made \$1 million in 2018, and even with a slight raise he should be very affordable. There's definitely room in Maddon's bullpen for a pitcher like Chavez.

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