



# CHICAGO CUBS DAILY CLIPS

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## Cubs.com

Non-tendered infielders offer intriguing options

By Jordan Bastian

Over the span of three days last week, the Cubs acquired a utility infielder, parted ways with another and then ended up with neither one in the fold. On the surface, it was a head-scratching series of transactions, but consider it a fact-gathering process for Chicago.

When the Cubs swung a deal with the Yankees on Wednesday to reel in Ronald Torreyes -- for a player to be named or cash considerations -- Chicago bought itself a few days to negotiate with the versatile infielder. On Friday, the Cubs sent Torreyes to the free-agent pool by opting not to tender him a contract, but the team established dialogue and expressed an interest in re-signing him.

Amid that course of action, the Cubs also had a chance to monitor other players being non-tendered around the Majors, providing another wave of potential alternatives. Chicago remains in need of a utility infielder, especially one capable of handling shortstop. Tommy La Stella (traded to the Angels for cash or a player to be named on Thursday) did not fit that last criteria.

The Cubs did tender a contract to shortstop Addison Russell, but he will be ineligible until May 3 while finishing a 40-game suspension for violating MLB's Joint Domestic Violence, Sexual Assault and Child Abuse Policy. Javier Baez can move from second base to short -- as he did down the stretch last season -- and Chicago has some in-house options for second (Ben Zobrist, Ian Happ and David Bote), but depth remains important.

Russell also knows that his still-unsettled contract will be non-guaranteed through arbitration, and the Cubs could part ways with the shortstop if he does not meet the standards put into place given his situation. So Chicago will continue to explore its options through both trade and free agency, and the recent non-tendered class offered some new possibilities.

With that in mind, here are some relevant non-tendered players who are now free-agents.

#### Tim Beckham

The former first overall pick (2008, Rays) was let go by the Orioles after earning \$3.4 million in '18. Beckham, 28, played mostly shortstop and third last season, but he has experience at second and first base, too. A right-handed hitter, Beckham hit .230 with a .661 OPS in 96 games this year after posting an .871 OPS in 50 games for Baltimore down the stretch in '17.

#### Wilmer Flores

The 27-year-old was dispatched by the Mets after earning \$3.4 million in 2018. Flores has not played shortstop regularly since 2015 and was used sparingly at second and third last season. He was utilized mostly as a first baseman in '18. Over the past three seasons, Flores has turned in consistent offensive numbers, compiling a .268/.315/.456 slash line and a 109 OPS+ in that span.

#### Jonathan Schoop

Schoop, 27, was an All-Star with the Orioles in 2017, when he hit .293 with 32 homers, 105 RBIs and an .841 OPS in a breakout showing. That helped him net an \$8.5 million contract for 2018, but he was non-tendered by the Brewers, who acquired him last summer. In '18, Schoop hit .233 with 21 homers, 61 RBIs and a .682 OPS. He has mostly played second, but he also has limited experience at short and third. Schoop is an aggressive hitter, posting a 3.7 percent walk rate and a 22.6 percent strikeout rate in his career.

#### Yangervis Solarte

Last season, Solarte saw his OPS decline to .655, which was down from .731 in 2017 and .808 in '16. The 31-year-old is a switch-hitter and offers depth at second, shortstop and third base, with the hot corner being his primary position. Solarte's position versatility and occasional pop could make him a useful bench player for plenty of teams. The Blue Jays non-tendered him after already buying out a \$5.5 million option.

#### Torreyes

The utility infielder who was briefly under the Cubs' control might be the most affordable option of the bunch. It might even be possible to add him on a Minor League contract, should a big league deal elsewhere prove elusive. Over the past three years with the Yankees, Torreyes slashed .281/.308/.374 in 221 games, and he can offer depth all over the infield. Torreyes also brings plus bat-to-ball ability, which is useful off the bench. For his career, he has an 85.1 percent contact rate and a 91.5 percent contact rate on pitches in the strike zone.

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#### **NBC Sports Chicago**

No matter what Cubs do this Hot Stove season, last year's failures hang over like a dark cloud

By Tony Andracki

No matter what the Cubs do this Hot Stove season, last winter's failures hang over their heads like a dark cloud.

If the Cubs truly aren't able to afford the top free agents on the open market this offseason, the main reason for that is because they've had to spend so much money in free agency on pitching the last few years. It's also because they swung and missed in a major way last winter and are still feeling the effects.

The Cubs entered last winter feeling pretty good about the state of their offense but wanted to augment the pitching staff in a big way. So they went out and handed \$198 million to Tyler Chatwood (\$38 million), Brandon Morrow (\$21 million), Steve Cishek (\$13 million) and Yu Darvish (\$126 million). They also paid Drew Smyly \$3 million in 2018 to rehab from Tommy John surgery before he and the \$7 million remaining on his deal were shipped off to the Texas Rangers last month.

The four free agent pitchers (not including Smyly, who didn't throw a single pitch) combined for 1.1 WAR (FanGraphs) across 244.2 innings in 2018.

Jesse Chavez posted a 1.0 WAR for the 2018 Cubs in 39 innings.

The Cubs paid Chavez roughly \$400,000.

They paid the other four pitchers \$54 million.

Of course, it's rather unfair to include Cishek in that bunch, as he was the MVP of the Cubs bullpen for the first five months of the year before a late-season fade. And Morrow was fantastic when healthy (22-of-24 in save chances, 1.47 ERA, 1.08 WHIP), though he didn't throw a pitch after the All-Star Game and came to the Cubs with a long history of injury issues.

Darvish was supposed to be the guy that put the Cubs rotation over the top and Chatwood was the under-the-radar arm the organization hoped would take a step forward getting away from Coors Field. Both guys were out of the rotation by Aug. 1.

"I think incomplete would be probably the kindest thing I could say [about last winter's moves]," Theo Epstein said, emphasizing that he meant the Cubs front office should get the "incomplete" grade, not the players. "There are a lot of talented players here that we didn't get off to great starts with in their times as Cubs. But we're digging in and working really hard — as are the players — to try and turn that around.

"...Our offseason moves should not be evaluated well at all and the in-season moves were pretty darn good. We're gonna have to try to have a much better offseason this time."

The Cubs already translated the in-season moves to the offseason, opting to bring Cole Hamels back on a \$20 million option.

With Darvish's health and Chatwood's control major question marks, picking up Hamels' option became a no-brainer for the Cubs — even at that lofty price tag during a time where every penny is important.

Chatwood's contract is unmovable but he's still not even 29, so there's a chance for a rebound; it's just that the Cubs can't bank on it.

Darvish is the bigger question mark, as he wasn't very good even when he was able to take the ball — 4.95 ERA, 1.43 WHIP, fifth-inning meltdowns that became a major storyline and accounted for only 0.2 WAR in 40 innings. To put that in context — Darvish was just as valuable to the 2018 Cubs as Anthony Bass and James Norwood, who each notched 0.2 WAR despite only 15.1 and 11 innings pitched, respectively.

Now that Darvish's triceps/elbow is cleaned up, can he get back to being the pitcher he was before signing the megadeal with the Cubs?

The Cubs hope so, but that's really all they can do — hope.

"I think he's in a good place mentally to go forward next year," GM Jed Hoyer said. "First year for free agents, there are a lot of pitfalls. Hopefully post-surgery, he comes back and he's ready to go for spring training."

The Cubs couldn't move Darvish's contract even if they wanted to, so instead of going out and adding to the bullpen or signing another big hitter this winter, they may be left with making a bunch of smaller moves and praying Darvish can get back on the right track.

Then there's the whole coaching aspect of last winter. The Cubs hired new hitting coaches (Chili Davis, Andy Haines) and a new pitching coach (Jim Hickey) shortly after the 2017 season ended. Those three are all out of their post, with only Haines leaving because he took a promotion with the Milwaukee Brewers.

That's a lot of shake-up on a coaching staff when Epstein stressed the importance of continuity the day after the Cubs season ended. And there could be more unrest with manager Joe Maddon heading into the final year of his contract.

The Cubs championship window is still open, but who knows for how much longer. There's an urgency from the fanbase to go out and add to a team that finished the 2018 regular season tied for the NL lead in victories.

But last winter is a cautionary tale about the major pitfalls that come with free agency and the Cubs can't afford any more misses this winter.

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### **NBC Sports Chicago**

If the Bryce Harper price tag makes the Cubs balk, here are a few cheaper alternatives

By Cam Ellis

Last week, I outlined how the Cubs have no real excuse not to go all-in on Bryce Harper.

And while I still feel that way, the thing about the Cubs is that they have never listened to me before, most definitely aren't listening to me now, and realistically will never listen to me in the future. It's entirely possible -- even probable, depending on who you ask -- that the Cubs sit down with Scott Boras, hear Harper's asking price, and politely chuckle him out of the room. It stands to \*some\* reason that spending \$300+ on multiple pieces makes more sense than spending it all on one guy, even if that one guy is a generational talent. With that said, if the Cubs aren't interested in the Harper Sweepstakes, here's a handful of guys that might be right up their alley:

Andrew McCutchen

Andrew McCutchen is still a very good baseball player. Is he the organizational cornerstone and semi-face of baseball that he was 3-4 years ago? No. But the Cubs don't need an organizational cornerstone. They need a corner outfielder who can still hit a little bit. Last season, McCutchen hit .255/.368/.424, good for a 120 wRC+. He managed to hit 20 home runs for the 8th straight season, 15 of which came

while spending half his time in the vast wasteland known as AT&T Park. To paint an even rosier picture, McCutchen's numbers across the board were well below his career norms, and his 2019 projections already point towards a positive regression. The Cubs certainly don't want to hitch their wagon to an aging outfielder for more than a handful of seasons, but a 2-3 year deal at around \$13-14 million AAV sounds about right?

Mike Moustakas

If the Cubs are deadset on moving Kris Bryant to left field full-time, Moustakas presents an intriguing buy-low option. What's interesting about Moustakas is that the Cubs would be prying him away but not one, but two NL Central rivals, as the Brewers and Cardinals are both widely considered front-runners in his sweepstakes. His slashline (.251/.315/.459) leaves a bit to be desired, but he finished with a 105 wRC+, still better than league average and roughly on-par with what Cubs' third baseman put up last season (109 wRC+). He had a better glove than Tommy La Stella or Kris Bryant did, and if you subscribe to this type of thing, he's got a penchant for clutch moments.

Michael Brantley

We covered Brantley's fit with the Cubs right here. He fits, it'd probably be a shrewd signing, and it'd be underwhelming. If that's your cup of tea, Michael Brantley is your dude!

Hunter Pence

Here's the wild card. Pence is more than likely washed; he's been an below-average offensive player for two years now. He hit .226/.258/.332 last year with an abysmal .254 wOBA. Not only was he terrible at the plate (-10 WAR), but he was almost equally-terrible in the field (-6.0). WITH THAT SAID, he's a career .271/.337/.450 hitter at Wrigley Field. He's posted a 112 wRC+ in 264 plate appearances at Wrigley, and his power (.178 ISO) clearly plays there as well. While nothing about those numbers stand out, it's the fact that the Cubs could have him for pennies on the dollar. Bringing in Pence at the vet's minimum, or even just a spring camp invite, offers almost no downside for Chicago.

With all this said, would you rather have two of the McCutchen/Moustakas/Brantley group, or one Bryce Harper?

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### **Chicago Tribune**

Former Cub Matt Szczur selling his World Series paintings for a good cause

By Mark Gonzales

Matt Szczur hasn't played for the Cubs for most of the last two seasons, but he still has an appreciation for the fans.

The outfielder with an artistic flair, who played for the Cubs from 2014 until he was traded to the Padres in May 2017, is selling prints commemorating the final out of the 2016 World Series through his foundation.

The original 3-by-4-foot painting hangs in the Wrigley Field suite of the Ricketts family. Szczur said he was asked by Chairman Tom Ricketts to produce the artwork after his painting of Anthony Rizzo and Kris Bryant was auctioned for \$35,000 at the team's annual Bricks and Ivy Ball that raises money for Cubs Charities.

"Chicago will always hold a special place in my heart because of how they treated me and what we've accomplished together," Szczur wrote in a message. "The Cubs are a great organization. The city and

fans are just as great. We'll be world champs forever, and that's something that can never be taken away."

Szczur wrote that Ricketts made a "generous" donation to his foundation for the World Series print, which gained popularity when it was posted online. Fans quickly contacted Szczur about obtaining a print, which was recently made available through his website, [szczurtheday.com](http://szczurtheday.com).

Artwork and charity have accompanied the athletic career of Szczur, a football star at Villanova who signed a \$1.5 million bonus with the Cubs as a fifth-round pick in 2011 to bypass a chance to participate in the NFL combine.

As a child, Szczur watched his father, Marc, draw, paint and carve wood. He took art classes in college, and he occasionally draws and paints to alleviate the stress of the baseball season.

"I see how happy it makes me, and I love how it can make other people happy, too," Szczur said. "I can definitely see myself pursuing this when I'm done playing. I've had teammates ask me to design and paint some stuff for them, and they love everything I've done.

"It's an option after baseball."

But for now, Szczur is focused on baseball as well as helping the less fortunate. In 2009, Szczur donated bone marrow to a 15-month-old Ukrainian girl battling leukemia and continues to raise awareness for the disease and other cancers.

Recently, Szczur's foundation donated \$10,000 to students coping with food insecurity and 50 turkeys to families for Thanksgiving.

Szczur is a free agent after appearing in 57 games with the Padres in 2018 and remains in contact with his former Cubs teammates.

"They'll always be my family," Szczur said. "Once you grind on the field with your teammates, they'll be your teammates throughout life. We were a part of something so special. It's not every day something like that (a World Series title) happens."

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