



Detroit Tigers Clips

Thursday, December 8, 2016

Detroit Free Press

Detroit Tigers, Al Avila willing to stand pat, wait for right deal (Fenech)
Tigers' Jose Iglesias drawing interest from clubs at winter meetings (Sipple)
Detroit Tigers still searching for centerfield, catcher options (Fenech)
Why Detroit Tigers are protecting Sandy Baez from Rule 5 draft (Sipple)

The Detroit News

No deal for Tigers, but 'winter is not over,' Avila says (McCosky)
No more kid gloves for Fulmer, Norris, Boyd: 200 innings (McCosky)
Tigers listened to offers on Jose Iglesias (McCosky)
Henning: Tigers deal with delayed trade plans (Henning)

MLive.com

Tigers set to leave Winter Meetings without making any deals (Woodbery)
In Rule 5 Draft, Tigers have room to make a selection (Woodbery)
Winter Meetings: Tigers' Anibal Sanchez subject of trade talk (Woodbery)

MLB.com

Stalled rebuild could work out for Tigers (Beck)
Tigers listening to interest in Iglesias (Beck)

Daily Transactions

Detroit Tigers, Al Avila willing to stand pat, wait for right deal

December 8, 2016

By Anthony Fenech/ Detroit Free Press

NATIONAL HARBOR, Md. – For the third consecutive evening at the Major League Baseball winter meetings, Tigers general manager Al Avila had nothing new to report.

The Tigers, one of the most talked-about teams of the off-season — with so many premium veteran players available in an organizational effort to decrease payroll at present and increase financial flexibility in the future — looked almost certain to leave the Gaylord National Harbor Resort and Convention Center this morning without making a move.

The team had not come close to making a trade as of Wednesday evening, Avila said, citing the market, which is plentiful with players under team control or signed to affordable contracts — players the Tigers don't have at their disposal.

“You can't do anything about that,” Avila said. “You just have to do whatever you can within the confines of what you're dealing with and move forward.”

Increasingly, it appears the Tigers will field a team next season comparable to last season's, footing a payroll that will once again surpass MLB's luxury tax limit.

And while it looks like Avila won't shed as much payroll as he would ideally like, he will once again field a team that profiles to play very competitively in the American League Central division, especially with two teams — Chicago and Minnesota — in a rebuilding stage.

“I had a sneaky suspicion that this could happen,” Avila said. “And it did and it has. And the winter's not over, so other things could still happen down the road and it might be later this winter, it might not. It might be later in the summer, it might be next year. I've mentioned it might not happen this winter.

“So if we had to go and play with the team as we have it, I know our skipper is very happy and I know that our division is not as strong, so we may have an even better chance to win next year.”

Among the news that was gathered in three days at the winter meetings: Ace right-hander Justin Verlander and first baseman Miguel Cabrera are near locks to stay put. Second baseman Ian Kinsler's trade market has dried up — in no small part due to a limited no-trade clause that Kinsler is seeking a contract extension to waive — and the Tigers won't settle for below market value for rightfielder J.D. Martinez.

Avila has not received many bites on players like designated hitter Victor Martinez, leftfielder Justin Upton or righty Jordan Zimmermann. Avila has received interest in shortstop Jose Iglesias, he said, and righty Anibal Sanchez, according to Fox Sports' Ken Rosenthal, but at the moment, neither trade scenario carries much optimism.

One player that did surface in trade rumors was lefty reliever Justin Wilson, who has received plenty of interest on the trade market, Avila said. The Tigers also appear interested in testing his market: According to multiple Major League sources, the team has reached out to other teams in an effort to gauge their interest in Wilson.

“Going into it, there wasn't a huge motivation about it,” Avila said. “It just seemed like it might be a good thing to explore because there was some interest there. But we'll see where it goes. Again, he's our No. 1 left-handed reliever in our bullpen and we gotta see how that plays out, because again, he's a good piece.”

Why Tigers are protecting Sandy Baez from Rule 5 draft

Wilson, 29, posted a 4.14 ERA in 66 appearances last season. He is projected to earn \$2.7 million in arbitration, according to MLBTradeRumors.com.

About trading Wilson, Avila said, “I would be less-inclined depending on the right deal. I can't say we wouldn't.”

And thus the main theme from the Tigers at this year's winter meetings, one in which they were rumored to be major wheelers and dealers was: They did not receive the right deal to part with their big players.

The time will come at some point. It could come later in the winter or at next season's trade deadline or not until a year from now. It is a process Avila knows is prudent for the organization's future. But it isn't one that he is willing to panic to start, essentially parting ways with an aging core of great players that could have another playoff run in it.

“We know the dilemma we’re in,” Avila said. “We know the situation we’re in. And if there’s one positive, it’s that we have a good team today, going into the season. And if we’re patient and we’re prudent and we don’t panic, per se, things will fall into place as time allows. It’s all timing. It’s all opportunity. And you can’t force the issue. Sometimes, you just kind of have to have some patience. I hope I’ve made that clear.”
By standing pat so far, he’s made it crystal clear.

Tigers' Jose Iglesias drawing interest from clubs at winter meetings

December 8, 2016

By George Sipple/ Detroit Free Press

NATIONAL HARBOR, Md. – Shortstop Jose Iglesias has drawn interest from clubs at the Winter Meetings, according to Tigers general manager Al Avila. Iglesias is projected to earn \$3.2 million in arbitration, according to MLBTradeRumors.com and won't become a free agent until 2019.

"There's been some interest and we're listening," Avila told local beat writers on Wednesday night in the team's suite at the Gaylord National Resort & Convention Center.

Avila wasn't sure how serious the interest is but "it's interesting enough there's possibilities."

Iglesias, who will turn 27 on January 5, hit .255 with 26 doubles and 57 runs scored in 137 games in 2016.

"The one thing I was most impressed with Iggy this year is he took a little bit of the glitz out of his game," Tigers manager Brad Ausmus told reporters on Tuesday afternoon. "He became a little more workmanlike at shortstop. Got his feet set, made good throws, and he was a better shortstop as a result. He kind of looks at himself as an entertainer, and he is, and he's got tremendous hands and feet, but there's that line when we talked to him about it, there's that line of making a good play look easy, and not making the easy play look difficult. "I thought he did an excellent job this year of kind of changing his approach defensively and just becoming more workmanlike."

Ausmus said both second baseman Ian Kinsler and first baseman Miguel Cabrera talked to Iglesias about making changes to his game.

"He's a good shortstop and we like him," Avila said of Iglesias. "He's still a low-cost guy. We still have, what is it? Two years of control. He's a guy that obviously we would listen to like anybody else. But there's a possibility there."

If the Tigers did trade Iglesias, they believe Dixon Machado could play shortstop.

"If the right deal for Iglesias were there, you probably plug in Machado as your shortstop," Avila said. "You've got (Andrew) Romine to back him up. When we were looking at the possibility of (Ian) Kinsler, which seems that has dried up at this point, (Machado) would have played second base. Again, with Romine backing him up."

If the Tigers end up keeping Kinsler, as it appears they will now, and Iglesias, then Machado and Romine would battle to make the club.

"That's not to say they wouldn't make both make the club, knowing that Romine can play the outfield too," Avila said.

Machado, who turns 25 on Feb. 22, hit .266 with 28 doubles and 59 runs scored in 131 games at Triple-A Toledo last season. He played in eight games for the Tigers, hitting .100 (1-for-10) with one run scored.

Asked what he liked about Machado, Avila said: "First and foremost his defense. There's guys that think he should be able to hit enough to be an everyday guy. Now, he's not going to be a great hitter, we don't think. We think he might be able to hit enough to be an everyday guy. Now again, that's a projection."

PITCHING PROSPECTS: Double-A Erie right-handed pitcher Paul Voelker has been mentioned as a player clubs have interest in as well. Voelker, who turned 24 in August, was a 10th-round pick by the Tigers in 2014 out of Dallas Baptist. He had a 4.17 ERA and a 1.44 WHIP last season. But he also had 79 strikeouts in 54 innings.

"Every time we've had some conversations his name comes up, not as a main piece, but as a guy that could help in completing (a trade)," Avila said.

Tigers assistant general manager David Chadd said Voelker has "one of the highest strikeout numbers in minor league baseball."....

Chadd said right-handers Adam Ravenelle and Myle Jaye are minor league pitchers who could end up helping the Tigers next season.

He thinks Ravenelle needs more work in the minors. Ravenelle had a 3.88 ERA with 57 strikeouts in 58 innings between High-A Lakeland and Double-A Erie.

He sees Jaye as a starter, not a reliever. Jaye, who turns 25 on Dec. 28, went 5-12 with a 3.95 ERA and a 1.22 WHIP in 28 starts last season between Double-A Erie and Triple-A Toledo. He had 135 strikeouts in 161 2/3 innings.

Detroit Tigers still searching for centerfield, catcher options

December 8, 2016

By Anthony Fenech/ Detroit Free Press

NATIONAL HARBOR, Md. — All the talk has been on the trade market.

But over three days at Major League Baseball's winter meetings, the Tigers have done their due diligence on the free agent front as well.

And though the team doesn't have the desire, financial wherewithal or need to sign a big-money free agent, it hasn't closed the door on adding a major league piece in the free agent market to shore up holes in centerfield or backup catcher.

"We have talked about a couple players here, as far as our needs in centerfield and catching, and we're still looking at those possibilities," general manager Al Avila said.

Most of the talk, he said, has been about identifying minor league free agents. That process, he said, is more lengthy, as those types of players usually sign later in the off-season after an organization's roster has been shaped.

Avila stated the obvious: The team can't go into spring training with only one catcher, even with John Hicks penciled in as insurance at Triple-A Toledo. An obvious free agent option would be Avila's son, former Tiger Alex Avila, who swings left-handed.

In centerfield, Avila pointed toward the time without Cameron Maybin last season, perhaps foreshadowing a situation in which, if the team does not fill the need via trade, and if none of its internal candidates secure a starting job, it could mix-and-match. A free agent option would be veteran Ben Revere, who has speed and swings lefty, though there has been no contact between the two sides, according to a person with knowledge of the situation.

Avila did, however, indicate a desire to keep searching for an everyday centerfield option.

"Fingers crossed," he said. "The key here for us, if we don't have that right guy, we think we'll make it work."

Why Detroit Tigers are protecting Sandy Baez from Rule 5 draft

December 8, 2016

By George Sipple/ Detroit Free Press

NATIONAL HARBOR, Md. -- The Detroit Tigers recently added right-handed pitcher Sandy Baez to their 40-man roster to protect him from being taken in Thursday's Major League Baseball Rule 5 draft. They have the 20th pick in the draft but likely will end up with a top-10 pick, as other teams pass.

Not every team has an open spot on its 40-man roster. The Tigers have one.

Baez, a 23-year-old from the Dominican Republic, was 7-9 with a 3.81 ERA and a 1.35 WHIP in 21 starts at Class A West Michigan last season. He had 88 strikeouts in 113 1/3 innings.

"I saw him personally -- we all saw him personally pitch," Tigers general manager Al Avila told reporters in the team's suite during the winter meetings Tuesday evening. "He was so impressive. He hit 100 miles an hour. Sometimes these Latin guys, just like tall left-handers, sometimes they take more time to develop. It's all about timing. What we felt was, yeah, it's a roster spot, and they're precious."

The Tigers felt that a rebuilding team would take a flyer on a guy like Baez.

"It wouldn't cost (them) anything to get that guy and say, 'Let's put this guy in here and see if we can carry him,'" Avila said. "All of a sudden, a couple years later, here he is, he's starting for them, throwing a hundred miles an hour, and you're kicking yourself in the butt."

Players who have played five minor league seasons are eligible to be drafted by another franchise, provided that the new team keeps the player on its major league roster for the entire 2017 season. If the new team demotes the player, he must be offered back to his former franchise. It will cost a team \$100,000 to take a player in the major league portion of the Rule 5 draft, double what it cost last year.

The Tigers could end up trying to get a hard-throwing reliever. They also could take a flyer on a centerfielder. J.J. Cooper of Baseball America said the most notable outfielder available this year is Jake Cave of the New York Yankees. Cave was taken second overall in last year's Rule 5 draft, by the Cincinnati Reds, but was returned to the Yankees. Cave is a left-handed hitter who batted .268 with 26 doubles, nine triples and eight home runs between Double-A and Triple-A last season.

"Last year, he was coming off of a pretty mediocre season offensively at Double-A," Cooper said. "This year, he comes back ... he hit in Double-A. He hit in Triple-A, showed more power than he had shown in the past. "If teams liked him last year -- and he went second overall in the Rule 5 -- he's better, as far as checking off the boxes, this year than last year."

Cooper said hard-throwing relievers are in abundance in the Rule 5.

"I can think of 30 guys," Cooper said. "Not all of them can pitch really well. But there's probably 30 guys who will give you 97-98 (m.p.h.) plus."

Tigers left-handed pitcher Kevin Ziomek, who missed most of the last season because of thoracic outlet syndrome, could get picked by another MLB team. Other Tigers prospects in play are right-handed pitcher Austin Kubitza, third baseman Zach Shepherd and catcher Arvicent Perez.

No deal for Tigers, but 'winter is not over,' Avila says

December 8, 2016

By Chris McCosky/ The Detroit News

National Harbor, Md. — It wasn't for a lack of trying, but general manager Al Avila said Wednesday night it was most likely the Tigers were going to leave the Winter Meetings without making a deal.

"I can't say it's frustrating or disappointing," he said. "We still have a pretty good team moving forward in 2017. In that sense, it's positive. But the market is what it is. You can't do anything about that."

And the market was decidedly unfriendly to the Tigers' mission — at least to this point. As evidenced by the deals pulled off by the Chicago White Sox — trading Chris Sale and Adam Eaton for seven top prospects, four from the Red Sox and three from the Nationals.

While the Tigers were listening to offers on their veteran players with hefty contracts — Ian Kinsler, J.D. Martinez, Justin Verlander, Miguel Cabrera and Justin Upton — the market was more conducive to moderately priced players who are still under team control.

"Look at the Adam Eaton trade," Avila said. "The Nationals get five years of control at a pretty good price. That's value. Years of control at a low price is value. That's what teams value. Unfortunately, we don't have too many of those players."

The ones they do have — Michael Fulmer, Daniel Norris, Matt Boyd, James McCann, Nick Castellanos, etc. — are the cornerstones of their future and weren't made available.

But, as Avila pointed out, there is no deadline to make offseason deals. The Winter Meetings isn't the endpoint of teams' roster maneuvers.

"I was clear that nothing may happen this winter," Avila said. "I had a sneaky suspicion that this could happen — and it has. But the winter is not over. Other things could still happen down the road. It might be later in the winter, during spring training or later in the summer."

As a reminder, he pointed out that the club signed Upton in January last year. He added that because so many quality free agents were still on the market, there could be an unusually high number of January and February deals this offseason.

"If there is one positive, it's that we do have a good team going into the season," Avila said. "If we are patient and prudent and we don't panic, things will fall into place as time allows. It's all timing and opportunity. You cannot force the issue."

The Tigers are still approximately \$20 million over the luxury tax threshold.

"We haven't had orders from management saying we had to get under it no matter what," Avila said. "I mean, tomorrow I could trade a couple guys and get lower-level prospects that would be far away (from playing in the big leagues), but that hasn't happened."

There isn't any urgency to do that now. The tax is computed and assessed based on the payroll at the end of the season.

"There are still a lot of free agents to be signed, and good ones," Avila said. "There are still a lot of hitters out there and there are other teams now (like the Diamondbacks) who are discussing moving some of their players. "But right now, the teams who have the youngest players and the least expensive players, players with the most control, they're the ones getting back the most in return," Avila said.

Teams did inquire about J.D. Martinez, especially early on. The Mets at one point offered young outfielder Michael Conforto, a trade Avila most likely would have pulled the trigger on. But they quickly took Conforto off the table.

The Dodgers showed some interest in Kinsler early, but Avila said Wednesday the Kinsler market had "dried up." Avila had said as early as Monday that he didn't expect Verlander or Cabrera to be traded.

Left-handed reliever Justin Wilson seemed to draw the most interest but Avila said he never got the deal he was looking for.

The Tigers, though, may not go home completely empty-handed. There is a good chance they will make a selection in the Rule 5 draft Thursday morning. They have the 20th pick.

No more kid gloves for Fulmer, Norris, Boyd: 200 innings

December 8, 2016

By Chris McCosky/ The Detroit News

NATIONAL HARBOR, Md. – Assuming good health, the Tigers will likely begin next season with a trio of young starting pitchers, none of whom have endured a full season in the big leagues.

Michael Fulmer, the American League Rookie of the Year, pitched 159 innings for the Tigers last season and a career-high 174 counting his work at Triple-A Toledo.

Matt Boyd threw 97 $\frac{1}{3}$ innings for the Tigers and 161 innings total.

Daniel Norris, who worked through a back injury early in the season, pitched 97 $\frac{1}{3}$ innings in Detroit and 161 total.

The Tigers were hyper-concerned about the workload of all three, and in fact rationed Fulmer's innings over the final two months of the season. But it appears the kid gloves are coming off.

"I'm not overly concerned about innings," manager Brad Ausmus said on Tuesday. "I think they can pitch 200 innings. I wouldn't say go over it, but you probably could get to it."

A bigger concern than the workload, Ausmus said, is the inevitable growing pains that all three will undoubtedly endure through their first full season in the big leagues.

"With young pitchers, they are going to have days where they are going to have some extreme lows, and that's where you're going to need the bullpen to pick up innings," he said. "When you have three of them potentially in the rotation, now that's 60 percent of your rotation. There's going to be some lows and the bullpen is going to have to pick up some extra innings."

That perhaps could lead to the Tigers using starting pitcher Mike Pelfrey, and possibly even Anibal Sanchez, as long relievers next season.

"I think initially, at least one of them would certainly be preparing as a starter – possibly both, depending on how things shake down," Ausmus said. "But to be honest with you, I called (pitching coach Rich) Dubee the other day on that particular topic, and we discussed it but we didn't make a final decision."

Pelfrey would seem a more likely candidate for the bullpen. It was a contingency scenario the Tigers envisioned when they signed him to a two-year, \$16 million contract before last season.

There is an increasing chance Sanchez could be traded before spring training. Several teams have inquired about him, but the Tigers know they would have to pay a large portion of his \$16 million contract, plus the \$5 million buyout for 2018.

If he's still with the club, though, Sanchez would likely begin spring training as the sixth starter. There is still some uncertainty regarding Jordan Zimmermann. He battled groin, neck and shoulder issues last season, and Sanchez, along with Buck Farmer, could be insurance against further problems.

"I'm just hoping it gets corrected," Ausmus said. "He had the injection (in his neck) a few weeks ago; I talked to him. He said he felt good. A second injection is planned. It's not that there was an issue, it was planned as part of therapy."

The final injection is scheduled for January and from there he is expected to be fully cleared to begin spring training.

"Really all's we can do is kind of hold our breath and get to spring training and hope it doesn't flare up again, because we need him," Ausmus said.

Tigers listened to offers on Jose Iglesias

December 8, 2016

By Chris McCosky/ The Detroit News

National Harbor, Md. — Tigers general manager Al Avila admitted he was intrigued.

He expected teams to call about J.D. Martinez, Ian Kinsler and his other veteran players; not so much serious talk about shortstop Jose Iglesias.

Iglesias, who is expected to make a little more than \$2 million next season and is under team control for two more years, is considered one of the team's building blocks for the future. He's the type of player Avila has let teams know he's not looking to trade.

And yet.

"There has been some interest in him and we've listened," Avila said. "I don't know how much legs it has, but it's interesting enough. It has a possibility. But again, he's a good shortstop. We like him and he's still a low-cost guy with two more years of control."

If Iglesias were dealt, Dixon Machado would get an opportunity to be the everyday shortstop, Avila said.

Machado is out of minor-league options, so if he didn't make the club in the spring, he would be waived.

On Tuesday, manager Brad Ausmus had praised Iglesias' maturity last season.

"One thing I was most impressed with Iggy this year is, he took a little bit of the glitz out of his game," he said.

"He became a little more workmanlike at shortstop. Got his feet set, made good throws, and he was a better shortstop as a result.

"He kind of looks at himself as an entertainer, and he is, and he's got tremendous hands and feet, but there's that line — and we talked to him about it — there's that line of making a good play look easy, and not making the easy play look difficult."

Around the horn

Avila said Double A pitcher Paul Voelker got a lot of attention from teams calling about possible trades. "Not as a main piece, but as a guy who could help," he said. Voelker, who pitched at Erie last season, had a 13 $\frac{2}{3}$ strikeouts per nine innings rate.

... Former Tigers lefty Joe Mantiply, who the Tigers lopped off their 40-man roster after the season, signed with the Yankees.

Henning: Tigers deal with delayed trade plans

December 8, 2016

By Lynn Henning/ The Detroit News

National Harbor, Md. – In terms of trappings and appearances, everything this week has been consistent with past Tigers presentations at baseball’s Winter Meetings.

The Tigers have their traditional team suite, this time on the eighth floor of the Gaylord Resort and Convention Center by the Potomac River’s shore. They have, per usual, a full crew on hand: general manager Al Avila and all of his front-office gang, including scouts, development staff, and Avila’s celebrity advisers, Al Kaline, Willie Horton, Alan Trammell, and Jim Leyland.

They sit, the main guys, at a work table inside their suite at the end of each business day and update media in general fashion on the day’s conversations and trade scuttlebutt. Avila is seated in the group’s middle, flanked by his manager, Brad Ausmus, by assistant GMs David Chadd and John Westhoff, and pro scouting director Scott Bream, among assorted others.

And then they talk, with Avila speaking 99 percent of the time, about a Tigers offseason that has not gone quite according to script.

It all began last week when a new owners-players contract was hammered together that greatly pleased the owners but didn’t help the Tigers. Not in terms of payroll, anyway.

The luxury tax was raised only slightly and tougher percentage penalties were applied. The net result was to put more of a squeeze on a Tigers team that is paying \$200-million-plus and sits, even with the new contract, well over the \$195-million limit. The Tigers’ bind is that they, proportionally, get whacked harder than other offenders when Detroit is a mid-market team paying major-market fines for being too generous with its salaries. The Tigers are to blame here, of course. No one forced owner Mike Ilitch to spend lavishly on players. But other clubs (the well-heeled Red Sox, Yankees, Dodgers, etc.) have an easier time pushing the throttle on payroll and paying Commissioner Rob Manfred’s speeding tickets.

The Tigers are feeling effects beyond tariffs on salaries they had hoped to chop. Cost-cuts, though, weren’t the goal quite this autumn, and winter, as much as the Tigers had been keen on trading expensive players for badly needed younger talent.

But with harsher punishment in place for the money-throwers, and with Manfred arm-twisting clubs like the Dodgers to slash spending that upsets his vision of a competitive landscape, teams have been stepping back from taking on fat contracts. They’ve been focusing instead on those terms you often hear, “team control” being a favorite when having a relatively inexpensive key player locked in well ahead of free agency is every big-league club’s roster dream.

It helps explain why a pitcher such as Justin Verlander is still untouched when, during many past Winter Meetings, a superstar of his stature would have been quite the conversation piece for inquiring clubs.

Verlander makes \$84 million spread over the next three seasons. Not a lot of takers there when spending is being policed and penalized even as big-league baseball had another record year of revenue (\$10 billion).

Add to the above another bad bit of timing for the Tigers.

This autumn’s auction block is loaded with right-handed power hitters. That’s fairly rare, at least in terms of scope. The net result is that an outfielder, J.D. Martinez, who in earlier years would have been viewed like a treasure chest awash in gold doubloons, has been pretty much ignored.

The Tigers will lose him to free agency in a year. Draft-pick compensation isn’t what it once was, and is even less for a team that’s been naughty with its luxury-tax ledger. It means the Tigers must either trade Martinez now or, more likely, hope for a more ravenous marketplace at next July’s trade deadline.

But that begets another no-win scenario for the Tigers.

They will prefer to move Martinez, as much as can be determined today, only if they’re not serious mid-season playoff contenders. And if they’re not in contention in July, it means a cash-draining 2017 club will have been an expensive bust.

Or, say they are in contention, as they were last July. They can hold off and shoot for an October playoff surprise. Or, they can just miss, as they did this season, or perhaps find they did nothing more than land a one-game wildcard invitation.

That dangerous spin of a roulette wheel kept them from making valuable long-term trades?

The Tigers will be realistic about the above. But anyone can see how complicated life could become for a team that wants to avoid a complete, ground-up rebuilding project and turn some of its older inventory into fresher, younger talent for a team's long haul.

The Tigers traded much of their farm during the Dave Dombrowski era, when a World Series was realistically in the picture. They also coughed up a trunk-load of early draft picks that are seriously clobbering the Tigers today.

So, making deals that unload expensive billboard talent for younger blood was essential for a team that, until the past few weeks, had every expectation of making healthy swaps.

Now, the landscape has changed. At least from December's appearances.

This is proving tough when the Tigers still aren't sure about center field in 2017, when they have next-to-no infield position prospects in the system, and when there are too few bright-light pitchers on the farm.

It could be rugged on a Tigers business office, as well. Folks there are heading into the thick of ticket-selling time for season packages. Those sales are heavily reliant on fans feeling good about next year's club and its exciting new faces.

Except at the moment there aren't any new faces.

Will that be a 12- or 25-game ticket package, sir?

Avila still has time to deal, especially when the trade mart looks as if it will be a late-bloomer. It's also possible, with decent health, a 2017 Tigers team with good young starting pitching in its equation could become quite the Central Division surprise.

It's possible. Lots of outcomes are possible. The Tigers are trying to stay positive as the Winter Meetings approach gavel-time. And even as some pleasing offseason plans appear, at the very least, to have been delayed.

Tigers set to leave Winter Meetings without making any deals

December 8, 2016

By Evan Woodbery/ MLive.com

NATIONAL HARBOR, Md. -- The Detroit Tigers, expected by many to be one of the most active teams at this week's Winter Meetings, will apparently leave without making a single deal.

"There's nothing new to report," said general manager Al Avila. "I don't anticipate that we will make a move (before leaving)."

There's another two months left in hot-stove season, so just because the Tigers didn't make a move this week doesn't mean there won't be something later. But the lack of action was still a surprise and an indication that the remaking of the Tigers roster might not truly begin until next winter.

"I had a sneaking suspicion that this could happen, and it has," Avila said. "The winter's not over. Other things could happen down the road. It might be later this winter, it might be later in the summer, it might be next year."

The Tigers received plenty of interest in left-handed reliever Justin Wilson and a few calls about shortstop Jose Iglesias, but never came close to an agreement on any trade.

The chances of dealing big names like J.D. Martinez and Ian Kinsler now seem considerably smaller, while the chances of Miguel Cabrera or Justin Verlander going anywhere could be almost nonexistent.

Tigers would rather make no deal than a bad deal, and Avila said they would continue to be "patient, prudent and not panic" because they're optimistic about their roster going into 2017.

"I can't say it's frustrating or disappointing," Avila said. "The market is what it is."

The Tigers have a vacancy on their 40-man roster and could still choose to select a player in the Rule 5 Draft on Thursday.

In Rule 5 Draft, Tigers have room to make a selection

December 8, 2016

By Evan Woodbery/ MLive.com

NATIONAL HARBOR, Md. -- The Detroit Tigers left a vacancy on their 40-man roster this week for added flexibility.

The free space means they won't have to scramble in the event of a trade. It also means that they could have the opportunity to do some bargain shopping at the Rule 5 Draft on Thursday.

The draft allows teams to poach players from other clubs who haven't been protected on the 40-man roster. The idea is to discourage hoarding and offer an escape for players whose path to the big leagues is blocked.

A drafted player must spend the entire season on his new club's active roster or be offered back to his old club.

If the Tigers follow the normal script, they could take a hard-throwing reliever (Baseball America has a few ideas), give him an extended look in spring training and then decide whether he's worth carrying on the roster in 2017.

The Tigers protected 23-year-old Sandy Baez to prevent any other club from using that same strategy with him. Baez hasn't pitched above Class A West Michigan, but he throws hard with great command and general manager Al Avila raved about his potential.

"I saw him personally," Avila said. "He was impressive. He hit 100 miles an hour."

Avila said Latin pitchers are sometimes late bloomers, but other teams know that as well. The Tigers didn't want to see him blossom with another organization.

"A couple years later, here he is, he's starting for them, throwing 100 mph, and you're kicking yourself in the butt," Avila said.

The last time the Tigers made a selection was 2008, when they selected left-handed pitcher Kyle Bloom. Bloom failed to make the team in spring training and was returned to the Pittsburgh Pirates.

In 2012, the New York Mets drafted pitcher Kyle Lobstein and immediately traded him to the Tigers for cash. Lobstein failed to make the club out of spring training in 2013, meaning he had to be offered back to his original team (the Tampa Bay Rays). Instead, the Tigers worked out a deal to maintain Lobstein's rights by sending catcher Curt Casali to Tampa.

The Tigers have the 20th selection in this year's draft (although many teams in front of them will choose not to make a pick), so if they're targeting a certain player it's possible they could engineer a trade similar to the one they used to acquire Lobstein.

Winter Meetings: Tigers' Anibal Sanchez subject of trade talk

December 8, 2016

By Evan Woodbery/ MLive.com

NATIONAL HARBOR, Md. -- The Detroit Tigers are getting trade inquiries about starting pitcher Anibal Sanchez, according to FOX Sports reporter Ken Rosenthal.

Sanchez, 32, is due \$16 million in 2017 and a \$5 million buyout in 2018, so the Tigers would have to cover a large sum of that money in any potential deal.

Sanchez is one of two expensive veterans who could have a hard time making the Tigers' starting rotation in 2017. The other, Mike Pelfrey, is owed \$8 million and might not be tradeable even if the Tigers covered virtually all of his salary.

Sanchez finished fourth in the Cy Young balloting in 2013, but has struggled in each of the last two seasons. In 2016, he was in and out of the rotation, going 7-13 with a 5.87 ERA in 153 innings. He struck out 135 and walked 53.

While his strikeout and walks numbers are only slightly worse than his career norms, Sanchez has been increasingly victimized by the long ball.

In 2013 and 2014, Sanchez allowed only 13 home runs in 308 innings. In the last two years, he's given up 59 in 310 innings.

Stalled rebuild could work out for Tigers

December 8, 2016

By Jason Beck/ MLB.com

NATIONAL HARBOR, Md. -- The Tigers arrived at baseball's Winter Meetings on Sunday as one of the most intriguing sellers, looking to their long-term future. Unless something unexpected happens, they'll leave on Thursday as a stronger contender for 2017 without making a single move.

They've improved their chances to contend by their inability to do anything -- and their division competition decisively rebuilding. It's the bright side to what would otherwise be a frustrating Winter Meetings.

"I can't say it's frustrating or disappointing," general manager Al Avila said of their inaction. "We still have a pretty good team moving into 2017. So in that sense, I guess it's a positive."

The White Sox doubled down on their Chris Sale trade to Boston on Wednesday by trading Adam Eaton to Washington, and they're not likely to stop trading established players. Lefty starter Jose Quintana, slugger Jose Abreu, third baseman Todd Frazier and closer David Robertson could be next to go if the White Sox can gain more prospects.

The young talent in return could make them a juggernaut in a few years. For 2017, though, the deals make for a long season.

The Royals traded their star closer, Wade Davis, to the Cubs for outfielder Jorge Soler, and have been rumored for more deals among a crop of championship-caliber players heading into their final year before free agency. They might not do a total rebuild, but they're thinner now than they were as a third-place team behind Detroit this past season.

"They're still very good," Avila warned.

Meanwhile, the Twins have their own rebuilding project under a new front office led by Derek Falvey and Thad Levine.

The result is that the American League Central looks like a two-team race. The defending AL champion Cleveland Indians are clearly in command, but if they suffer any hangover effect from a long postseason and World Series loss, the Tigers -- with many of the same parts from a team that finished just shy of a Wild Card spot -- could be in position to pounce.

"If we have to go and play with the team as we have it, I know our skipper's very happy," Avila said. "And I know our division's not as strong. We may have an even better chance to win next year."

It's certainly a positive for manager Brad Ausmus, who heads into the last year of his contract with one more chance to take a veteran team on a playoff run.

"It's still the Indians on top," Ausmus said. "They have a very good team, and the vast majority [of it] is coming back. Right now, they are the cream of the Central division, and it's up to us to catch them."

To do that, they have to beat the Indians head-to-head, something they did just four times in 18 meetings last season. That comprised a good portion of their eight-game gap in the standings. Detroit went 15-4 against Minnesota and 12-7 against Chicago, but just 7-12 vs. Kansas City.

Even if the Tigers can't catch Cleveland, extra wins against the rebuilding remainder of the division could better their chances in the Wild Card race, which they lost by just 2 1/2 games this year.

There are still holes for the Tigers to fill, notably in center field -- where Cameron Maybin's trade to the Angels last month left a void that prospect JaCoby Jones isn't expected to be ready to fill until at least midseason. Avila was hoping to find a stopgap in a trade, but the Tigers have started reaching out to free agents.

Don't expect Detroit to go the opposite direction and deal prospects for a star like Pittsburgh's Andrew McCutchen, but a short-term, low-cost deal for someone like Ben Revere or Austin Jackson becomes a stronger possibility than a few days ago. It wouldn't be a glamorous move, but it might do the job.

If the Tigers aren't contending at midseason, they could revisit the rebuilding process by the July 31 Trade Deadline. If they play it out through the year, they'll accomplish their payroll reduction through free agency -- J.D. Martinez, Mike Pelfrey and Mark Lowe hit the open market next winter, Ian Kinsler and Anibal Sanchez have club options, and Justin Upton has an opt-out clause. The difference is that the Tigers wouldn't get prospects in return, only compensation Draft picks if they make qualifying offers to the top guys.

It's not the plan the Tigers made when the 2016 season ended, but their struggles to rebuild now could have a bright spot.

Tigers listening to interest in Iglesias

December 8, 2016

By Jason Beck/ MLB.com

NATIONAL HARBOR, Md. -- The Tigers checked into the Gaylord National Resort & Convention Center for this week's Winter Meetings eyeing a potential trade of second baseman Ian Kinsler. That market dried up, but Detroit could instead trade his double-play partner.

While teams have shied away from Kinsler, slick-fielding shortstop Jose Iglesias has drawn interest this week, general manager Al Avila confirmed Wednesday. And the Tigers, who have said all offseason that they'll listen on virtually all of their players, aren't dismissing the possibility.

"There's been some interest, and we're listening," Avila said. "I don't know how much legs it has, but it's interesting enough that there's possibilities."

Iglesias is not a high-salary veteran player whose contract propelled the Tigers into luxury-tax territory this year. The 26-year-old made \$2.1 million in 2016 and is projected to make \$3.2 million next season in his second year of arbitration. He's two years away from free agency.

For the price, Iglesias provided the kind of defense that made him a Gold Glove finalist, not just with highlight plays but on the routine grounders that gave him occasional trouble in past seasons.

"The one thing I was most impressed with Iggy this year is he took a little bit of the glitz out of his game," manager Brad Ausmus said Tuesday. "He became a little more workmanlike at shortstop, got his feet set, made good throws, and he was a better shortstop as a result."

"He kind of looks at himself as an entertainer, and he is, and he's got tremendous hands and feet, but there's that line when we talked to him about it, there's that line of making a good play look easy, and not making the easy play look difficult."

While Iglesias wouldn't help the Tigers much to gain financial flexibility, he could attract the level of prospects they've been seeking for their other players -- and that other teams have garnered for similar players. For that reason, the Tigers almost have to listen.

"He's a good shortstop and we like him," Avila said. "He's still a low-cost guy and we still have two years of control. He's a guy we'll listen to [interest on] like anybody else."

If the Tigers were to trade Iglesias, they would look internally to replace him with Dixon Machado, who helped fill in for Iglesias while he was injured over the past couple of seasons. Machado has also been an internal candidate at second base if the Tigers trade Kinsler.

"First and foremost is defense," Avila said of Machado. "And there are people who think he should be able to hit enough to be an everyday guy. Now, he's not going to be a great hitter, we don't think. But he should be able to hit enough."

Machado is out of Minor League options.

LAST UPDATED: THU, DECEMBER 8, 2016, 01:26 EST

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 7, 2016

TEAM	PLAYER	TRANSACTION
Arizona Diamondbacks	Fernando Rodney	Signed as Free Agent, (2017)(one-year contract)
Boston Red Sox	Mitch Moreland	Signed as Free Agent, (2017)(one-year contract)
Chicago Cubs	Wade Davis	Traded From from Royals, Kansas City (for OF Jorge Soler)
Colorado Rockies	Ian Desmond	Signed as Free Agent, (2017-2021; Opt 2022)(five-year contract)
Kansas City Royals	Jorge Soler	Traded From from Cubs, Chi. Cubs (for RHP Wade Davis)
Miami Marlins	Jeff Locke	Signed as Free Agent, (2017)(one-year contract)
Milwaukee Brewers	Steven Geltz	Refused Minor League Assignment - Free Agent
New York Yankees	Matt Holliday	Signed as Free Agent, (2017)(one-year contract)
New York Yankees	Joe Mantipty	Signed to a Minor League Contract
San Francisco Giants	Tim Federowicz	Signed to a Minor League Contract
Seattle Mariners	Richie Shaffer	Designated for Assignment
Seattle Mariners	Chris Heston	Traded From from Giants, San Francisco (for player to be named)
Texas Rangers	Carlos Gomez	Signed as Free Agent, (2017)(one-year contract)

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 6, 2016

TEAM	PLAYER	TRANSACTION
Atlanta Braves	Eric O'Flaherty	Signed to a Minor League Contract
Chicago White Sox	Yoan Moncada	Traded From from Red Sox, Boston (for LHP Chris Sale, five-player deal)
Houston Astros	C.J. Riefenhauser	Signed to a Minor League Contract
Milwaukee Brewers	Travis Shaw	Traded From from Red Sox, Boston (for RHP Tyler Thornburg, 5-player deal)
Philadelphia Phillies	Joaquin Benoit	Signed as Free Agent, (2017)(one-year contract)
Philadelphia Phillies	Michael Mariot	Designated for Assignment
San Francisco Giants	Bryan Morris	Signed to a Minor League Contract

MONDAY, DECEMBER 5, 2016

TEAM	PLAYER	TRANSACTION
Arizona Diamondbacks	Jeff Mathis	Signed as Free Agent, (2017-2018)(two-year contract)
Cincinnati Reds	Tony Renda	Outrighted to Minors
Houston Astros	Carlos Beltran	Signed as Free Agent, (2017)(one-year contract)
Houston Astros	Ashur Tolliver	Acquired Off Waivers From from Angels, Los Angeles
Los Angeles Dodgers	Rich Hill	Signed as Free Agent, (2017-2019)(three-year contract)
San Francisco Giants	Mark Melancon	Signed as Free Agent, (2017-2020)(four-year contract)
Seattle Mariners	Christian Bergman	Signed to a Minor League Contract

Seattle Mariners	Jesus Sucre	Signed, (2017)(avoids arbitration)
Toronto Blue Jays	Steve Pearce	Signed as Free Agent, (2017-2018)(two-year contract)
Toronto Blue Jays	Chris Colabello	Refused Minor League Assignment - Free Agent