

Antonetti: Indians aim to build for '19, beyond

By Mandy Bell MLB.com

LAS VEGAS -- There was no doubt the Indians would draw attention at the Winter Meetings, regarding potential trades involving Corey Kluber and Trevor Bauer. Although there are plenty of conversations happening behind closed doors, all has been silent on the Cleveland front so far at Mandalay Bay.

That is, for now.

Outside of a report by The Athletic's Corey Brock on Tuesday that the Indians have expressed interest in Carlos Santana and rumors regarding a potential Kluber trade on Monday, the Tribe has kept itself out of the headlines. Although the club hasn't made a splash just yet, president of baseball operations Chris Antonetti mentioned on Tuesday afternoon that it had been a "long" and "eventful" day. Antonetti also said that he, general manager Mike Chernoff and their decision-making team have been using anything from a whiteboard to computers, to pens and paper, to break down every offer and potential trade scenario.

"We have to be cognizant of [which team a player may be traded to], but I think the thing we're most concerned about is how we put ourselves in a better position in 2019 and beyond," Antonetti said. "And that will always be the driving factor. If there's a great deal for us that happens to be with one of our competitors, we'll still pursue it."

Some may wonder why the Indians would trade two-time American League Cy Young Award winner Kluber, or Bauer, who is coming off a career season. But trading either pitcher would require a nice return of talent, which could help fill multiple needs by adding outfield depth and landing some arms for the bullpen after the club lost multiple relievers, including Cody Allen and Andrew Miller, to free agency.

"[Adding to the bullpen is] definitely on the list of things we'd like to do," Antonetti said. "At the same time, we do feel that we have a number of alternatives that are coming back that we expect will either be better than what they were in 2018 or, in some cases, guys returning from injuries that weren't available to us in 2018. We've run through that list of guys. Everybody from Cody Anderson to Nick Goody, Danny Salazar, there's a variety of different guys that could fill that role."

Antonetti said on Monday that Salazar is "progressing with his rehab in Arizona" and he is expected to start throwing this week after having season-ending shoulder surgery in July. Despite his confidence, a potential Kluber or Bauer trade would still leave a solid rotation with the starter who is not dealt and Carlos Carrasco, while adding more strength to the bullpen and outfield, which may be the answer the Indians are looking for.

A potential trade to create for a reunion with Santana could've been a factor in Antonetti's hectic day. Santana was recently dealt to the Mariners in a trade with the Phillies, but he is back on the market. Other teams reportedly interested in the first baseman are the Rays, Rockies and Marlins.

With Santana owed \$40 million the next two seasons, and the Indians looking to trim their payroll, this may result in Cleveland acquiring Santana simply to flip him to another team. If not, the deal could include a trade of Yonder Alonso (who is owed \$8 million in 2019) to free up first base for Santana. With the Mariners entering a rebuilding year, taking on Edwin Encarnacion's \$21.67 million contract for '19 would be a stretch. If the Tribe would be able to dump that contract elsewhere, keeping Santana would be much more reasonable.

No matter what deal, if any, is currently being cooked up, Antonetti made one thing clear: the team is not rebuilding.

"If we were rebuilding, we'd take a dramatically different approach," he said.

Through each step of the process, Antonetti has been sure to keep his players updated with his expectations for 2019. As of now, the plan is for Kipnis to spend the majority of his time in the outfield while Yandy Diaz would man third base.

"Kip was awesome in how he approached it," Antonetti said. "He said, 'Hey, I'll do whatever, I'll prepare, I just want a head start, and give me your best guess.' So at the time, we gave him what we thought was our best estimate and told him if that changes, we'll let you know."

Antonetti said he believes his decision-making team's responsibility is to put the Indians in the best position for 2019 and beyond.

"I'm hopeful our behaviors over the last handful of seasons demonstrates that winning is a priority for us," Antonetti said. "It's a priority for our front office, it's a priority for our ownership. There are some things and some realities we have to face in how we build winning teams, and maybe do it a little bit differently, but that doesn't change the end goal, which is to try to win a World Series. Yes, we have to take different approaches in how we do that, but it doesn't change the objective."

Optimism? Skepticism? It's fair to balance both while monitoring Indians' winter activity

By T.J. Zuppe 3h ago 14

LAS VEGAS — Rebuilding? Nah.

That's not the right term for what the Indians are attempting to do this winter. Think of it more as massaging, readjusting or reimagining the roster.

But not rebuilding.

That word has taken on a negative connotation and is not an accurate representation of their offseason goals.

"If we were rebuilding, we'd take a dramatically different approach," Chris Antonetti said Tuesday at the MLB Winter Meetings.

No kidding.

If the Indians were looking to drastically cut payroll and fixate solely on the future, why stop at the rumors of a Corey Kluber or Trevor Bauer trade? Why not see what they could get for Brad Hand or Mike Clevinger?

Why not dangle José Ramírez? Why sign Carlos Carrasco to an extension?

And why in the wide, wide world of sports wouldn't they craft the mother of all prospect returns by making Francisco Lindor available?

Instead, they're looking to balance two desires: a need to fortify their current core to make another run at a title in 2019 while also extending the window of their championship contention by adding several controllable young pieces capable of contributing for many years.

That's where the trade whispers enter the fray — everything from the well-known pitching rumors involving the Tribe's top two hurlers to a report from The Athletic's Corey Brock, indicating that the Indians are one of three teams that have spoken to the Mariners about their old pal, Carlos Santana, who is still owed just more than \$40 million over the final two years of his deal.

As constructed, the Indians, led by one of baseball's best rotations and two star position players, might still be a group with the talent capable of winning their division for a fourth consecutive season, but the massive holes in the outfield and bullpen aren't capable of being addressed by more than a band-aid without some roster shuffling. Getting creative on the trade front is one way to create some flexibility and infuse their organization with some coveted youth for now and the future.

But if it were easy, everyone would do it. For that reason, two things can be true at once:

1. The choice to seriously entertain offers for Kluber or Bauer could accomplish both of their major goals. Because of the potential for those returns, considering those offers is wise.
2. Trading a front-line starter with remaining control is full of inevitable risk. If they misfire, it could cripple their hopes of winning a title at any point within this current stretch.

So, sure, it's fair to be skeptical of the approach. Given the magnitude of what they're trying to pull off — not to mention how difficult it will be to improve while subtracting an ace-caliber hurler — it's probably even healthy and realistic to maintain a level of doubt.

That said, Antonetti hopes some of the organization's recent success offers comfort while fans wait for the puzzle to come together.

"I'm hopeful our behaviors over the last handful of seasons demonstrates that winning is a priority for us," Antonetti said. "It's a priority for our front office, it's a priority for our ownership. There are some things and some realities we have to face in how we build winning teams and maybe do it a little bit differently, but that doesn't change the end goal, which is to try to win a World Series. Yes, we have to take different approaches in how we do that, but it doesn't change the objective.

"I would hope that as our fans look back, there is at least some acknowledgement over the last six years, we've had the best record in the American League, at every juncture when we've had a competitive team, we've tried to do our best to win. That's taken incredible support from ownership and investing dollars and a willingness from us in the front office to recommend trading prospects away to try to capitalize on major-league wins."

To a degree, he has a point.

When the club was a couple of pieces away from a title in 2016, they unsuccessfully attempted to trade for Jonathan Lucroy before eventually landing the missing ingredient in their bullpen, Andrew Miller. They sent several of their top prospects away to secure that acquisition and were prepared to offer more to close both deals.

After coming up one win shy of a title, the organization signed one of the best free-agent hitters available before the 2017 season, Edwin Encarnacion, to a three-year, \$60 million pact, the largest free-agent deal in team history. And after failing to address their bullpen depth before 2018, they sent their top prospect to the Padres at the deadline for Brad Hand and Adam Cimber, two controllable relief arms they hoped would prove critical in the 2018 postseason and beyond.

None of those decisions ultimately pushed the Indians to a title, but they do show various levels of commitment throughout their most recent opportunities (not to mention the work put into procuring their dominant rotation).

That said, this is new territory.

This isn't as simple as seeking the best prospects for a front-line starter. The Indians must weigh how soon those players can help chase a title and consider the unfortunate side effect of helping a direct competitor.

Those are hardly easy choices.

Even if a handful of recent actions point to an optimistic view, every year presents a new challenge. Uncertainty might not create the best environment to breed that faith, but the front office will need to push forward with or without feeling it from the fans.

"I think our responsibility is to do the best thing for the organization and try to put ourselves in the best position for 2019 and beyond," Antonetti said. "That will always be the deciding factor."

If the Santana rumors felt a little confusing, consider what Antonetti revealed about the potential to make a trade capable of spreading money over many years, creating a bit more flexibility in 2019.

"We could explore those types of things," he said. "We still have to be cognizant what's the overall financial commitment. At a minimum, that buys more time. Just eases potentially whatever short-term pressure we might feel."

The Indians went that route when they dealt Michael Bourn and Nick Swisher to the Braves for Chris Johnson in 2015. Johnson was under contract for one more year than the Bourn-Swisher combination but earned far less in 2016. The organization was content to create the short-term flexibility in that scenario and went on to release Johnson, paying him nearly \$17 million after his departure.

That's not to say Santana is guaranteed to be dealt in a similar way, but if the Mariners were interested in saving money over two years by taking back 2019 salary, perhaps some common ground could be established.

We've spent a lot of time discussing the Indians' outfield, but their bullpen also profiles as a potential problem area given the impending loss of Miller and Cody Allen. The Athletic asked Antonetti about the organization's eventual relief plan for 2019.

"(Adding depth is) definitely on the list of things we'd like to do," he said. "At the same time, we do feel that we have a number of alternatives that are coming back that we expect will either be better than what they were in 2018 or, in some cases, guys returning from injuries that weren't available to us in 2018. We've run through that list of guys. Everybody from Cody Anderson to Nick Goody, Danny Salazar, there's a variety of different guys that could fill that role."

The Indians say they feel comfortable giving Yandy Diaz 500-660 plate appearances in 2019, and it certainly sounds as if he's penciled in as a starter for next season (provided he doesn't end up as trade bait).

"Yandy has a lot of ingredients to be really good," Antonetti said. "He's already demonstrated a lot of those. He controls the strike zone exceedingly well. Swings at good pitches. Puts the ball in play really hard. And over time we do think he'll hit for more extra bases."

If Jason Kipnis remains with the club through the winter, the most likely roster configuration will feature him in the outfield next year.

"That can change," Antonetti said. "It's very fluid. Kip was awesome in how he approached it. He said, 'Hey, I'll do whatever, I'll prepare, I just want a head start, and give me your best guess.' So at the time we gave him what we thought was our best estimate and told him if that changes, we'll let you know."

The front office ventured outside their suite for lunch for a second consecutive day, something they viewed as a minor victory on a day said to be "eventful." That activity didn't result in a trade, but we did learn that Antonetti planned to eat healthy, ordering a salad. That idea, however, was negated by a double order of french fries.

"I have an issue with fried potatoes," Antonetti joked. "Kind of an addiction."

Indians to adjust to life without many familiar faces in clubhouse

LAS VEGAS — So many players have been such consistent factors in what the Indians have done for so long that it's diffi-cult for some in the organization to even imagine the home clubhouse at Progressive Field without them.

The type of roster overhaul the Indians have started to undergo this offseason isn't only a changing of names on paper. The Indians clubhouse, which for the last couple of years was among the most stable in the major league, next season will be without many of the voices viewed as leaders around the room.

Michael Brantley is gone, barring an unexpected return in free agency. Andrew Miller and Cody Allen, the backbone of the bullpen, are free agents and are likely to find new landing spots. Josh Tomlin, who was the longest-tenured player, is un-signed. Yan Gomes was traded to the Washington Nationals. Corey Kluber or Trevor Bauer could be dealt soon. On and on.

The lockers of many of the veterans who have guided the Indians during their climb to World Series contenders will have new owners next spring. A good deal of experience and mentorship has likely walked out the door for the last time. Main-stays around the clubhouse every day have moved on.

"It's hard thinking about a clubhouse without those guys when they had been there for so long and were such core members of the culture," General Manager Mike Chernoff said Monday at baseball's winter meetings in Las Vegas. "I also think they left a lasting legacy. They have thought about that legacy over time and helped to empower a lot of the younger players and groomed them into leadership roles, too, which is a huge credit to those guys."

The Indians are cognizant of how many stabilizing presences are leaving the clubhouse all at once. Each team takes on its own identity or culture, and the 2019 Indians will surely fit that bill without so many familiar faces.

As Brantley, Tomlin and the others potentially leave Cleveland, the Indians sat down with them after the postseason, hoping to smooth that transition and learn whatever they could about what gave the team its identity from within the clubhouse, which could be undergoing its first major shift in several years.

"We've spent a lot of time thinking about that, have had a lot of conversations with [manager Terry Francona] and the coach-ing staff about what that might look like next year," president of baseball operations Chris Antonetti said. "And to that end, we actually spent time at the end of

the season and over the course of the few weeks after trying to hear firsthand from those players about what they felt was the identity in the clubhouse and what makes us who we are and what would be some of the things that would be important to carry forward organizationally, [as well as] what are the things we can learn from and be better and try to apply those next year.

“So, what exactly that looks like remains to be seen, because I imagine we’re going to have some other players that would be joining the organization over the course of the next few months and go to spring training and try to form a cohesive unit.”

There have been those who have come in and supplemented the stabilizing presence of those in the clubhouse in recent years, along with Francona down the hall and his daily Cribbage matches. Jason Giambi and Mike Napoli both garnered near-constant praise for their contributions to younger teams. But it appears there will be a shift in 2019.

Members of the front office remain thankful that Francona has been the constant factor.

“I think we’ll always lean on Tito and the coaching staff,” Antonetti said. “I think each team forms its own identity over the course of the season and different guys emerge as leaders over the course of a season. We saw that with Nap or Giambi or Michael Brantley, an evolution over time, Josh Tomlin, who, at the time, wasn’t our highest-performing player but was one of the dominating voices in the clubhouse and how he led.”

Indians notebook: Yandy Diaz could play third base, Jason Kipnis likely to stay outfield

By Ryan Lewis

LAS VEGAS —The construction of the Indians’ 2019 Opening Day roster remains fluid, and that situation could be altered dramatically not only by a major transaction but also by the flexibility of players who could move around and handle multiple positions.

Jose Ramirez could end up at third base or second base. Jason Kipnis could play second or make a more permanent move to the outfield instead of his late-season excursions the last two years. Yandy Diaz could end up at either corner infield spot.

The Indians have enough decisions to make based on who is already under club control, let alone if they bring in a player who might start a chain reaction down the lineup. Plans could be blown up if the right deal arises.

For now, the Indians have told Kipnis that if the season started today, the most likely lineup configuration would place him in the outfield. That would likely mean left field, effectively as a replacement for Michael Brantley.

“But that can change. It’s very fluid,” president of baseball operations Chris Antonetti said Tuesday at baseball’s winter meet-ings in Las Vegas.

“Kip was awesome in how he approached it. He said, ‘Hey, I’ll do whatever, I’ll prepare, I just want a head start, and give me your best guess.’

“So at the time we gave him what we thought was our best estimate and told him if that changes, we’ll let you know.”

If second base is unoccupied, it would leave a spot open for a player not currently on the roster. Or, in a simpler scenario, Jose Ramirez remains at second base — which manager Terry Francona has called his best position when he has enough reps — and Diaz takes over third base.

That would leave Diaz in a much larger role than any he’s had at the major-league level. Diaz has logged 299 plate appearances between 2017 and 2018 combined, hitting .283 with a .727 OPS.

When asked if Diaz could handle 500-600 plate appearances and third base on an everyday basis, Antonetti responded with “Yes” to both questions. Third base is Diaz’s most comfortable position, and the Indians said they believe he can still evolve as a hitter.

“Yandy has a lot of ingredients to be really good,” Antonetti said. “He’s already demonstrated a lot of those. He controls the strike zone exceedingly well, swings at good pitches, puts the ball in play really hard. And over time we do think he’ll hit for more extra bases. But he’s got the really good ingredients to hit.”

As the Indians search for ways to allocate their resources and construct a roster in the best way possible, Diaz could be among those who benefit the most, making him a key piece to their 2019 puzzle. Fans have clamored for Diaz because of his torrid spring performances, and the Indians have searched for ways to get his bat into the lineup at times in the past. If a deal isn’t reached that alters the current landscape, that time could come Opening Day next year.

First base homecoming?

The Indians are casting a wide net in terms of potential trade partners or configurations and operating with a budget that could fluctuate. Now, one rumor involves the potential return of Carlos Santana to Cleveland, according to Corey Brock and Ken Rosenthal of The Athletic. The report also lists Tampa Bay, Colorado and Miami as potential landing spots.

Santana was recently dealt to the Seattle Mariners in a deal with the Philadelphia Phillies. His involvement was partially to help offset the salaries in the deal. So the rebuilding Mariners have a reason to move Santana and the \$40 million left on his deal, which also includes a club option for 2021, over the next two seasons.

A trade for Santana could potentially include Yonder Alonso, who is owed \$8 million this season with a \$9 million club option for 2020. In that hypothetical deal, the Mariners save a good deal of money and could add a prospect. Or, Alonso could stay and the Indians could potentially deal Edwin Encarnacion and the \$25 million he’s still owed elsewhere. Jim Bowden of The Athletic reported on Tuesday that the Colorado Rockies are interested in Encarnacion.

As Antonetti and general manager Mike Chernoff said on Monday, the team is looking to acquire some younger players (who happen to be less expensive) but are operating with a budget that could fluctuate. A Santana trade could effectively set up a counter move, or several, as the Indians continue to try to shift around resources to maximize the roster.

Also in the rumor mill, Jon Morosi of Fox Sports reported on Tuesday that the Cincinnati Reds continue to be interested in acquiring either Corey Kluber or Trevor Bauer.

The Indians, meanwhile, remain entrenched in several different trade scenarios, many of them potentially being connected either due to roster contraction or payroll, further complicating their outlook.

Former Cleveland Indians relievers Andrew Miller, Cody Allen drawing interest on open market

By Paul Hoynes, cleveland.com | Posted December 11, 2018 at 09:45 PM | Updated December 12, 2018 at 07:11 AM

LAS VEGAS -- Cody Allen and Andrew Miller, the two relievers who have been big parts of Indians’ bullpen since mid-2016, are on the open market and drawing interest.

The market for Miller has been called “robust” and there is no chance he’ll return to the Indians. The market for Allen is still developing, but several teams have shown interest. It would be a surprise if he returned to the Indians, but the door may not be entirely shut.

Miller's five trips to the disabled list in the last two years apparently have not hurt his market value. Earlier this month it was reported that at least nine teams were interested in Miller. Boston, the Yankees, Mets and St. Louis were among them.

The Twins have shown interest in Miller and Allen. Derek Falvey, Minnesota's chief baseball officer, is familiar with them from his days with the Indians.

Last season was not a good one either Allen or Miller. Allen went 4-6 with a 4.70 ERA and converted 27 saves in 32 chances. But his ERA, homers allowed (11) and walks (33) were career highs.

Miller, who made three trips to the disabled list, threw only 34 innings in 37 appearances. He went 2-4 with a 4.24 ERA with two saves.

Bradley Zimmer, Danny Salazar rehabbing in Arizona

Chris Antonetti, Indians president of baseball operations, said Monday that outfielder Bradley Zimmer and right-hander Danny Salazar are making progress after undergoing surgery on their right shoulders.

Zimmer and Salazar are rehabbing at the Indians' spring training site in Goodyear, Ariz.

"He's made good progress in his recovery," said Antonetti of Zimmer. "He'll start his throwing sooner than he'll start his hitting."

Zimmer underwent shoulder surgery in July after he'd been optioned to Class AAA Columbus. The Indians said he injured it during a bat-swinging drill with the Clippers.

Salazar didn't appear in a game all season. He reported to spring training with a sore right shoulder and had surgery in July.

"Danny is doing well," said Antonetti. "He's progressing with his rehab. We expect him to start throwing at some point this week."

The Indians, depending on Salazar's progress, will condition him as a starter in spring training.

On the market with Michael Brantley and Brandon Guyer

Michael Brantley, one of five free-agent outfielders who played with the Indians last season, has drawn solid interest on the open market.

Brandon Guyer, another one of those free agent outfielders, is still waiting for his market to develop.

Atlanta, Houston, the White Sox and Phillies are among the teams reportedly interested in Brantley. Last season Brantley, who has never played for another big-league team besides the Tribe, hit .309 (176-for-570) with 17 homers, 76 RBI and a .832 OPS.

Guyer didn't have as good an exit season. He appeared in 102 games, hitting .206 (40-for-194) with seven homers and 27 RBI.

When the Indians decided not to exercise Guyer's option for 2019, Antonetti said he'd be open to talking to him about re-signing for less money. There's been interest in Guyer, but he's not expected to sign until the outfield market shakes out.

Justin Masterson spreading the good word in retirement

Before there was Corey Kluber, Justin Masterson was the Indians' No. 1 starter. He pitched for the Tribe from 2009-14 before being traded to St. Louis.

Randy Rowley, Masterson's agent, said Monday that his client was pretty much retired.

"He's doing his ministry, which is what he loves," said Rowley.

Masterson, 33, went 48-61 with a 4.23 ERA in his career with the Indians. He appeared in 164 games, including 154 starts. Masterson last pitched professionally for Oklahoma City, the Dodgers' top farm club, in 2017.

Cory Snyder looking for work

Former Indians slugger Cory Snyder is at the winter meetings looking for work. Snyder managed in Taiwan the last two years. Before that he managed in Mexico, leading his team to a championship in 2016, after being fired by Seattle as its Triple-A hitting coach.

Snyder played for the Indians from 1986-90. He also played with the White Sox, Toronto, San Francisco and the Giants. He hit .245 with 115 homers and 340 RBI for the Tribe.

Snyder said he's talked to Baltimore, but had been unable to get in touch with the Indians.

Cleveland Indians have an eventful and complicated day at the winter meetings, but no one has been traded yet

By Paul Hoynes, cleveland.com phoynes@cleveland.com

LAS VEGAS – When Chris Antonetti sat down to talk to reporters on Tuesday afternoon, he said it had been an eventful day.

OK, so when is the press conference to announce the big trade?

Hey, just slow down a minute and remember where you are. This is the winter meetings, where there are hundreds and hundreds of conversations and few, if any, trades.

Still the day's events sounded interesting from Antonetti's point of view.

"They were just some really complicated transactions and some that are interdependent upon other transactions," said Antonetti, "so it's a collaborative effort where we're all spending a lot of time trying to work out the different integrations of it."

Perhaps it had something to do with reports that the Indians were one of the teams talking to Seattle about Carlos Santana -- yes, that Carlos Santana -- who just landed in Seattle by way of Philadelphia after leaving the Indians for free agency following the 2017 season. How does Santana fit on a roster that already has first baseman Yonder Alonso and DH Edwin Encarnacion?

And what about the potential trades of Corey Kluber or Trevor Bauer? If such a trade does take place, it probably won't be before the meetings end Thursday with the Rule 5 Draft.

Would the Indians get Santana just to flip him to another team? He's still owed \$40 million over two years on the three-year, \$60 million deal he signed with the Phillies. Or would they be able to trade Encarnacion? Or perhaps send Alonso back to Seattle, the team he ended the 2017 season with, as part of the deal?

Perhaps they're discussing a three-team trade similar to the one they acquired Bauer in right after the winter meetings in 2012.

One way or the other, the Tribe will be able to dump salary at the end of the 2019 season when Jason Kipnis, Encarnacion and Alonso become eligible for free agency. Alonso has a vesting option for 2020.

Kipnis, by the way, was told at the end of last season to prepare for the 2019 season as an outfielder. Things can certainly change between now and opening day, but if nothing does, Kipnis would probably start in left field with Jose Ramirez at second and Yandy Diaz at third.

"With Kip, we told him that based on the configuration of our roster, if we were to start the season in 2019 the way we ended 2018, the most likely configuration would be with him in the outfield," said Antonetti. "But that can change. It's very fluid."

Antonetti said Kipnis, a former All-Star second baseman, was great about it.

"He just wanted to get a head start on things," said Antonetti.

Asked if they were willing to give Diaz 500 to 600 plate appearances a year, Antonetti said, "We would. We think he's got a chance to be a good major league player."

Regarding playing Diaz every day at third base, Antonetti added, "We believe he can. He's done that in his time in the minors when we weren't busy moving him around to make a spot for him on the major-league team."

But remember this is the winter meetings. The Rays, who are looking for a right-handed hitter, have reportedly checked in on Santana as well. Not to mention doing their homework on Diaz and Encarnacion. At the winter meetings, nothing is real until it actually becomes real.

Who will the Cleveland Indians lean on following this winter's talent and leadership drain?

By Paul Hoynes, cleveland.comphoynes@cleveland.com

LAS VEGAS – A manager manages, and players play. But who leads?

When Terry Francona became manager of the Indians before the 2013 season, Jason Giambi was signed to help show his team the way. The Indians were the surprise of the American League that year, rebounding from a 94-loss season to win a wild-card spot with 92 wins.

In 2016, the Indians signed Mike Napoli, another veteran known for his power at the plate and ability to unite, and they reached Game 7 of the World Series.

Giambi and Napoli were short-term fixes. They did their job and moved on. As the Indians matured, Francona and the front office felt the team had developed enough leaders among its core. An injection from the outside was no longer needed – to say nothing of the fact that personalities such as Giambi and Napoli are not common.

Now that core has cracked. Michael Brantley, Cody Allen, Josh Tomlin, Lonnie Chisenhall – four of the longest tenured Indians – are free agents. Chisenhall has already signed with the Pirates. Andrew Miller, an Indian for a short time, but always a voice of reason, is a free agent as well. The same goes for Rajai Davis.

Yan Gomes, an Indian since the start of Francona's tenure, was traded to Washington on Nov. 30.

The big-league service time accrued by Brantley (eight years, 131 days), Tomlin (eight years, 33 days), Chisenhall (six years, 158 days), Gomes (six years, 83 days) and Allen (six years, 76) accounts for almost 36 years of experience. And all that experience has been with the Indians. Gomes is the only player not to spend his entire big-league career with the Tribe.

Now they're gone. Perhaps the Indians will sign Tomlin to a minor league deal and invite him to spring training in February. But the chances of Brantley and Allen returning are remote. Even a player such as Erik Gonzalez, who spent just over two years in the big leagues, is part of the culture drain. He spent 10 years in the organization before being traded to the Pirates in November.

And there is another shoe or two waiting to drop – a potential trade of Corey Kluber, the two-time Cy Young winner. Kluber is another player who has spent his entire big-league career with the Tribe. He's been in the big leagues for six years and 74 days.

Jason Kipnis could be traded as well. He's spent 10 years with the Indians, the last seven plus with the big-league club.

So who leads now and what happens to the Indians' way?

Chris Antonetti, president of baseball operations, GM Mike Chernoff, Francona and the coaching staff have spent the early part of the offseason talking about it. In exit interviews with their departing free agents after the team was eliminated in the ALDS, they asked them what they felt the personality of the team was and what parts of the clubhouse culture should be preserved.

"So what exactly that looks like remains to be seen," said Antonetti. "I imagine we're going to have some other players that would be joining the organization over the course of the next few months and go to spring training and try to form a cohesive unit. But I couldn't have more confidence in anyone than Tito in how he'll build that culture and remain consistent with who we are as an organization."

Will Francona and the coaching staff's roles change because of the roster turnover?

"I think we'll always lean on Tito and the coaching staff," said Antonetti. "I think each team forms its own identity over the course of the season and different guys emerge as leaders. We saw that with Nap or Giambi or Michael Brantley, an evolution over time. Josh Tomlin, who at the time wasn't our highest-performing player, but was one of the dominating voices in the clubhouse in how he led."

Chernoff added, "It's hard thinking about a clubhouse without those guys when they had been there for so long and were such core members of the culture. I also think they left a lasting legacy. They have thought about that legacy over time and helped to empower a lot of the younger players and groomed them for leadership roles. That's a huge credit to those guys."

Winter meetings predictions: Will Vegas deliver any last-day drama?

ESPN.com

Wednesday is the last full day of the winter meetings, and there has been little action as teams warily consider their options. With roughly 24 hours to go before the leading executives of all 30 teams start packing up to go home and return to the hot stove, what's going to happen in Las Vegas before they have to jet? We polled some of our writers and editors at the meetings to see what they expect may yet happen.

Biggest name you think could sign today

J.A. Happ, mostly because it seems to be a matter of dickering about the years he'll sign for with his new (or old) team. -- Bradford Doolittle
Wilson Ramos is here in Vegas and has met with the New York Mets and Milwaukee Brewers. The Mets, of course, are in the middle of the J.T. Realmuto rumors, but why blow up your farm system or trade Noah Syndergaard when you can sign Ramos or Yasmani Grandal? -- David Schoenfield

The general silence and lack of big-splash moves at these winter meetings has made it hard to predict anything in the realm of daily signings. Clearly at this point, Manny Machado and Bryce Harper won't be at the Mandalay Bay putting their names on any contracts. If a major domino were to somehow fall, perhaps it will be a pitcher. J.A. Happ certainly knows where he stands with those courting him. -- Coley Harvey

Put me down for J.A. Happ as well. The starting pitcher market has taken shape more than any other this winter with Patrick Corbin and Nathan Eovaldi having signed. And at age 36, the two- or three-year deal that Happ is likely to get seems to fit the final piece-type move that contenders are looking for right now. -- Dan Mullen

Likeliest major trade of the day

The Seattle Mariners will trade Carlos Santana to somebody, if only because it has been a few days since Jerry Dipoto pulled off a trade. -- Doolittle

Seems to be too many chefs in the Realmuto kitchen at the moment. So how about Corey Kluber? To the Los Angeles Dodgers, and Alex Verdugo is the big piece the Cleveland Indians get in return. -- Schoenfield

As the sun set on the desert Monday, so much chatter revolved around a mega, three-team trade that would finally inject some true buzz into these meetings. It didn't happen. As we enter Wednesday, the overall trade chatter in Las Vegas has diminished. -- Harvey

Insert Dodgers outfielder's name here. L.A. needing to deal from its outfield depth is a matter of when, not if. If I have to pick one Dodgers outfielder, I'd say Yasiel Puig is most likely of the group to be dealt today. -- Mullen

Team most likely to make a final-day splash

I'm not sure where J.T. Realmuto will end up, but I'm guessing the Miami Marlins will find his new team before the meetings break up. So the Marlins will make the biggest splash, as marlins tend to do. -- Doolittle

Well, I just had Kluber going to the Dodgers, so that's a splash worthy of Bartolo Colon jumping into the kiddie pool. But there seems to be a lot of buzz with the Mets, and their new GM obviously isn't afraid to make a move. Maybe it's a trade or maybe it's a free-agent signing. -- Schoenfield

It seems hard to discount anything the Chicago White Sox might do at this point. They appear to be connected in various talks for the top remaining free-agent starters, and they just made a key addition to the rotation Tuesday, adding Ivan Nova in a trade with Pittsburgh. Oh, and

they're reportedly one of Manny Machado's four suitors -- though any team's deal with him would likely occur after the winter meetings. -- Harvey

See my comment above. The Dodgers feel like one of the few teams that really has to do something and once they make one move, the rest of the dominoes could fall from there. -- Mullen

What WON'T happen but will have people talking?

I don't think the Mets will deal Noah Syndergaard, but the fact the buzz about that possibility got as loud as it did will surely keep New York fans on edge for the rest of the winter. -- Doolittle

The Syndergaard rumors are fun and intriguing, but I still find it hard to believe the Mets would trade him on the heels of the Edwin Diaz/Robinson Cano deal. -- Schoenfield

Bryce Harper won't get signed by a team while the winter meetings wrap up in his hometown, but he will be all the buzz Wednesday. The question of where will he sign will soon get replaced by a more earnest when will he sign? His agent, Scott Boras, is expected to hold court in his customary Wednesday-of-the-winter-meetings scrum. Once that happens, he'll surely have the baseball world talking about Harper. -- Harvey

J.T. Realmuto to the _____. I think Realmuto will move soon, but there doesn't seem to be a perfect fit given the Marlins' (rightfully) high asking price, so it might take a little while longer for this to get done. -- Mullen

If you could make one deal, what would it be?

I would trade Adam Ottavino to 1927 so he would find out that Babe Ruth could hit him just as well as the Bambino hit Walter Johnson and Lefty Grove. Back in reality, I'd like to see the Houston Astros trade from their prospect depth to get Trevor Bauer, putting Bauer back in the same rotation as Gerrit Cole. What could go wrong? -- Doolittle

The Yankees get Scooter Gennett from the Cincinnati Reds for Sonny Gray and a prospect. -- Schoenfield

From a New York Yankees perspective, there are so many trade possibilities that seem worth exploring. Just on Tuesday, GM Brian Cashman listed more than a dozen names of Bronx Bombers who have generated interest from other teams. Would I trade any of them at this point? No. Noah Syndergaard might be a nice flamethrower and all, but the promise of young Miguel Andujar still feels like too great a price to pay. So to answer this question a different way, here's one deal I wouldn't make. -- Harvey

After two days of waiting with only Andrew McCutchen to the Phillies to show for it, I'll take any move that becomes the signature move for these winter meetings, with Corey Kluber getting traded to the Dodgers being one that certainly would fit that bill. -- Mullen

Storyline everyone will be talking about on the plane out of Vegas

Unfortunately, unless deals start to crystallize before Thursday, it will be the same reaction as last year: relative inaction. The chatter has seemed a little more consistent but the transactions have again just come in trickles. -- Doolittle

Bryce and Manny, Manny and Bryce. -- Schoenfield

Honestly, the biggest storyline will revolve around the lack of activity that occurred at these meetings. The planes out of Nevada will be filled with people wondering why every major free agent appears so content on waiting to announce a decision, instead of giving the baseball world something to chew on for three days. -- Harvey

The same thing we were talking about on the plane into Vegas: Where will Bryce Harper and Manny Machado sign? -- Mullen