



Detroit Tigers Clips

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Tigers tame on trade market; interest high in lefty Justin Wilson (Fenech)
Tigers' Ausmus: Daniel Norris, Matt Boyd not yet set in rotation (Sipple)
On Leyland's advice, Detroit Tigers' Justin Verlander is skipping WBC (Fenech)
TigerFest is Jan. 21; tickets go on sale Friday (Fenech)

The Detroit News

Henning: With Sale off table, Verlander to Nationals makes sense (Henning)
Gose being given shot at redemption with Tigers (McCosky)
No dominoes fall to Tigers after Sale trade (McCosky)

MLive.com

Even after Chris Sale deal, chances of Justin Verlander trade seem slim (Woodbery)
Baseball Winter Meetings live updates: Latest news, rumors from Day 3 (Woodbery)
Tigers injury updates: Jordan Zimmermann getting neck treatment (Woodbery)
Tigers' Justin Wilson getting 'high level of interest' in trade talks (Woodbery)
Tigers like Francisco Rodriguez in pen, but growing trade value is hard to ignore (Woodbery)

MLB.com

Ausmus doesn't expect many moves for Tigers (Beck)
Tigers lefty Wilson generating trade buzz (Beck)
Verlander's status unchanged by Sale trade (Beck)

CBSDetroit.com

Brad Ausmus: We Don't Want To Trade Our Stars (Burchfield)

Daily Transactions

Tigers tame on trade market; interest high in lefty Justin Wilson

December 7, 2016

By Anthony Fenech/ Detroit Free Press

NATIONAL HARBOR, Md. – It was busier today than a day earlier at the Major League Baseball winter meetings, with a familiar face grabbing the headlines by executing another blockbuster trade, but the Detroit Tigers remained under the radar.

“There’s not anything new to report,” general manager Al Avila said in the evening. “There’s still possibilities of some trades — maybe not as dramatic as you may imagine — but some things that could help us.”

One player that officially emerged on the trade radar was left-handed reliever Justin Wilson, whom Avila said has received the most attention of the Tigers’ relievers.

Wilson, 29, posted a 4.14 ERA and 1.33 WHIP in 66 appearances this past season. He started off strong in 2016 — his first with the Tigers following an off-season trade from the Yankees — but wasn’t as effective from the middle of May onward. He served as the team’s set-up man early in the season but wasn’t used in high-leverage roles down the stretch.

In addition to Wilson, the Tigers have also received inquiries on righty Shane Greene, Avila said. But while both turned in the same type of season, there are differences in the way the team values them.

Wilson is projected to earn \$2.7 million in his second year of arbitration, according to MLBTradeRumors.com. Greene is under team control.

“I would think that you would have to separate both,” Avila said. “One is right-handed, one is left-handed. One’s got four years of control, one’s got two years of control. One is starting to make a little bit of money, the other’s not. So there’s really two separate situations.”

If the Tigers were to trade Wilson and not receive a lefty reliever in return, they would be without a No. 1 lefty in the bullpen. Other internal options include Kyle Ryan and Blaine Hardy, though neither has performed like a top lefty.

While a trade of Wilson would open up another hole on the roster, the Tigers could receive the kind of player or prospect from a team in need of lefty relief help that would make a swap worth it.

Still, with nearly two days of the winter meetings complete, it did not appear that a trade was imminent. It’s still too early to say whether or not a trade will be completed before the team leaves town after Thursday morning’s Rule 5 draft, but the signals Avila has been sending point towards the core sticking together.

He spoke shortly after Red Sox president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski landed lefty ace Chris Sale from the White Sox in exchange for top prospects Yoan Moncada and Michael Kopech.

As Dombrowski left the stage, Tigers manager Brad Ausmus arrived at a podium nearby for his scheduled media session with reporters.

Ausmus thanked Dombrowski for taking Sale out of the American League Central.

The Sale move doesn’t figure to alter the Tigers’ plans, though there could be more interest in ace Justin Verlander.

“I don’t believe it’s going to affect our situation at all as far as starters at this point,” Avila said. “I think the phone calls started coming actually before that was announced. I don’t think it was a domino effect, no, but I would assume there will be a domino effect because that’s one more guy that gets taken up and maybe some teams will move on.”

Tigers' Ausmus: Daniel Norris, Matt Boyd not yet set in rotation

December 7, 2016

By George Sipple/ Detroit Free Press

NATIONAL HARBOR, Md. – Detroit Tigers manager Brad Ausmus said Justin Verlander, Michael Fulmer and Jordan Zimmermann are the only three guys set in the starting rotation as of now.

For now, that means lefties Matt Boyd and Daniel Norris would have to battle for a spot, along with veterans Anibal Sanchez and Mike Pelfrey.

“There's no question I felt Boyd and Norris pitched well, especially in the pennant race atmosphere going down the stretch, and that doesn't hurt them,” Ausmus told national and local reporters during a scrum today at the winter meetings, held at the Gaylord National Resort & Convention Center.

“But if you would have asked me last year -- maybe you did ask me and I refused to answer -- but if I did answer last year, I would have said Norris in spring training. Norris gets hurt, all of sudden it changes everything. He ends up being down in the minor leagues for half the season.

“But I do think Daniel and Matt Boyd both pitched very well. I thought they made progress, and I think they both have a chance to be good.

Ausmus acknowledged that he did have a recent discussion with pitching coach Rich Dubee about how Sanchez and Pelfrey would be used in spring training. Ausmus said at least one of them will prepare to be a starter.

“Possibly both, depending on how things shake down,” Ausmus said. “But to be honest with you, I called Dubee the other day on that particular topic, and we discussed it but we didn't make a final decision.”

Given how Sanchez and Pelfrey performed last season, it's hard to imagine them beating out Boyd or Norris for a spot in the rotation.

Boyd, Norris and Fulmer, who was the American League rookie of the year, helped bolster the rotation last season. Innings will again be a concern for the trio, though.

“I think with the young guys, you have to watch innings,” Ausmus said. “I'm not overly concerned about innings. You can't get to 200 -- I wouldn't say go over it, but you probably could get to it. 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. When you have three of them potentially in the rotation, now that's 60% of your rotation, there's going to be some lows that the bullpen is going to have to pick up some extra innings.”

Tigers general manager Al Avila said Monday that Zimmermann had injections due to pain in his neck.

Ausmus said he's not concerned with the injections.

“I'm just hoping it gets corrected,” Ausmus said of Zimmermann's neck issues. “He had the injection a few weeks ago; I talked to him. He said he felt good. The second one is planned. It's not that there was an issue, it was planned as part of therapy. He gets that in January.

“Really all 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. We missed him for about half the season last year, and he was going to be our No. 2.”

As for Norris, Ausmus said Dubee did a good job of getting him to slow down.

“A lot of it is in his head,” Ausmus said of Norris. “He so badly wants to get the ball and get the guy out. I think what Rich did with him, especially on the side sessions, is kind of break it down step-by-step, get on the rubber, get your sign, get your set, deliver the pitch. Pick your target. Try and impress on him you can't pitch before you've done these other things.

“I think Daniel wants to be successful and get guys out. And, quite frankly, he wants to win a World Series, right this second. He's done a nice job of slowing it down and taking it one pitch at a time. It's the old adage. I thought that was the difference, allowed him to concentrate, make better pitches.”

On Leyland's advice, Detroit Tigers' Justin Verlander is skipping WBC

December 7, 2016

By Anthony Fenech/ Detroit Free Press

NATIONAL HARBOR, Md. – Justin Verlander is skipping this spring's World Baseball Classic.

On Sunday, Verlander texted Jim Leyland.

The Detroit Tigers ace wanted to talk with his former skipper about the World Baseball Classic, which Leyland is participating in as manager of the U.S. team.

On Monday, Leyland sat alongside U.S. general manager Joe Torre at the Gaylord National Resort and Convention Center, in Oxon Hill, Md., answering questions in a media session, when his phone flashed.

“JV” was calling to chat

“This is Verlander,” Leyland said. “Maybe we got him.”

Leyland called Verlander back almost immediately after. And over the course of their conversation, in which the veteran right-hander expressed his desire to pitch for the U.S. team, Leyland, a father figure of sorts, advised him to skip the event.

“We had a great conversation and after we talked about everything, I just felt that maybe it was best for him to skip it,” Leyland said Tuesday afternoon. “He was into it, he wanted to do it, he was positive about it, but we talked about a lot of different circumstances and we just felt – particularly, me – that it was probably best for him.”

This past season, Verlander reclaimed his spot as one of baseball's best pitchers. He finished second for the American League Cy Young Award, posting a 3.04 ERA and 1.00 WHIP with a league-leading 254 strikeouts. The biggest reason for the renaissance season at age 33 was his health. For the first time in three seasons, he came into spring training at full health. It showed.

The main reason for him skipping the WBC, which will take place in March, is his spring training preparation.

Verlander, a creature of habit, does not begin to throw at maximum effort until the final few starts of spring training. To pitch in the WBC and give the U.S. team the best chance to win, he would have been forced to alter a routine that he's leaned on for the better part of a decade, perhaps exposing himself to an injury.

“I think he was wrapped up in playing for the United States and I didn't want to put any pressure on him,”

Leyland said. “I thought it was ridiculous to do that. He listened to what I said, and he's a veteran guy that got back in a regimen this year, and I think it's just best at this time for him to probably skip it.”

Leyland certainly would have liked to have Verlander on the mound. Even so, the U.S. team will trot out an impressive starting rotation.

“We're going to have good pitchers,” Leyland said. “We're very confident in the guys we have. You always like to have every single guy you want but it doesn't always work out that way.”

And after speaking at length with the pitcher he helped mold into a 200-inning workhorse, riding him since his rookie year in 2006, Leyland counseled Verlander as a friend, not a manager.

“I thought it was best for him,” he said.

TigerFest is Jan. 21; tickets go on sale Friday

December 7, 2016

By Anthony Fenech/ Detroit Free Press

NATIONAL HARBOR, Md. — Baseball is right around the corner.

The Detroit Tigers announced this afternoon that TigerFest tickets go on sale at 10 a.m. Friday. TigerFest is scheduled for Saturday, Jan. 21.

Tickets are available online at tigers.com/tigerfest or by phone at 866-66-TIGER (886-668-4437).

More than 30 Tigers players, managers and coaches are scheduled to attend. A full list of players will be announced in January.

Tickets are \$28 for adults and \$14 for kids 12 and under. All fans in attendance will receive a knit hat.

Henning: With Sale off table, Verlander to Nationals makes sense

December 7, 2016

By Lynn Henning/ The Detroit News

National Harbor, Md. – Now it's down to a narrower list of teams that might have the urge, and inventory, to pry Justin Verlander from Detroit.

Boston always made sense. In context, anyway. The Red Sox were bent on grabbing an ace-grade starter during this week's Winter Meetings. And the Red Sox are now piloted by Dave Dombrowski, a general manager who loves nothing more than to craft hulking headline deals that, at least on the surface, give his team a glorious shot at winning a championship.

But at mid-day Tuesday, after a quiet first two days at baseball's Winter Meetings, Dombrowski did what he so often did in Detroit. He blew up the meetings. He traded not for Verlander, which because of salary and age was never Boston's first choice, but instead hauled in Chris Sale in a whopping deal that sent stud second baseman Yoan Moncada, as well as 100-mph man Michael Kopech and others, to the White Sox.

Verlander remains, practically speaking, on December's trade mart. For a price Detroit finds appealing. But there are few teams other than the Washington Nationals who (a) can handle a remaining contract as grand as Verlander's and (b) who have the prospect prizes Tigers general manager Al Avila will demand.

Chances that Verlander will pitch for any team outside of Detroit in 2017 are low. But until the Nationals and their savvy, trade-maestro GM, Mike Rizzo, decide to instead deal with the Rays for Chris Archer or Drew Smyly or one of Tampa Bay's available arms, or find help elsewhere, Verlander is too enticing, too correct of a fit, for Washington to ignore.

The Red Sox were bad bets to chase Verlander for reasons underscored by what became a spectacular bid for Sale.

They were third in the big leagues in 2016 at \$215 million. They were over the luxury-tax line by nearly \$30 million and were staring at heftier penalties, and even more heat from Commissioner Rob Manfred, if they didn't get salaries more in step in 2017.

That pretty much canceled Verlander even if Dombrowski hadn't preferred Sale, who is 27, and who has one of the club-cushiest deals imaginable during the next three seasons (\$38 million, total).

It's a different story in Washington. The Nationals are perhaps one prime-time starter from giving the Cubs a serious reason to worry about next year's National League pennant. They were 10th in payroll in 2016 at \$163 million and could absorb Verlander's tab with no undue stress.

They also have what the Tigers need. In abundance.

Victor Robles (outfielder, 19), Reynaldo Lopez and Lucas Giolito (right-handed starters, 22), Erick Fedde and Joe Ross (right-handed starters, 23), and Andrew Stevenson (center fielder, 22), who, it should be noted, was ready to become a Tigers draft pick in 2015 until the Nationals grabbed him in the second round, eight picks ahead of Detroit.

Any combination of the above would lure Verlander from the Tigers – if Rizzo, who is one of baseball's shrewdest dealers, decides he must have Verlander.

And that's a long way from being a certainty when Rizzo can trade for younger, less expensive pitchers. Even if they weren't a Cy Young finalist in 2016 who is probably destined for a Cooperstown plaque.

There is another side to any potential Verlander deal if the Tigers and Nationals were to chat seriously. Verlander would need to bless any swap.

He has spent all of his big-league life with the Tigers. Any player who has been in the league for 10 years, five with the same team, can veto a trade. Verlander probably would OK a Nats arrangement for several reasons. The first, and most important, is that Washington could win a World Series in 2017. With another blue-chip starter, anyway. Even with their starry rotation, the Nats need a kingpin alongside Max Scherzer, Stephen Strasburg, Gio Gonzalez, etc. Verlander would qualify as a plus-plus add, and Rizzo knows it. If you plan to beat the Cubs any time during the next five seasons, he'll need more artillery than Washington has flashed in its past playoff fadeouts.

Verlander also knows the Nationals culture. He grew up in nearby Virginia. This is his old backyard.

It figures, too, that an East Coast or West Coast address works for his fiancée, Kate Upton, whose career, if you haven't noticed, is high-profile and would figure to be more conveniently situated along either American shore. Assemble the pieces, focusing most heavily on the Nationals' taste for a World Series, and Verlander makes as much sense as can be made from thoughts the Tigers would deal him. Or that another team could afford him. Dombrowski was bound to push the plunger sooner or later and drop a dynamite blast on big-league baseball's trade mart. Tuesday's move tore apart what had been something of an ice-jam. By way of eliminating a top trade target in Sale, the seismic Red Sox-White Sox swap helped adjust December market standards. It also made other suitors jealous. Maybe above all, the Nats, which seemingly had been close Monday night to getting Sale.

Now, Rizzo can concentrate on other options. And if they didn't include Verlander, simply to inquire about an asking price, it would be an astonishing surprise to all – beginning with the Detroit Tigers.

Gose being given shot at redemption with Tigers

December 7, 2016

By Chris McCosky/ The Detroit News

National Harbor, Md. — It's not exactly a clean slate.

Anthony Gose, who began the last two seasons as the Tigers' starting center fielder but finished last year banished to Double A Erie, will be welcomed back this spring and given a chance to fight for his roster spot. But, just as reliever Bruce Rondon had to do before last season, Gose will have to mend some fences and rebuild trust with the coaching staff and teammates.

"I've always liked Anthony," manager Brad Ausmus said. "He works his tail off, he really does — almost to a fault at times. I think if he can learn to back off and let the game come to him a little bit with his athleticism, he can be a big league everyday center fielder.

"Last year, it's over. It's water under the bridge."

Adding intrigue to the situation, though, is the presence of Lloyd McClendon as the new Tigers' hitting coach. McClendon managed Triple A Toledo last season and he and Gose engaged in a very public shouting match during a game.

Gose was immediately suspended and demoted to Double A Erie.

"Those kind of things happen in baseball where there are certain disagreements or certain people don't even get along," Ausmus said. "Most of the time, media doesn't know about it. Guys just don't get along and they don't talk to each other. So that does happen.

"I don't think that would be the case here. I think Mac and Gose will be fine together. I think they will work together fine. I don't think there will be any issues. I know Mac will do everything he can to try to get the most out of him."

Gose hit .254 with the Tigers in 2015, but fell into a horrible slump early last season and never recovered. He hit .209 in 30 games before being sent to Toledo — striking out 38 times in 101 plate appearances.

He hit .185 in Toledo and .209 in Erie. Combined in those stops, he fanned one out of every three at-bats (129 strikeouts in 379 plate appearances).

He, along with Tyler Collins and JaCoby Jones are the in-house candidates for the center field job. But one of general manager Al Avila top goals during the Winter Meetings is to find a affordable veteran.

"I think the smart thing for JaCoby (is to start the season at Toledo)," Ausmus said. "I think he could use a little more polishing... I think, in a perfect world, he could use a little more time. And really, at this point, (center field) is wide open. We have some candidates in-house, but it wouldn't shock me if they somehow go out of house."

Anamoly or reality?

The metrics say J.D. Martinez was the worst fielding outfielder in the American League last season. According to FanGraphs, his defensive runs earned went from plus-4 to minus-22 and his zone rating went from plus-7 to minus-21.

Alarming. Martinez broke his right elbow crashing into the wall in Kansas City, but Ausmus doesn't believe that was a factor.

"I don't think it was the injury," he said. "I remember on a flight back towards the end of the season. J.D. and I were talking about that a little bit, and he knows. Quite frankly, I just think it was an off year for him defensively. I don't want to chalk it up to any more than that.

"It certainly wasn't lack of effort. He's always out there taking fly balls in batting practice and he cares about his defense ... I just think it was a down year. I expect him to return to the 2015 J.D. Martinez.

Eliminate the K

One point of emphasis going into spring training, Ausmus said, was for the hitters to have a better two-strike approach at the plate, especially those who aren't going to slug 20-plus home runs.

"Honestly, the one thing I would like to see, I would like to see us strike out less," Ausmus said. "I think certain guys that produce runs, drive in runs, you live with strikeouts. But I think we've got some other guys that can cut down on the strikeouts, and that will be a topic of discussion early on in camp."

The Tigers struck out 1,303 times last season, sixth most in the American League.

“I've already talked to Mac (hitting coach Lloyd McClendon) about it, and he's on board,” Ausmus said. “We'll talk about it early on, probably the first day or two of spring training. Miguel Cabrera doesn't strike out that much. He has the ability to shorten up and go the other way with two strikes, especially with runners in scoring position.

“For me, other guys should be looking at that. Here is a guy that hits 35 homers, drives in a hundred and he still has the ability to shorten up.”

Ausmus understands the increased value placed on power these days and the impact it has on young players.

“Analytics helps the game tremendously,” he said. “It gives you insight and makes the team better. But now you're getting that trickle-up effect. Kids that have been reading about power and how important doubles and homers are analytically, well, they swing for the fences, and I think that's why there are more strikeouts.

“There is something to be said at times, especially for specific types of players, to putting the ball in play and put pressure on the defense.”

Rule 5 alive

The Tigers have the 20th pick in the Rule 5 draft on Thursday morning, and the Tigers have left an open spot on their 40-man roster in hopes a player they like is available.

“We are looking at it as, we will possibly be involved,” Avila said. “We don't pick very high, so maybe a guy we target won't get to us. If that's the case, we don't pick.”

The Tigers passed on their Rule 5 pick last year. If the Tigers do select a player, they would have to keep him on the active 25-man roster all season, or else send him back to his original team.

Spring thoughts

Ausmus said he expects either Anibal Sanchez or Mike Pelfrey, though perhaps not both, to begin spring training as a starter.

“I think initially, at least one of them would certainly be preparing as a starter,” he said. “Possibly both, depending on how things shake down. 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.”

No dominoes fall to Tigers after Sale trade

December 7, 2016

By Chris McCosky/ The Detroit News

National Harbor, Md. — General manager Al Avila said he expected a significant trickle-down from the blockbuster trade pulled off by his old boss Dave Dombrowski and the Red Sox Tuesday, but he didn't think it would reach the Tigers.

"I don't believe the Chris Sale trade is going to affect our situation at all, as far as our starting (pitching) situation," he said.

In other words, he didn't expect teams that had lost out on Sale — who goes to the Red Sox in exchange for four top prospects, including the No. 1-rated prospect in baseball (Yoan Moncada) — to begin making offers for Tigers ace Justin Verlander.

"We have engaged in more conversation today, but those phone calls started coming before that trade was announced," Avila said. "There was not a domino effect (regarding Verlander)."

There were some reports, unconfirmed by the Tigers, that the Phillies had interest in possibly acquiring right-fielder J.D. Martinez, though any trade would hinge on whether the Tigers were able to trade second baseman Ian Kinsler.

In that scenario, one of the players the Tigers would get back from the Phillies would be second baseman Cesar Hernandez, who hit .294 with a .371 on-base percentage and led the National League with 11 triples.

Again, the Tigers did not confirm that scenario. Avila did confirm, though, that the most coveted player on his roster thus far was left-handed reliever Justin Wilson.

"The highest level of interest has been on Justin Wilson," Avila said.

Right-handed reliever Shane Greene has generated interest around the league, as well, but the Tigers seem more inclined to listen to offers on Wilson than Greene.

"We've said we'd talk about anybody, but there are guys who it wouldn't make sense to trade because they are the type of guys we're trying to acquire — guys that are young and under team control," Avila said.

Wilson is under club control for two more years and is projected to earn \$2.7 million if he goes to arbitration. He's coming off an uneven season, posting a 4.14 ERA and a career-high 1.33 WHIP.

Greene, by contrast, is under club control for four more years and will make the major league minimum.

"Greene, even though he didn't have the year everyone expected, we still think he's got upside," Avila said.

"It's kind of a no-brainer for us. He's not the type of guy we want to trade."

Greene, though for stretches was virtually unhittable, had an erratic season (5.82 ERA and 1.326 WHIP). Avila and manager Brad Ausmus both believe injuries were the cause of his inconsistency.

"The blister issue, I think, he really battled that," Avila said. "I think he maybe tried to bounce back too quickly."

Ausmus talked to Greene recently. Besides the blister, Greene was also still working through the arterial issues which shut him down in 2015.

"He said it's progressing," Ausmus said. "It still gets — he gets kind of a cold sensation (in the index finger of his pitching hand) once in a while, but he says it's getting less and less frequent ... He struggled at times but he also showed flashes are being very good."

"He knows he's going to be in the bullpen. He's comfortable with it. I know he likes it. He prefers it. I'm expecting that to be kind of the foundation for an improved 2017."

As of 6 p.m. Tuesday, Avila didn't think a trade was imminent. But he was more certain that moves would be made before the end of the week.

"There are the possibilities of some trades," he said. "Maybe not as dramatic as you might imagine, but something that could help us."

Ausmus' news conference Tuesday was starting just as Dombrowski's presser was ending. As the two shook hands, Ausmus joked, "Hey, thanks for making that trade."

The Tigers are not sorry to see Sale out of the Central Division, for sure.

“I’m not surprised by it,” Ausmus said. “Dave knows how important starting pitching is to a team, so it doesn’t surprise me that a Chris Sale would be in his crosshairs. We’ve obviously had our fill of him over the years.” Avila, though, used the trade as an example of the position he is trying to get the Tigers’ organization to be in. “Sale was a great move for whoever was going to get him,” he said. “If you are worried about the luxury tax, for the caliber of pitcher you are getting, it’s the most reasonable contract you could imagine.” And the only way the Red Sox were able to make that deal, was to have a deep and talented-rich farm system. “Valuable, good players in your farm system that everybody covets and a great major league player that’s under a very team-friendly contract — that combination is what everybody looks for,” Avila said. “And like I keep telling you, one of these days down the road, that’s where we want to be. We want to have those kind of prospects in the system.”

Even after Chris Sale deal, chances of Justin Verlander trade seem slim

December 7, 2016

By Evan Woodbery/ MLive.com

NATIONAL HARBOR, Md. -- There might be about 46 million reasons that Chicago White Sox starter Chris Sale was able to fetch a higher asking price than Detroit Tigers ace Justin Verlander on the trade market this week.

That's the difference in what the two pitchers are owed over the next three years.

Verlander, who is set to make \$84 million in the final three years of his deal (compared to \$38 million for Sale), has other hurdles that make a deal more difficult, like trade veto rights.

That's why it appears increasingly likely that Verlander will remain with the Tigers in 2017 and that talk of a winter deal is simply talk. Even the Sale trade, which could impact the rest of the starting pitcher market, probably won't change that, said Tigers general manager Al Avila.

"I would assume there will be a domino effect," Avila said. " But I don't believe it's going to affect our situation at all."

Tigers manager Brad Ausmus said Tuesday that trades were "easy to talk about and harder to do." He didn't seem upset that none of the rumored trades had fallen through.

"I don't want those guys traded," he said, referring to stars like Verlander and Miguel Cabrera. "Are you kidding me? That's the last thing I want."

Avila said it's possible that any trades the Tigers execute this week will not be "as dramatic" as people expect. It's also possible they'll leave Maryland without making even a single move.

"We're not under any pressure to get something done in the next two days," he said.

WBC Update: Speaking of Verlander, the Tigers ace declined a chance to participate in the World Baseball Classic after speaking to team manager Jim Leyland.

"Major League Baseball doesn't want the organizations interfering with players' decisions to play in the WBC," Ausmus said. "If they want to play, I understand that. And if they don't want to play, I understand that side of the argument, as well. I don't broach it."

Reliever Bruce Rondon could be one several Tigers playing for the Venezuelan team if he makes the cut.

"I think it's probably good for him to be around some of those guys (in spring)," Ausmus said. "Although it seems like half their team is Detroit Tigers."

Miguel Cabrera has confirmed that he will play for Venezuela, which is managed by Tigers first base coach Omar Vizquel. Former Tigers shortstop Carlos Guillen is the general manager.

Baseball Winter Meetings live updates: Latest news, rumors from Day 3

December 7, 2016

By Evan Woodbery/ MLive.com

NATIONAL HARBOR, Md. -- The AL Central Division was at the center of another big trade on Tuesday night.

On the last full day of the Baseball Winter Meetings dedicated to trade talk, will the Detroit Tigers get in on the act, too?

On Tuesday, the Chicago White Sox dealt ace Chris Sale to the Boston Red Sox for prospects. Later, the Kansas City Royals sent closer Wade Davis to the Chicago Cubs for outfielder Jorge Soler. (The latter deal is pending a physical).

The Tigers have received inquiries on reliever Justin Wilson, and general manager Al Avila suggested that any trade that occurs this week might not be "as dramatic" as expected.

As the day unfolds, we'll have all the news, rumors and reports right here.

7:59 a.m. -- Avila and manager Brad Ausmus certainly aren't talking as if they have any plans to part ways with ace Justin Verlander.

Only 3 rotation spots set in stone, but Daniel Norris, Matt Boyd made strong case in '16

December 7, 2016

By Evan Woodbery/ MLive.com

NATIONAL HARBOR, Md. -- Young starting pitchers Daniel Norris and Matt Boyd had impressive 2016 seasons, but their spot in the Detroit Tigers' 2017 rotation won't be doled out in December.

Tigers manager Brad Ausmus said he considers the first three starters -- Justin Verlander, Michael Fulmer and Jordan Zimmermann -- set in stone.

That means, at least for now, Norris and Boyd will battle Anibal Sanchez, Mike Pelfrey and perhaps Buck Farmer for the final two spots in the rotation.

Ausmus said Shane Greene, who began last season as a starter, will remain in the bullpen.

The emergence of Norris and Boyd has made the status of Sanchez and Pelfrey more tenuous. But Ausmus said he expected that at least one and possibly both of the veterans would prepare for spring training as starters. They could later move to the bullpen when needed. (Ausmus said the final decision had not been made and that he would consult with pitching coach Rich Dubee).

Pelfrey (\$8 million salary) and Sanchez (\$16 million) will both be difficult or impossible to deal during the offseason. But it might also be difficult to stick both in the bullpen unless one could become a credible middle-inning option.

Injuries can quickly change the rotation, which is why the Tigers will have seven or even eight viable starters available.

Norris is probably closest to a lock for the No. 4 spot in the rotation. He was expected to win a roster spot out of spring training in 2016 before he got hurt. Fulmer ultimately arrived in Detroit and became the AL Rookie of the Year.

Boyd has options available, so he could potentially start the year in Triple-A Toledo if he struggles in spring and Sanchez has a good camp.

"There's no question Boyd and Norris pitched well, especially in the pennant race atmosphere going down the stretch, and that doesn't hurt them," Ausmus said.

Tigers injury updates: Jordan Zimmermann getting neck treatment

December 7, 2016

By Evan Woodbery/ MLive.com

NATIONAL HARBOR, Md. -- Third baseman Nick Castellanos rushed back from a broken hand to try to help the Detroit Tigers push for the playoffs in the final week of the regular season.

Now, after a couple months of rest, the injury sustained when he was hit by a pitch is fully healed.

"He feels nothing in his hand," manager Brad Ausmus said. "He's fine."

Meanwhile, starting pitcher Jordan Zimmermann recently got an injection in his neck, trying to conquer some of the injury setbacks that derailed part of his 2016 season.

Ausmus said the injections were planned as part of his therapy and don't represent any new problems. He'll receive a second one next month.

"Really all we can do is hold our breath and get to spring training and hope it doesn't flare up again, because we need him," Ausmus said. "We missed him for about half the season last year, and he was going to be our No. 2 (starter)."

Reliever Shane Greene endured finger blisters that caused numbness and sent him to the disabled list in May.

"He said it's progressing," Ausmus said. "He gets kind of a cold sensation once in a while but he says it's getting less and less frequent."

Tigers' Justin Wilson getting 'high level of interest' in trade talks

December 7, 2016

By Evan Woodbery/ MLive.com

NATIONAL HARBOR, Md. -- The Detroit Tigers are getting calls about left-handed reliever Justin Wilson, general manager Al Avila confirmed Tuesday night.

Avila said the Tigers had more trade conversations Tuesday than they did a day earlier, but were not on the verge of any major deals.

"There's a possibility of some trades that are maybe not as dramatic as you may imagine, but that could help us," he said.

In addition to Wilson, the Tigers have also heard from other teams interested in Shane Greene. The Tigers might be less likely to part with Greene, however, because he is slated to make the league minimum in 2017. Wilson, on the other hand, could make \$2.7 million in arbitration, according to one estimate.

"The highest level of interest has been on Justin Wilson," said Avila.

As for Greene?

"We've said that we would talk about anybody on our team, but there are certain guys that really don't make any sense in a trade because those are the type of guys we're trying to acquire," Avila said. "Guys that are under control, young and don't cost a lot of money."

The Tigers acquired Wilson, 29, a year ago this week by trading prospects Luis Cessa and Chad Green to the New York Yankees.

Wilson went 4-5 with a 4.14 ERA in 66 games for the Tigers in 2016. He struck out 65 and walked 17 in 58 2/3 innings.

Tigers like Francisco Rodriguez in pen, but growing trade value is hard to ignore

December 7, 2016

By Evan Woodbery/ MLive.com

NATIONAL HARBOR, Md. -- The Detroit Tigers exercised the \$6 million contract option on reliever Francisco Rodriguez because they wanted him to anchor the bullpen once again in 2017.

Since then, the hyper-inflated market for bullpen arms has not only made that decision look easy in retrospect, it's caused many to wonder if Rodriguez isn't more valuable as a trade chip.

The answer? Rodriguez isn't going anywhere -- at least not for now.

"There might be a good situation down the road," Avila said.

For now, the Tigers are counting on Rodriguez to close again in 2017 and help young pitchers like Bruce Rondon (and eventually Joe Jimenez) adjust to the big leagues.

"He did a tremendous job for our young players," Avila said, acknowledging that sometimes clubhouse contributions can be overstated. "This was not baloney. This was real."

The Tigers shopped center fielder Cameron Maybin aggressively, eventually unloading him to the Anaheim Angels who then exercised his \$9 million contract option.

The Tigers didn't try to do the same for Rodriguez, planning to exercise the option and keep him in the fold from the start.

"He brought us an affordable guy who saved a lot of games for us last year," Avila said.

Since then, closer Mark Melancon has signed a jaw-dropping four-year, \$62 million deal with the San Francisco Giants. Kenley Jansen and Aroldis Chapman, still on the market, are expected to get even more lucrative deals.

The Rodriguez of 2013 might have commanded a deal like that. Since then, his velocity and strikeout rate have dropped, and the soon-to-be 35-year-old has relied more on guile. He's also not suited to being an Andrew Miller-style multi-inning "super reliever."

But Rodriguez still saved 44 games and registered a 3.24 ERA in 58 innings 2016 and was one of the Tigers' most consistent bullpen arms. He could help groom Rondon for that role, perhaps as early as 2017.

Until then, the Tigers plan to keep him in the fold.

Ausmus doesn't expect many moves for Tigers

December 7, 2016

By Jason Beck/ MLB.com

NATIONAL HARBOR, Md. -- Brad Ausmus did not sound like a manager facing a rebuilding task as he took his spot in front of the cameras at the Winter Meetings on Tuesday. Instead, the Tigers skipper is planning for 2017 with the team he has now.

"I don't think there's going to be a ton of change," he said from the media room at the Gaylord National Resort and Convention Center. "It's so much easier to talk about trading people, and a lot [tougher] to actually trade them, especially when you're talking about guys that have some sizable contracts. Some of them have no-trade clauses.

"Quite frankly, even talking about being more responsible fiscally, we don't want to trade. We like them, especially some of the names mentioned earlier in the season. Miguel [Cabrera], Justin [Verlander], I don't want those guys traded. Are you kidding me? That's the last thing I want. I just think it's easy to talk about and harder to do."

Assuming no major moves are made, Ausmus will head into his fourth season as manager with most of his team intact from a club that was in a playoff race until the final day of the regular season in 2016. He would have Verlander, the AL Cy Young runner-up, topping a pitching staff that includes three talented young starters -- notably AL Rookie of the Year Michael Fulmer -- a recovering Jordan Zimmermann and a selection of young relievers.

His lineup currently includes Cabrera, J.D. Martinez, Justin Upton, Ian Kinsler, Victor Martinez and Nick Castellanos.

Detroit's competition in the AL Central includes the defending AL champion Indians, but also a White Sox squad that just traded Chris Sale and could soon trade others, as well as a Royals team debating its own potential moves.

If Ausmus takes this team into the season, he believes they can compete.

"To me, there's no doubt," he said. "We didn't have Zimmermann for half the year. J.D. and Nick missed roughly six weeks. We had three rookies in the rotation for the last 45 days or so. And we were still [in contention] going into [the final day], the last team standing that didn't make the postseason."

The one hole right now is in center field, where Cameron Maybin's trade to the Angels leaves a gaping void not just defensively, but in the second spot in the lineup between Kinsler and Cabrera.

"Really, at this point, it's wide open," Ausmus said of the spot. "We have some candidates in-house, but it wouldn't shock me if they somehow got out of house at some point."

Other than that, he said, the lineup won't look much different.

"We have to see how it develops and see what happens at center field now that Cam is gone," he said. "I think, generally speaking, the lineup, assuming we have the same guys other than Cam, it's going to look pretty similar. There's not a ton of stuff you can do with a lineup. There's not a ton of flexibility with it. We have a lot of guys that play on a regular basis. So, even in terms of platooning or playing the nonstarters, just doesn't happen very much with our lineup."

As for other issues with the club, Ausmus said:

Zimmermann, who underwent an injection a few weeks ago to alleviate lingering pain in his neck, is feeling good and expected to undergo another injection in January. "Really all 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.

Castellanos, who missed most of the final two weeks with a broken hand, is working out normally this season. Reliever Bruce Rondon has the chance to pitch at the back end of the bullpen, but has to be ready to put together a full, productive season. "You can't just do it for two-thirds of a season at the Major League-level," Ausmus said. "He has to keep doing the same thing from Day One next year."

Anthony Gose will come to camp as a center-field candidate despite ending the season at Double-A Erie. His previous issues with Triple-A Toledo manager Lloyd McClendon, now the hitting coach in Detroit, are "water under the bridge," Ausmus said.

Tigers lefty Wilson generating trade buzz

December 7, 2016

By Jason Beck/ MLB.com

NATIONAL HARBOR, Md. -- The Tigers came to baseball's Winter Meetings with veteran names in play for trades. Justin Wilson wasn't expected to join them. But with a day and a half to go before teams return home for the holidays, the lefty reliever might be the most attractive Detroit pitcher on the market.

While Wilson has generated buzz around the lobby of the Gaylord National Resort & Convention Center, maybe more than outfielder J.D. Martinez, Tigers general manager Al Avila said Wilson has drawn the highest level of interest among their non-closing relievers.

That doesn't necessarily mean Wilson is on the move, especially since Detroit isn't deep in lefty relief. But if the Tigers are going to swing a deal here that saves a little bit of money and fills some needs, Wilson is an option. The Tigers acquired the 29-year-old Wilson at last year's Winter Meetings, prying him from the Yankees for pitching prospects Luis Cessa and Chad Green. What followed was an up-and-down season that saw Wilson go from lefty setup to primary eighth-inning reliever to situational reliever.

"I thought he was great," Avila said.

The final numbers included a 4-5 record and 4.14 ERA, along with 65 strikeouts over 58 2/3 innings. However, Wilson posted reverse splits, allowing a .308 average (28-for-91) to left-handed hitters compared with .234 to righties. He put up one save and 25 holds in 30 chances.

"I thought he was unlucky," manager Brad Ausmus said.

Wilson is eligible for arbitration for a second time. MLB Trade Rumors has projected him to make \$2.7 million in 2017. By comparison, free-agent lefty Brett Cecil just signed a four-year, \$30.5 million contract to join the Cardinals.

Other Tigers setup relievers have drawn interest, including Shane Greene, but most are under control at relatively little cost. Alex Wilson is eligible for arbitration for the first time. Moreover, almost all of them are right-handed.

The Tigers don't have many lefty options if Wilson is dealt. Kyle Ryan and Blaine Hardy are the only other lefty relievers currently on the roster. However, if the Tigers can fill other needs with the return package, such as center field or prospect depth, they might have a decision to make.

It wouldn't be glamorous, but the way the Winter Meetings are going, it doesn't sound like glamour is on the table.

"There's still possibilities of some trades," Avila said, "maybe not as dramatic as you may imagine, but some things that could help us."

Verlander's status unchanged by Sale trade

December 7, 2016

By Jason Beck/ MLB.com

NATIONAL HARBOR, Md. -- The Chris Sale trade has a big impact on the Tigers in terms of their division competition. Fittingly, it happened on a day when manager Brad Ausmus said he'd like his team to strike out less in 2017.

But if anybody thought Sale's trade to Boston could impact the trade market for another American League Central ace, general manager Al Avila indicated Justin Verlander probably won't see any effect.

Around baseball, Avila said, "I would assume there will be a domino effect, because that's one more guy that gets taken up and maybe some teams now move on. But I don't believe it's going to affect our situation at all." In other words, Verlander is still likely to stay in Detroit.

While a weak free-agent market and the Tigers' desire to pare down payroll put Verlander in focus as a potential big name on the trade block, two key differences put him in a different situation:

First, Verlander turns 34 years old in February; Sale turns 28 just before Opening Day.

Second, while older players can generate more interest than youngsters when they're on short-term deals, Verlander has a far bigger contract. He'll make \$28 million in each of the next three seasons, with a \$22 million option for 2020 that would vest with a top-five finish in 2019 AL Cy Young voting. Sale will make \$12 million next year before club options of \$12.5 million in '18 and \$13.5 million in '19.

Moreover, Verlander has no-trade rights as a 10-and-5 player -- 10 years of Major League experience, the last five with the same team. Any trade would require his approval. He could waive it in return for an incentive, such as his 2020 option picked up. Or he could opt to stay in Detroit, where he has spent his entire big league career.

The Tigers have made it clear they will not move Verlander to dump salary coming off a season in which he led AL pitchers in Wins Above Replacement (6.6) and strikeouts (254) while finishing second in ERA (3.04). Any team wishing to acquire Verlander would be expected to take on his entire contract.

Meanwhile, the trade market has other younger, less expensive starters available, such as Tampa Bay's Chris Archer, Drew Smyly and Alex Cobb.

Thus, barring a more dramatic change in the market, Verlander is expected to top the Tigers' rotation once again in 2017. Ausmus said Verlander, AL Rookie of the Year Michael Fulmer and Jordan Zimmermann are expected to occupy the top three spots in Detroit's rotation, with Matt Boyd and Daniel Norris competing for the two spots behind them. Mike Pelfrey and/or Anibal Sanchez will stretch out as starters in Spring Training to give the Tigers depth, Ausmus said.

Brad Ausmus: We Don't Want To Trade Our Stars

December 7, 2016

By Will Burchfield/ CBSDetroit.com

Since Al Avila expressed the Tigers' desire to get "younger and leaner," the baseball world has been waiting on the corresponding fire sale.

Brad Ausmus doused those flames at the Winter Meetings.

"It's so much easier to talk about trading people and a lot harder to actually trade them, especially when you're talking about guys that have some sizeable contracts, some of them have no-trade clauses," the Tigers manager said on Tuesday afternoon.

Without naming names, Ausmus seemed to be referencing Miguel Cabrera and Justin Verlander. Despite being swept up in trade rumors, both players are due \$28 million next season and have the power to veto any trade the Tigers put together.

On top of that, Ausmus went on, the Tigers aren't especially motivated to part ways with some of their most productive players.

"And quite frankly, even though we're talking about being more responsible fiscally, we don't want to trade them – we like them. Especially some of the names that were mentioned earlier in the season – Miguel Cabrera, Justin Verlander. I don't want those guys going anywhere, you kidding me? I mean, that's the last thing I want. I just think it's easy to talk about it and harder to do," Ausmus said.

Cabrera racked up 38 home runs and 108 RBI in 2016, while Verlander very nearly won the Cy Young Award. And Ian Kinsler and J.D. Martinez, two more Tigers popping up in trade rumors, are coming off strong seasons of their own.

For all the talk of the Tigers selling assets to cut costs, Ausmus doesn't expect the team's roster to look significantly different at the start of Spring Training.

"I don't think it will be," he said. "I think fiscally speaking, most people understand what Al's talking about. You don't want to continue to spend over your means. But the Ilitches and the Tigers have been for a decade now one of the better teams in baseball and I think they want to continue it.

"It's going to be a little bit different methodology in terms of how you do it. But going from the end of 2016 to the start of Spring Training 2017, I don't think there's going to be a ton of change."

Ausmus' comments fall in line with those made by Avila on Monday, when the GM suggested the Tigers aren't as desperate to shed salary as they originally appeared.

LAST UPDATED: WED, DECEMBER 7, 2016, 01:29 EST

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	Ashur Tolliver	Acquired Off Waivers From from Angels, Los Angeles
Houston Astros	Carlos Beltran	Signed as Free Agent, (2017)(one-year contract)
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](#) [Jesus Sucre](#) Signed, (2017)(avoids arbitration)

[Seattle Mariners](#) [Christian Bergman](#) Signed to a Minor League Contract

[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

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 4, 2016

TEAM	PLAYER	TRANSACTION
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Atlanta Braves	Jacob Lindgren	Signed as Free Agent, (2017)(one-year contract)
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Cincinnati Reds	Gabby Guerrero	Signed to a Minor League Contract
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Minnesota Twins	Ben Paulsen	Signed to a Minor League Contract
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