



CHICAGO CUBS DAILY CLIPS

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December 3, 2018

- Chicago Sun-Times, **Cubs tender contract to suspended Addison Russell, vow to 'hold him accountable'**
<https://chicago.suntimes.com/sports/cubs-tender-addison-russell/>
- Chicago Sun-Times, **Cubs sending wrong message by leaving door open for Addison Russell**
<https://chicago.suntimes.com/sports/chicago-cubs-addison-russell-domestic-violence-theo-epstein-major-league-baseball-reuben-foster/>
- Daily Herald, **Cubs tender contract to Russell, who says he's '110 percent committed'**
<https://www.dailyherald.com/sports/20181130/cubs-tender-contract-to-russell-who-says-hes-110-percent-committed>
- The Athletic, **Cubs tender Addison Russell a contract, now it's time to trade him**
<https://theathletic.com/686418/2018/11/30/cubs-tender-addison-russell-a-contract-now-its-time-to-trade-him/>
- The Athletic, **What the Cubs can learn from the Brewers' unique pitching strategy**
<https://theathletic.com/685596/2018/11/30/what-the-cubs-can-learn-from-the-brewers-unique-pitching-strategy/>
- Cubs.com, **Seven Cubs players tendered contracts**
<https://www.mlb.com/cubs/news/kris-bryant-javier-baez-tendered-contracts/c-301303364>
- Cubs.com, **10 biggest trades in Cubs history**
<https://www.mlb.com/cubs/news/10-biggest-trades-in-cubs-history/c-301358766>
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<https://www.nbcsports.com/chicago/cubs/cubs-opt-retain-addison-russell-amid-domestic-violence-suspension-theo-epstein-contract>

- NBC Sports Chicago, **Cubs Mailbag: What does the future hold for Davids Ross and Bote?**
<https://www.nbcsports.com/chicago/cubs/cubs-mailbag-what-does-future-hold-david-ross-bote-bryant-rizzo-schwarber-sosa-kimbrel-harper>
- Chicago Tribune, **Cubs tender contract to shortstop Addison Russell despite MLB suspension**
<https://www.chicagotribune.com/sports/baseball/cubs/ct-spt-cubs-addison-russell-contract-20181130-story.html>

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Chicago Sun-Times

Cubs tender contract to suspended Addison Russell, vow to 'hold him accountable'

By Gordon Wittenmyer

In a decision that drew swift backlash on social media, the Cubs on Friday tendered a contract to troubled shortstop Addison Russell, suggesting a return to the team that until recent weeks looked like a long shot.

Russell's status with the team has been in doubt since a yearlong MLB investigation into domestic-violence allegations culminated with a 40-game suspension announced the day after the Cubs' season ended in early October. Russell has 28 games left to serve in 2019.

Team president Theo Epstein and chairman Tom Ricketts met with Russell this week, and Epstein made it clear in a statement that the controversial decision on Russell ahead of the non-tender deadline Friday "does not represent the finish line nor rubber-stamp his future as a Cub."

The decision spotlights one of the most serious issues facing professional sports leagues and teams. It also comes the same week as the Redskins drew widespread outrage as the only NFL team to claim linebacker Reuben Foster on waivers just two days after the 49ers released him following an arrest and charges for domestic violence.

It's also just a few months after the "zero tolerance" Astros traded for suspended pitcher Roberto Osuna during their playoff push. Two years ago, the Cubs took heat for acquiring Aroldis Chapman for their World Series run, which was the same season he served a 30-game suspension.

The procedural move means the Cubs retain the rights to the arbitration-eligible Russell, but it does not prevent them from releasing him at any point before the start of the season for no more than the cost of a small fraction of his 2019 salary.

The value of a projected salary of more than \$4 million through the arbitration process already would be reduced by the prorated amount of time missed while serving the unpaid suspension.

Russell, 24, who repeatedly denied the physical-abuse allegations leveled by his ex-wife, Melisa Reidy, and one of Reidy's friends (via social media), acknowledged blame — without an admission of any specific behavior — in a lengthy statement released Friday.

"I am responsible for my actions," he said in a statement. It also included a "heartfelt apology to my family and my former wife Melisa and for my past behavior."

He extended the apology to fans, teammates and the organization and added: "I've had time to reflect on my past behavior and think about the next steps I need to take to grow as a person."

The statement outlines those steps, including compliance with a treatment plan under the MLB-players' union joint domestic-violence policy. He's also working "several times a week" with a personal therapist he enlisted before starting the mandated MLB program.

"While there is a lot of work ahead for me to earn back the trust of the Cubs fans, my teammates and the entire organization, it's work that I am 110 percent committed to doing," he said.

Epstein, who hinted at the likelihood of Friday's move when talking about Russell during the general managers meetings four weeks ago, reiterated Friday several points he made then, including accepting responsibility for addressing the failures as well as successes of young players "on our watch."

Epstein said the Cubs have been in regular contact with Reidy "to support her and to listen" and have closely monitored Russell's progress the last two months.

"We are encouraged by his early effort and will continue to evaluate and verify his progress," Epstein said, adding:

"There is a long road ahead for Addison, and we will hold him accountable. There also is a long road ahead for our organization as we attempt to make some good of this situation. We are committed to being part of the solution."

NOTE: The Cubs tendered contracts to seven of their eight arbitration-eligible players, the lone exception being utility infielder Ronald Torreyes, who was acquired Wednesday in a trade with the Yankees.

Torreyes, who was projected to make about \$900,000 through the arbitration process, becomes a free agent. But the Cubs are expected to continue talks to try to keep the versatile infielder for a key backup role next season.

Addison Russell's full statement

"I offer my heartfelt apology to my family and my former wife Melisa for my past behavior. I also want to apologize to Cubs fans, the Cubs organization, and my teammates for letting them down. Since accepting my suspension, I've had time to reflect on my past behavior and think about the next steps I need to take to grow as a person. Here are the first steps I've taken:

I accepted my suspension and did not appeal. I am responsible for my actions.

I am complying with the MLB-MLBPA treatment plan, and I will be meeting regularly with different experts, counselors, and therapists. Even before any mandated treatment, I took the extra initiative of obtaining my own therapist and I have been meeting with that therapist several times a week for the last two months and plan to continue this therapy beyond the MLB treatment plan. With that therapy, I am attempting to improve myself by learning new outlooks and understanding different emotions.

After I have done my own therapy and gained new insights into myself, I hope to be able to work with non-profit groups in Pensacola, Chicago, and Arizona to support their missions and become part of the solution.

Finally, I recently met with Tom Ricketts and Theo Epstein to explain my progress and goals. They outlined the Cubs' expectations for me. I accept and am completely committed to meeting those expectations. I am grateful for their support.

I am just in the early stages of this process. It is work that goes far beyond being a baseball player – it goes to my core values of being the best family man, partner, and teammate that I can be, and giving back to the community and the less fortunate. While there is a lot of work ahead for me to earn back the trust of the Cubs fans, my teammates, and the entire organization, it's work that I am 110 percent committed to doing."

Theo Epstein's full statement

"The behavior that led to Addison Russell's suspension under Major League Baseball's Joint Domestic Violence Policy happened on our watch. We traded for Addison when he was a 20-year-old Double-A player, helped him develop into a world champion and welcomed the praise that came along with his triumphs.

If we're willing to accept credit when a member of our organization succeeds on the field, what should we do if he engages in conduct off the field worthy of discipline from Major League Baseball?

After a very thorough process, we have chosen to take action to try to become a small part of the solution for Addison, his family, Melisa Reidy and the larger issue of domestic violence prevention. In determining our path forward, we've maintained regular dialogue with Melisa to support her and to listen. We've also consulted with a number of domestic violence experts. Over the past few months, I've maintained frequent communication with Addison, and Cubs personnel have met with him regularly. Earlier this week, Tom Ricketts and I met with Addison in Chicago to assess his progress and communicate our expectations as he works to earn back the trust of our fans and entire organization. He affirmed he understands and accepts those expectations.

As Addison detailed in his statement, he has taken the initial steps to hold himself accountable for his past behavior and begin the rehabilitation process. He is working closely with his own therapist – help he proactively sought on his own beyond the league-mandated treatment – and plans to continue this work once the mandated program is completed. We are encouraged by his early effort and will continue to evaluate and verify his progress.

Today, we are taking the procedural step of tendering Addison a non-guaranteed contract in conjunction with Major League Baseball's deadline to tender contracts to arbitration-eligible players. While this decision leaves the door open for Addison to later make an impact for us on the field, it does not represent the finish line nor rubber-stamp his future as a Cub. It does however reflect our support for him as long as he continues to make progress and demonstrates his commitment to these important issues.

Just as Addison has a responsibility to own his actions and put in significant work to grow, our organization has a responsibility to act as well. We're taking a hard look at how we can support domestic violence prevention. In our own workplace, we are dedicating more resources to expand training for our players, their families and our coaching staff and front office. We will engage the appropriate experts to help us design programs for the Cubs which raise awareness of domestic violence, help prevent future incidents and make us the safest workplace possible. We also have connected with Family Rescue, a Chicago-based organization dedicated to serving survivors of domestic violence and community education and prevention. We're exploring ways we can support their award-winning efforts to eradicate domestic violence in Chicago.

We understand every action we take and word we use sends a message to our fans – all of whom have their own unique experiences and perspectives, and some of whom have a personal connection to domestic violence. The message we would like to leave you with is we take the issue of domestic violence seriously. There is a long road ahead for Addison, and we will hold him accountable. There also is a long road ahead for our organization as we attempt to make some good of this situation. We are committed to being a part of the solution.”

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Chicago Sun-Times

Cubs sending wrong message by leaving door open for Addison Russell

By Rick Morrissey

Addison Russell can't be in a Cubs uniform anymore. He just can't be.

Those were the first words of a column I wrote in September, after the shortstop's ex-wife detailed the abuse she said she had suffered at his hands.

It turns out I was wrong. Russell can be in a Cubs uniform because the Cubs say he can. They tendered him a contract Friday, the message be damned.

But I was right, at least where it matters most. Russell lost the privilege of being in a Cubs uniform when he repeatedly abused his then-wife. The contract development can't change that. You engage in the heinousness of domestic abuse, you don't deserve to represent the Cubs anymore. There are lines that never should be crossed. That's a big one.

But it's not how these Cubs roll. Amid lengthy statements released by Russell and team president Theo Epstein on Friday was a simple, unpleasant idea:

If we think you can play, you can stay.

It's noble that the Cubs say they want to use Russell's troubles as a springboard to address domestic violence. It's wonderful that they say they feel responsible for walking with Russell during his counseling, especially after they strutted with him when he was helping them win the 2016 World Series.

But where is it written that he has to play baseball? You can walk with Russell and not allow him to be on the team. The actions aren't mutually exclusive.

It would have been nobler if the Cubs had announced they were setting up a foundation to help abused women and to educate the public about the issue. It would have been commendable if they had said they were going to continue to stand by Russell as he worked to change his behavior.

It would have been truly inspirational if they had done this while announcing he would no longer be a Cub.

Then again, it would have been nice if they had taken positive, affirming steps when they traded for closer Aroldis Chapman, who had served an MLB suspension for domestic violence, in 2016. But he could throw a ball 105 mph, and . . . what chokehold on his girlfriend?

It was the Cubs' unfortunate timing that the Russell development came three days after linebacker/woman abuser Reuben Foster, cut by the 49ers after a recent domestic-violence incident, was claimed by the Redskins. It caused a national uproar. Foster had been charged with battery on the same woman for the second time in 10 months, but that didn't deter a football team that thought a talented player had redeeming value.

It's amazing how thoughtful teams are when it comes to improving their rosters.

At least one sports franchise has done the right thing. On Friday, the Chiefs cut star running back Kareem Hunt after video emerged of him kicking and shoving a woman. Hmm. Can he play left field?

Epstein went out of his way to detail the changes Russell had made since MLB suspended him 40 games late last season.

"We are taking the procedural step of tendering Addison a non-guaranteed contract in conjunction with Major League Baseball's deadline to tender contracts to arbitration-eligible players," Epstein said in his statement. "While this decision leaves the door open for Addison to later make an impact for us on the field, it does not represent the finish line nor rubber-stamp his future as a Cub. It does, however, reflect our support for him as long as he continues to make progress and demonstrates his commitment to these important issues."

Would the Cubs have wanted to be part of the solution to the domestic-violence problem if another team had been willing to trade for Russell? There's no way of knowing.

I'm not discounting the idea that Epstein feels deeply about this. Perhaps the easiest thing would have been to cut Russell. There would have been no backlash over having an abuser on the roster. And Javy Baez is a better shortstop than Russell. Epstein seems to want to address domestic violence head-on. But it's hard to separate his compassion from the Cubs' desire to win another World Series.

At a minimum, this is a bad look. It says actions don't matter. It says women, some of whom root for the Cubs, aren't quite as important as a good-fielding shortstop. No amount of words can alter that message.

I hope Russell gets the help he needs and his ex-wife finds peace. But both can happen without him being in a Cubs uniform.

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Daily Herald

Cubs tender contract to Russell, who says he's '110 percent committed'

By Scot Gregor

Friday was the deadline for major-league teams to tender contracts to unsigned players on the 40-man roster, and the decision is typically based on talent and financial considerations.

In the case of the Cubs and shortstop Addison Russell, there was another factor.

Russell was suspended 40 games Oct. 3 (retroactive to Sept. 21) for violating Major League Baseball's Joint Domestic Violence, Sexual Assault and Child Abuse Policy. He is not eligible to be activated until May 3.

Russell is facing allegations that he abused his ex-wife.

On Friday, the Cubs tendered Russell a contract. It is not guaranteed.

"While this decision leaves the door open for Addison to later make an impact for us on the field, it does not represent the finish line nor rubber-stamp his future as a Cub," team President Theo Epstein said in a statement. "It does, however, reflect our support for him as long as he continues to make progress and demonstrates his commitment to these important issues."

The Cubs did tender 2019 contracts to six other arbitration eligible players -- Javier Baez, Kris Bryant, Kyle Schwarber, Kyle Hendricks, Carl Edwards Jr. and Mike Montgomery.

Ronald Torreyes, Justin Hancock and Allen Webster were non-tendered. The Cubs acquired Torreyes in a trade from the Yankees Wednesday in exchange for a player to be named later or cash considerations.

Like Epstein, Russell, 24, also released a statement Friday:

"I offer my heartfelt apology to my family and my former wife Melisa for my past behavior. I also want to apologize to Cubs fans, the Cubs organization and my teammates for letting them down. Since accepting my suspension, I've had time to reflect on my past behavior and think about the next steps I need to take to grow as a person. Here are the first steps I've taken:

- I accepted my suspension and did not appeal. I am responsible for my actions.
- I am complying with the MLB-MLBPA treatment plan, and I will be meeting regularly with different experts, counselors and therapists. Even before any mandated treatment, I took the extra initiative of obtaining my own therapist and I have been meeting with that therapist several times a week for the last two months and plan to continue this therapy beyond the MLB treatment plan. With that therapy, I am attempting to improve myself by learning new outlooks and understanding different emotions.
- After I have done my own therapy and gained new insights into myself, I hope to be able to work with nonprofit groups in Pensacola, Chicago and Arizona to support their missions and become part of the solution.
- Finally, I recently met with (Cubs owner) Tom Ricketts and Theo Epstein to explain my progress and goals. They outlined the Cubs' expectations for me. I accept and am completely committed to meeting those expectations. I am grateful for their support.

"I am just in the early stages of this process. It is work that goes far beyond being a baseball player -- it goes to my core values of being the best family man, partner and teammate that I can be, and giving back to the community and the less fortunate. While there is a lot of work ahead for me to earn back the trust of the Cubs fans, my teammates, and the entire organization, it's work that I am 110 percent committed to doing."

The Cubs could have non-tendered Russell and let him become a free agent.

"The behavior that led to Addison Russell's suspension under Major League Baseball's Joint Domestic Violence Policy happened on our watch," Epstein said. "We traded for Addison when he was a 20-year-old Double-A player, helped him develop into a world champion and welcomed the praise that came along with his triumphs. If we're willing to accept credit when a member of our organization succeeds

on the field, what should we do if he engages in conduct off the field worthy of discipline from Major League Baseball?

"After a very thorough process, we have chosen to take action to try to become a small part of the solution for Addison, his family, Melisa Reidy and the larger issue of domestic violence prevention. In determining our path forward, we've maintained regular dialogue with Melisa to support her and to listen. We've also consulted with a number of domestic violence experts. Over the past few months, I've maintained frequent communication with Addison, and Cubs personnel have met with him regularly. Earlier this week, Tom Ricketts and I met with Addison in Chicago to assess his progress and communicate our expectations as he works to earn back the trust of our fans and entire organization. He affirmed he understands and accepts those expectations."

In four seasons Russell is a .242 hitter with 51 home runs and 230 RBI. Last year he had 5 homers and 38 RBI in 130 games.

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The Athletic

Cubs tender Addison Russell a contract, now it's time to trade him

By Jon Greenberg

What does the Cubs' decision to tender Addison Russell a contract Friday say about his future with the team?

Well, that future is less clear than it would be if they didn't tender him one.

On the deadline to tender contracts to their own arbitration-eligible players, the Cubs did what most of us expected and extended Russell a contract offer rather than making him a free agent. It doesn't mean Russell will play for the Cubs when his suspension under the league's domestic violence policy ends in May.

"Today, we are taking the procedural step of tendering Addison a non-guaranteed contract in conjunction with Major League Baseball's deadline to tender contracts to arbitration-eligible players," Cubs president Theo Epstein wrote in a statement. "While this decision leaves the door open for Addison to later make an impact for us on the field, it does not represent the finish line nor rubber-stamp his future as a Cub. It does however reflect our support for him as long as he continues to make progress and demonstrates his commitment to these important issues."

As Lauren Comitor wrote earlier in November, Russell should get a chance to play somewhere after, at the very minimum, counseling and therapy following his acceptance of MLB's discipline for his ex-wife's allegations of domestic abuse. There are scores of experts and stories about how one-strike punishment for domestic violence is detrimental to everyone involved.

In a statement attributed to Russell, in which he apologized to his ex-wife Melisa Reidy and everyone else without admitting anything besides regrettable "past behavior," he said he is getting more than the minimum amount of treatment prescribed by the MLB-MLBPA joint agreement.

"I am complying with the MLB-MLBPA treatment plan, and I will be meeting regularly with different experts, counselors, and therapists," the statement reads. "Even before any mandated treatment, I took the extra initiative of obtaining my own therapist and I have been meeting with that therapist several times a week for the last two months and plan to continue this therapy beyond the MLB treatment plan."

With that therapy, I am attempting to improve myself by learning new outlooks and understanding different emotions.”

I am under no illusions that Russell wrote any of that, but if it’s true, that’s a good thing for him and his family.

But, it still doesn’t mean he should be a Cub.

In his statement, Epstein waxed philosophical a bit about what the organization owes Russell.

“The behavior that led to Addison Russell’s suspension under Major League Baseball’s Joint Domestic Violence Policy happened on our watch,” he wrote. “We traded for Addison when he was a 20-year-old Double-A player, helped him develop into a world champion and welcomed the praise that came along with his triumphs.

“If we’re willing to accept credit when a member of our organization succeeds on the field, what should we do if he engages in conduct off the field worthy of discipline from Major League Baseball?”

It’s fair to say the Cubs owe him support right now, but in the future, they owe him nothing.

The Cubs stuck by him in 2017 when the allegations were floated by a friend of Reidy. Russell declared his innocence then and did so again when Reidy wrote a blog post about dealing with domestic abuse.

But he didn’t fight the 40-game suspension this fall. At the GM meetings, his agent Scott Boras was asked if Russell will speak about the disconnect there.

“I think that will come,” Boras said. “Addison is in a regimented schedule right now and going through this. We’ve certainly been in communication with the Cubs. Everybody understands what’s going on with Addison and how he has been very diligent with his program and his therapy going forward.”

Forget Russell’s possible public mea culpas for a second. Can Epstein believe what Russell says publicly or privately? After Russell was initially placed on administrative leave in September, Epstein admitted the Cubs don’t know Addison Russell the person.

“I would say that I know him in a baseball context and that one thing I think we’ve learned as a society as we collectively ... try to deal appropriately with and handle accusations like this, it’s important to step back and understand because you know someone in one context, you don’t necessarily know them fully,” he said.

Some saw that as a cop-out, but I didn’t. When athletes or coaches say the opposite in situations like this — he’s a great guy in the clubhouse — it demeans the victim and bolsters the idea that an athlete’s professional life upstages their personal one. What Epstein said was true. He expanded on that notion at the GM meetings.

“We get to know our players in a professional setting and then some players are easier to get to know away from the field, what makes them tick,” he said. “And there are other players where it’s harder to get to know (them). Some players you think you know and you don’t.

“Look, we want to do everything we can to be there for our players as resources, too. Just because they make a lot of money — some of them — it doesn’t mean that their lives are easy. Or that their family lives are easy. We want to be there for our players. We want to be there for their spouses and their families.

That's the best kind of organization. I think we do a really good job in that regard. Clearly, there's room to keep getting better."

Knowing Epstein a little bit, I can say he takes real-world situations very seriously. That is to say he gives a shit about the world outside of baseball. If he says he's taking Russell's situation seriously, I believe him. You might not and that's fine too.

"Before he can play another game in a Cubs uniform, we need to know that he's serious about self-improvement and has grown to the point where he would represent the club well," Epstein said at the GM meetings.

Epstein got deserved grief for preaching character for almost five years and then trading for Aroldis Chapman, but that was a clear quick and dirty agreement: you pitch, we win. The Cubs were only vouching for him in making it clear he wouldn't embarrass them by denigrating his previous punishment by MLB.

That trade paid off, though it took a psychic toll on Cubs fans, particularly women. Joe Maddon's initial response to the Russell story and his insistence he didn't need to read Reidy's blog post turned off fans and bothered some of his bosses.

While it's not Maddon's job to personally mentor or punish Russell, he is a face of the team.

Russell and his wife have divorced and she decided to use her freedom to speak about domestic abuse and violence. Epstein said the Cubs have maintained a dialogue with her and that's important to understand the situation.

The question the Cubs should be asking is: what does his continued employment say to their fans? The Cubs are an entertainment business, after all, not just a regular old business producing widgets. Popular support is everything to this club. The Cubs don't just represent Epstein or the Ricketts family, they represent the city that houses and supports them.

Does Chicago want Addison Russell anymore?

"We understand every action we take and word we use sends a message to our fans – all of whom have their own unique experiences and perspectives, and some of whom have a personal connection to domestic violence," Epstein wrote in his statement. "The message we would like to leave you with is we take the issue of domestic violence seriously. There is a long road ahead for Addison, and we will hold him accountable. There also is a long road ahead for our organization as we attempt to make some good of this situation. We are committed to being a part of the solution."

How so?

"Just as Addison has a responsibility to own his actions and put in significant work to grow, our organization has a responsibility to act as well," Epstein said. "We're taking a hard look at how we can support domestic violence prevention. In our own workplace, we are dedicating more resources to expand training for our players, their families and our coaching staff and front office. We will engage the appropriate experts to help us design programs for the Cubs which raise awareness of domestic violence, help prevent future incidents and make us the safest workplace possible. We also have connected with Family Rescue, a Chicago-based organization dedicated to serving survivors of domestic violence and community education and prevention. We're exploring ways we can support their award-winning efforts to eradicate domestic violence in Chicago."

Now that those words on the public record, we'll see how the Cubs live up to them.

Just like the Chapman situation, what a team is willing to put up with to employ an athlete depends on their value. It's not pretty, but it's true.

Do the Cubs need Addison Russell?

On the field, despite his offensive failings, Russell still has significant value as a defensive shortstop. The Cubs were much better defensively with him at shortstop and Javy Báez at second base. Before Russell was benched more often in favor of Báez at shortstop and Daniel Murphy to get more offense, the team valued Russell's defense — particularly his instinctive first step to the ball.

But for a team that has just fired its second hitting coach in as many seasons, can they afford his bat in the lineup? For all the promise Russell has shown — 21 homers in 2016, his two homers in the NLCS and one in the World Series that year — the actual results are middling to disappointing. Of the young Cubs who haven't matured on the field like the team would have liked, he's the biggest offensive letdown. His defense is good enough to hit eighth or ninth. But what does that say about his value?

While I'm not too concerned about Russell's future, I think a departure would be good for him too. A fresh start might be beneficial to his development, personally and professionally. He wouldn't be the first player who ended up suspended by the league's domestic violence policy to get moved immediately afterward. Chapman is one. Roberto Osuna is another.

Russell does one thing well, which should keep him employed by a big league club, but for the Cubs, everything else around him is a big negative. Now that they're offering him a contract, the Cubs should trade him for whatever they can get.

I don't know if that's the plan, but it should be.

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The Athletic

What the Cubs can learn from the Brewers' unique pitching strategy

By Sahadev Sharma

After spending last offseason improving their pitching — despite several of those acquisitions not living up to expectations — the Cubs actually feel good about their starting rotation this winter. There are undoubtedly imperfections and questions. But on paper, the Cubs' rotation currently looks like the strength of a team that once again has playoff aspirations.

With the offense in need of upgrades, this big-market team isn't using money as a cudgel, but rather as an excuse for why they can't vie for the best free agents available. Consequently, the way the Cubs built their rotation has come under scrutiny. The Cubs' starting five will account for three of the top four contracts on their 2019 payroll — upwards of \$85 million combined. This after they managed just 28 innings in 2018 from pitchers they signed as international free agents or drafted and developed themselves.

"There were days we looked out on the field and you got minimum salary, minimum salary, minimum salary," general manager Jed Hoyer said about the Cubs' young position player core that helped them win a World Series. "We had such a payroll efficiency offensively. But we've always had somewhat

payroll inefficiency pitching-wise because we've had to go outside and get veteran guys. And listen, we've had really good pitching staffs. It's not as if our pitching has struggled, but it has been inefficient, if you want to call it that, from a financial and trade standpoint because we haven't had the (Kris) Bryant, (Javy) Báez, (Albert) Almora or (Ian) Happ version of the pitcher."

Teams obviously love developing their own top-tier talent. There's a certain satisfaction to it, surely, but it's primarily because of those affordable, cost-controlled early years. Of course, there are no trophies awarded to the team with the most efficiently built roster. The Cubs should be a team that outspends their mistakes, but they're being constrained by the realities of the budget put in place by ownership. And finding ways to creatively work with it is the front office's job.

When speaking to the media at the GM meetings earlier in November, Hoyer repeated the annual mantra this Cubs front office has preached: the pitching in the system is turning the corner. Yet once again, they'll head into a season without a single pitcher on any major publication's top 100 prospect list. Adbert Alzolay could be on the precipice, but he's coming off a lat injury. Things can change in the course of the season, and the Cubs surely hope that's the case nine months from now. But right now, it's not as if there are any stud arms ready to step in if anyone gets injured or when Cole Hamels departs after next season.

But around baseball, teams are finding different ways to utilize pitchers. And with that, how we evaluate the Cubs and their pitching prospects has to adjust as well.

"It's definitely shifting, right?" Hoyer said. "It used to be your starters and relievers. And now you're like, okay, there are some hybrid roles in there. Which guys fit into which roles is a really good question. The game is evolving. There's no doubt, even the last two or three years, that hybrid-type guy has shown a lot of value and starters are going shorter. I think it's on us to change how we evaluate those guys. Think about which guys can be effective, which guy can throw 100 pitches, which guy can go once through a lineup, which guy is a short-burst guy."

Suddenly, fringy starter prospects like Justin Steele or Duane Underwood Jr. can become a little more interesting value-wise. Alzolay could be the first legitimate starter this front office develops, start to finish. But if not, perhaps he turns into a dominant multi-inning reliever who cleans up after José Quintana or Mike Montgomery work four or five innings. Or maybe all three combine with a couple other optionable arms who can work two or three innings a game to eat up some starts for the team.

Those are the types of creative ideas blossoming all around baseball, and the Cubs need only look north for a perfect example. The Milwaukee Brewers were 19th in baseball in innings pitched from their starters, and that's with an extra game in the books. In the playoffs, the Brewers' starters averaged under 3 1/3 innings per start. And still, they were one game away from reaching the World Series. This wasn't some disastrous pitching staff carried by its offense. Their success took careful planning and near-perfect execution. And the fact that it worked so well is opening plenty of eyes.

"With us, this has been an organizational philosophy that's evolved over the past three years," Brewers general manager David Stearns said. "We've begun referring to our pitchers as out-getters and we've been blurring the lines a little bit between starters and relievers. It's been really, an ongoing process for three years. What we saw this year was maybe an acceleration of that. Especially what we did in September and into the playoffs. What made it work was the buy-in from our players. What made it work were players who recognized that this was going to give us our best opportunity to win. We have a great group of players who really cared about winning. When that happens and they buy in, it makes doing something like this that's a little bit different a whole heck of a lot easier for the team."

This is hardly a simple strategy. And the fact that it varies so drastically from traditional starter-reliever roles can make all of this hard to swallow, not only for fans, but for managers, coaches and players. But the Brewers were steadfast with their plan, even during a stretch of 30 games in 31 days leading up to the All-Star Game when they went 14-16, posted an ERA above four and lost their division lead.

“Craig (Counsell) and our coaching staff want to win as much as anyone,” Stearns said. “They were often the ones coming up with various strategies and posing different ideas and suggesting different concepts about how we could put our players in the best position to succeed. Where we got to in September and ultimately October was not necessarily a front office exclusively driven approach. This was an organizational-wide discussion on a number of different levels that ultimately led to a strategy that we thought put us in the best position to win as many games as possible down the stretch.”

But it was also borne out of necessity. The Brewers spent heavily to add Lorenzo Cain and chose not to spend big on an arm that could reliably pick up 180-plus innings. They came into the season with Jimmy Nelson on the shelf (he ended up not throwing a single pitch), they quickly saw that Chase Anderson wasn't going to repeat his 2017 and the few veterans they had on the staff were hardly the type of inning-eating horses one would expect to lead a playoff rotation.

“We want to put our personnel in the best position to succeed,” Stearns said. “And we thought that given the makeup of our roster, meaning our entire 40-man roster, that this was the right strategy for us. It's not the right strategy for everyone. There may be future constructions of Milwaukee Brewers where it's not right the strategy for our organization. But where we were in 2018, we thought it was the right way to go and we do think it helped us win games.”

Whether it's Hamels, Jon Lester, Kyle Hendricks or a healthy Yu Darvish, the Cubs have plenty of arms who they believe can get through at least six innings. Perhaps at some point, Corbin Burnes or Brandon Woodruff will become that type of starter for the Brewers. But in 2018, that wasn't the case. So the Brewers had to adjust. They had to be innovative with their pitching if they wanted to accomplish their goals.

Don't expect the Cubs to completely shift philosophies when it comes to starting pitching. Unless they actually believe it's the best way to win, which by all indications isn't the case, the Cubs shouldn't be looking to reinvent the wheel. Should they take advantage of what's become a clear path to success in certain circumstances if the opportunity presents itself? Certainly. They should never reject a unique way to find value or build a roster. Innovation is a key to sustained success.

But the Cubs should also never be a team that has to piece together a pitching staff merely because they didn't want to spend for a top-tier starter.

“This happens every year, or at least the last few years,” Hoyer said. “We come (to the GM meetings) having watched the playoffs and everyone talks about the way pitchers are used. And I think, all right, good luck doing that during the regular season because you're going to wear everyone down unless you have 20 guys stashed top to bottom. I think the scarcity of good pitching and the reality that it's hard to play that way all year — I think that's a fact. It's hard to play pennant-race, playoff baseball for six months. The starter still has a big role in our opinion.”

The Cubs don't have an immediate need to change their overall pitching strategy. But perhaps in the near future, these new ideas could help them fill some holes and remedy their inability to develop a tried and true starting pitcher.

"In some ways, there should be more ways to maximize a guy's potential with the way pitchers are used," Hoyer said. "It's a fascinating element of the game."

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Cubs.com

Seven Cubs players tendered contracts

By Jordan Bastian

Each facet of the Cubs' roster will be impacted by arbitration cases this winter.

Kris Bryant will be aiming for a healthy comeback showing to help correct the lineup problems that arose down the stretch last season. Javier Baez will be trying to build off an MVP-caliber campaign and Kyle Schwarber will continue the search for his ceiling. Kyle Hendricks will have a home in the rotation, while Carl Edwards Jr. and Mike Montgomery shore up the bullpen. Addison Russell is in a position to earn back trust as the team's shortstop. Ronald Torreyes, Justin Hancock and Allen Webster were non-tendered and are now free agents.

The seven arbitration-eligible players who were tendered on Friday night can exchange proposed salary figures for 2019 with the team on Jan. 11 if a deal is not reached prior to that deadline.

Baez, Edwards, Montgomery, Schwarber and Torreyes are all eligible for arbitration for the first time. Players can avoid arbitration with a contract at any point leading up to their scheduled hearing in February. Torreyes, Hancock and Webster are now free agents.

The case that drew the most attention prior to Friday's announcement was the one surrounding Russell, who is in the midst of serving a 40-game suspension for violating Major League Baseball's Joint Domestic Violence, Sexual Assault and Child Abuse Policy. Both Cubs president of baseball operations Theo Epstein and Russell issued lengthy statements addressing the matter after it was announced that the team tendered him a contract.

It is important to note that arbitration deals are not guaranteed contracts unless specified as such at the time of the agreement. If a player on a non-guaranteed arbitration contract is released on or before the 16th day of Spring Training, he is owed 30 days of termination pay (based on a prorated version of their salary). That rises to 45 days' pay between the 16th day of spring and the start of the season.

Arbitration contracts only become guaranteed once a player makes a team's 25-man roster.

"We are taking the procedural step of tendering Addison a non-guaranteed contract," Epstein said. "While this decision leaves the door open for Addison to later make an impact for us on the field, it does not represent the finish line nor rubber-stamp his future as a Cub. It does however reflect our support for him as long as he continues to make progress and demonstrates his commitment to these important issues."

The Cubs acquired Torreyes in exchange for a player to be named later or cash, and then dealt infielder Tommy La Stella (eligible for arbitration) to the Angels for the same return on Thursday. With Russell ineligible for activation from MLB's restricted list until May 3, Torreyes looked like a fit as defensive depth for both second base and shortstop. The Cubs maintain interest in trying to re-sign him.

Along the same lines, Chicago could attempt to re-sign Hancock and Webster to Minor League contracts.

Bryant set a first-year arbitration record last year with a \$10.85 million pact with the Cubs, but the former National League Rookie of the Year and MVP dealt with a left shoulder injury that sapped his power stroke in '18. In 102 games, Bryant hit .272 with 13 homers, 52 RBIs and an .834 OPS around two stints on the disabled list. Chicago is counting on a return to health next season for the star third baseman.

Baez not only offered plus defense at both second and short last year, he was a breakout offensive star en route to a runner-up finish for the NL MVP. The 25-year-old middle infielder hit .290 with 34 homers, 40 doubles, nine triples and an NL-high 111 RBIs. Baez also stole 21 bases, scored 101 runs, posted an .881 OPS and picked up a Silver Slugger Award for his work.

After trimming down, Schwarber found a home in left field last season for the North Siders and hit .238 with 26 home runs, 61 RBIs and an .823 OPS in 137 games. Over the past two years combined, the 25-year-old slugger has belted 56 homers across 266 games.

As things currently stand, Hendricks (who earned \$4.175 million in 2018) projects to be part of a deep Cubs rotation that also includes Cole Hamels, Jon Lester, Jose Quintana and Yu Darvish. Hendricks went 14-11 with a 3.44 ERA in 199 innings last year. Montgomery (3.99 ERA in 38 games, including 19 starts) presents a depth option for the rotation, but will likely be in the bullpen, along with Edwards (2.81 ERA and 12.2 strikeouts per nine innings in 131 games across the '17-18 seasons).

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Cubs.com

10 biggest trades in Cubs history

By Jordan Bastian

Hall of Famers. Prolific home run hitters. Critical pieces to World Series champions. Each of those descriptions fit players who were added via trade throughout the Cubs' long and storied history.

With such a wealth of history, it is a daunting task to try to identify the best trades in the club's many seasons. When famous acquisitions such as Pete Alexander and Gary Matthews are among those that did not make the cut, you know the list is lengthy. Fans undoubtedly have opinions on the deals that did not work out in Chicago's favor. (Lou Brock says hello.)

This exercise is about the swaps that did pay dividends for the North Siders. With that in mind, here are our Top 10 trades in Cubs history:

1. Reeling in Ryno

Cubs got from Phillies: SS Larry Bowa, 2B Ryne Sandberg

Cubs gave up: SS Ivan de Jesus

Date: Jan. 27, 1982

Sandberg was considered a throw-in part of this trade, but he finished his career as one of the greatest second basemen in MLB history. Over 15 seasons with the Cubs, Sandberg amassed 282 homers, 403 doubles and 2,385 hits. The Hall of Famer was a seven-time Silver Slugger Award winner, nine-time Gold Glove Award recipient, 10-time All-Star and took home the National League Most Valuable Player Award in 1984. The Phillies, meanwhile, got three underwhelming seasons out of de Jesus.

2. Bell for Sosa

Cubs got from White Sox: LHP Ken Patterson, OF Sammy Sosa

Cubs gave up: OF George Bell
Date: March 30, 1992

The White Sox swung this trade for Bell with the idea of utilizing the veteran slugger -- coming off a strong 1991 tour with the Cubs -- as a designated hitter. The crosstown deal sent a raw talent in Sosa to the Cubs, who watched him turn into one of the game's all-time great power hitters. Sosa belted 545 of his 609 career homers on the North Side, where he made seven All-Star teams and won the NL MVP in '98. That summer, Sosa and Cardinals slugger Mark McGwire captivated the baseball world while chasing down Rogers Maris' previous single-season homer mark of 61 in '61.

3. Finding Fergie

Cubs got from Phillies: OF John Herrnstein, RHP Ferguson Jenkins, OF Adolfo Phillips
Cubs gave up: RHP Bob Buhl, RHP Larry Jackson
Date: April 21, 1966

Jenkins showed promise in his debut with the Phillies, but he blossomed when the Cubs landed the righty and put him in their rotation. He spent parts of 10 seasons with Chicago, piling up 167 wins with a 3.20 ERA with the North Siders. Along the way, he made three All-Star teams and finished in the top three in NL Cy Young Award voting four times, including winning the award in 1971. Jenkins was enshrined in the Hall of Fame in '91. For Philadelphia, Jackson was most noteworthy, posting a 2.95 ERA over 752 1/3 innings over parts of three seasons.

4. Adding Three Finger

Cubs got from Cardinals: RHP Mordecai Brown, C Jack O'Neill
Cubs gave up: C Larry McLean, RHP Jack Taylor
Date: Dec. 12, 1903

"Three Finger" Brown spent 10 of his 14 seasons with Chicago, during which he fashioned a 1.80 ERA. Statistics from that early era look much different than today, but it is still remarkable to see 48 shutouts and 206 complete games over 2,329 innings with Chicago. The Hall of Famer also played a key role in the Cubs' back-to-back World Series triumphs over Detroit in 1907-08, giving up no runs over 20 innings. On the other side of the coin, Taylor was brilliant for St. Louis in 1904 (2.22 ERA in 352 innings), but his career was done by '08.

5. Baltimore swap

Cubs got from Orioles: RHP Jake Arrieta, RHP Pedro Strop and international bonus cash
Cubs gave up: RHP Scott Feldman, C Steve Clevenger
Date: July 2, 2013

This wound up being a flop for the Orioles, who only got an underwhelming half-season out of Feldman and nothing to write home about from Clevenger over a few Major League tours. Arrieta, on the other hand, blossomed into a frontline starter and Strop a bullpen fixture with the Cubs. Arrieta went 68-31 with a 2.73 ERA in parts of five seasons with Chicago, winning the 2015 NL Cy Young Award with a 22-6 ledger and 1.77 ERA. In '16, he went 2-0 with a 2.38 ERA in two World Series starts to help lead the Cubs to their first championship since 1908.

6. Acquiring Kiki

Cubs got from Pirates: OF Kiki Cuyler
Cubs gave up: INF Sparky Adams, OF Pete Scott
Date: Nov. 27, 1927

The Cubs netted Cuyler in the prime of his Hall of Fame career, which included playing in the 1929 and '32 World Series with Chicago. Cuyler was with the Cubs for eight of his 18 seasons, in which he hit .321 with 128 homers, 157 triples, 328 steals, 394 doubles, 1,304 runs scored and an .860 OPS. He scored 155 runs in 156 games in '30 and was an All-Star with the Cubs in '34. Combined, Pittsburgh only received three years of production between Adams and Scott.

7. The Red Baron

Cubs got from Indians: RHP George Frazier, C Ron Hassey, RHP Rick Sutcliffe

Cubs gave up: RHP Darryl Banks, OF Joe Carter, OF Mel Hall, RHP Don Schultze

Date: June 13, 1984

Cleveland netted six productive seasons out of Carter (126 steals, 151 homers and 530 RBIs) and eventually flipped him to the Padres in '89 to land catcher Sandy Alomar and second baseman Carlos Baerga. The Cubs' acquisition of Sutcliffe, however, produced one of the great Cy Young stories in history. After posting a 5.15 ERA for the Indians to start the '84 campaign, Sutcliffe went 16-1 with a 2.69 ERA down the stretch after joining the Cubs. That showing helped the righty win the NL Cy Young Award that year, in which he helped Chicago reach the NL Championship Series. Over eight years with the Cubs, the Red Baron went 83-65 with a 3.74 ERA.

8. Raiding the Pirates

Cubs got from Pirates: OF Kenny Lofton, 3B Aramis Ramirez

Cubs gave up: RHP Matt Bruback, INF Jose Hernandez, INF Bobby Hill

Date: July 23, 2003

Third base had been a turnstile for the Cubs for decades prior to Ramirez's arrival in the '03 trade with Pittsburgh. The deal helped fortify Chicago's roster for the '03 run to the NLCS, but it also gave the franchise an eight-time Opening Day third baseman. Over parts of nine seasons with the Cubs, Ramirez hit .294 with 239 homers and an .887 OPS, earning two All-Star nods and one Silver Slugger along the way. None of the players on the Pittsburgh side of the deal panned out.

9. Landing Rizzo

Cubs got from Padres: RHP Zach Cates, 1B Anthony Rizzo

Cubs gave up: RHP Andrew Cashner, OF Kyung-Min Na

Date: Jan. 6, 2012

Cashner went 28-43 with a 3.67 ERA in five seasons with San Diego, hardly living up to the kind of return that would have made this trade less lopsided. Rizzo joined the Cubs and soon became a fan favorite, earning a place on multiple All-Star teams, turning in Gold Glove-caliber defense and becoming a lock for 30-homer, 100-RBI seasons. Rizzo joined a young Cubs core that helped end the franchise's 100-plus year World Series drought with the '16 victory over Cleveland.

10. The Derrek deal

Cubs got from Marlins: 1B Derrek Lee

Cubs gave up: 1B Hee-Seop Choi, RHP Mike Nannini

Date: Nov. 24, 2003

The Cubs turned the page on the Choi era with this trade, which brought in an impact bat and defender in Lee. Over parts of eight seasons with Chicago, Lee hit .294 with 179 homers, 574 RBIs and a .903 OPS. He made two All-Star teams, won two Gold Gloves and finished third in NL MVP voting in 2005. For the Marlins, Choi only lasted part of one season, while Nannini never reached the Majors.

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Cubs.com

Cubs tender Russell, release statements

By Jordan Bastian

Given the seriousness of the situation surrounding Addison Russell, the Cubs understood that Friday's decision on the shortstop would draw a great deal of attention. The organization has opted to keep Russell on board rather than part ways, and the club indicated a desire to work with Russell going forward.

Chicago tendered a 2019 contract to Russell -- who is in the midst of serving a 40-game suspension for violating Major League Baseball's Joint Domestic Violence, Sexual Assault and Child Abuse Policy -- following accusations made by his ex-wife, Melisa Reidy. Eligible for arbitration this offseason, Russell is ineligible for activation until May 3 after accepting the suspension in October, retroactive to Sept. 21.

"The behavior that led to Addison Russell's suspension under Major League Baseball's Joint Domestic Violence Policy happened on our watch," said Theo Epstein, Cubs president of baseball operations, in a lengthy statement. "We traded for Addison when he was a 20-year-old Double-A player, helped him develop into a world champion and welcomed the praise that came along with his triumphs.

"If we're willing to accept credit when a member of our organization succeeds on the field, what should we do if he engages in conduct off the field worthy of discipline from Major League Baseball? After a very thorough process, we have chosen to take action to try to become a small part of the solution for Addison, his family, Melisa Reidy and the larger issue of domestic violence prevention."

Russell also issued a statement.

"I offer my heartfelt apology to my family and my former wife Melisa for my past behavior," Russell said. "I also want to apologize to Cubs fans, the Cubs organization, and my teammates for letting them down. Since accepting my suspension, I've had time to reflect on my past behavior and think about the next steps I need to take to grow as a person."

Russell proceeded to list steps he has taken over the past two months. He noted that he accepted MLB's suspension without appeal and has complied with the treatment plan provided by MLB and the MLB Players Association. Russell added that he will be meeting regularly with experts, counselors and therapists, and already took the step of finding his personal therapist for weekly meetings that will continue beyond the plan he was given.

"I am responsible for my actions," Russell said. "With that therapy, I am attempting to improve myself by learning new outlooks and understanding different emotions. After I have done my own therapy and gained new insights into myself, I hope to be able to work with nonprofit groups in Pensacola, Chicago, and Arizona to support their missions and become part of the solution."

Russell, 24, earned \$3.2 million last season and is likely due for a raise via arbitration after hitting .250 with five homers, 38 RBIs and a .657 OPS in 130 games. The shortstop, who will begin the season on MLB's restricted list, also contributed 13 Defensive Runs Saved in 1,003 2/3 innings. Over the past two years, Russell has not been able to match the 21 homers and 95 RBIs he posted as an All-Star in 2016, but he has remained steady in the field.

Given that Russell will miss the season's first month while finishing his suspension, the Cubs will need a contingency plan in place at shortstop. They acquired Ronald Torreyes in a trade with the Yankees on Wednesday but elected to non-tender the arbitration-eligible utility infielder prior to Friday's 7 p.m. CT deadline. Chicago maintains interest in trying to re-sign Torreyes, who is now a free agent, but will surely explore other alternatives via free agency and trade. National League MVP runner-up Javier Baez can stick at short until Russell returns, and Chicago has in-house options for second base in Ben Zobrist, Ian Happ and David Bote.

In his statement, Epstein noted that the Cubs have maintained dialogue with Reidy to get her input on the ongoing situation. The team also consulted with domestic violence experts over the past two months. Earlier this week, Cubs owner Tom Ricketts and Epstein met with Russell in Chicago to assess the shortstop's progress and to address expectations as he works to "earn back the trust of our fans and entire organization."

"I accept and am completely committed to meeting those expectations," Russell said. "I am just in the early stages of this process. It is work that goes far beyond being a baseball player -- it goes to my core values of being the best family man, partner, and teammate that I can be, and giving back to the community and the less fortunate. While there is a lot of work ahead for me to earn back the trust of the Cubs fans, my teammates, and the entire organization, it's work that I am 110 percent committed to doing."

The deadline to exchange proposed salary figures with arbitration-eligible players is Jan. 11, but the Cubs can negotiate a deal with Russell at any point leading up to a scheduled arbitration hearing. Epstein said Friday's decision "does not represent the finish line nor rubber-stamp his future as a Cub."

As long as Russell continues to demonstrate progress and commitment to the issues at hand, Epstein said he will have the support of the organization. The team's front-office leader also said the ballclub has its own work to do in addressing domestic violence in a broader sense.

"Just as Addison has a responsibility to own his actions and put in significant work to grow," Epstein said, "our organization has a responsibility to act as well. We're taking a hard look at how we can support domestic violence prevention. In our own workplace, we are dedicating more resources to expand training for our players, their families and our coaching staff and front office.

"We will engage the appropriate experts to help us design programs for the Cubs which raise awareness of domestic violence, help prevent future incidents and make us the safest workplace possible. We also have connected with Family Rescue, a Chicago-based organization dedicated to serving survivors of domestic violence and community education and prevention. We're exploring ways we can support their award-winning efforts to eradicate domestic violence in Chicago.

"We understand every action we take and word we use sends a message to our fans -- all of whom have their own unique experiences and perspectives, and some of whom have a personal connection to domestic violence. The message we would like to leave you with is we take the issue of domestic violence seriously. There is a long road ahead for Addison, and we will hold him accountable.

"There also is a long road ahead for our organization as we attempt to make some good of this situation. We are committed to being a part of the solution."

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ESPNChicago.com

Cubs tender contract to Addison Russell amid 40-game domestic violence ban

By Jesse Rogers

CHICAGO -- The Cubs on Friday tendered a contract to suspended shortstop Addison Russell, who is eligible for arbitration.

Russell, 25, will miss the first month of the season after accepting a 40-game suspension late in 2018 after his ex-wife Melisa Reidy accused him of domestic abuse in a blog post. From the start, the Cubs have said they want to see Russell get help while also being a positive force on the issue.

Although the Cubs tendered him a contract for next year, it still doesn't mean Russell will suit up for them again. The move before Friday's deadline simply prevented Russell, who made \$4.3 million last season, from becoming a free agent.

"While this decision leaves the door open for Addison to later make an impact for us on the field, it does not represent the finish line nor rubber-stamp his future as a Cub," team president Theo Epstein said in a statement. "It does however reflect our support for him as long as he continues to make progress."

The Cubs also tendered six other players: Kris Bryant, Kyle Hendricks, Carl Edwards Jr, Mike Montgomery, Kyle Schwarber and Javy Baez

They nontendered Ronald Torreyes, whom they just traded for on Wednesday, as well as pitchers Justin Hancock and Allan Webster.

Russell issued a statement Friday offering his "heartfelt apology" to his family, his ex-wife and the team for "letting them down" with his past behavior.

"Since accepting my suspension, I've had time to reflect on my past behavior and think about the next steps I need to take to grow as a person," Russell said. "... I am just in the early stages of this process. It is work that goes far beyond being a baseball player -- it goes to my core values of being the best family man, partner, and teammate that I can be, and giving back to the community and the less fortunate.

"While there is a lot of work ahead for me to earn back the trust of the Cubs fans, my teammates, and the entire organization, it's work that I am 110 percent committed to doing."

Russell said he's taken responsibility for his actions, has complied with the MLB-MLBPA treatment plan, has sought out therapy on his own and has met with Cubs owner Tom Ricketts and Epstein.

"The behavior that led to Addison Russell's suspension under Major League Baseball's Joint Domestic Violence Policy happened on our watch," Epstein said in a statement Friday. "... If we're willing to accept credit when a member of our organization succeeds on the field, what should we do if he engages in conduct off the field worthy of discipline from Major League Baseball?"

"After a very thorough process, we have chosen to take action to try to become a small part of the solution for Addison, his family, Melisa Reidy and the larger issue of domestic violence prevention."

Allegations against Russell of abuse in his former marriage surfaced in 2017 on social media via a friend of Reidy, but the case didn't come to a head until late last season when a blog post attributed to Reidy described more detailed allegations, describing years of physical and emotional abuse. Reidy then agreed to meet with MLB investigators.

The team is monitoring Russell's progress as he's been in counseling as part of his deal with the league. The Cubs want to see "self-improvement."

"We understand every action we take and word we use sends a message to our fans -- all of whom have their own unique experiences and perspectives, and some of whom have a personal connection to domestic violence," Epstein said. "The message we would like to leave you with is we take the issue of domestic violence seriously."

"There is a long road ahead for Addison, and we will hold him accountable. There also is a long road ahead for our organization as we attempt to make some good of this situation. We are committed to being a part of the solution."

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NBC Sports Chicago

Glanville Offseason Journal: Kris Bryant and the small window a player has to make big money.

By Doug Glanville

The Chicago Cubs are quickly approaching an era where the young core of talented players is about to hit payday. It is the nature of the business that you play in the minor leagues to get seasoned, to make your game more complete before you earn your way to the top.

It is understood that you will not make much money in salary in the minor leagues, just as when Kris Bryant was sent down in 2015, he made a pro-rated \$82,700. Of course, by non-pro sports standards, that is good money, but since he banked \$10.85M last year, the difference is stark.

Bryant has entered the years where the power pendulum has swung his way. He has the hammer; once you hit three years of service, you get to arbitration, and now you can argue your value compared to your peers.

Players who have the same service time, put up the same numbers, same position, age...these are some of the "comps" to know who you will use as a reference to justify your asking price. The teams want to go low, and the player wants to go high. And arbitration has no gray area. Decisions are final and they pick one side.

When the Cubs sent Bryant down in 2015, they were making a long-term plan. By shorting him of that full season, they could have another year of control on the back-end (which led to a grievance filed by Team Bryant.) Theo Epstein was forthcoming about this standard strategy employed by teams.

But Bryant is represented by Scott Boras, who will file that away (literally) and do what he can to claw back that year in earnings. This could be done by a patient approach, putting up numbers year-by-year and maxing your value in smaller increments. Or, dangling the idea that his client will leave as soon as possible.

But this comes with risk. Injuries, bad years, anything can come up to make you wish you had the security blanket of a long-term contract. So you trade annualized max money for visibility and, let's face it: at what Bryant will command, he will do well.

Yet in major league baseball, value is about what someone is willing to pay and the market that defines that value. There is a difference between \$200 million and \$275 million, even if you can buy a small island with either.

This is the economics of the game; balloon payments after paying your dues. You are represented by an agent who has institutional knowledge with a clear-eyed understanding of how short a career can be. Seize the day to get your value no matter what it says about your inflated place in society.

Baseball creates wealth as a business and players get paid out of that pool. But it is a pool that swims in relativity, which is why Kris Bryant is looking at Machado and Harper to see when the first big domino falls.

Let's not dismiss who is representing Bryant in Boras. Someone with a long memory and the patience of a sloth. He will flood you with data, just as when he was recruiting me decades ago. Boras flew across the country to Philadelphia, dropped a nearly five-hour presentation on me which was complete with charts explaining why my signing bonus should be nearly three-times the standard.

His argument was that I was an engineer at an Ivy-league school who will be losing all kinds of income while toiling away in the minor leagues. It was compelling, to say the least. But I ended up choosing Arn Tellem as my agent, a Philly-guy. Boras does not play games. He will push you to the brink.

But the Cubs are not just dealing with Bryant and Boras, they are looking at arbitration eligible players in Schwarber, Hendricks and Baez, too — guys who will see some big pay hikes. Do you lock in these young players for a long time now or do you slowly work year to year, moving in and out chess pieces to adapt to an aging core of players? Who is your core?

Most players, once they get to the pay day, reference the minor leagues to lose the guilt of getting paid seven or eight figures to play a game. My \$327 paycheck when I played with the Geneva Cubs certainly was a motivator to work hard and a reminder to take the long-term deal on the table I would ultimately get from the Phillies in stride.

Although Schwarber and Bryant had very brief minor league stints, they understand not to let youth blind you from how short your window is in baseball. Make your money. Their agents will remind them.

I remember that crossover moment from my career when the Monopoly money started get thrown around in contract talks. It was after my first year with the Phillies, a full year after the Cubs traded me. I had a partial season and two full seasons under my belt. I was similarly situated to Willson Contreras, who is not quite at the three-year mark, but in a position where the Cubs would consider locking him up before his price tag goes up from a big season.

It was surreal to see seven figure numbers thrown around remembering that a debate came up between my agent and the team over \$50,000 or so dollars. A lot of money, but the discussion ended up framed as "Let's not nickel and dime over it." Really? Fifty grand is a nickel or a dime? That is the world that hits you literally overnight.

In my case, since my parents always emphasized investing one's money and planning ahead, I had to think back to the year when my dad had me write down the price of a mutual fund every day in a little black book to get used to tracking investments. I was very fortunate for that guidance.

Good fortune also helps a player feel secure. My road was longer by today's standards certainly, for a first-round college draft pick since it took me five years to arrive, but what mattered was appreciating

the road that took me to Philadelphia as a starting player with a contract in hand that granted me three years of breathing room.

I still needed to get better and adapt to the rhythm of 162-game marathons, while finally playing without the anxiety of being one play away from being out of the game and finding a new line of work. At least, that is how it felt.

It also was validating to get this vote of confidence from a team. The naysayers, the setbacks, the years in winter ball, all could be reframed as a necessary part of the journey. It was an example of how you could truly change the past. My manager in Triple-A Iowa, who had my career buried for dead, would have been proven right if I somehow fizzled out after Triple-A. That would have been my story. I ran into a rough and tumble manager in the minor leagues who did not like me very much and I fell short.

As a mentor of mine (and coach that brought me to Puerto Rico for winter ball), Tom Gamboa said “If you didn’t make it to the show, and your bubble gum card ended after Triple-A Iowa, you would have had good reasons, but you would have cheated on your destiny.” Destiny. Powerful word.

This group of Cubs have one significant leg up on me in feeling established at a young age. They are world champions. They have defined destiny.

Destiny looks ahead, but that long-term commitment also makes you look back in time. Many names came to mind for how I got to that point. Coaches, family, friends, mentors, heroes. I was taught by some amazing professionals. Sandy Alomar Sr., Jimmy Piersall, Tom Gamboa, countless teammates, like Shawon Dunston who passed on wisdom on a daily basis. I also remembered Jim Rigglesman, my first manager in the big leagues with the Cubs.

Rigglesman would pull me aside and remind me that one day “You will be an everyday centerfielder. Maybe not here, but somewhere.” He would walk into the outfield during batting practice and plant the reminder. In a world of great talent all around us that fills up Major League Baseball, words mattered, words counted and these words came rushing back to me when I was about to sign a long-term contract with the Phillies that endorsed the belief that I was a big-league centerfielder.

Kris Bryant, like any player on the cusp of a financial windfall, will think back on key words and those who helped him along the way. There is something clarifying about truly arriving and being able to look at your craft through a lens that can see past tomorrow.

In 2015, when I was at ESPN, I interviewed Kyle Schwarber and Bryant at the same time in San Francisco (sadly I can’t find that tape), a day when Barry Bonds was hovering around the cage. I happened to talk to Bonds for a while at the cage and Bryant and Schwarber were in that wide eyed-stage. Open, optimistic, excited, new.

They shared a lot about adjusting to the life; they were in the midst of that childhood joy. I recall learning that Bryant was a big Bonds fan growing up and was torn between admiring his greatness (as his childhood did cartwheels) and being frustrated with the PED allegations after Bryant learned firsthand what it took for him to make it honorably.

Just fast-forward to today and Bryant is still a young man. But now he is a Rookie of the Year, an MVP, a World Champion, but he also went through a down year with injury, doubt, frustration and responsibility. The rollercoaster has begun.

Bryant is reaching the heart of his career. The eye of the hurricane in baseball when a player is at peak performance. As the late-Ken Caminiti said to me one spring "Baseball is a great when it is going well. Nothing better." So true. Not so fun when on the bench hitting .176 going into a Chicago late April night game.

But with a long-term deal of the magnitude that Bryant will command, it helps that you are much more likely to have the time to get out of any slump. You are granted time in a long-term deal, but you are expected to produce more in that time. Fair enough.

Yet you have to come to grips with the fast-acting maturity that must reach before your 30th birthday. You must be ready to peak at a young age compared to most other professions. The team has made a long-term investment in you. That investment needs to pay dividends and generate interest, now. There is no more future potential and upside. It is now-side. Get it done so we can win.

Now the pressure really starts.

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NBC Sports Chicago

Addison Russell speaks for first time since suspension as Cubs retain shortstop

By Tony Andracki

The Cubs could have cut ties with Addison Russell this week but opted to tender the embattled shortstop a contract ahead of Friday evening's deadline.

Russell was suspended 40 games for domestic violence by Major League Baseball in early October and will miss the first month of 2019. He already sat out the final 12 games of the 2018 campaign after his ex-wife, Melisa Reidy, published a disturbing blog post detailing the physical, psychological and emotional abuse she suffered while married to Russell.

The 24-year-old shortstop also released a statement for the first time since his suspension and Theo Epstein explained the decision:

"I offer my heartfelt apology to my family and my former wife Melisa for my past behavior. I also want to apologize to Cubs fans, the Cubs organization, and my teammates for letting them down. Since accepting my suspension, I've had time to reflect on my past behavior and think about the next steps I need to take to grow as a person. Here are the first steps I've taken:

"I accepted my suspension and did not appeal. I am responsible for my actions.

"I am complying with the MLB-MLBPA treatment plan, and I will be meeting regularly with different experts, counselors, and therapists. Even before any mandated treatment, I took the extra initiative of obtaining my own therapist and I have been meeting with that therapist several times a week for the last two months and plan to continue this therapy beyond the MLB treatment plan. With that therapy, I am attempting to improve myself by learning new outlooks and understanding different emotions.

"After I have done my own therapy and gained new insights into myself, I hope to be able to work with non-profit groups in Pensacola, Chicago, and Arizona to support their missions and become part of the solution.

“Finally, I recently met with Tom Ricketts and Theo Epstein to explain my progress and goals. They outlined the Cubs’ expectations for me. I accept and am completely committed to meeting those expectations. I am grateful for their support.

“I am just in the early stages of this process. It is work that goes far beyond being a baseball player – it goes to my core values of being the best family man, partner, and teammate that I can be, and giving back to the community and the less fortunate. While there is a lot of work ahead for me to earn back the trust of the Cubs fans, my teammates, and the entire organization, it’s work that I am 110 percent committed to doing.”

That doesn't mean it's a guarantee Russell will ever put on a Cubs uniform again. The contract is not guaranteed for Russell and the Cubs could still opt to release or trade him before his suspension is up in late-April/early-May.

Russell is in his second year of arbitration and projected to make about \$4.3 million, according to MLB Trade Rumors (though he is not paid while suspended). The Cubs had until 7 p.m. Friday to decide whether they would tender Russell a contract.

Russell is under control for another two seasons after 2019 and made \$3.2 million this past season. In addition to the off-field controversy, Russell has also seen a dip in production and struggled to stay healthy, dealing with hand, shoulder and foot issues over the last couple years. He hit a career-high .250 in 2018, but that came with a major downturn in power (only 5 homers, .340 SLG).

The Cubs apparently are willing to endure some bad publicity by retaining Russell, though part of that is due to the personal responsibility they feel, as summed up by Epstein's comments at the GM Meetings earlier this month.

The Cubs president of baseball operations echoed that sentiment again Friday afternoon:

“The behavior that led to Addison Russell’s suspension under Major League Baseball’s Joint Domestic Violence Policy happened on our watch. We traded for Addison when he was a 20-year-old Double-A player, helped him develop into a world champion and welcomed the praise that came along with his triumphs.

“If we’re willing to accept credit when a member of our organization succeeds on the field, what should we do if he engages in conduct off the field worthy of discipline from Major League Baseball?”

“After a very thorough process, we have chosen to take action to try to become a small part of the solution for Addison, his family, Melisa Reidy and the larger issue of domestic violence prevention. In determining our path forward, we’ve maintained regular dialogue with Melisa to support her and to listen. We’ve also consulted with a number of domestic violence experts. Over the past few months, I’ve maintained frequent communication with Addison, and Cubs personnel have met with him regularly. Earlier this week, Tom Ricketts and I met with Addison in Chicago to assess his progress and communicate our expectations as he works to earn back the trust of our fans and entire organization. He affirmed he understands and accepts those expectations.

“As Addison detailed in his statement, he has taken the initial steps to hold himself accountable for his past behavior and begin the rehabilitation process. He is working closely with his own therapist – help he proactively sought on his own beyond the league-mandated treatment – and plans to continue this work once the mandated program is completed. We are encouraged by his early effort and will continue to evaluate and verify his progress.

“Today, we are taking the procedural step of tendering Addison a non-guaranteed contract in conjunction with Major League Baseball’s deadline to tender contracts to arbitration-eligible players. While this decision leaves the door open for Addison to later make an impact for us on the field, it does not represent the finish line nor rubber-stamp his future as a Cub. It does however reflect our support for him as long as he continues to make progress and demonstrates his commitment to these important issues.

“Just as Addison has a responsibility to own his actions and put in significant work to grow, our organization has a responsibility to act as well. We’re taking a hard look at how we can support domestic violence prevention. In our own workplace, we are dedicating more resources to expand training for our players, their families and our coaching staff and front office. We will engage the appropriate experts to help us design programs for the Cubs which raise awareness of domestic violence, help prevent future incidents and make us the safest workplace possible. We also have connected with Family Rescue, a Chicago-based organization dedicated to serving survivors of domestic violence and community education and prevention. We’re exploring ways we can support their award-winning efforts to eradicate domestic violence in Chicago.

“We understand every action we take and word we use sends a message to our fans – all of whom have their own unique experiences and perspectives, and some of whom have a personal connection to domestic violence. The message we would like to leave you with is we take the issue of domestic violence seriously. There is a long road ahead for Addison, and we will hold him accountable. There also is a long road ahead for our organization as we attempt to make some good of this situation. We are committed to being a part of the solution.”

Friday evening represents MLB's deadline for all teams to tender a contract to arbitration-eligible players. Beyond Russell, the Cubs' list of arbitration-eligible players includes Kris Bryant, Kyle Hendricks, Javy Baez, Kyle Schwarber, Mike Montgomery, Carl Edwards Jr. and newly acquired infielder Ronald Torreyes.

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NBC Sports Chicago

Cubs Mailbag: What does the future hold for Davids Ross and Bote?

By Tony Andracki

Welcome to the weekly Cubs mailbag. This edition is jam-packed with plenty of valid Cubs/MLB questions, but we threw in a few fun ones at the end.

As always, thanks for all of your submissions and enjoy!

How about John Lackey as asst Pitching Coach and David Ross as Asst Hitting Coach or Bench Coach - John Barger (@Jbarger1967)

Good question, John, but I know you're just joking about Lackey as assistant pitching coach — though that would certainly be fun as hell to cover. Imagine how those mound visits would go...

As for the David Ross question, it's an interesting one and totally valid. Theo Epstein and the Cubs want Ross to be around a little bit more in 2019 and for good reason. He's still a very well respected and popular voice in that clubhouse and it's entirely possible he emerges as a potential successor for Joe Maddon at manager — possibly even as soon as 2020.

Ross will be a manager somewhere someday, whenever he's ready and willing to put in the extreme time commitment away from his family and kids. He's been enjoying retirement — and "Dancing With The Stars" — the last couple years, but if he's in line to become the Cubs skipper in the near future, ramping up his time around the team next year is a great precursor.

Could David Bote play 3d base for the Cubs next year if Kris Bryant is moved to Lf? - Rowan Campbell (@RustaRow)

Could that scenario happen? Of course. Will it? Probably sometimes and mostly against left-handed pitchers, but it likely will not be a regular occurrence barring injury.

Bote certainly looks like a better defender than Bryant at third base and Bryant is a better left fielder than Kyle Schwarber even with Schwarbs' weight loss and improvement in that regard, so this could be a "victory formation" type of alignment late in close games.

But it's more likely Bote will be a role player in 2019, drawing a start a couple times a week but mostly backing up each infield position and the Cubs also want to work him out in the outfield this spring to become a super utility guy. It's still a question as to how much Bote will hit in the big leagues as he struggled over a larger sample after a hot start.

With Jesse Chavez heading to Texas, where do the Cubs look for a lower priced BP arm? Or do you imagine they spend some \$\$ to get a higher type. Miller, Allen, Britton, etc - Brandon Spinner (@wxSpinner89)

Well Mr. Spinner, the easy answer to the question of "where" is: EVERYWHERE. Low-priced bullpen arms are found everywhere, with Chavez serving as recent proof of that. Relievers are so volatile, so those who were good last year are not necessarily guaranteed to be good in 2019, which ultimately means there are a lot of bargains to be had out there.

Brian Duensing was a great example of this in 2017 and while he struggled after the Cubs handed him \$7 million on a two-year deal, it's entirely possible he puts the shoulder injury in the past and becomes a reliable option again. Same for Brandon Kintzler. Maybe the recently signed Kyle Ryan can become a solid left-handed, multi-inning option. Alec Mills certainly impressed in 2018. This could be the season Dillon Maples puts it all together. 24-year-old right-hander Dakota Mekkes has soared through the Cubs farm system and his next stop will be Chicago at some point in 2019.

The point is, the Cubs have a bunch of options already in the mix and there is no shortage of bullpen arms at the bottom of the market. Think about a guy like Carson Smith, who has only managed to throw 23.2 innings the last three seasons but was one of the most valuable relief pitchers in the game with Seattle in 2015 and he's still only 29. A.J. Ramos, Drew Storen, Zach McAllister and Brandon Maurer are other younger options who have flown under the radar recently but could be nice low-risk options.

As for the top of the market, it would be unlikely to see the Cubs outbid a bunch of other teams for the best available relievers given their financial woes, but they could definitely use another proven, reliable option in the back end of that 'pen.

what are the odds the Cubs sign Craig Kimbrel? - kimberly corono (@kimsrad)

Pretty slim, Kimberly. Epstein and the Cubs front office members don't like handing out huge contracts to relievers given the positions volatility and Kimbrel is asking for a 6-year contract and will surely get the most money of any bullpen arm this winter.

Do the Cubs have enough in the bullpen or do they need to address the clear inconsistency? - dwest (@dwest9cubs)

They 100 percent do not have enough in the bullpen. The chances are higher that the Cubs would sign BOTH Bryce Harper and Manny Machado than do nothing and ignore the bullpen this winter, even if that means they won't sign the top guys on the market. The only area the Cubs feel is set right now is the rotation.

Simple question. Rumors? Where are all the rumors? - Jon Levanich (@JonLevanich)

Oh the rumors are coming, Jon. There's never a shortage of rumors in Hot Stove Season, even if major signings are few and far between. One reason it may seem slow on the rumor front from a Cubs perspective is that they started their offseason on Oct. 3, something we're not used to around here. The last few falls, the Cubs either played all the way past Halloween or were eliminated 7-10 days before. We've had three more weeks of an offseason than we're used to.

I'm the cubs future owner How many World Series you think we can snag together? I'm going for three in 6 years - Alessia Lowe (@LoweAllesia)

It depends on when you buy the team and how long you own it, Alessia. If you bought it this offseason and owned it for the next 6 years, I'd say the Cubs add one more World Series during that time while also making it to the Fall Classic and losing on another instance. But championship windows can close awfully fast. Just ask the San Francisco Giants (or even the Blackhawks if we're talking non-baseball).

Who needs to take the biggest step forward next year to help the team reclaim the division? - Trevor Hipsher (@thipsher85)

Great question, Trevor. There are so many potential answers here, but I'm going to say Kyle Schwarber. Willson Contreras would've been my call here, but he's already taken a step forward in 2017, then took a step back in 2018, so I don't quite feel like that counts. Carl Edwards Jr. also could've been an option given the importance of a bullpen and the Cubs' need in that regard.

But Schwarber is a huge wild-card in that he's entirely capable of putting up numbers that come close to Bryce Harper in the power and OBP departments, yet will cost \$30 million less in 2019. With all the inconsistency the lineup has faced recently, a dynamic Schwarber striking fear into the opposing pitchers would change the complexion of the lineup.

That's cold, Jack.

Hi Tony. From the start, Rizzo's been pegged as a leader. From what you see/hear, is he shouldering any extra weight (warranted or not) for the collective "breaking" of the team's offense? I'd love to hear more about his development as a leader and the pressure it can cause. - W.F. Call (@HatCreek_Outfit)

I don't think Rizzo is taking any extra weight on because of the offensive lull, but that's mostly because he already shouldered a lot of weight for the lineup. In the 2016 NLCS, he was one of the main culprits to the offensive slump and took it hard for obvious reasons. But he rebounded — as did the rest of the Cubs lineup — and we all know how that finished.

Rizzo is the face of the franchise and he is certainly a leader and a major tone-setter in the lineup, but guys like Jason Heyward and Jon Lester are more of the leaders in the clubhouse and Javy Baez is among the most vocal leaders on the team.

Who would you guess will be leading off for the Cubs in 2018? - Wally O'Malley (@wallyomalley)

Good question, Wally, and the simple answer is that I just don't know right now. It's totally possible the Cubs wind up signing or trading for a more prototypical leadoff hitter since the current roster doesn't boast a guy in that mold. But if they don't make that move, I bet Ben Zobrist sees a bunch of time there when he plays and I would also bet a Schwarber (vs. RHP) and Albert Almora Jr. (vs. LHP) platoon, too.

Cub need proven bats at the lead off spot and another power bat behind Rizzo. Will the cubs fix this here in this off season? I cant see the cubs win any world series without an upgrade. Philly g cubs win. - Philly G (@gocubsgopg)

They could use another power bat, sure, but the Cubs are also anticipating more power from guys like Schwarber and Ian Happ in 2019 — plus a return to form and health from Bryant. But they still intend to address the lineup this winter and we may even see a guy like Nick Markakis or Michael Brantley join the roster to help provide veteran at-bats.

Do the Cubs have any interest in FA veteran catcher Martin Maldonado as a backup to Contreras? He isn't an offensive guy but is one of the best defensive catchers and a great pitch framer who could work wonders with Wilson Contreras. - Eric Alexander (@Ericlosingit)

The Cubs certainly need a veteran backup option and Maldonado could fit that bill, but he also has spent the last two years as essentially a starter (playing 257 games) and at only 32, may prefer to hold out for a more regular role rather than simply spelling Contreras once or twice a week. But if he wants another taste at the postseason after his first experience in 2018 with the Astros, maybe Maldonado would choose to spend next summer in Wrigleyville.

Two-parter: Should we be worried Cole Hamels will regress over a full season? Also: Can you tell Clarence I say hi, who's a good boy, yes he is? - JJ Stankevitz (@JJStankevitz)

Clarence is a real good boy and I will tell him you asked about him. As for Hamels — yes, it's a legit concern he may regress given he's about to be 35 and had shown a noticeable dip in stuff and production before the final two months of the season in Chicago. That being said, he was still dialing it up to 95 mph with the Cubs, has put his oblique injury firmly in the rearview mirror and is a savvy veteran who simply knows how to get hitters out. There will be some regression, but a potential Hamels meltdown is not even in the Top 30 of biggest Cubs concerns heading into 2019.

should the cubs consider trading for starlin castro? #mailbag - timbo slice (@tfilarski)

Yes, and no.

Yes because the Cubs need another starting-caliber middle infielder, the guys in the clubhouse freaking love Starlin and he's not even 29 yet and coming off arguably his best season as a pro (3.3 WAR, second only to the 3.5 WAR he put up in 2012).

No because he's due more than \$12 million this year, still doesn't walk a ton and is good enough that the Marlins would actually want something of value for him, which is a tough sell.

if you had to take a position player from the 2003-2005 Cubs teams in their current state and put them on the 25 man roster, who would it be? - Dan Gratie (@DanGratie)

Love this thought experiment, Mr. Gratie. Derrek Lee was my initial reaction (especially the 2005 version), but neither he nor Rizzo could play the outfield, so that idea's out. Moises Alou and Sammy Sosa had some good years in that stretch and Aramis Ramirez would be a nice fit in the middle of this Cubs lineup, pushing Bryant to the outfield.

But I'm gonna go with Kenny Lofton. A consistent, stable leadoff hitter would do wonders to let the rest of this Cubs lineup settle in and Lofton slashed .327/.381/.471 while playing good defense and notching a 1.8 WAR in only 56 games for the Cubs in 2003. That's a 5.5 WAR player over an entire season.

What is the best intramural sport to play and why? Please include all relevant factors (ie competition, beverage consumption, weather) - Peter John (@Cubs567)

Softball. It's the closest rec sport to baseball (obviously) and there's enough downtime where you can enjoy a beer at the field but not so much downtime where you get bored. It's mostly played on beautiful summer nights (there's no place better on Earth than Chicago in summertime and I'll fight anybody who says otherwise) and 16-inch softball evens out the playing field and competition quite a bit. Plus, anybody can play it. You don't have to have a long history of playing baseball/softball all throughout high school or anything like that.

Will any pitchers be signed this year exclusively just to get a haircut? - Victor C. (@VictorC4victory)

The Cubs should totally have John Lackey out for Joe Maddon's Respect Bald event in spring training this year.

What position would Jon Snow occupy in the Cubs lineup? - Patrick Giblin (@patrickgiblin)

Easy — The Pitcher That Was Promised. Epstein's front office has yet to draft/develop a homegrown starting pitcher and as a result, they've had to shell out a boatload of money the last few winters to round out the rotation and bullpen. Jon Snow could totally change that as The Chosen One.

How many of the Lannister children survive? Any other fantasy tale and I've got Tyrion and Jaime making it through. GoT? I think Cersei is standing tall at the end. - Matt LaCasse (@MattLaCasse)

I think Tyrion is the only one left standing at the end because I'm still optimistic the humans will win and Tyrion will be one of the saviors riding a dragon. Either way, Jaime just seems destined to die in the GoT universe.

How do we get Pedro his own reality show where he sings the opening? - KChi18 (@KAFChi18)

That would be incredible. Pedro Strop has always been one of my favorite guys in the Cubs clubhouse and now he's finally getting the appreciation and recognition he deserves. Guarantee Cubs fans would watch this show.

if paul walker (god rest his soul) was still alive do you think the rock would have remained as big of a character in the movie series? - Blake Bortles (@5blakebortles5)

First off, sorry about your demotion in the Sunshine State, Blake. But at least it gives you more time to hang out with Jason Mendoza.

Secondly, probably. Paul Walker has only been out of the Fast and Furious universe for one film and The Rock was a pretty big part of Fast & Furious 6 and Furious 7 after his debut in Fast Five. It's hard to imagine this franchise without Dwayne Johnson.

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Chicago Tribune

Cubs tender contract to shortstop Addison Russell despite MLB suspension

By Mark Gonzales

Five months before Addison Russell is eligible to return from a Major League Baseball-mandated suspension for violating its domestic-violence policy, the Cubs displayed a measure of faith in their shortstop by tendering him a contract Friday, hours before the deadline.

“While this decision leaves the door open for Addison to later make an impact for us on the field, it does not represent the finish line nor rubber-stamp his future as a Cub,” team President Theo Epstein said in a statement. “It does, however, reflect our support for him as long as he continues to make progress and demonstrates his commitment to these important issues.”

The Cubs are expected to face some resistance, especially from some fans who believed Russell should have been released immediately after he was suspended. But Epstein has led an initiative to support domestic-violence prevention throughout the organization.

As part of the process in the Cubs’ decision to tender Russell a contract, Epstein said the team continues to listen and support Russell’s former wife, Melisa, who wrote in a late-September internet post, nearly 16 months after allegations surfaced by a third party on social media, that Russell abused her.

The revelation led MLB to place Russell on administrative leave and eventually suspend him for 40 games for violating its Joint Domestic Violence, Sexual Assault and Child Abuse Policy, retroactive to Sept. 21. MLB announced the suspension Oct. 3, a day after the Cubs lost to the Rockies in the National League wild-card game.

The tender doesn’t assure Russell’s return because no arbitration-eligible contracts are fully guaranteed. The Cubs still can explore a trade or release him. But after two months, they are satisfied with Russell’s efforts.

“I am just in the early stages of this process,” Russell said in a statement. “It is work that goes far beyond being a baseball player — it goes to my core values of being the best family man, partner and teammate that I can be and giving back to the community and the less fortunate.

“While there is a lot of work ahead for me to earn back the trust of the Cubs fans, my teammates and the entire organization, it’s work that I am 110 percent committed to doing.”

In his statement, Russell apologized to his ex-wife, fans, the organization and his teammates, saying he was responsible for his actions. He also hired a therapist before starting the treatment plan MLB and the players association administered.

Before the Cubs tendered him a contract, Russell conveyed his progress and goals to team Chairman Tom Ricketts and Epstein, and they outlined their expectations for him.

“I accept and am completely committed to meeting those expectations,” Russell said. “I am grateful for their support.”

Russell is projected to earn \$4.3 million, according to MLBtraderumors.com, after batting .250 with five home runs and 38 RBIs while dealing with finger and shoulder injuries for most of the 2018 season. That’s a big dip from 2016, when he had 21 homers and 95 RBIs while helping the Cubs to the World Series title.

Epstein, however, said the organization needs to do its due diligence to be part of the solution.

“If we’re willing to accept credit when a member of our organization succeeds on the field, what should we do if he engages in conduct off the field worthy of discipline from Major League Baseball?” Epstein said.

Epstein said the organization has bonded with Family Rescue, a Chicago-based organization devoted to helping domestic-violence victims and providing community education and prevention.

“There is a long road ahead for Addison, and we will hold him accountable,” Epstein said. “There also is a long road ahead for our organization as we attempt to make some good of this situation. We are committed to being a part of the solution.”

The Cubs also tendered contracts to six other arbitration-eligible players: third baseman Kris Bryant, infielder Javier Baez, pitchers Kyle Hendricks, Mike Montgomery and Carl Edwards Jr. and left fielder Kyle Schwarber.

Infielder Ronald Torreyes, whom the Cubs acquired Wednesday in a trade with the Yankees, and pitchers Justin Hancock and Allen Webster didn’t receive offers and are free agents, dropping the Cubs’ 40-man roster to 36. They could seek a cheaper replacement for Torreyes.

The Cubs will scour a list of new free agents — players who weren’t tendered contracts by their former teams — but their projected 2019 payroll could exceed the \$206 million luxury-tax threshold.

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