



# CHICAGO CUBS DAILY CLIPS

CubsPressbox.com · CubsMedia@Cubs.com · 773-404-4191

March 9, 2018

- Chicago Sun-Times, **Outfield of dreams, or a nightmare of late-spring decisions for Cubs?**  
<https://chicago.suntimes.com/sports/outfield-of-dreams-or-a-nightmare-of-late-spring-decisions-for-cubs/>
- Chicago Sun-Times, **Cubs beat Padres 10-4 in spring-training game Thursday**  
<https://chicago.suntimes.com/sports/cubs-beat-padres-10-4-in-spring-training-game-thursday/>
- Chicago Sun-Times, **Javy Baez's injury scare a reminder of regenerated hype, hope around 2018 Cubs**  
<https://chicago.suntimes.com/sports/javy-baezs-injury-scare-a-reminder-of-regenerated-hype-hope-for-2018-cubs/>
- Chicago Sun-Times, **Concussion shuts down Cubs catcher Taylor Davis**  
<https://chicago.suntimes.com/sports/concussion-shuts-down-cubs-catcher-taylor-davis/>
- Daily Herald, **Will Chicago Cubs shortstop Addison Russell bounce back after a tumultuous 2017?**  
<http://www.dailyherald.com/sports/20180308/will-chicago-cubs-shortstop-addison-russell-bounce-back-after-a-tumultuous-2017>
- The Athletic, **Who's batting leadoff? Who cares? Joe Maddon knows Cubs should have a monster offense either way**  
<https://theathletic.com/266698/2018/03/09/whos-batting-leadoff-who-cares-joe-maddon-knows-cubs-should-have-a-monster-offense-either-way/>
- The Athletic, **R-E-L-A-X: Javier Baez feels like it's 2016 all over again**  
<https://theathletic.com/266544/2018/03/08/r-e-l-a-x-javier-baez-feels-like-its-2016-all-over-again/>
- The Athletic, **With Chili Davis' help, can Addison Russell live up to the hype?**  
<https://theathletic.com/266719/2018/03/09/with-chili-davis-help-can-addison-russell-live-up-to-the-hype/>
- Cubs.com, **Baez leaves game with hamstring tightness**  
<https://www.mlb.com/cubs/news/cubs-javier-baez-leaves-games-after-double/c-268210312>
- Cubs.com, **Chatwood works on curveball in 3rd spring start**  
<https://www.mlb.com/cubs/news/cubs-tyler-chatwood-works-on-curve-in-start/c-268182702>
- Cubs.com, **Bryant named Cubs' MLBPA player rep**  
<https://www.mlb.com/cubs/news/kris-bryant-named-cubs-mlbpa-player-rep/c-268182578>
- ESPNChicago.com, **The Cubs' leadoff answer? Ian Happ is turning heads atop lineup**  
[http://www.espn.com/blog/chicago/cubs/post/\\_/id/46488/the-leadoff-man-ian-happ-is-turning-heads-atop-cubs-lineup](http://www.espn.com/blog/chicago/cubs/post/_/id/46488/the-leadoff-man-ian-happ-is-turning-heads-atop-cubs-lineup)

- NBC Sports Chicago, **The Cubs should roll with a 6-man rotation in 2018**  
<http://www.nbcsports.com/chicago/cubs/cubs-should-roll-6-man-rotation-2018-lester-maddon-rays-world-series-darvish-montgomery-quintana>
- Chicago Tribune, **Cubs' Carl Edwards Jr. biding time for bigger payday**  
<http://www.chicagotribune.com/sports/baseball/cubs/ct-spt-cubs-carl-edwards-jr-notes-20180308-story.html>
- Chicago Tribune, **Residents excited about Wrigley Field renovations, concerned about public safety**  
<http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/local/breaking/ct-met-wrigley-field-community-meeting-20180308-story.html>
- Chicago Tribune, **Thursday's spring recap: Cubs 10, Padres 4**  
<http://www.chicagotribune.com/sports/baseball/cubs/ct-spt-cubs-padres-spring-game-20180308-story.html>
- Chicago Tribune, **Javier Baez '100 percent' after suffering left hamstring cramp**  
<http://www.chicagotribune.com/sports/baseball/cubs/ct-spt-cubs-padres-recap-20180308-story.html>
- Chicago Tribune, **Performances could add intrigue to Cubs' arbitration-eligible players in 2019**  
<http://www.chicagotribune.com/sports/baseball/cubs/ct-spt-cubs-arbitration-eligible-players-20180308-story.html>

--

### **Chicago Sun-Times**

Outfield of dreams, or a nightmare of late-spring decisions for Cubs?

By Gordon Wittenmyer

MESA, Ariz. — Job battles? In Cubs camp?

Not this spring. But anyone looking for decisions to be made during the last three weeks should keep an eye on the outfield.

Not only are the five players in the outfield mix the same five getting consideration for the leadoff role, their playing time, across all three spots, is anything but certain.

That goes for Gold Glove right fielder Jason Heyward, as well. Manager Joe Maddon, who has resorted to platooning him for extended stretches the last two seasons, said Heyward opens the season as the every-day right fielder. For now.

But Maddon, who has been raving about Heyward's new-look bat this spring ("I love what he's doing"), doesn't deny that another tough season at the plate could result in another platoon role.

Meanwhile, Gold Glove-caliber Albert Almora Jr. and power-hitting switch hitter Ian Happ will share the center-field job, though the playing-time split hasn't been determined.

"It's a nice situation to be in," said Maddon, who has seen Happ rake all spring with an occasional fielding gem tossed in and Almora come alive in the last week, including homers in back-to-back games. "Just keep them healthy, and then we have to make a tough decision."

Lefty-hitting slugger Kyle Schwarber in left field and switch-hitting veteran Ben Zobrist in both corners are expected to get significant time in the lineup, but the calculus is anything but certain.

"From a manager's perspective, it's such a good and bad — or difficult — [issue]," Maddon said. "It's tough to dole out the work. These guys are good, and they all could be starting somewhere at the end of this camp. But we'll have to figure it out."

--

### **Chicago Sun-Times**

Cubs beat Padres 10-4 in spring-training game Thursday

By Gordon Wittenmyer

MESA, Ariz. — Tyler Chatwood gave up his first run of the spring in a three-inning start. The run scored on a two-out hit in the third after he'd walked two during the Cubs' 10-4 victory over the Padres in a Cactus League game at Sloan Park.

"I wasn't as sharp today," said Chatwood, who has a 1.50 ERA in three spring starts. "My fastball command was very spotty. My curveball has tight spin right now, has good shape. I'm just starting it out as a ball rather than strike to ball.

"Overall, I feel good, so it was good to get out of there feeling good. Now I know what I need to focus on and lock in."

The Cubs improved to 10-2-2 this spring.

### Baez injury scare

Second baseman Javy Baez felt hamstring tightness while running out a double during the Cubs' five-run second and left the game.

He got treatment during and after the game and called it a cramp.

He said he felt "normal" and didn't expect to miss any scheduled playing time.

### Happ watch

Hot-hitting switch hitter Ian Happ tripled home a run with one out in the fourth and later scored in the inning, batting in the leadoff spot again.

Happ is 9-for-21 (.429) with seven extra-base hits, two walks, a .500 on-base percentage and a 1.690 OPS in eight games leading off.

### Pen watch

Left-hander Justin Wilson, who struggled with command after being acquired in a trade last July, pitched another scoreless inning, allowing just a one-out single.

In three scoreless outings, he hasn't allowed a walk, has struck out two and given up two hits.

Lefty Mike Montgomery, the sixth starter and staff swingman, pitched two innings, giving up a home run in each for his first two runs allowed of the spring.

The second homer, by lefty-hitting Travis Jankowski, was an inside-the-park shot to right-center.

Fun fact

Jankowski's homer was the second ITPHR against the Cubs in three games.

On deck: Angels at Cubs, Mesa, Matt Shoemaker vs. Jon Lester, 2:10 p.m. Friday, 670-AM.

--

### **Chicago Sun-Times**

Javy Baez's injury scare a reminder of regenerated hype, hope around 2018 Cubs  
By Gordon Wittenmyer

MESA, Ariz. — Put away the crying emojis and put down the Xanax.

The Cubs' season is back on. Second baseman Javy Baez says he's OK.

"I'm completely fine, 100 percent," Baez said. "I just cramped for a little bit, but everything's back to normal."

Baez set social media ablaze when he left the Cubs' game against the Padres in the second inning because of hamstring tightness he experienced running out a double. It was the first semblance of adversity for the Cubs since spring training opened nearly a month ago.

"It's scary," said Tyler Chatwood, the Cubs' starting pitcher.

You didn't have to tell anybody in Cub Nation within range of a Wi-Fi signal.

The response underscored not only how well-regarded the Gold Glove-caliber infielder is among his followers, but it also might have been a cue that towering expectations for this team are back.

With Chatwood and Yu Darvish added to the rotation, the bullpen lengthened with Brandon Morrow and Steve Cishek and every regular position player returning, there's not an opening on the projected roster.

Barring injury.

"Obviously, everybody's feeling good, and we've got a lot of energy in the clubhouse," Baez said of the vibe this spring. "Since Darvish signed, we've kind of got everybody together, and we're feeling great. I feel the team is as motivated as in the '16 year. We'll see when we start."

Until then, the only potential for distress or unease would seem to be moments such as Thursday's second inning. Baez hooked a breaking ball into the left-center gap and felt a tug in the left hamstring three steps out of the box.

"I just felt a cramp," said Baez, who grabbed at the hamstring as he slowed to a jog and bent at the waist to stretch the muscles upon reaching second.

"Obviously, [manager] Joe [Maddon] didn't want me to stay in the game. But I feel great. I got some treatment. The trainers went all over it, and everything's fine."

He thinks it might have been nothing more than dehydration.

"Actually, I haven't been drinking a lot of water," he said. "I drink water during the workouts, but outside of the workouts, obviously, it's important, [too]."

Just because Baez said he feels great doesn't mean he's clear of any concern at this point. He expects to get treatment Friday morning again and have his playing status evaluated then.

But he already was scheduled to have Friday off and said he expects to play Saturday, unless the Cubs want to play it cautiously with three weeks to go before the season opener and give him an extra day or two.

"I'm not worried about it," he said.

As much as anything, the incident was a reminder of how much the Cubs have at stake if certain players go down. The infield in particular this season could be as strong defensively as it has been since the core was put together.

First baseman Anthony Rizzo already is a Gold Glove winner, shortstop Addison Russell has been a Gold Glove finalist and Maddon just in the past week said he has seen enough improvement in Kris Bryant at third to suggest he could win a Gold Glove if the field of candidates in the National League wasn't so strong right now.

And Baez is probably the best fielder in the group — at more than one position.

"I'm a big ground-ball guy, so having those guys, they're pretty elite out there," Chatwood said. "Just being able to play to my strengths and have those guys make a lot of plays behind me is going to be a lot of fun."

And now back to your regularly scheduled spring cruise toward April.

--

### **Chicago Sun-Times**

Concussion shuts down Cubs catcher Taylor Davis

By Gordon Wittenmyer

MESA, Ariz. — Catcher Taylor Davis, a longtime minor-leaguer who debuted with the Cubs last September, has been shut down the last week because of a concussion suffered when hit by a foul tip during live batting practice.

The popular Davis only began regular daily activities, such as walking outside and eating a normal lunch, Wednesday, five days after being injured. As for when he'll return to the field, "I have no idea," he said.

"That's all out of my hands. I'm just thankful I feel better. [On Wednesday], I felt like a human being again."

Davis, who got 15 minutes of national fame last summer for his habit of staring at TV cameras while at Class AAA Iowa, was catching Justin Hancock last Friday when he was struck.

"I've gotten hit in the face before – I'm a catcher," he said. "I've been hit in the head."

He didn't think much of it at first and prepared for that afternoon's game. But then didn't feel well.

"I'm thankful I said something," he said, "because the next couple of days were tough. I haven't had anything like this.

"I'm just thankful I feel better."

--

### **Daily Herald**

Will Chicago Cubs shortstop Addison Russell bounce back after a tumultuous 2017?

By Bruce Miles

Even on a team as loaded as the Cubs, there are a few players on the spot.

Left fielder Kyle Schwarber is one. Closer Brandon Morrow is another.

And then there is shortstop Addison Russell.

No player on the Cubs last year endured a more tumultuous season than Russell.

On the field, he appeared in only 110 games, down from 151 in 2016 and posted a hitting line of .239/.304/.418 with 12 homers and 43 RBI.

A strained right foot and plantar fasciitis put him on the disabled list from Aug. 3-Sept. 16.

Off the field, he had to answer questions about accusations of domestic abuse raised on social media, accusations Russell has denied and no longer wishes to discuss in public.

In the early days of spring training this year, Russell seemed more relaxed and ready to go. At 24, he is still part of the Cubs' young "core" of players even though he had to listen to trade rumors in the off-season.

"There was a lot of trade talk," he told reporters. "My initial thoughts were, 'I hope it doesn't happen. But wherever I go, I'll try to bring to the table what I bring here.'"

Russell's foot seems better this spring, and he has worked on strengthening his right shoulder to help his throwing. All of that should help Russell, who already is a smooth fielder.

"It really comes down to arm strength on a consistent basis," manager Joe Maddon told the media. "If you can imagine, when a guy doesn't make mistakes throwing a baseball and he's more accurate because he's stronger, the rest of his game becomes better because he doesn't worry about it anymore.

I think a part of when guys struggle in a particular area of their game, it's because they are concerned about something else. When he becomes solid with his throwing, the rest of his game takes off."

The Cubs would like Russell's offense to take off, particularly his batting average and on-base percentage. When healthy, the power should be there, as he has demonstrated in the past.

His 12 home runs last year were down from the 21 he hit in the Cubs' world-championship season of 2016, when he also drove in 95 runs.

Russell has talked of wanting to become more disciplined at the plate, but his walk rate dipped from 9.2 percent in 2016 to 7.5 percent last year while his strikeout rate ticked up from 22.6 percent to 23.6 percent.

A more settled Russell also should compete for a Gold Glove, along with his double-play partner, second baseman Javier Baez.

"Absolutely," Maddon said. "He doesn't make mistakes physically as he goes after a ball, how his feet work. He plays through the ball really well and turns a double play well."

And settled is where Russell feels with the Cubs.

I'm happy being in a Cubs uniform," he said. "I want to be in a Cubs uniform for sure. But there was some talk out there. If I got traded, I got traded. But that's not the case here."

--

### **The Athletic**

Who's batting leadoff? Who cares? Joe Maddon knows Cubs should have a monster offense either way  
By Patrick Mooney

MESA, Ariz. — This is what a news vacuum looks like: the Cubs already had a clear vision of every spot on their 25-man opening day roster before the first full-squad workout on Feb. 19. The Cubs have played 14 Cactus League games since then and it's still three weeks until anything counts at Marlins Park.

There can be no true "camp battles" when the Cubs don't really have any job openings. Jake Arrieta isn't going to show up at the Sloan Park complex and shock the baseball world in a Dexter Fowler sequel. Even strength and conditioning coordinator Tim Buss has been relatively understated, wearing a fur coat one morning instead of playing with zoo animals.

That leaves the leadoff guy, a nagging question that will never have a single answer with this team.

"It's really wide open and I'm not hyper-concerned about that either," manager Joe Maddon said Thursday. "I think that's a little bit overblown with us. If you look at our numbers last year — the eventual number of runs scored — it's pretty darn good.

"Would I love to have Rickey Henderson leading off? Absolutely. Lou Brock would be a good option, too. Sorry to offend the Cub fans. But if you don't have that, for me, it's about just trying to match up your best on-base percentage guy."

Who's batting leadoff? Who cares? The Cubs spent top-10 picks on five hitters who have become part of their core: Javier Baez, Albert Almora Jr., Kris Bryant, Kyle Schwarber and Ian Happ.

The Theo Epstein regime flipped another first-round selection (right-hander Andrew Cashner) and an All-Star pitcher (Jeff Samardzija) to build their team around Anthony Rizzo and Addison Russell. Chairman Tom Ricketts authorized \$240 million to sign free agents Jason Heyward and Ben Zobrist to lengthen and diversify a World Series lineup.

The Cubs fired a handpicked hitting coach (John Mallee) who went to three-straight NLCS and hired Chili Davis, who doesn't want to talk about mechanics and commands instant respect for his 19-year playing career and work with the Oakland A's and Boston Red Sox.

Maddon loves his Geek Department, tries to see the game from all angles and will make data-driven decisions.

This offense will be good enough — or it won't — because there are not that many levers to pull or buttons to press here.

"It just depends," said Maddon, who hasn't completely ruled out using Schwarber, Bryant or Rizzo at the top of the order for certain matchups. "But you've seen Happy there. You've seen Albert there. You've seen Heyward. Zorilla was there. You're going to see probably those four guys, maybe one or two more.

"Like last year, we just got to that point where we weren't scoring runs and we were kind of in a little bit of a funk. I thought it would be kind of fun to put Rizz there — one of the best leadoff hitters in the history of baseball if you look at his numbers."

Just ask him.

"Was it the greatest? OK, just ask him," Maddon said. "I'm not afraid to do all that stuff. You have to break down stereotypes, just based on years ago — guys got to be small and got to be fast. They didn't even pay attention to on-base percentage — just got to be small and fast. The No. 2 guy had to be able to sacrifice bunt and do hit-and-run properly.

"That was wonderful and that's the way it was played. I don't think it's necessarily the way to go. I never thought that, though, but I never played with Dick Groat."

Beyond the failed Schwarber experiment, the Cubs used 10 other leadoff guys last season — and still put up 822 runs, outscoring every other NL team except for the Colorado Rockies (who generated almost 60 percent of their 824 runs at Coors Field).

Rickey Henderson or Fowler isn't walking through that door — and neither is Jon Jay, who hit leadoff a team-high 51 times last year — but the Cubs have a 30-homer, 100-RBI hitter three years running (Rizzo), an NL MVP (Bryant), an NLCS co-MVP (Baez), a World Series MVP (Zobrist) and a World Series legend (Schwarber).

Where would you put the ceiling on Russell (24 years old), Happ (23) and Almora (23)? Willson Contreras (25) either believes he already is the best catcher in the game or will be soon.

"There's different methods," Maddon said. "The way we're set up, how we look, Dexter's not here. When Dexter was here, it was a lot easier to see it. But it's more difficult to see it right now. There's nothing wrong with a little bit of experimentation."

--



## The Athletic

R-E-L-A-X: Javier Baez feels like it's 2016 all over again

By Patrick Mooney

MESA, Ariz. — Cubs fans, R-E-L-A-X: Javier Baez didn't drink enough water, felt a cramp in his left hamstring and exited Thursday's Cactus League game as a precaution.

Baez emerged from the clubhouse storage area with a bottled water in his hand, saying he now feels "100 percent" after getting treatment and could play Friday if it weren't already a scheduled day off for him.

Baez is one of Major League Baseball's great entertainers, always one pitch away from a spectacular play that will go viral on social media. Fittingly, he wore a black Air Jordan T-shirt, red shorts and red sneakers. His hair is dyed a color that is turning blondish-gray.

Baez laughed when a reporter mentioned the crying emoji popping up as soon as his injury news broke on Twitter — and what that says about the excitement and expectations surrounding this team.

"Everybody's feeling good," Baez said. "We got a lot of energy in the clubhouse. Since [Yu] Darvish signed, we kind of got everybody together and we're feeling great. I feel the team is as motivated as the '16 [group]. We'll see when we start."

Everyone is supposed to be optimistic during spring training, but there is a different pace and vibe around the Sloan Park complex in Mesa. Baez symbolizes so much of what the Cubs project this year — a renewed sense of commitment, natural improvement from a 25-year-old player and a return to championship-level defense.

"I feel great," Baez said. "Just cramped for a little bit, but everything's back to normal."

Baez felt something a few steps out of the batter's box after driving a ball off San Diego Padres right-hander Jordan Lyles into the left-center field gap. Baez eased up while rounding first base and cruised in for two-run double. He motioned toward the home dugout and walked off the field in the second inning of a 10-4 victory in front of 12,569 fans.

"It's scary," said winning pitcher Tyler Chatwood (one run allowed in three innings), who signed a three-year, \$38 million contract with the idea that he would be backed up by an elite defensive unit and a relentless offense. "The goal for everybody is to get out of here healthy and ready for the season."

"Hopefully, it's nothing serious and he's able to continue to get ready for the season."

Baez didn't look or sound at all concerned about the hamstring (maybe he'll go on the Jason Hammel diet and eat some potato chips to avoid cramping). The bigger takeaway is that Baez — a breakout star from the 2016 World Series run and last year's World Baseball Classic with Team Puerto Rico — echoed what other players have said about the post-hangover Cubs.

"Everybody wants to be here," Baez said. "Everybody wants to work. Everybody wants to be around everybody."

--

## The Athletic

With Chili Davis' help, can Addison Russell live up to the hype?

By Sahadev Sharma

Entering the 2015 season, Addison Russell was a consensus top-five prospect. His name was mentioned in the same breath as Francisco Lindor, Carlos Correa and Corey Seager as one of the best shortstop prospects in all of baseball.

Three years later, Lindor, Seager and Correa were one, two and three in WAR (FanGraphs) for shortstops for both 2017 and the last three seasons combined.

Where's Russell?

He doesn't show up until No. 20 for 2017, and is No. 10 over the last three years. That's not bad for a young player entering his age-24 season, but it feels like a disappointment when looking at all the young superstar shortstops now ahead of him along with the hype that came with his name when he first entered the big leagues.

"We all have different sets of talents," Russell recently said. "I don't look at other people's games like that. I just know they're really great ballplayers. I'm my own person and I'm going on my own path. I'm still young, too. I've had things in my life that have happened and I had to overcome. So my focus wasn't always solely on one thing at one time. So having this past offseason, I've been able to reflect over the time and see where my mindset is at. Hopefully I'll be right up there with them."

Call it unfocused, immature or distracted; whatever it was, Russell's head hasn't always been on baseball when he's at the ballpark. That, along with a shoulder issue and a foot injury, kept him from coming close to reaching his potential last season.

Russell's defense has never been in question. Since 2016, his first full season at shortstop, only Andrelton Simmons has provided more value on defense (according to defensive runs saved). Yes, Russell's throwing can be a problem at times, but overall he's clearly valuable on defense. It's his offense that has kept him out of the conversation for best shortstops in the game. Given the rapid rise of his contemporaries, some have assumed Russell is a finished product at 24.

"He's got the bat, believe me, he's got the bat," Cubs hitting coach Chili Davis said. "They're all very talented. I really can't compare them to Addy. But they're all quality, young players. Addy's getting there. I think if he can stay healthy for a whole year, he'll put some numbers up. He will."

Russell seemed to be making progress on offense during his All-Star season in 2016. He slugged 21 homers and manager Joe Maddon trusted him enough that he'd often put him in the cleanup spot. But Russell took a step back in 2017 as his batting average and power stayed static (in a season in which power was up all around baseball as the league average ISO jumped from .162 to .171). His walk rate dipped (9.2 percent to 7.5 percent) and his wRC+ dropped (94 to 84) as well.

"I definitely want to showcase more of my talent than I displayed [last year]," Russell said. "Going into this year, it's just mainly keeping a good mental [approach]. Just staying level-headed. Staying healthy, producing and being out there on the field."

During his rookie season, Russell adopted a leg kick as opposed to a toe tap with his stride. It was something he discussed bringing it back with former Cubs hitting coach John Mallee during the All-Star break and they both decided that was a good time. Russell went on to post a 101 wRC+ in the second

half of the season after delivering a 79 wRC+ in the first half, albeit only in 31 games (25 starts) because of injury.

The leg kick was actually a suggestion Davis made to Russell during their shared time in the Oakland organization.

“When I went to my first big-league camp, I was 19 years old,” Russell said. “I met Chili for the first time and he’s watching me swing. He said, ‘It’s a good swing, decent swing. But one day, I’m gonna get you when you have a leg kick.’ Next thing you know I have a leg kick and then he’s over here with the Cubs. Baseball is such a small world. I’m excited to have him as a coach.”

Davis spent three seasons as the A’s hitting coach and three seasons in the same role in Boston before arriving in Chicago. He’s overseen breakout offensive performances from Josh Donaldson, Yoenis Cespedes, Mookie Betts, Jackie Bradley, Jr. and numerous others. And without much fanfare, he put the inkling of a mechanical change into Russell’s head years before the shortstop actually implemented it.

“I tell you what, I’m not a big leg kick fan,” Davis said. “But he needed something to get him started, to get him back behind the ball and just read the ball a little better. Everybody’s different, but for him I thought that would give him that little pause to read the ball and fire.”

Davis said at that point Russell had changed his whole setup in an attempt to be more consistent. After Russell told Davis he was trying to do, Davis said he felt a leg kick would be appropriate. But Davis also didn’t want him to immediately abandon the changes he was making at the time because it’s impossible to know for sure what will work for a player. In the end, Russell did adopt the leg kick — just years after and miles away from Davis’ initial suggestion.

Toward the end of last season, Russell made another small adjustment, turning his torso slightly toward the pitcher in an effort to see the ball coming out of the hand better. His walk and hard-hit rate jumped a fair amount after implementing the change, and although it was a sample of just 12 games, Davis believes Russell had the right idea in mind.

“To me as a hitter, that is where everything starts,” Davis said. “How do I see the ball out of the pitcher’s hand? To be able to set yourself up, not too wide open, but to where you’re actually picking the ball up with both eyes is important.”

Russell said his history with Davis makes him comfortable with the man he referred to as his “first hitting coach.” Not that it’s difficult to approach the friendly Davis. That’s good because Russell said he isn’t done trying to make adjustments. He came into camp asking Davis how to better attack the inside pitch.

“I don’t want it to be a matter of him cheating to get to it,” Davis said. “I want his first move to be able to put his hands in a slot that he can get the barrel in the zone as quickly as possible, but still have the ability to hit balls out over the plate.”

Davis said his goal is to keep Russell’s hands traveling a little closer to his body. His initial move to load should not be away from his body, and that should allow him to get to inside pitches without selling out, Davis said. It’s a process that starts off the batting tee, moves to front flips, then live BP and finally to game action. Davis said the main goal in all of these drills is to track the ball out of the hand to the zone. That’s the aspect that can’t be lost while other changes are made.

"You're working on a move, it's a feel move," Davis said. "That's why I like it being his first move. His initial move that gets his hands in that firing slot. Once I get in that firing slot, then I can go ahead and let it go."

Much of this is feel. Learning the nuances of hitting. Jelling with a new hitting coach. Trying to live up to the high expectations many of your peers have already reached. Russell seems anxious to do it all. Ultimately, no matter how good Davis is at his job, it's on Russell to achieve all those goals.

--

## **Cubs.com**

Baez leaves game with hamstring tightness

By Carrie Muskat

MESA, Ariz. -- Apparently the Cubs' Javier Baez isn't drinking enough water.

Baez had to leave Thursday's game in the second inning because of tightness in his left hamstring, most likely caused by dehydration.

"I felt a cramp," Baez said. "After I passed first base, [my leg] went back to normal. When I stopped, I felt the cramp. Obviously, [manager Joe Maddon] didn't want me to stay in the game. I'm completely fine, 100 percent. I got some treatment. The [athletic] trainers were all over it, and everything is fine."

The Cubs had two runners on and nobody out against the Padres' Jordan Lyles when Baez hit a double into the left-center-field gap in the second. Both runs scored, but Baez limped into second base. Maddon went out to talk to Baez, and the infielder came out of the game.

"It's scary," Cubs pitcher Tyler Chatwood said about seeing Baez leave the game. "The goal for everybody is to get out of here healthy and ready for the season."

The problem isn't believed to be serious.

"I haven't been drinking a lot of water," Baez said. "I drink water during the workouts, but outside of the workout, it's also important, and I haven't been drinking a lot of water."

He was not scheduled to play on Friday, and could be back in the lineup for one of the Cubs' split-squad games Saturday if he passes all the tests.

"We still have almost three weeks [before the season starts]," Baez said.

Chesny Young, who replaced Baez as a pinch-runner and took over at second base, also had to come out of the game after colliding with first baseman Anthony Rizzo in foul territory chasing Wil Myers' pop-up in the third inning.

"I didn't see the play but saw somebody crash," Baez said. "I thought, 'No way. It can't be two in one day.'"

Young appeared to be shaken up on the play and was taken out as a precautionary measure.

Baez's double came in a five-run second inning, when the Cubs smacked six straight hits off Lyles.

"A few of the pitchers who came from watching the game, they were talking about our hitting today," Baez said. "Obviously everybody is feeling good. We have a lot of energy in the clubhouse. Since [Yu] Darvish signed, we got everybody together. We're feeling great. I feel the team is as motivated as the [2016 season]."

--

### **Cubs.com**

Chatwood works on curveball in 3rd spring start

By Carrie Muskat

MESA, Ariz. -- Tyler Chatwood did a little experimenting Thursday in his third Cactus League start for the Cubs.

"I threw some curveballs that I normally wouldn't throw in those counts to get a feel for it," Chatwood said after his outing, in which he gave up one run on two hits and two walks over three innings in the Cubs' 10-4 win over the Padres. "Right now is a time for us to get a feel for those pitches so when we go into the season, we'll have them. There are definitely things we're working on out there."

And by testing reactions to his pitches, Chatwood may surprise batters with an unexpected curve.

"It's just a matter of finding that feel," he said. "I'll try to build off that."

The right-hander got plenty of run support in the Cubs' victory in front of 12,569 at Sloan Park. The Cubs scored five runs in the second inning, rattling off six straight hits, including an RBI single by Addison Russell, two-run double by Javier Baez, and RBI doubles by Victor Caratini and David Bote.

Chatwood also got to see his new teammates play well in the field. Russell made back-to-back stellar plays.

"I'm a big ground-ball guy, so having those guys, they're pretty elite out there," Chatwood said. "Having those guys play behind me will be a lot of fun."

### Camp battles

Ian Happ was back atop the Cubs' lineup Thursday for the eighth game, but manager Joe Maddon isn't ready to commit to him or anyone else as the full-time leadoff hitter.

"It's really wide open, and I'm not hyper-concerned about that either," Maddon said. "I think that's been overblown with us. If you look at the numbers last year, the eventual number of runs scored was pretty darn good."

The Cubs ranked second in the National League with 822 runs, using 11 different leadoff hitters.

"Would I love to have Rickey Henderson? Absolutely," Maddon said. "Lou Brock would be a good option, too. If you don't have that, it's about trying to match up your better on-base percentage guy who you're willing to take that opportunity with."

The Cubs have experimented with four different leadoff hitters so far. Happ now is 9-for-21 with four homers, one triple, two doubles and eight RBIs in eight games in the No. 1 spot.

Jason Heyward is 1-for-6 in two games batting leadoff so far, Albert Almora Jr. is 0-for-7 in three games there, and Ben Zobrist is 0-for-3 in one game.

#### Injury updates

- Catcher Taylor Davis has been sidelined since suffering a concussion last Friday during a live batting practice session in which he was catching Justin Hancock. Davis said he was hit on the head by a foul tip.

"I've gotten hit in the face before, and I've gotten hit in the head," Davis said Thursday. "I've never had this before."

On Wednesday, Davis said he finally felt "like a human being" and was able to go out for lunch.

"I'm thankful to be feeling good again," he said.

In other injury updates, the Cubs want pitcher Shae Simmons to take it easy after feeling some tightness in his right shoulder in Wednesday's game. Simmons walked two batters in the fourth inning and was pulled. His status is day to day, and no tests are scheduled.

Reliever Pedro Strop threw a bullpen session Thursday. He has been out with a sore left calf and was not scheduled to pitch in any games yet.

#### Garner asks about exit velocity

On Thursday, David Garner was trying to figure out the exit velocity of the line drive hit by the Indians' Yonder Alonso in the third inning Wednesday night. Garner didn't have much time to react, but stuck his glove out and snared the ball.

"It was so fast, it was moving in slow motion," Garner said. "I saw it the whole way."

How fast did it seem?

"If I was going to be accurate, it was 100 percent over 100 miles an hour," Garner said.

His hand felt fine until a few innings later, when he felt some soreness. He's not expected to miss any time.

Up next: Jon Lester will make his third spring start on Friday when the Cubs play host to the Angels at Sloan Park in Mesa. Game time is 2:05 p.m. CT. In his first two outings, Lester has given up two runs on four hits and four walks over 4 1/3 innings while striking out six. The game will be broadcast on 670 The Score and can be viewed on MLB.TV.

Looking ahead, the Cubs have split-squad games on Saturday; Kyle Hendricks will face the White Sox, while Luke Farrell will start the night game against the Dodgers. Yu Darvish's next scheduled start will be Sunday against the Athletics.

--

#### **Cubs.com**

Bryant named Cubs' MLBPA player rep

By Carrie Muskat

MESA, Ariz. -- Kris Bryant feels good this spring. He's getting to know his new teammates, enjoying drills with new infield coach Brian Butterfield and learning about the business side of the game.

The third baseman is the Cubs' player representative this season after serving as the assistant to Jake Arrieta last year. The player rep serves on the Major League Baseball Players Association executive board and is responsible for meeting regularly with the players on his team. It's Bryant's job to represent his teammates in the resolution of any problems at the club level.

"Watching some of the events of the offseason, I feel I owe it to myself, because a lot of this will affect me and people my age, and I want to have all the information I can for down the road," Bryant said. "I learned a lot this offseason and hope to learn more."

He has gone to MLBPA meetings in Arizona, and it's been an education.

"There's everything you do on the field, but there's a whole [other] side to this game, and it's the business side, and it affects us and affects how people play on the field," Bryant said. "If I can find a way to learn more about that and enjoy that part of it, too, it will be free and easy on the field."

This will be Bryant's fourth year in the Majors, and he won't be a free agent until after the 2021 season. Still, he wants to be prepared.

"It'd be good to take more of a proactive approach as a player and voice our opinions more, so they're heard," he said. "There are a lot of people who voice their opinions. If we can get more players to participate, it will make it better for ourselves and the players who come after us. That's my whole purpose behind wanting to take it. It's more of an active approach."

Bryant admitted he was more of an observer in his first two seasons.

"It's more, 'What do I do?' and you don't want to step on anybody's toes," he said of his early years. "You want to learn the game and everything that comes along with it. As you get older, you see older players take more of a leadership role. That's what I want to do is learn more about the game and how it affects us."

It's hard to think of Bryant, 26, as an "older player." He's done a lot in his young career, including winning the National League Rookie of the Year Award in 2015, then the Most Valuable Player Award the next year. He wants to represent the young Cubs core that includes players like Anthony Rizzo, Addison Russell and Kyle Schwarber.

"I think the earlier I can start learning about it, it will set me up better later on, so I can speak on things and be more educated," Bryant said. "I won't have to say, 'I don't know,' to some questions."

--

### **ESPNChicago.com**

The Cubs' leadoff answer? Ian Happ is turning heads atop lineup  
By Jesse Rogers

MESA, Ariz. -- One of the few downsides to all of the success the Chicago Cubs have had recently is that there aren't many unknown quantities for fans to discover during spring training. But before you get to

the middle of Chicago's star-laden lineup there exists a possible sleeper for the top spot of the order -- and he has been hard to miss so far this spring.

Switch-hitting second-year man Ian Happ wasn't drafted in the first round of the 2015 draft necessarily to hit leadoff or play center field, but that's exactly what he has been doing during an eye-opening stretch of Cactus League play. If spring training is any indication, the seeds are being planted for manager Joe Maddon to grow the former Cincinnati Bearcat from a part-time piece to the primary guy as the lead-off hitter in Chicago's 2018 lineup.

"I'm more comfortable, no doubt," Happ said early in camp. "I know what to expect."

After hitting 24 home runs as a part-time player last year, Happ's apprenticeship is seemingly over. Maddon has him batting first most often this spring, and he has responded. Going into Friday's Cactus League action, Happ is 9-for-21 with a .500 on-base percentage and four home runs, two coming left-handed and two coming right-handed, and two of which have led off a game.

Spring stats are hardly telling, but the Cubs haven't had that kind of dynamism at the top of the order since Dexter Fowler left after the 2016 World Series. Happ is soaking in everything he can about the spot in the order where the Cubs ranked 12th in the National League in batting average and 10th in on-base percentage last year.

"My thought process going in is, it's no different than anywhere else, I'm just going to get more at-bats," Happ said. "It's a different perspective knowing you're going to get five at-bats as opposed to three to four."

"To be the best you can be that day, you want to be on base at least twice in five at-bats. Middle order or back order, you're not really looking at it that way. At the top, if you get on once, you didn't really do your job. Twice is a good day. More than that is great."

In other words, it's a mindset: Don't change your swing or your style at the plate, but change your mentality.

That's what Happ has learned. And who did he learn it from?

"You have to pick guys' brains," Happ said. "I keep getting back to Dexter. He was always trying to get on base twice. It doesn't matter how you do it."

The word you hear most from scouts who have seen Happ for a half-season in the majors is "athlete." Yes, he's still raw -- especially in the outfield -- but it doesn't take long to see his hand-eye coordination as well as his speed.

"The thing that stands out is his power," one NL scout said. "It's hard to see that coming from his frame. He needs work on his base running, but he looks fast."

Happ is listed at 6-foot and 200 pounds, but those might be generous numbers. He packs a wallop though. In the Cubs' third spring game, he worked the count against Madison Bumgarner, then hit a 3-2 pitch out to right field. His two home runs hitting right-handed this spring are only three fewer than he hit from that side all last season, and the idea of a switch-hitting leadoff man with power at the top could make an already-stacked Cubs lineup even more dangerous.



Happ isn't slated to play every day, but it's looking more and more like he might bat first when he is in the lineup. A season-long debate revolved around what batting first did to Kyle Schwarber in 2017: Did it change a young hitter's mindset too much? Schwarber has a keen eye and still struggled in the role, and Happ will have to eliminate some swing-and-miss from his game to succeed -- his strikeout rate was 31 percent and his strikeouts-to-walk ratio wasn't pretty at 3.31 -- but he's just learning the league and himself.

One of Maddon's concerns about players at the top of the order is the number they see on the scoreboard. An 0-for-5 day, as opposed to 0-for-3 or 0-for-4, can really hurt a batting average -- and an ego. That's why taking some walks at the top of the order is important, for the team and the player. It kind of limits the exposure to a failed day.

"I know it's going to even out over the course of the season, but your goal as a leadoff hitter is to get on base as much as possible for the big boys behind you," Happ said. "You don't put pressure on yourself or overthink it, but you just know going in you're going to get that extra at-bat. If you don't come to terms with it early, it's going to eat you up."

Happ won't be 24 until August, but he already understands what the leadoff process is all about -- and what it's not.

"I'm going to attack the baseball the same way," he said. "I can't change who I am as a hitter. I'm going to continue to be aggressive and take my walks when they come."

--

### **NBC Sports Chicago**

The Cubs should roll with a 6-man rotation in 2018

By Tony Andracki

Joe Maddon's former team — the Tampa Bay Rays — is planning on going with a four-man starting rotation in 2018.

But Joe Maddon's current team may be better served by going the opposite route.

The Cubs are in a completely different place than the retooling Rays and with World Series expectations on Chicago's North Side, the season turns into a seven-month-long marathon, not just the six months of regular season.

Theo Epstein's front office has built a team with an eye on playing all the way through the end of October and will need Maddon's coaching staff to keep everybody healthy and peaking at just the right time.

A six-man rotation could be the best way to accomplish that.

The Cubs are always trying to stay ahead of the curve, setting new trends instead of following. Maybe the way the Rays are thinking of things will ultimately be the newest fad, but that also places a lot of pressure on the bullpen to fill more innings than ever before.

The bullpen bubble burst — at least partially — last fall when every team struggled to get consistent outings from their relievers. The World Series was riveting and intense, but part of the reason it went that way was the inability of almost every Astros and Dodgers reliever to consistently get outs.

Cubs relievers faded down the stretch, too, struggling through a couple of rocky months before a rough October. Part of the reason for that was fatigue.

In 2017, the Cubs were coming off a season that stretched past Halloween and featured career highs in innings for several players. They were hoping to ease that burden and in turn, inadvertently put too much on the plate of the bullpen.

Maddon let his starting pitchers throw more than 100 pitches just 46 times last season and only nine times did a starter toss more than 110 pitches. The season high was 116 by Jose Quintana on Sept. 24 in a complete game shutout of the Milwaukee Brewers.

The thought process was simple: Keep your starters fresh and feeling good in hopes of making another World Series run.

But that didn't quite work out for multiple reasons, including the bullpen issues.

Moving to a six-man rotation could be the best of both worlds in 2018. It would give the Cubs a chance to rest their starters more than normal, giving them an extra day in between outings.

And with that extra day of rest, that could mean Maddon may feel more comfortable unleashing his starters for 115 or more pitches when their performance warrants it, thus taking some of the burden off the bullpen.

The Cubs also have the personnel to do it, with Mike Montgomery ready to step into the rotation at any time. He gives the team six good options in the rotation and even if any starter goes down to injury, they're in a fine position to simply move back down to a five-man turn.

Thanks to the versatility of the Cubs position players, they don't have to carry as many bench bats and can subsequently roll with 13 pitchers on the 25-man roster. So even with a six-man rotation, the Cubs could still have a normal seven-man bullpen.

There are a couple of issues with the whole six-man rotation, however.

For one thing, starting pitchers are extreme creatures of habit and they plan their bullpens and workouts in between starts around the fact they are throwing every five days. It's tough to see a seasoned veteran like Jon Lester easily adapting to getting an extra day in between outings.

When the Cubs have gone to a six-man rotation in the past, Lester and the other starters have been unhappy with the move. If the players won't buy in, obviously there's no real advantage to going against the grain with an unconventional rotation.

There's also the numbers, which indicate nearly every MLB pitcher struggles when facing the opposing order a third time through. The reasoning is simple: Each hitter in the big leagues is the best of the best and the more often they see a guy's stuff or arm angle on a given day, the easier it is to make adjustments.

However, this Cubs rotation may be the bunch to try something new.

Lester, Montgomery, Kyle Hendricks and Yu Darvish all get better as the game goes on and Jose Quintana's jump is hardly worrisome — .690 opponent OPS first time through the order, .675 OPS second time through and .754 OPS third time.

If ever there was a team and a time to move to a six-man rotation, the 2018 Cubs could be it.

--

### **Chicago Tribune**

Cubs' Carl Edwards Jr. biding time for bigger payday

By Mark Gonzales

Reliever Carl Edwards Jr. kept a straight face Thursday while realizing he could stand to make a few million dollars sooner than anticipated.

Edwards could qualify for salary arbitration next season as a "Super Two" player if he ranks in the top 22 percent of players in the two-to-three-year service-time bracket.

Edwards would qualify if the cutoff for next season's Super Two class stays below two years, 134 days — in the likely event he remains on the Cubs' major-league roster for the entire 2018 season.

"(My agents) have mentioned it," he said Thursday. "I told them I understand, but I just want to play the game. As long as I'm up and helping the team, that's all that matters."

The service time cutoff in 2017 was two years, 123 days, but the cutoff fluctuates on an annual basis. In 2011, it was two years, 146 days, according to [baseball-reference.com](http://baseball-reference.com).

Edwards, who is under team control, is in line for a decent raise from his \$556,000 salary when the Cubs sign him formally for this year. He posted a 2.98 ERA in 73 appearances in his first full major-league season in 2017.

Sign language: The Cubs have worked on various signs from the dugout in an effort to avoid reaching the maximum amount of six mound visits before being forced to pull a pitcher.

After speaking recently with veteran umpire Gerry Davis about specifics, manager Joe Maddon stressed that abiding by the new rule remains a work in progress.

"Umpires want to work with this, and we want to work with the umpires," Maddon said. "They have a lot on their plate. We don't want to be confrontational with the umpires."

Extra innings: The Cubs will meet Friday morning with members of the Ross Initiative in Sports for Equality and their RISE to Vote campaign. The organization has embarked on a national nonpartisan campaign that includes registering pro athletes to vote and encourages them to emphasize the importance of voting to their fans. ... Reliever Shae Simmons was pulled from Wednesday's game because of shoulder tightness. Infielder Chesny Young was shaken up after colliding with first baseman Anthony Rizzo on a foul popup and left Thursday's game in the third inning.

--

## Chicago Tribune

Residents excited about Wrigley Field renovations, concerned about public safety

By Tony Briscoe

Lakeview residents were buzzing about the newest renovations to Wrigley Field and the surrounding neighborhood at a community meeting Thursday evening.

Cubs officials confirmed that the opening date for the Hotel Zachary remains on track for March 26, ahead of the team's April 9 home opener against the Pirates.

Many in the overflow crowd of about 100 who had gathered for the meeting at the 19th District police station looked forward to the new addition, including Lawry and Jackie Price, who live a mile south of the ballpark.

"It would be a great addition to the neighborhood," said Lawry Price, who's lived in Lakeview for more than 80 years and wore a replica World Series ring. "It's going to bring revenue to the community, and we're going to benefit from that. We didn't gain any revenue from those other businesses, the ticket brokers and 7-Eleven. Those were just stop-offs."

As in recent years, Wrigley has undergone major renovations during the offseason. Among the projects, Cubs fans will see a relocation and widening of the dugouts, structural improvements and seat replacements.

Construction has also begun on four premier clubs that will accommodate season ticket holders. The Maker's Mark Barrel Room along the first-base line, The W Club on the third-base line and the Catalina Club in the upper level behind home plate are expected to open in 2019. The American Airlines Club 1914 remains on schedule to open for the 2018 season.

The expansion of concession areas won't be completed until 2019.

The updates fueled optimism that the Cubs might have a chance to host their first All-Star Game since 1990.

"It won't be until they finish the locker room for the visitors," Lawry Price said. "That will be the big stepping stone."

In 2017, the Park at Wrigley, a 50,000-square-foot outdoor plaza marked by a large TV screen, concession areas and shops with merchandise and a tavern, opened amid some concerns, said Heather Way Kitzes, Cubs manager of government and community relations.

"Last year, we promised that this would not be a beer garden, and I think we can all agree that it is anything but," Way Kitzes said. "It's not a disaster waiting to happen as some believed. In fact, it's become our neighborhood town square."

Thursday's update was the 15th annual community meeting between the Cubs and city officials, according Ald. Tom Tunney, 44th.

"Here we are now, and it's a brave new world around Wrigley Field," he said.

Tunney said the neighborhood has maintained a "healthy tension between community and the Cubs." But he reaffirmed that the team was only a portion of the neighborhood's priorities.

"I often tell them that ... the Cubs are an important asset, but this neighborhood is called Lakeview, because I think the lake is the biggest asset," Tunney said.

A yearly survey revealed public safety ranked atop the list of concerns for neighbors who signed up for the Cubs email list. Deputy Chief Al Nagode and other Chicago Police Department officials tried to alleviate those concerns, saying the department would try to maintain safety at Cubs games and other large events at Wrigley by managing traffic and providing a police presence and barriers.

"We've had a lot of incidents throughout the country, right? There's been a lot of concerns with large venues and security at these," Nagode said. "We'll make sure we address that with you. We're always playing that game of how we have an entertainment venue versus our need for public safety. We're always playing that balancing act."

--

### **Chicago Tribune**

Thursday's spring recap: Cubs 10, Padres 4

By Mark Gonzales

The Cubs knocked out Jordan Lyles during a five-run second inning Thursday and coasted to a 10-4 victory over the Padres before a crowd of 12,569 at Sloan Park. The Cubs collected six consecutive hits off Lyles, as Javier Baez, Victor Caratini and David Bote each had RBI doubles. The Cubs received a scare when Baez limped into second base with what he said later was a left hamstring cramp and expects to play perhaps as soon as Saturday.

At the plate: Addison Russell executed a single on a hit-and-run play to score Ben Zobrist with the Cubs' first run in the second. Ian Happ continued his drive for the leadoff spot with a triple in the fourth.

On the mound: The large lead enabled Tyler Chatwood to throw more breaking pitches in the third, but Chatwood said he felt out of rhythm as he walked two in the inning that led to Carlos Asuaje's RBI single. Left-hander Justin Wilson didn't allow a run for his third consecutive appearance.

In the field: Russell made an exceptional stop at shortstop to retire Eric Hosmer in the second, and he and first baseman Anthony Rizzo perfectly executed a rundown to nail Freddy Galvis to complete a double play to end the inning.

Key number: 7 — Happ's extra-base hits this spring.

Up next: Vs. Angels, 2:10 p.m. Friday at Sloan Park. LH Jon Lester vs. RH Matt Shoemaker.

--

### **Chicago Tribune**

Javier Baez '100 percent' after suffering left hamstring cramp

By Mark Gonzales

Javier Baez poked a low, outside pitch into left-center field for a double Thursday that he wouldn't have come close to hitting in past seasons.

But Baez's achievement nearly was obscured somewhat when he limped three steps out of the batter's box and eventually signaled for medical attention after his two-run double off the Padres' Jordan Lyles in the second inning of the Cubs' 10-4 victory at Sloan Park.

The concerns of Cubs fans were alleviated when Baez later was diagnosed with a left hamstring cramp that could allow him to return as soon as Saturday, and the incident now could be just another lesson in his development as a complete player.

"I drink water during the (pre-game) workouts," said Baez, who declared he was 100 percent after receiving treatment from the medical staff. "But outside of the workouts, it's obviously important and I haven't been drinking a lot of water."

Throughout his career, Baez, 25, has taken major steps to correct flaws since he the Cubs selected him in the first round of the 2011 draft. Questions about his fielding after committing 44 errors at shortstop at Class A Daytona and Double-A Tennessee in 2013 gradually were quelled, and he made a smooth transition to second base after Addison Russell took over for veteran Starlin Castro in August 2015.

Baez's defensive excellence became complete in 2017, especially after he played 26 consecutive errorless games in place of an injured Russell at shortstop in August and September.

His elite play gave him the confidence to aim for a Gold Glove Award at second base as his major defensive goal.

But he could take his biggest strides at the plate as he has curbed some of the wildness in his swing after accumulating 95 strikeouts in 213 at-bats as a rookie in 2014.

"He's not an enigma," manager Joe Maddon said last month. "I just think he's young. The thing with Javy is this — he has cut down on those areas and has become a magnificent defender. He needs to take his defensive mind and apply it on offense. He sees things defensively. He's so naturally reactive out there he has a good feel for it."

Baez has put a major emphasis on pitch selection this year. He admitted he was looking for a fastball when Lyles threw him a curve Thursday, but he was able to make contact and hit the ball just past a diving Manuel Margot.

Plate discipline became a major priority this winter for Baez, who achieved career-highs with 23 home runs and 75 RBIs but has seen his strikeout rate drop from 44.6 percent in 2014 to 25.6 percent in 2016 and 30.7 percent last season.

"I've been doing a lot better, seeing the ball a lot better," Baez said. "My swing is the same. My stance is a little different, but my approach is the same. As long as I don't jump to the ball, I'll be good."

Maddon would like Baez to find a rhythm at the plate similar to his defense and be able to adjust to various pitch speeds.

"That's the hardest part as a hitter," Maddon said. "Defensively, he can roll out of bed and be magnificent. As he learns to play the game offensively, it's going to keep getting better. I think you're going to see a magnificent offensive player before it's over. And for me, it's all about organizing the strike zone. Once he organizes the zone, what not to swing at, he's going to take off."

## Chicago Tribune

Performances could add intrigue to Cubs' arbitration-eligible players in 2019

By Mark Gonzales

The Cubs are expected to announce agreements with their remaining unsigned players in a few days, and none of the signings are expected to raise eyebrows.

But there are some curious cases, most noticeably with infielder Javier Baez, outfielder Kyle Schwarber and pitchers Mike Montgomery and Carl Edwards Jr.

Baez, Montgomery and Schwarber enter their final year before they're eligible for salary arbitration, so a productive season would result in a more substantial spike in pay in 2019 than they'll receive this season.

Of the four, Baez and Montgomery (two years, 89 days each) have the most service time, and Baez is coming off a season in which he hit 23 home runs and drove in 75 runs while providing Gold Glove Award-caliber defense.

Although Baez might not receive the \$1.05 million salary that Kris Bryant received last year, Baez could receive a decent raise from his \$609,000 salary in 2017.

Montgomery, who earned \$570,500 last season, had a 2.49 ERA in 30 relief appearances, compared to a 4.15 mark and 5-5 record in 14 starts. But Montgomery allowed one run in 13 innings covering two starts against the Reds and Pirates in place of injured Jon Lester.

Schwarber, who has two years, 83 days of service time, batted .211 with 150 strikeouts and was demoted to Triple-A Iowa for two weeks. But he rebounded with 18 home runs after returning.

Edwards' situation will become more intriguing after this season, based on whether he will qualify for "Super Two" status and be eligible for arbitration. Should Edwards spend the entire 2018 season on the major-league roster, as expected, he will have two years, 134 days of major-league service.

The service time cutoff in 2017 was two years, 123 days, but the cutoff fluctuates on an annual basis. For instance, the cutoff was two years, 146 days in 2011, according to [baseball-reference.com](http://baseball-reference.com).

The cutoff date in 2018 (determined by the top 22 percent of players between two and three years of service time), will dictate whether Edwards will be paid a few million dollars sooner rather than later.

At any rate, Edwards is in line for a decent raise from his \$556,000 salary in 2017. Edwards posted a 2.98 ERA in 73 appearances in his first full major-league season.

--