



CHICAGO CUBS DAILY CLIPS

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November 30, 2018

- Chicago Tribune, **Cubs trade pinch hitter Tommy La Stella to the Angels**
<https://www.chicagotribune.com/sports/baseball/cubs/ct-spt-cubs-tommy-la-stella-trade-angels-20181129-story.html>
- Chicago Sun-Times, **Bounced: Cubs trade Tommy La Stella to Angels**
<https://chicago.suntimes.com/sports/bounced-cubs-trade-tommy-la-stella-angels/>
- Daily Herald, **Cubs trade LaStella to Angels**
<https://www.dailyherald.com/sports/20181129/cubs-trade-lastella-to-angels>
- The Athletic, **Mooney: Tommy La Stella traded, Termel Sledge getting hired and an Addison Russell decision looms**
<https://theathletic.com/684892/2018/11/29/mooney-tommy-la-stella-traded-termel-sledge-getting-hired-and-an-addison-russell-decision-looms/>
- Cubs.com, **Cubs deal La Stella to Angels; roster at 39**
<https://www.mlb.com/cubs/news/cubs-trade-tommy-la-stella-to-angels/c-301265050>
- Cubs.com, **Source: Sledge to be Cubs' asst. hitting coach**
<https://www.mlb.com/cubs/news/termel-sledge-joins-cubs-coaching-staff/c-301269288>
- ESPNChicago.com, **Cubs trade Tommy La Stella to Angels**
http://www.espn.com/mlb/story/_/id/25410705/chicago-cubs-trade-tommy-la-stella-los-angeles-angels
- NBC Sports Chicago, **Cubs end Tommy La Stella era by dealing pinch-hitter extraordinaire to LA**
<https://www.nbcsports.com/chicago/cubs/cubs-end-tommy-la-stella-era-dealing-pinch-hitter-extraordinaire-la>
- NBC Sports Chicago, **It looks like the Cubs have a new assistant hitting coach**
<https://www.nbcsports.com/chicago/cubs/it-looks-cubs-have-new-assistant-hitting-coach>
- NBC Sports Chicago, **How would Cubs approach this offseason if they hadn't won the 2016 World Series?**
<https://www.nbcsports.com/chicago/cubs/how-would-cubs-approach-offseason-if-they-hadnt-won-2016-world-series-harper-epstein-bumgarner>

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Chicago Tribune

Cubs trade pinch hitter Tommy La Stella to the Angels

By Mark Gonzales

With shortstop Addison Russell ineligible to return until May 3, there's a premium on versatility for the Cubs.

That apparently played a strong role in their decision Thursday to trade pinch-hitting specialist Tommy La Stella to the Angels for a player to be named or a cash consideration. The deal occurred one day after the Cubs acquired versatile infielder Ronald Torreyes from the Yankees.

The trade of La Stella, 29, who set a franchise record with 24 pinch hits, reduces the number of arbitration-eligible Cubs to eight who would become free agents if they aren't tendered a contract by 7 p.m. Friday.

The trade of La Stella, who was projected to earn \$1.2 million — \$300,000 more than Torreyes, according to MLBtraderumors.com — opens a spot on their 40-man roster that could be used for another waiver claim or a free agent signing.

The Cubs have an urgent need for middle infield versatility because Russell won't be available to start the season because he has 29 games remaining on his 40-game suspension for violating Major League Baseball's domestic-violence policy.

Torreyes, 26, has started 42 games at shortstop over the last three seasons and is regarded as adequate defensively at that position as well as at third base and second base.

La Stella, who joined the Cubs in a trade for reliever Arodys Vizcaino four years ago, improved as a defender but was only a backup at second and third when he wasn't handling pinch-hit roles.

La Stella never played shortstop, and he started only 22 games at second and third last season. His popularity swelled after the Cubs placed him on the temporary inactive list in August 2016 when he declined to report after being assigned to Triple-A Iowa and struggled with deciding what to do about his career.

La Stella playfully ordered a bounce house to be placed on the parking stalls of President Theo Epstein and general manager Jed Hoyer in spring training last March. Last season he also served as a mentor to rookie David Bote on the intricacies of pinch-hitting.

But without Russell, who appears likely to be tendered a contract while he continues his MLB-mandated counseling for domestic abuse, the Cubs need internal options to get through the first month of the season.

Javier Baez's exceptional defense at shortstop in place of Russell during a six-week stretch late in the 2017 season and again in 2018 resurrect questions as to whether the Cubs are better off with Baez as their full-time shortstop.

The Cubs have three scheduled days off in the first 13 days of their regular-season schedule and seven days off before Russell would be eligible to return, so that should provide enough rest for Baez — who played a team-high 160 games in 2018.

In addition to Torreyes, Bote made 14 starts at shortstop for Triple-A Iowa last season and played flawlessly during his lone start at short for the Cubs on Aug. 29.

If Baez shifts from second base to short during Russell's suspension, Ben Zobrist, Bote and Torreyes could handle the second base duties. The Cubs also could seek another middle infielder through a free-agent market that could expand with a list of players who aren't tendered contracts by Friday night.

- A source confirmed multiple reports that Double-A Tulsa batting coach Termel Sledge is in line to become the Cubs' assistant hitting coach.

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Chicago Sun-Times

Bounced: Cubs trade Tommy La Stella to Angels

By Gordon Wittenmyer

One day after acquiring Ronald Torreyes from the Yankees for infield depth, the Cubs on Thursday traded popular and enigmatic pinch hitter Tommy La Stella to the Angels for a player to be named or cash.

The move came just ahead of the deadline Friday for tendering contracts to players.

The arbitration-eligible La Stella, 29, was projected to make \$1.2 million in 2019, according to mlbtraderumors.com. Torreyes, 26, is projected to make \$900,000.

The Cubs have seven other arbitration-eligible players, including troubled shortstop Addison Russell, whose status with the team remains in flux after a yearlong domestic-violence investigation by MLB resulted in a 40-game suspension.

La Stella, who made headlines during the Cubs' 2016 World Series championship season when he refused a minor-league assignment, rehabilitated his reputation and relationships in the clubhouse over the past two seasons.

By last spring, he made different headlines by instigating a battle of pranks with general manager Jed Hoyer, including having a bounce house erected over Hoyer's and president Theo Epstein's parking spots in Mesa, Arizona.

"I'd like to thank the Chicago Cubs for an amazing experience over the last 4 years — a special group of people who taught me about so much more than just the game of baseball and who supported me when they easily could have chosen not to," La Stella, who set a franchise record with 24 pinch hits in 2018, said in a statement.

"Thank you to the fans and everyone in the organization, especially to the boys; being around you guys was some of the best times I've had playing the game. And lastly, thank you to my new team, the Angels. I'm excited for this new opportunity and can't wait to get it started."

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Daily Herald

Cubs trade LaStella to Angels

By Daily Herald report

The Chicago Cubs Thursday traded infielder Tommy LaStella to the Los Angeles Angels for a player to be named or a cash consideration.

LaStella, 29, spent the last four seasons with the Cubs and batted .273 (139-for-509) with 34 doubles, nine homers and 63 RBI in 303 games.

LaStella departs as the club's all-time single-season pinch-hit leader with 24 hits in that role in 2018. LaStella was acquired by the Cubs from the Atlanta Braves for pitcher Arodys Vizcaino Nov. 16, 2014.

The Cubs' 40-man roster is at 39.

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The Athletic

Mooney: Tommy La Stella traded, Terrmel Sledge getting hired and an Addison Russell decision looms
By Patrick Mooney

In what looked like a final tribute to Tommy La Stella – the bench player Joe Maddon once described as someone who could wake up at 3 a.m. and hit anyone – the Cubs announced Thursday's trade with the Los Angeles Angels at 3 p.m.

Tommy Being Tommy meant escalating a prank war with Cubs executives Theo Epstein and Jed Hoyer in spring training when he arranged for a kiddie bounce house to be set up on their parking spots at the team's Arizona complex.

Tommy Being Tommy involved a stunning transformation into one of the most popular guys in the clubhouse, making amends for his New Jersey sabbatical while initially refusing to report to Triple-A Iowa during the 2016 dream season.

Tommy Being Tommy generated 24 pinch-hits in 2018, setting a new single-season franchise record.

La Stella earned his World Series ring and contributed to four playoff teams at Wrigley Field. La Stella's friendship with Jake Arrieta and a strange College World Series bet once led to Arrieta showing reporters a Coastal Carolina (La Stella's college) tattoo on his right butt cheek.

Even by Cubs standards, La Stella truly was a character, valued for his left-handed swing, appreciated by Maddon and teammates for his positive attitude in the dugout and respected in the media for his unique insights into the game.

But with Friday's deadline to offer contracts to arbitration-eligible players approaching, the Cubs wanted different dimensions to their roster, flipping La Stella to the Angels for cash or a player to be named later. MLB Trade Rumors projected La Stella would earn \$1.2 million next year and the Cubs may have already found La Stella's replacement, acquiring versatile infielder Ronald Torreyes from the New York Yankees on Wednesday in a similar roster-cleanup move.

La Stella released this statement through his agency, Beverly Hills Sports Council: "I'd like to thank the Chicago Cubs for an amazing experience over the last 4 years – a special group of people who taught me about so much more than just the game of baseball and who supported me when they easily could have chosen not to. Thank you to the fans and everyone in the organization, especially to the boys, being around you guys was some of the best times I've had playing the game. And lastly, thank you to my new team, the Angels. I'm excited for this new opportunity and can't wait to get it started."

Cubs fans and media mourned the loss of La Stella by roasting ESPN reporter Jesse Rogers, the creator of La Stella's 3 a.m. nickname, on Twitter.

The Cubs are planning to add Termel Sledge to Maddon's staff as the assistant hitting coach, sources told The Athletic. Sledge transitioned into coaching as a minor-league instructor for the Cubs in 2015 and spent the last three seasons as a Double-A hitting coach for the Los Angeles Dodgers. Once his big-league career ended, which featured stops with the Montreal Expos, Washington Nationals and San Diego Padres, Sledge went to Japan, where he played with Yu Darvish.

Now that Sledge is teaming up with Anthony Iapoce – who supervised the organization's minor-league hitting program between 2013 and 2015 – the Cubs will have their third hitting-coach combination in three years, following John Mallee and Eric Hinske (2017) and Chili Davis and Andy Haines (2018).

While the Cubs try out new voices and different messaging to see if that can help fix the Cubs' "broken" offense, Davis is reportedly finalizing a deal with the New York Mets to become their hitting coach.

"Obviously, we didn't hit for as much power as we did the year before," Hoyer said. "I think that blaming that – or assigning that – to a hitting program is dangerous. Everyone likes homers. It's not like anyone is preaching not to hit homers. I think one of the things we struggled with at the end of the year was we really couldn't pinpoint exactly why the second half of the season we didn't hit. There's no silver bullet, I don't think, to fix that.

"Obviously, we made a change with Chili. I think Chili is a great hitting coach. I think, for our group, it felt like returning to some of our roots and going back to get Iapoce was the right thing to do. But it is difficult. You're always trying to figure out: (When) individual players (struggle), how much of that is based on a hitting program? And how much of that is based on individual struggles? That's what we're trying to figure out."

There are so many layers to the Addison Russell situation – his 40-game suspension under Major League Baseball's domestic violence policy with the players' union, the raw talent inside a one-time All-Star shortstop, Epstein's belief in rehabilitation, the organization's social responsibility and win-now demands – that no decision will be made because the Yankees DFA'd Torreyes. Either way, this team needs infield depth and offering Russell a contract (that's not fully guaranteed) before Friday's non-tender deadline doesn't automatically mean that he'll wear a Cubs uniform again. For the Cubs and Russell, this is a much larger, ongoing conversation.

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Cubs.com

Cubs deal La Stella to Angels; roster at 39

By Jordan Bastian

Cubs manager Joe Maddon once quipped that Tommy La Stella could wake up at 3 a.m. ready to hit any pitcher in baseball. Now, the club's longtime pinch-hitting specialist will have to adjust to a new time zone.

On Thursday, the Cubs traded La Stella to the Angels in exchange for a player to be named or cash considerations. The move came one day after Chicago acquired utility infielder Ronald Torreyes from the Yankees for the same return agreement and a day ahead of the 7 p.m. CT deadline for teams to tender contracts to any unsigned players on the 40-man roster.

"I'd like to thank the Chicago Cubs for an amazing experience over the last four years -- a special group of people who taught me about so much more than just the game of baseball and who supported me when they easily could have chosen not to," La Stella expressed in a statement. "Thank you to the fans and everyone in the organization, especially to the boys, being around you guys was some of the best times I've had playing the game. And lastly, thank you to my new team, the Angels. I'm excited for this new opportunity and can't wait to get it started."

La Stella -- eligible for salary arbitration this offseason -- was a non-tender possibility with the Cubs, whose roster now sits at 39. The rest of Chicago's arbitration class includes Javier Baez, Kris Bryant, Carl Edwards Jr., Kyle Hendricks, Mike Montgomery, Addison Russell, Kyle Schwarber and Torreyes. Among that group, Russell is also a candidate to be non-tendered, which would make him a free agent.

La Stella, who will turn 30 in January, spent the past four seasons with the Cubs, hitting .273 with a .753 OPS in 303 games. His 44 career hits as a pinch-hitter are the fourth most in Cubs history, and he filled that role admirably with a .288 average (44-for-153).

Last season, La Stella set a single-season Cubs record with 24 pinch-hits and hit at a .312 clip with a .398 on-base percentage in 77 pinch-hit at-bats. The previous club record of 20 pinch-hits in one year was shared by Thad Bosley (1985) and Dave Clark (1997). On Aug. 30, La Stella delivered a pinch-hit home run -- a go-ahead, two-run homer that gave Chicago a 5-4 win over the Braves.

La Stella also offered depth at second and third base. Last season, he made his first career pitching appearance with 1 1/3 innings on July 20 against the Cardinals.

Torreyes will be in the mix to take La Stella's spot on the Cubs' bench, offering more versatility as a defender all around the infield. Whether Chicago opts to retain Russell or not, the team was in need of improved depth behind the starting options at second and shortstop.

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Cubs.com

Source: Sledge to be Cubs' asst. hitting coach

By Jordan Bastian

The Cubs are planning on bringing Terrmel Sledge aboard as their new assistant hitting coach, a source told MLB.com on Thursday.

The hiring of Sledge, which was first reported by The Athletic, is expected to be formally announced when the Cubs unveil manager Joe Maddon's entire coaching staff for the 2019 campaign. The team is still in the process of searching for a new pitching coach following Jim Hickey's decision to step down from the role due to undisclosed personal reasons.

Sledge joins hitting coach Anthony Iapoce as the Cubs' new leadership for an offense that ranked among baseball's best overall in 2018 but limped through the season's final two months. Iapoce takes over the job previously held by Chili Davis, who was dismissed after the season. Sledge assumes the role held by Andy Haines, who was hired this offseason by the Brewers to be their primary hitting coach.

The 41-year-old Sledge worked as a hitting coach in the Cubs' farm system in 2015 and spent the past three years as the hitting coach for Double-A Tulsa with the Dodgers. He spent four seasons in the Majors as an outfielder and first baseman between stints with the Expos/Nationals and Padres from

2004-07. Sledge then played in Japan from '08-12 and was a teammate of Cubs pitcher Yu Darvish with the Nippon-Ham Fighters in '08-09.

Last season, the Cubs' offense turned in a .265/.345/.426 slash line in the first half, compared to a .249/.316/.389 mark after the All-Star break. Injury issues (most notably the left shoulder problem that plagues Kris Bryant) and some down years for core players contributed to the downturn by the lineup. The Cubs scored no more than one run in 39 games, which was the second-highest total behind only the Orioles (40) in the Majors.

Over the season's final two months, the Cubs averaged 4.04 runs per game and posted an 86 Weighted Runs Created Plus (indicating that the lineup was 14 percent below MLB average). That was a dramatic drop-off from the first four months, when the Cubs led the National League with a 106 wRC+ while averaging 5.01 runs per game.

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ESPNChicago.com

Cubs trade Tommy La Stella to Angels

By Jesse Rogers

CHICAGO -- The Chicago Cubs traded their best pinch hitter, infielder Tommy La Stella, to the Los Angeles Angels on Thursday for a player to be named later or cash considerations.

The trade comes one day after the Cubs acquired versatile infielder Ronald Torreyes from the New York Yankees.

A fan favorite who was popular with teammates, the 29-year-old La Stella set the Cubs' single-season record with 24 pinch hits last season, compiling an .813 OPS off the bench. As soon as he accepted his role off the bench, he thrived at the plate while becoming a leader in the dugout.

"I'd like to thank the Chicago Cubs for an amazing experience over the last four years -- a special group of people who taught me about so much more than just the game of baseball and who supported me when they easily could have chosen not to," La Stella said in a statement. "Thank you to the fans and everyone in the organization, especially to the boys -- being around you guys was some of the best times I've had playing the game."

His penchant for hitting top relievers earned him the nickname "3 a.m." from manager Joe Maddon, who once said La Stella could "wake up at 3 a.m. and hit anyone."

La Stella joins the Angels with an opportunity to earn everyday at-bats. Either third base or second base are currently open, depending on which one Zack Cozart plays in his return from shoulder surgery.

"I'm excited for this new opportunity and can't wait to get it started," La Stella said in the statement.

Young, unproven players like Taylor Ward, David Fletcher and Luis Rengifo are also in the mix for the Angels.

Moving an infielder potentially paves the way for the Cubs to tender a contract to suspended shortstop Addison Russell by Friday night's deadline. Russell is suspended until May for violating the league's policy on domestic abuse.

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NBC Sports Chicago

Cubs end Tommy La Stella era by dealing pinch-hitter extraordinaire to LA

By Tony Andracki

The Cubs parted ways with fan favorite and pinch hitter extraordinaire Tommy La Stella Thursday afternoon, dealing the infielder to the Los Angeles Angels in exchange for a player to be named later or cash.

La Stella set a Cubs record with 24 pinch-hits in 2018, finishing with 11 more base knocks off the bench than the next closest player in baseball (Chase Utley — 13).

La Stella — who will be 30 in January — made only 24 starts for the Cubs this past season, hitting .266/.340/.331 (.672 OPS) across 192 plate appearances. In his four seasons in Chicago, he struck out only 79 times vs. 60 walks in 587 plate appearances.

The Cubs traded for utility infielder Ronald Torreyes Wednesday, filling in their depth at the back end of the roster. Torreyes is a better defender than La Stella and can play all three infield positions, but La Stella's bat off the bench was a valuable asset for manager Joe Maddon the last few years.

Both La Stella and Torreyes are due a raise in salary in 2019 in arbitration, with the former coming in around \$1.2 million according to MLBTradeRumors and Torreyes at \$900,000, so the move doesn't save a whole lot of cash for the Cubs. That being said, it's hard to shell out \$1.2 million for a guy who is limited defensively and takes only 150 or so at-bats per year.

While La Stella didn't play a huge role on the Cubs, there's a lot of value in being a successful pinch-hitter and they will have to replace his left-handed bat coming off the bench. The offseason isn't even a month old yet, but this move weakens the Cubs bench at the moment.

The Cubs had until 7 p.m. Friday to tender La Stella a contract ahead of his second year of arbitration.

The move knocks the Cubs' 40-man roster down to 39 players.

Update: La Stella released a statement on Thursday evening, thanking the Cubs organization for "an amazing experience over the last 4 years".

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NBC Sports Chicago

It looks like the Cubs have a new assistant hitting coach

By Tony Andracki

The Cubs still haven't fully rounded out their 2019 coaching staff, but they drew a step closer Thursday.

Termmel Sledge is the reported choice for assistant hitting coach and once the deal is official, will work under new hitting coach Anthony Iapoce:

The Cubs fired Chili Davis after just one year as hitting coach and saw assistant Andy Haines leave for the head gig with the Milwaukee Brewers.

Sledge, 41, played in the majors from 2004-07, finishing 6th in the National League Rookie of the Year voting with the Montreal Expos in '04 while hitting 15 homers and posting a .799 OPS in 446 plate appearances. He played 100 games with the Padres in 2007, posting a .210/.310/.360 slash line.

Sledge served as the assistant hitting coach in the Cubs farm system in 2015 with short-season Class-A Eugene where he worked with Ian Happ and Eloy Jimenez.

More recently, Sledge has served as the lead hitting coach with Double-A Tulsa in the Dodgers system, helping guys like Cody Bellinger, Alex Verdugo and Willie Calhoun take the next step in 2016. Sledge also worked with Tyler Colvin in 2018 when the former Cub played 15 games and took 47 plate appearances with Tulsa.

The Cubs still have one open spot on Joe Maddon's staff as they need to replace pitching coach Jim Hickey, who officially stepped down last week.

Sledge will be one of three new coaches trying to help navigate the roster to another championship and Maddon under contract for only one more season.

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NBC Sports Chicago

How would Cubs approach this offseason if they hadn't won the 2016 World Series?

By Tony Andracki

Look, we're not trying to rewrite history and take a championship AWAY from the Chicago Cubs.

But it's an interesting thought experiment — how would the Cubs approach this winter if they didn't already have those World Series rings stashed away in their trophy cases or safety deposit boxes?

Would Tom Ricketts and ownership be more likely to throw away the budget and payroll concerns and give Theo Epstein a bunch of blank checks? Would Epstein's front office feel an urgency to wheel and deal or go hard after the top free agents like Bryce Harper? Would they be among the teams most interested in trading for Madison Bumgarner or Edwin Diaz? Would Joe Maddon still be the skipper?

Without that rain delay, if Albert Almora Jr. had not tagged up from first base on a fly ball or if Ben Zobrist's grounder was simply hit right at Jose Ramirez instead of a few feet toward the line, the entire tone and narrative around this winter would be totally different for the Cubs. (To be fair, everything over the last two years would be different in Cub Nation.)

All the talk about the need to weigh production over potential would be full-on shouts if the Cubs were going on 111-plus years of World Series drought.

But, obviously, none of those "ifs" are true. The Cubs did win the World Series in 2016 and the organization certainly doesn't forget that (nor will they ever).

That championship bought Epstein and Co. some well-deserved patience, but it also changed the mentality and expectations, for better or for worse.

"Look, we've won more games than any team in baseball the last four years, we're coming off a 95-win season that ordinarily would leave us in a different mindset just based off the win totals," Epstein said earlier this month. "I don't want to pile on. There are amazing things continuing to happen in this

organization, but I think some of it is how to handle success — the greatest quest in sports and accomplishing it at such a young age and it was so sudden.

"...I think there are some things that we can do better in terms of how we approach winning day-to-day, what you need to do from Day 1 through Day 162 and then through October to win. I don't want to get into specifics — and I'm not pointing fingers because I'm intricately involved in this, too — but I know from talking to our players in full candor that we all feel the same way."

Sure, the Cubs shrugged off the World Series hangover enough to make it all the way to the NLCS again in 2017 and woke up on the morning of the final day of the 2018 regular season with the best record in the National League, but any talk of a potential dynasty with this team was clearly premature.

Like Epstein said, the Cubs have more wins than any other team in baseball since the start of the 2015 season, yet they still have only one ring and now we're on the back half of the projected 7-year window of contention.

The Cubs won't actually trade Kris Bryant right now, but the rumors this winter highlighted an important point — the clock is ticking. Bryant, Anthony Rizzo and Javy Baez all have just three years left in a Cubs uniform while Yu Darvish is the only pitcher under contract beyond 2020 with no clear options in the pipeline (except maybe Adalberto Alzolay).

That doesn't mean the sky is falling and the Cubs could obviously still wind up with multiple World Series rings with this core of players. But there's also an urgency now both despite and because of that magical fall of 2016.

"This time is precious," Epstein said. "We're all part of this group that has enough talent to win the World Series and we don't want to waste it. We don't want to look back with any regret that there are things we could've done differently in our preparation or in our work habits or in our attitudes that we brought to the park each day."

"We want to really attack the season with a winning mentality from Day 1 and I'll just leave it at that."

Would the Cubs have lacked a sense of urgency and "edge" in 2018 if they were still on the greatest quest in sports? Probably not, but it's impossible to say.

The confidence and winning culture the Cubs have developed over the last few seasons worked against them, in a way, in 2018 as they just assumed they'd be OK in the end no matter what kind of adversity popped up along the way.

And they almost were. It took an incredible surge from the Brewers to catch the Cubs in the division and even took a Game 163 playoff to surpass Baez and Co.

The Cubs want to get back to that mindset, attitude and approach they had in 2016 — a chip on their shoulder to resolve their unfinished business.

In that prism, being eliminated the way they were might've been the best thing for these Cubs.

"I think everyone in the organization in some form or another expected to be getting back to a fourth straight NLCS," Epstein said, "and no matter what we were up against with the schedule or the injuries or us not hitting for half a season or the Brewers going on an epic run, there was still this belief because

— quote — 'We're the Cubs and we have this much talent and we've always come through before, that we'd find a way and we'd look up and we'd be in a fourth straight NLCS.'

"And I think when it doesn't happen and it stops so suddenly and you walk off the field, you have better perspective to evaluate some of the reasons why this time we did not achieve our goal."

That "pissed off" feeling is creating its own sense of urgency this winter — a wake-up call and reminder that this organization cannot rest on its laurels.

But that doesn't mean the Cubs have to feel pressure to overreact this winter. The Cubs have already made some major changes on their coaching staff and there's a legit case to be made that patience is the more prudent path compared to an aggressiveness in regards to potential roster shakeups. There's no longer a dark cloud of "Cubbie Occurrences" or "curses" hanging over this team.

On the one hand, 2016 seems so long ago. But on the other, it is still fresh enough in everybody's mind and there are enough players and coaches and front office members around to help the team duplicate the on-mission environment from Day 1. There's still more than enough talent on this roster to add to the trophy case.

"We didn't really answer the bell the first half of the [2017] season and this past year, there were moments where we were complacent, where we felt we had chances to put away the division," Epstein said. "I think we all felt in the end, we'd be talented enough where it would happen and it didn't."

"That's on us and we have to own that and we need to change it. That's a real focus for us this winter and it has been and will continue to be as well as player personnel and doing everything we can to find the right mix."

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