



CHICAGO CUBS DAILY CLIPS

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February 4, 2019

- Chicago Tribune, **Cubs sign former Rangers reliever Tony Barnette to 1-year contract**
<https://www.chicagotribune.com/sports/baseball/cubs/ct-spt-cubs-sign-tony-barnette-20190201-story.html>
- Chicago Tribune, **Cubs Q&A: Roster spots, Tyler Chatwood's role, left-handed bullpen help and leadoff duties**
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- Chicago Sun-Times, **Bryce Harper is no Tony Barnette — just ask the Cubs' new reliever**
<https://chicago.suntimes.com/sports/cubs-agree-to-terms-with-reliever-tony-barnette/>
- Daily Herald, **Cubs sign righty reliever Barnette, send Clarkin to Iowa**
<https://www.dailyherald.com/sports/20190201/cubs-sign-righty-reliever-barnette-send-clarkin-to-iowa>
- Cubs.com, **Reliever Barnette, Cubs agree to 1-year deal**
<https://www.mlb.com/cubs/news/tony-barnette-signs-1-year-deal-with-cubs/c-303449746>
- Cubs.com, **Inbox: How is Bryant's shoulder progressing?**
<https://www.mlb.com/cubs/news/is-kris-bryant-healed-from-shoulder-injury/c-303407844>
- ESPNChicago.com, **Jed Hoyer confident about the Cubs -- and his favorite football team**
http://www.espn.com/mlb/story/_/id/25900456/jed-hoyer-confident-cubs-favorite-football-team
- NBC Sports Chicago, **Cubs make another low-key addition to bullpen**
<https://www.nbcsports.com/chicago/cubs/cubs-reportedly-make-another-low-key-addition-bullpen-brach-tony-barnette-rangers-japan-opening-day-relievers>
- NBC Sports Chicago, **Glanville: The manager and the coach - now, then and the future**
<https://www.nbcsports.com/chicago/cubs/glanville-manager-and-coach-now-then-and-future>

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Chicago Tribune

Cubs sign former Rangers reliever Tony Barnette to 1-year contract

By Mark Gonzales

The Cubs added depth to their bullpen Friday by signing free-agent reliever Tony Barnette to a one-year contract.

Barnette, 35, has a 3.50 ERA in 125 appearances with the Rangers (2016-18), including a 2.39 ERA and 0.911 WHIP in 22 appearances in 2018. He missed the second half of 2018 because of a right shoulder strain.

Barnette limited opponents to a .196 batting average (19-for-97), including a .167 mark (5-for-30) against left-lefties and a .209 mark (14-for-67) mark against right-handed hitters.

Barnette's \$750,000 base salary would increase to \$1 million if he spends one day on the major-league active roster. His contract also includes incentives for games pitched and days spent on the major-league roster. The team option for 2020 is \$3 million.

Left-hander Ian Clarkin cleared waivers and was sent outright to Triple-A Iowa. The Cubs' 40-man roster is at 39.

ESPN also announced it will carry the Cubs-Nationals game on May 19 as part of its Sunday Night Baseball coverage, with a 6 p.m. CT start at Nationals Park. This addition means the Cubs will play on three consecutive Sunday nights — vs. St. Louis on May 5, vs. Milwaukee on May 12, and at Nationals Park on May 19.

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Chicago Tribune

Cubs Q&A: Roster spots, Tyler Chatwood's role, left-handed bullpen help and leadoff duties
By Mark Gonzales

The Tribune's Cubs beat writer Mark Gonzales answers readers' questions about the possibility of a trade, plans for Tyler Chatwood and the leadoff spot:

What do you make of the Cubs' roster right now? I count 27 guys for the 25-man roster. Do you see a trade in the coming days/week to clear it up or more Triple-A Iowa shuttling this summer? — Daniel Shepard

I see a LOT of shuttling between Iowa and Wrigley Field. With Brandon Morrow expected to miss the first four weeks and the free-agent departures of Jesse Chavez and Justin Wilson, look for the bullpen to face constant scrutiny.

Depth is going to play a bigger factor this season, with Jon Lester and Cole Hamels in their mid-30s, Ben Zobrist turning 38 in May and Willson Contreras coming off a season in which he caught more than 1,100 innings and had no power in the second half. There is the potential for a trade, but it would be tough to deal an infielder like David Bote because of his versatility, especially with Addison Russell serving the final 29 games of his suspension and Zobrist likely needing more rest.

The Giants need outfielders, but a deal involving Jason Heyward might be too difficult to pull off because five years and \$106 million remains on his contract.

Is there a reason Brad Brach's signing hasn't been made official yet? Is it possible he failed his physical, are the Cubs close to a trade and need to make a trade to make room on the 40-man roster, or did Theo Epstein just forget? — Justin Parks

Several years ago a team that announced the free-agent signing of a catcher before the catcher took his physical examination. The physical revealed a medical issue, and the deal was voided.

In Brach's case, the announcement could be a formality as teams often want to keep their 40-man roster flexible. We saw this late last week with Ian Clarkin being taken off the 40-man roster before the signing of Tony Barnette was announced.

In 2014, Jason Hammel threw a few bullpen sessions at the Cubs spring complex in team gear for a few days before his signing was announced, so it's not uncommon for teams to delay the announcement of a free-agent signing.

Who is going to be the backup catcher for Willson Contreras? What are the plans for Tyler Chatwood? — Joyce

I think there's going to be an addition soon that addresses the catching depth. First, Contreras caught more than 1,100 innings, and he wore down in the second half. Second, Victor Caratini is only 25 but could be squeezed by Contreras' tenure and Caratini's need to play more to develop.

Martin Maldonado's name has been mentioned, but he has caught 242 games over the last two seasons and might be looking for similar playing time. Nick Hundley (who played for general manager Jed Hoyer with the Padres), A.J. Ellis and Rene Rivera are among the catchers still available.

Rivera fit in well during his short stint with the Cubs in 2017, so a reunion could be appealing.

As for Chatwood's role, I see this as similar to what Edwin Jackson encountered in 2015. Chatwood might not get the same innings he was guaranteed last spring, but he has a chance to stick as long as he contributes.

But with the chance to win the division so precious, I can see the Cubs giving up on him at midseason if he's not contributing.

I guess a healthy Yu Darvish and Kris Bryant are almost like adding two big-time free agents, but are the Cubs going to do anything about the closer role, or will it be by committee until Brandon Morrow comes back? — Bill Patterson

The closer role is tentatively set with Pedro Strop handling the majority of the closer duties until Morrow returns. Some setup relievers can't handle the closer duties on a short-term basis, but Strop did very well after Morrow was sidelined in the second half. I also can see Brach spelling Strop on occasion, but Brach is well-suited for setup duty.

Brach, who also pitched for Hoyer in San Diego, held the closer's role with the Orioles for parts of 2017-18 after Zach Britton was injured.

Why was Daniel Murphy dumped? — Garry Wilbur

I think Murphy was viewed merely as a short-term rental after it was evident the Cubs offense was struggling. I thought Murphy did very well offensively, and the Cubs might have been eliminated sooner had they not acquired him.

But Murphy's range at second base was limited, and he wasn't going to play much at first base with Anthony Rizzo there. The Cubs place a premium on versatility (and range), and those factors didn't help Murphy's chances of returning.

I think Murphy is going to do very well with the Rockies, assuming his knee is fully healed.

Are the Cubs going to get a power lefty for the bullpen? — Chris Myers

With Andrew Miller and Britton off the market, the Cubs may need to settle for an effective reliever who can retire left-handed batters. Right-handed reliever Tony Barnette, who held left-handed hitters to a .167 average last season for the Rangers, could be a sleeper if he's healthy.

The available free-agent lefties include Jake Diekman, Tony Sipp, Xavier Cedeno, Dan Jennings, Jorge De La Rosa and Boone Logan. The Cubs may simply continue to wait until the asking prices drop even more to their liking.

The Cubs continue to dumpster dive while the division keeps getting stronger. Do you see them making a meaningful move, or is this it? — Peter Marzano

I wouldn't call the Cubs' offseason a dumpster dive as much as displaying their faith that young players will rebound from subpar or uneven seasons. It's a somewhat dangerous approach, but it also tells me the potential trade return on a few of these guys wasn't what they sought.

With many projections that have them over the luxury tax threshold, here's one consideration to keep in mind: during each of the last four seasons, the team has had enough financial wiggle room to upgrade the roster at midseason. But with the payroll already over the tax threshold, do the Cubs still add salary if there's a deal that enhances their chances to make a deep run in the postseason? I think they would make a trade — assuming they don't make any other substantial additions in the next three months.

Is Maddon going to play musical chairs at the leadoff spot? — Jeffrey K. Claeson

He has little choice but to use multiple leadoff hitters and multiple lineups.

The only difference from last year is that you won't see Ian Happ at the top as much as he was early last season. With Daniel Murphy gone, this creates more opportunities for Albert Almora. I still think there's a scenario where Ben Zobrist bats leadoff at least once a week. Maddon likes Zobrist batting behind Rizzo, but the switch-hitting Zobrist can work deep counts and help his teammates. If Willson Contreras can return to his 2017 form, I can see Zobrist hitting more at the top.

If Bryant or Rizzo are batting leadoff, it's an indication the offense is struggling.

Is this the year Albert Almora becomes an everyday player? — Carole Steffensmeier Grayson

At the Cubs Convention last month, Maddon mentioned that Almora started to hit better against right-handed pitchers. Despite all the gripes about his lack of blazing speed or not working deep counts, Almora batted .333 from the leadoff spot and had a .368 on-base percentage — among the league leaders.

Almora is only 24, and he still can become a better hitter. He might be better suited as a starting position player who might be substituted for in-game unless the Cubs need a defensive replacement in the latter innings.

Can we just start spring training? — Steve Preis

I think we're all in agreement that a short playoff stint can make for a very, very long offseason.

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Chicago Tribune

Cubs say Wrigley Field's extensive renovations are 'on schedule' as team heads to spring training
By Tim Bannon

The Cubs packed their bats, jerseys and other equipment Friday morning into a single semitrailer, which was scheduled to leave Wrigley Field on Friday afternoon bound for spring training in Arizona.

Pitchers and catchers report Feb. 12 to the team's complex in Mesa, Ariz. The first official workout for pitchers and catchers will be Feb. 13, and the first full-squad workout is Feb. 18.

The truck is expected to arrive in Mesa on Monday afternoon, the Cubs said.

Meanwhile, the team says the latest Wrigley renovations are on track and the ballpark will be ready for the home opener April 8 against the Pirates.

"Everything's on schedule right now," Colin Faulkner, senior vice president of sales and marketing, said Friday.

"People have asked given the weather we've had this week. But we've had guys out there working and things are on plan. Several years ago we used to get nervous about it, but having done this for five offseasons now, we got used to being able to deliver everything by opening day."

Faulkner also announced that single-game tickets will go on sale at 10 a.m. on Feb. 22. All tickets will now be electronic, available via the MLB Ballpark app. Season ticket holders were given the option of paying extra (\$150 per seat) for paper tickets, but Faulkner said few chose that option.

The regular season begins March 28 in Arlington, Texas, against the Rangers. The Cubs travel to Atlanta and Milwaukee before heading home.

Among the most significant renovations fans will see this season are new upper-deck concession areas and restrooms, three new clubs inside the park and a new bar where the former Captain Morgan Club/Draft Kings Fantasy Zone stood near Addison and Sheffield.

Also, three seasons after the home team got a new clubhouse, the counterpart on the first-base side will be renovated. It long has been considered one of the smallest in the major leagues.

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Chicago Sun-Times

Bryce Harper is no Tony Barnette — just ask the Cubs' new reliever
By Gordon Wittenmyer

If his pitching is even close to as good as his Twitter game, right-hander Tony Barnette might turn out to be the best free agent signing of the winter for the Cubs.

Until then, suffice it to say that the little-known reliever who spent six years playing in Japan knows where he stands with Cubs fans on a hot stove news scale.

After his signing to a one-year, \$750,000 deal was announced Friday, Barnette tweeted that he's in Arizona and "thrilled to get this year started with the @Cubs," then added:

"(Reads first comment) also ... I'd like to apologize my name doesn't rhym[e] with ... tarper."

Texas Rangers relief pitcher Tony Barnette works against the Chicago White Sox during the eighth inning of a baseball game, Friday, June 29, 2018, in Arlington, Texas. Texas won 11-3. | Jeffrey McWhorter/Associated Press

Judging by the comments it elicited, the 35-year-old vagabond with a 3.50 ERA in three years for the Rangers made a good first impression with a fan base still aching for the Cubs to go after Bryce Harper.

Next up for Barnette is finding a place in a bullpen crowded with more pitchers on big-league contracts than available spots but little certainty after the top four or five names on the list as spring training opens less than two weeks from now.

Barnette, who pitched parts of four seasons in the minors before a six-year stretch with the Yakult Swallows in Japan, debuted in the majors with the Rangers in 2016 – where he was a teammate of Cubs starter Yu Darvish. He was a closer for much of his time in Japan, including 41 saves with a 1.29 ERA in 2015.

After making 53 and 50 appearances his first two seasons with the Rangers, he was limited to 22 last season because of a shoulder injury and didn't pitch after July 3 – which helps explain a base salary half of what he made last year.

Barnette earns a \$1 million bonus if he makes the Opening Day roster. He makes an additional \$50,000 each for reaching 40-game and 50-game thresholds, and an additional \$75,000 each for 60 and 70 appearances.

He also has bonuses for days on the active roster: \$75,000 each for 100 and 125 days, \$100,000 for 155 days.

The Cubs hold a \$3 million option for 2020 (no buyout). Despite arbitration-level service time, the contract makes him a free agent after this season if the Cubs don't pick up the option or after 2020 if they do.

Last season, Barnette went 2-0 with a 2.39 ERA in 26⅓ innings before being sidelined by the shoulder strain.

This move comes after the Cubs added Brad Brach to their bullpen as he agreed on a one-year, \$4.35 million contract on Jan. 24.

With the addition of Barnette, the Cubs' 40-man roster stands at 39. Pitchers and catchers report for spring training in Mesa, Arizona, on Feb. 12.

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Daily Herald

Cubs sign righty reliever Barnette, send Clarkin to Iowa

By Bruce Miles

Spring training is just days away, and the Cubs' equipment truck left Wrigley Field Friday for Mesa, Arizona.

Shortly after the truck embarked on its journey, the Cubs made a pair of roster moves.

They signed right-handed reliever Tony Barnette to a free-agent contract and outrighted left-handed pitcher Ian Clarkin to Class AAA Iowa.

The 40-man roster stands at 39.

Barnette, 35, signed a one-year contract, plus a club option for 2020.

The deal is worth a reported \$750,000 this year, with the option worth a reported \$3 million

Barnette went 2-0 with a 2.39 ERA and a WHIP of 0.91 in 22 relief appearances for the Texas Rangers last season. In 26⅓ innings pitched, he allowed 19 hits while walking five and striking out 26. His season ended in early July because of a right shoulder strain.

For his career, Barnette is 11-4 with a 3.50 ERA in 125 major-league relief appearances over the last three seasons with Texas.

Barnette was originally selected by the Arizona Diamondbacks in the 10th round of the 2006 draft out of Arizona State. He pitched in the D'Backs' minor-league system for four seasons before joining Japan's Yakult Swallows in 2010.

He pitched six seasons for Yakult, making 260 relief appearances. He had 41 saves and a 1.29 ERA in his final season in Japan in 2015. Barnette is from Anchorage, Alaska, and he's looking to become the first player from that state to appear in a big-league game for the Cubs.

The Cubs on Friday also announced Clarkin cleared waivers and was sent to Iowa. Clarkin had spent this off-season going back and forth between the Cubs and the White Sox on waivers.

Cubs pitchers and catchers hold their first formal workouts of spring training Feb. 13. Position players have their first full-squad workout Feb. 18.

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Cubs.com

Reliever Barnette, Cubs agree to 1-year deal

By Jordan Bastian

CHICAGO -- The Cubs will have all spring to sort through their options for a bullpen beset with question marks. On Friday, Chicago allowed right-hander Tony Barnette to throw his name into the ring.

Barnette and the Cubs agreed to a one-year contract worth \$750,000 for the upcoming season, plus a \$3 million club option for 2020. That deal comes after Chicago agreed to a one-year contract (plus a mutual

option for '20) with righty Brad Brach last week, though that deal is pending a physical and not official yet.

Barnette and Brach provide the Cubs with additional depth for a relief corps that will potentially be without closer Brandon Morrow (right elbow surgery in November) for the season's first month. By adding two right-handed relievers to the mix, Chicago also created a bit more uncertainty about how Tyler Chatwood might fit into the 2019 pitching plans.

If Yu Darvish is healthy and ready for Opening Day -- the starter has resumed throwing off a mound after being limited to eight outings last year due to a right elbow injury -- he will join a rotation that includes Jon Lester, Cole Hamels, Kyle Hendricks and Jose Quintana. Without any unforeseen setbacks to that group, lefty Mike Montgomery and Chatwood become the top two depth options for the starting staff.

Montgomery performed well as a swing man last year, posting a 3.99 ERA in 124 innings across 38 appearances (19 starts). Chatwood, who is set to earn \$12.5 million in 2019, had a 5.30 ERA with a higher walk rate (19.6 percent) than strikeout rate (17.5 percent) in 103 2/3 innings last season. Chatwood could have a home in the bullpen, but Chicago will surely be monitoring his progress with his command during the spring.

Pedro Strop, Carl Edwards Jr., Steve Cishek and Brach look like the only true locks for the Opening Day bullpen. Barnette would probably fall right behind that group, along with Montgomery, depending on what happens with the rotation. Brian Duensing (7.65 ERA in 37 2/3 innings in 2018) and Brandon Kintzler (4.60 ERA in 60 2/3 innings in '18) will be competing for jobs as well, following subpar showings last season.

The Cubs will also have non-roster invitees with some MLB experience -- arms like George Kontos, Junichi Tazawa and Rob Scahill -- though that list of players has not been officially announced. On the 40-man roster, pitchers such as Randy Rosario, Kyle Ryan, James Norwood, Dillon Maples, Alec Mills and Duane Underwood Jr., among others, will be jockeying for position.

The 35-year-old Barnette has had an interesting career trajectory to this point.

A native of Alaska, Barnette was selected in the 10th round of the 2006 MLB Draft by the D-backs, but he left affiliated baseball to pitch for the Yakult Swallows in Japan from 2010-15. He spent the past three years with the Rangers, turning in a 3.50 ERA with 132 strikeouts and 43 walks in 144 innings. Last year, Barnette had a 2.39 ERA with 26 strikeouts and five walks in 26 1/3 innings, but a right shoulder issue ended his season in July.

Barnette -- who relies mostly on a four-seamer, two-seamer, cutter and curve -- generated 51.4 percent grounders last season. That was up from a 45.1 percent rate for his MLB career. The right-hander had reverse splits in '18 (.498 OPS against lefties and .631 OPS against righties), but has traditionally been better against righties (.652 OPS) than lefties (.780 OPS) in his career.

Left-hander Ian Clarkin also cleared waivers on Friday for the Cubs, who sent him outright to Triple-A Iowa. Clarkin, 23, was claimed twice from the White Sox by the Cubs this offseason. With the Barnette addition, the Cubs' 40-man roster currently sits at 39 players.

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Cubs.com

Inbox: How is Bryant's shoulder progressing?

By Jordan Bastian

How is Kris Bryant's shoulder? And how much influence does his dad have on what Bryant does?

-- Larry C., Estacada, Ore.

All indications are that Bryant's left shoulder is healthy and strong, and that the Cubs' third baseman will be unrestricted during Spring Training. Bryant emphasized as much during conversations with reporters this offseason, noting that he began his hitting program in early December and has been swinging hard with zero issues. Getting Bryant back to his usual slugging ways would be a huge lift for Chicago's lineup.

As for his father, Mike, it's well known that he played a huge role in building his son's swing and that he continues to play a large part in Bryant's offseason regimen. Mike Bryant runs Bryant Baseball Academy in Las Vegas and serves as a hitting instructor for other young hitters, too.

That type of setup -- whether it's a dad like Mike, who played professional baseball in the 1980s, or a private instructor -- is becoming more common for hitters. And more teams are recognizing that this dynamic is not going to go away.

I can speak to a similar situation in Cleveland, where longtime outfielder Michael Brantley (now with the Astros) worked closely with his dad, former Major Leaguer Mickey Brantley. They had a close bond and dedicated time both in the offseason and season to working on and discussing Michael's swing. The Indians respected that relationship, but there was always great communication with Cleveland's MLB hitting coaches at the same time.

Cubs president of baseball operations Theo Epstein spoke on this topic during the Winter Meetings and compared it to golfers who have personal swing coaches.

"There are going to be other voices that are impactful and influential," Epstein said. "And you ought to listen and understand where they're coming from and know what they're being taught, so you can help. But I don't think, especially with really talented players, you don't want to take something away from them that's been helpful and try to rebuild them. You want to understand what works for them and try to incorporate it into your system a little bit, but more than anything, you respect what they rely upon and you're going to be around them every day, so you try to be able to reinforce that.

"If you look at on the PGA Tour, every player has their own swing coach. Hitting a baseball is a little harder than hitting a golf ball, but that might be where things end up 10 years from now or something. You might have guys all with their own swing coach. We're not there yet, but certainly the hitting coach job is a lot different now. If you look back a generation ago, it was, 'We hired Hitting Coach X and his philosophy is the following,' and then you're going to try to essentially bring everybody along in that way, whether it's something mechanical or approach-wise.

"Now, it's more understanding players' individual approaches, offering them alternatives and adjustments, but it's more understanding their process, their swing, their mechanics and working with them. So it's a different ballgame now."

The scouting summary for MLB Pipeline's No. 4 Cubs prospect Brailyn Marquez reads: "His command isn't as advanced as his control." What does that mean?

-- Jack F., Louisville, Colo.

That's a great question, Jack, because there is indeed a subtle difference in the meaning behind both descriptions of a pitcher. You'll sometimes hear the terms being used interchangeably, but that's a mistake.

Simply put, a pitcher with great control is going to be able to throw strikes consistently. That said, not every strike is created equal, right? If the catcher was set up over the outside edge and the pitcher fired a strike more over the middle, that's a mislocated strike. You might say he had good control, but he did not command the pitch. So think of command as the ability to place the ball in its intended location -- both in and out of the zone. If a catcher does not need to move his glove much, you'd say that pitcher has great command.

After hearing so much this offseason about whether the designated hitter should be brought to the National League, I wonder what your thoughts are on the topic? And do you think this is why the Cubs have not traded Kyle Schwarber?

-- Richard J., West Bloomfield, Mich.

Let's get the second part of that question out of the way first. No, I do not think Schwarber is still around because the Cubs are envisioning him as a DH in the NL at some point. That scenario may not even come to fruition. I think Schwarber is still around because he's not only cost effective (\$3.39 million in 2019) and young (25), but also an above-average hitter (115 wRC+ with 26 homers and a career-high 15.3 percent walk rate in '18).

As for the concept of bringing the DH to the NL? I'd be in favor of it, and that's a change in opinion for me. When I was younger, I was all-in on being a traditionalist. Well, after covering some silly, avoidable pitcher injuries over the years, and watching so many automatic outs, I'm now firmly in the universal DH camp.

With Brandon Morrow looking like he won't be ready for Opening Day, who will fill the closer role? A committee? I would love to see Pedro Strop close even after Morrow is fully ready.

-- Noah M., Las Vegas

I would expect Strop to get the bulk of the save opportunities while Morrow is sidelined. Until his own injury issues in September, Strop filled in well as the primary closer after Morrow was shelved on July 19 and out for the remainder of last season. Strop had 11 saves in 13 chances with a 1.77 ERA and a .139 opponents' average (.475 OPS) in 20 games between July 19-Sept. 13. And when Morrow does rejoin the bullpen, we will surely revisit this topic.

When do individual tickets go on sale for the Cubs?

-- Justin M., Three Rivers, Mich.

During Cubs Convention, the team announced that single-game tickets will go on sale on Feb. 22. In the meantime, ticket packs can be purchased now at cubs.com/packs.

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ESPNChicago.com

Jed Hoyer confident about the Cubs -- and his favorite football team

By Jesse Rogers

CHICAGO -- Every year during Super Bowl week, ESPN.com sits down with Chicago Cubs general manager Jed Hoyer. What started as simply getting a one-time, big-game prediction because his beloved

New England Patriots were the AFC representatives has become a yearly exercise -- in part because the Patriots keep returning to the championship game. Hoyer has been more right than wrong in his predictions, which we save for the last question.

How well do you know the Patriots, and what's the takeaway from one of the great dynasties of this era?

Jed Hoyer: We've sat and talked to those guys. They're phenomenal. Bill Belichick and I have the Wesleyan connection. What to take from it? The continuity they have and the consistency they have is just incredible. Take away the individual brilliance of Bill and Tom Brady, a lot of it is just about that continuity they have as an organization. It helps them avoid distractions. Their consistency is mind-blowing in a league where there is none.

You mention distractions. The Patriots seem to have mastered avoiding any semblance of one, not just within a season but within an era of football. I mean, some people think -- me included -- you guys are still dealing with the aftermath of winning it all in 2016. They never, for example, have a championship hangover. Does that resonate?

JH: It's remarkable. They just know who they are as an organization. They know exactly the type of players and coaches they want to bring in, and their focus doesn't change. Their strategy changes from week to week, but as far as the people and players they bring in, they're incredibly consistent. All of that helps to avoid distractions. I can only imagine being an opponent.

Let's turn to your sport. Do you think it fundamentally hurts baseball the way the past two offseasons have gone strictly in terms of timing? Even when the bigger names sign, I'm not sure it will be as celebrated as if they happened in November or December.

JH: I don't enjoy this, but at the same time, it's kept baseball in the news, even if people are getting tired of the stories. It used to be these things were done by the middle of December. Now they're dragging out, and ultimately I don't think it's good for the players, teams or the industry to have eternal offseasons like this. I hope we get back to a situation where we use the month of November. That month is barely being used for player discussion. That starts now in December. I hope we push the calendar back again.

What can be done?

JH: I think both sides should get their heads together and figure how do we move things back. Other sports don't have this problem because they have salary caps. Their urgency is based on the finite dollars because of the cap. We don't have that. It's hard to argue with anyone expressing disappointment with how slow the market is moving.

During the Cubs convention, Kris Bryant spoke out about the lack of interest in the bigger-name free agents and how free agency is going in general. He didn't say his own team by name, but obviously that includes the Cubs. He wondered how any team would not be interested in his friend Bryce Harper. How does the team feel about those comments?

JH: When it comes to spending, we have one of the top payrolls in the game. We've spent a lot of money. Some of that is on our young, core players. Some has been on big free-agency signings. Our spending is at a significant level.

So much talk about your budget this offseason reminds people that you've paid a lot for pitching over the years because you haven't developed your own draft picks. It's a topic you are familiar with. Does it continue to be a fair criticism?

JH: Totally fair. We were tighter this winter for a number of reasons, and one of them is we have an expensive pitching staff. It's a good one, but expensive, in part because we haven't had the same kind of zero-to-three [years] of inexpensive pitchers coming through the system like we did with hitters. One of the things we did do this winter was bring Cole Hamels back. It was the absolute right thing to do. That made an expensive rotation even more expensive. Some of the moves made last winter haven't worked out yet. We think they will, but they haven't yet. That leaves us with an expensive rotation for a variety of reasons.

You've turned over some of your minor league infrastructure. You've studied this. Why has developing pitching been an issue? Bad luck?

JH: I'll say this. A big part of being successful in this job is being accountable, not only publicly but also internally. We've spent an unbelievable amount of time talking about that and what we can change. What are we not doing, besides using our high picks on hitters? I don't think you can point to luck. I think that's a crutch. It's on us to continue to ask the right questions and try to figure it out. When we were building, we did acquire a number of inexpensive pitchers, but what we haven't done is taken from the draft and developed.

You mentioned Hamels. In hindsight, with a less flexible offseason, I think people have wondered if using those dollars on him instead of hitting was worth it.

JH: Zero second thoughts. Cole had such an incredible impact on our pitching staff, on our clubhouse. He was totally rejuvenated coming over here. We loved having him. Having a talent like Cole both on and off the field, on a contract like that for one year, seemed like the right thing to do. No regrets whatsoever.

What has it been like balancing the disappointment of the end of last season with the knowledge that you won 95 games?

JH: Every season that doesn't end in a World Series title, you can't feel like it had no meaning. It's just the nature of our sport. But that said, I love the fact that we've gotten to a place where we won 95 games and made the playoffs, and it was considered a disappointment. In some ways, I look at that as a success. We have changed the standard and the culture here, both internally and externally. And the expectations are higher. We had brutal, raw, emotional exit meetings for four days after we lost last season. Five years ago, that season would have been a huge success. I'm proud of that. Now, the key is going further.

Can the Cubs get back to playing the underdog card? Is that possible in a post-World Series-winning world? Would that be a good thing?

JH: There's nothing wrong with having some doubt. In '16, we were clearly the best team in the division, and we embraced that target. That's not the case right now. Our division is the deepest in baseball. Every division series is going to be a real battle. In some ways, that's really good. People are going to pick a lot of different teams to win our division. Complacency is kind of a loaded word, but do I think we played with the same urgency we played with in 2016? No. We just talked about the Patriots. You want that mentality every year. They've created that. We've had good years by normal standards, but have we had that same urgency we had in 2016? No. We need to get back to that.

You hired a 37-year-old pitching coach, Tommy Hottovoy, who spent his time at the computer last year, though he worked with all your pitchers. Is this a millennial-type experiment, or did he earn it just like anyone else would?

JH: No. I think he's going to be a star. I think he's done an amazing job, but largely behind the scenes, working in run prevention. I think we've always looked at him as a guy that can do anything in this game. I think he's going to excel in that role. No question -- the work ethic, the relationships with the pitchers, his mind, his fascination with pitching -- he's going to be great. I'm really excited. Of course, he'll develop in the role.

Recently, you hired Adam Beard, previously with the Cleveland Browns, to oversee all aspects of a player's off-field development, from nutrition to mental health and everything in between. It seems like a trend to hire that type of czar, so to speak. Why now?

JH: This model is one a lot of sports teams in Europe use. Adam has had a great career. The goal is to make sure every single player's care is as well communicated and thought out as possible. Having someone overseeing all those areas and bringing everyone together seemed like the right thing. How do we sync up our player-care infrastructure as well as we can? Adam will do that. When it comes to athlete care, I think he's going to bring a lot of things that are at the forefront of injury prevention.

We haven't talked much about your offense. Is it still your hope and expectation that it will round out the way you thought? Perhaps utilizing the best that Chili Davis brought, the best that John Mallee brought and now Anthony Iopace, combined, of course, with the players' talent.

JH: We always imagined 26, 27, 28 years old, when those guys hit that critical area of their talent and experience matching up, we'd be a monster of an offense. We've had our moments, but that's not what happened last year in the second half. You want that power we showed in '17 with some situational awareness and some veteran know-how. I think we'll get there. It probably didn't happen as quickly as we thought. Candidly, we thought going into 2018 we were in a different place offensively than we ended up. But I think we're going to get there. In fact, we're going to benefit from what happened in the second half last year.

OK, now the big question: What's your prediction for Sunday?

JH: I have Patriots winning 31-27. It's a one-possession game. Every time I think it's going to be lopsided, one way or another, it never is. It will be close. The Rams have elite players, but the way the Patriots have played the last two games, I like them.

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NBC Sports Chicago

Cubs make another low-key addition to bullpen

By Tony Andracki

The Cubs are throwing another name into the ring of relievers for 2019.

The Cubs signed free-agent right-hander Tony Barnette to a one-year deal Friday afternoon. The agreement comes with a club option for 2020.

Barnette is not a household name, but he has 125 career big-league appearances with the Texas Rangers, posting an 11-4 record, 3.50 ERA and 1.25 WHIP.

He appeared in just 22 games last year with the Rangers, going 2-0 with a 2.39 ERA, 0.91 WHIP and 26 strikeouts against only 5 walks in 26.1 innings before a lat injury ended his season prematurely.

Barnette, 35, is a former 2006 10th-round selection by the Arizona Diamondbacks, where he spent three-plus years in the minor leagues before a move to Japan. He pitched for the Yakult Swallows in Tokyo from 2010-15, picking up 97 saves in the Japan Central League.

He returned to the MLB ahead of the 2016 season and has been a part of the Rangers bullpen since.

If the figures are accurate, the Cubs are getting Barnette on a low-risk big-league deal and he will likely be a part of the Opening Day bullpen puzzle, joining Brad Brach as the offseason additions.

With Barnette in tow, the Cubs' bullpen currently looks like this:

Pedro Strop
Carl Edwards Jr.
Steve Cishek
Brad Brach
Mike Montgomery
Brandon Kintzler
Brian Duensing
Tony Barnette

Tyler Chatwood is also owed more than \$12 million in 2019, but his role with the team is still undetermined.

Brandon Morrow is slated to begin the year on the disabled list and the Cubs have a host of other depth options for the bullpen, including Alec Mills, Randy Rosario, Kyle Ryan, Dillon Maples, Rowan Wick, James Norwood, Junichi Tazawa and George Kontos.

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NBC Sports Chicago

Glanville: The manager and the coach - now, then and the future

By Doug Glanville

Joe Maddon is not new to this game.

When you consider experience, Maddon is someone who has seen the game through a variety of lenses. Outside of his minor league career as a player, he scouted, coached, was a roving hitting instructor and bench coach. His first managerial job with Tampa was after three decades in the game.

He knows a lot. Development, training, growth, talent assessment, production, you name it. He is not in Chicago by accident. The bullet points are indisputable. One of which now has a world championship next to it.

Yet today, a manager is evaluated very differently than those that were hired during the bulk of Maddon's decades of experience. What used to be a pipeline of candidates, paying their dues, learning

the system inside and out by being on the ground and slowly climbing rung by rung, is now a grooming system. Managers are grown in a new kind of farm, special assistants who are taken behind the curtain, pumped with information, shown the keys to the system and trusted to implement them at the highest level.

And to earn the top job, it is not required to have managed before. Anywhere.

The wave of managers that came along under this new model was deep. The Brewers, the NL Central division winners from a year ago and Cubs' nemesis, are led by Craig Counsell, who took a path of hands-on training in their system. But so did Mike Matheny, Robin Ventura, Walt Weiss and many others. Aaron Boone and Alex Cora were first year managers who both won 100 or more games...in their first seasons. All respected former players. Who needs the minor leagues?

Joe Maddon is in the midst of the collision between then and now. He is not necessarily old school because of his age or experience (he has wild, themed trips and keeps young guys loose), but because he took every step under the baseball sun to be where he is now.

Baseball in 2019 is much more about algorithms, methodologies and predictive calculations and the mindset of leadership in how it is conveyed to the players. There are forecasting models, there are rules to most effectively use your bullpen, there is data out of a player's ear hole that frame how he can be most productive with two strikes.

Just like instant replay, when the technology arrived to be able to see things we used to not be able to see, how can we not use it to make better calls? The data is there now. We know the best times to steal a base. At least the numbers do.

Then, in walks Mark Loretta, the Cubs' new bench coach. You will want to be a fly on the wall when Maddon and Loretta have meetings. Loretta, who I played with in winter ball in Puerto Rico, listened to the soundtrack to Les Miserables when we drove to games. He would trade Imagine Dragons and a player to be named later for a Broadway musical. Sharp as a tack. Maddon could pour him a glass of 10th century wine and the two of them could figure out how we could play baseball on Mars. Someone put a mic in that room.

Loretta took the new school path. A former player (a fantastic hitter, by the way) who was taught like an apprentice, not like someone climbing a ladder to the top. He then moves laterally into a major league job and instantly becomes a potential heir apparent.

This is today; managers are surrounded by coaching staffs that are full of people that could replace them in a drop of an analytics game day packet.

In the case of Loretta, and as I learned from interviewing for the Rays job in 2014, the bench coach is a trusted advisor. He must be in the know and make a soulful connection to the beat of the team. A manager cannot possibly have the pulse of every player on every day of the season. You need someone else to have the pulse too, to be ten steps ahead and earn the confidence of the team, beyond how they can help you win.

That is a lot of power to share with anyone, especially someone who could one day be your replacement.

But that is the relationship of today's managers, the same coach who sits on your shoulder and gives you real-time advice, is the same guy that you see over your shoulder inching his way to your throne. Succession planning at its finest.

I am confident Maddon-Loretta will get along fine and together will make the Cubs a better team in many ways. They are crossing paths at a time when the role and qualifications of a manager have changed dramatically in the last five to seven years. Experience not required. And by the way, these kinds of new school managers have been highly successful. So, it is hard to argue against its success, even if they never saw the inside of a minor league manager's office.

In the meantime, like any time in the win-now mode, as the Cubs are in, it will be important for Maddon to get off to a good start, an inspired start. The Reds are better, the Brewers are not backing down, the Cardinals are, well, the Cardinals. The Cubs struggled to 95 wins. One piece here, one ball bounce there and they have a division title in 2018, but other organizations made moves too (see Paul Goldschmidt). No one sits still, even if they are going backwards.

The Cubs are not sitting still either and only the games will tell us what that means for 2019. Spring training is right around the corner, and we should know up front that the Maddon-Loretta braintrust will be pivotal in whether the Cubs bring home a ring or if "now" one day will take over for "then."

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