



CHICAGO CUBS DAILY CLIPS

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

October 10, 2018

- NBC Sports Chicago, **Cubs hope 2019 will be the 'Year of Strop' all over again**
<https://www.nbcsports.com/chicago/cubs/cubs-hope-2019-will-be-year-pedro-strop-all-over-again-epstein-morrow-cubs-bullpen-closer>
- NBC Sports Chicago, **Javier Báez and other Cubs projected to receive huge arbitration salary raises**
<https://www.nbcsports.com/chicago/cubs/javier-baez-and-other-cubs-projected-receive-huge-arbitration-salary-raises>
- Chicago Tribune, **4 offseason questions for the Cubs about their catchers**
<http://www.chicagotribune.com/sports/baseball/cubs/ct-spt-cubs-offseason-questions-catchers-20181010-story.html>
- Chicago Tribune, **Javier Baez projected to receive \$6 million raise in arbitration**
<http://www.chicagotribune.com/sports/baseball/cubs/ct-spt-cubs-javier-baez-arbitration-20181009-story.html>
- The Athletic, **How Javier Báez became the heart, brain and star of the Cubs**
<https://theathletic.com/579213/2018/10/10/how-javier-baez-became-the-heart-brain-and-star-of-this-cubs-team/>

--

NBC Sports Chicago

Cubs hope 2019 will be the 'Year of Strop' all over again

By Tony Andracki

Among other things, 2018 has to be considered the "Year of Pedro Strop" for the Cubs.

You know you're kind of a big deal when Joe Maddon builds an entire theme trip around your unique — and loud — sense of style.

Strop entered 2018 already entrenched as one of the franchise's best relievers of all time but also finally got an extended run to serve as the team's closer and took major advantage of the opportunity.

Though it was his sixth year with the Cubs, 2018 served as a complete realization as to how reliable and stable he's been since coming over in the middle of the 2013 season as the "other" part of the Jake Arrieta trade with the Baltimore Orioles.

Now, Strop is underrated no more.

The best indicator of that was the huge hole he left in the Cubs bullpen after injuring his hamstring running out a groundball Sept. 13 in Washington D.C.

Strop missed the rest of the regular season, but made a gutsy return to the mound for the NL Wild-Card Game last week to toss a scoreless 9th inning and help give his team a chance to walk it off (though that never came):

Afterwards, Strop indicated he actually was pitching through "severe pain" and wasn't going to be able to pitch in the NLDS or possibly even beyond if the Cubs had made it that far.

"I knew I was going to be done after this game," Strop said. "What I said was, 'Without this game, there's no longer playoffs, there's no World Series.' So I thought it was the most important game of my season. That's why I took the challenge. And I knew I was able to command my pitches, even with the pain, so I was like, 'OK, let's take the pain.'"

That gritty mindset is exactly what has endeared Strop to teammates, coaches, front office execs and fans throughout his 6-year run in Chicago.

"What an unbelievable performance," Theo Epstein said. "That was a 4-6 week injury that he came back from in about 2 [weeks]. Did a great job on a big stage, just wanted to be back for his teammates and found out after the game that he was actually pitching in pain and didn't want to show it because he didn't want to come out of the game."

"He's such a big part of the heartbeat of this team. I mean, this guy — I hope he can be a part of this organization when he's done playing. That's how impactful he is to the other relievers and to the team as a whole. Just a great disposition, great heart on that kid and a great pitcher."

Strop may be the most well-liked player in the Cubs clubhouse, always smiling and energetic, picking up his teammates when they're down or cheering the loudest when they come through with a big play.

When Javy Baez flipped his bat in frustration after popping out early in the season, it was Strop that stepped up and told Baez that's not how he should act, prompting an unprompted, public apology from the Cubs' young infielder.

The Cubs have a \$6.25 million team option on Strop for 2019 and while we won't find out for sure that they plan to exercise that option until after the World Series, it's all but guaranteed the affable reliever will once again be an anchor for the bullpen next season.

Strop, 33, already has more holds than any other pitcher in Cubs history by a wide margin — his 114 dwarfs Carlos Marmol's 83 holds — and ranks 11th in franchise history in games pitched (361). With another full regular season of work if he can stay healthy, he could move into 6th place on the Cubs' all-time appearances list, leap-frogging the likes of James Russell (365 games), Ryan Dempster (374) and Fergie Jenkins (401).

Strop has been remarkably consistent in his Cubs career — never turning in an ERA higher than 2.91 — while pitching in some of the most high-leverage situations. Coming into 2018, he only had notched 9 career saves but finished 13 games with the Cubs when Brandon Morrow went down to injury midseason.

In a day and age where the bullpen is more important than it's ever been around baseball, Strop is such a valuable weapon for the Cubs as a respected veteran who runs towards big moments, can pitch in any role (including closer) and help serve as a stabilizing force in the most volatile position group in the game.

"I'm glad he had that opportunity this year to close games and get some much-deserved recognition for how good he is and what he means to this team, even if it was only for 6 weeks or so," Epstein said. "Lotta fans tipping their cap to him — or moving it to the side for him. He deserves that and we fully expect him to be back next year and playing a huge role."

--

NBC Sports Chicago

Javier Báez and other Cubs projected to receive huge arbitration salary raises

By Tim Stebbins

Forget about Bryce Harper and Manny Machado for a second. The Cubs still have to pay the arbitration-eligible stars already on their roster.

Tuesday, MLB Trade Rumors released their projected arbitration salaries for the 2019 season. The Cubs have eight arbitration-eligible players, including Kris Bryant, Javier Báez and Kyle Hendricks.

MLBTR projects Bryant to make \$12.4 million in 2019, an increase from the \$10.85 million that he made in 2018. For reference, his 2018 salary set the record for first-year arbitration-eligible players.

Hendricks is projected to make \$7.6 million in 2019, up from the reported \$4.175 million that he made last season. Unsurprisingly, after his MVP-esque 2018 season, Báez's salary is projected to increase more than any other Cub in arbitration.

Báez is projected to make \$7.1 million in 2019, his first season as an arbitration-eligible player. Báez made \$657,000 in 2018, so if the \$7.1 million projection is accurate, his 2019 salary will increase by about 981 percent from 2018 (woah).

Addison Russell is projected to make \$4.3 million, up from his \$3.2 million 2018 salary. Russell was recently suspended for 40 games, however, so his situation is somewhat up in the air.

Like Báez, Kyle Schwarber and Mike Montgomery are also first-year arbitration eligible players. Their salaries are projected to increase to \$3.1 million and \$3 million, respectively. Both made just over \$600,000 in 2018.

Carl Edwards Jr. is projected to make \$1.4 million next season, while Tommy La Stella is projected to make \$1.2 million. If all of these figures are accurate, the Cubs will pay these players a combined \$40.1 million next season.

According to Spotrac, the Cubs had the fourth-highest payroll in 2018 at \$194,259,933. While their roster is surely to see some turnover (as will every other team's), the arbitration salaries are sure to put a dent in the Cubs' payroll.

This is not to say that the Cubs will not pursue Harper, Machado or other free agents. What it does mean is that the Cubs will have some rather tough decisions to make regarding players currently on the roster entering 2019.

Change is a good thing, though, right?

--

Chicago Tribune

4 offseason questions for the Cubs about their catchers

By Mark Gonzales

This is the third in a series of a position-by-position analyses about the Cubs entering the offseason.

Next up: Catching

1. How does Willson Contreras fix his power woes?

Contreras' premature excitement over his long drive that resulted in only a double against the Reds on Sept. 16 exemplified the frustration over his lack of power this season, particularly in the second half when he produced only 11 extra-base hits and went 43 games without hitting a home run.

The bigger issue, however, is getting Contreras back to making the hard contact he displayed in 2017, when he produced 21 doubles and 21 home runs despite missing one month because of a hamstring strain.

Because manager Joe Maddon likes batting the pitcher eighth, it's important to get Contreras back in his 2017 mode, when his OPS was .855. It might be wise for Contreras to spend some time in Arizona with hitting coach Chili Davis this winter to find a foundation to get him back on track for 2019.

2. Is Contreras' handling of ace Jon Lester more important than his pitch framing issues?

After the Cubs were eliminated, Contreras was in tears in the dugout and Lester made a point afterward to praise Contreras for his handling a pitching staff with a wide variety of styles.

"He did an unbelievable job with us," Lester said. "He's potentially going to win the (National League) most valuable player award."

[READ MORE; 4 offseason questions for the Cubs about their relief pitchers »](#)

[READ MORE: 5 offseason questions for the Cubs about their starting pitchers »](#)

Contreras helped Lester control the running game of opponents to the extent it's not nearly the issue it was when Lester arrived in 2015. Overall, Contreras was successful in nailing 34.2 percent of attempted base stealers, second to the Marlins' J.T. Realmuto (38.2 percent) among qualifying National League catchers.

"Contreras is an athlete with a shutdown arm," an NL scout said. "There aren't too many of those."

But Contreras was charged with 11 errors and nine passed balls. According to Statcorner.com, Contreras ranked 11th worst in pitch framing with minus-12.8 runs above average. In mid-May, Maddon bristled over criticism of Contreras for his pitch-framing numbers.

The season-ending mark actually is an improvement over his minus-19.6 mark in 2017, but the improvement needs to continue because the Cubs starters rely more on inducing soft contact than strikeouts and need to get as much as possible help on borderline pitches.

Contreras' setup behind the plate varied at times, as he sometimes used a one-knee setup similar to former Gold Glove catcher Tony Pena with no runners on base. Putting 2018 in the past may do wonders for Contreras.

3. Is Victor Caratini's growth stunted?

Contreras led the majors with 1,109 2/3 innings, but his lack of production and Caratini's work with Cole Hamels cut into Contreras' playing time.

Caratini possesses value as a switch-hitter, and he's in the final stages of his development behind the plate after starting his professional career as a corner infielder.

"He has some work ahead of him, but his current problems are fixable," another NL scout said. "He has a chance to start on some teams."

One possible solution would be to give Contreras some starts in left field to rest his legs and get Caratini more work behind the plate.

4. Do the Cubs need a more experienced veteran catcher?

Absolutely. Before the 2018 season, one agent believed Contreras would be better served down the road as a left fielder because the demands of catching could affect his offensive production. In fact, Contreras made 123 starts at catcher and none elsewhere. Along with a dip in power, his batting average fell from .276 in '17 to .249 this year.

Caratini got some work at first and third base. Finding a backup isn't a major priority, but the Cubs could be well-served finding a seasoned veteran with more offensive ability than Chris Gimenez showed last summer in the event Contreras is injured or struggles.

However, that doesn't appear to be Kyle Schwarber, who didn't catch an inning in 2018 — two seasons removed from major knee surgery and one season after catching seven innings in four games.

--

Chicago Tribune

Javier Baez projected to receive \$6 million raise in arbitration

By Mark Gonzales

Cubs President Theo Epstein wasn't ready last week to say whether the team would invest heavily in the free-agent market amid speculation the Cubs could make a push for Bryce Harper or Manny Machado.

And, according to recent projections by mlbraderumors.com, the projected salaries of their arbitration-eligible players could factor into those decisions.

Infielder Javier Baez, coming off a breakout 2018 season, is projected to receive a raise from \$657,000 to \$7.1 million as a first-year arbitration-eligible player, according to the website.

Kris Bryant is projected to receive a raise from \$10.85 million to \$12.4 million. Pitcher Kyle Hendricks will receive a boost of about \$3.42 million to \$7.6 million.

Shortstop Addison Russell is projected to receive a \$1.1 million raise to \$4.3 million, though he is in the midst of a 40-game suspension that clouds his future with the Cubs.

Left fielder Kyle Schwarber (\$3.1 million) and left-hander Mike Montgomery (\$3 million), both first-year arbitration-eligible players, are projected to receive raises of about \$2.4 million apiece, according to the website.

Reliever Carl Edwards Jr. is listed as an arbitration-eligible player as a Super Two qualifier. He is projected to make \$1.4 million. Infielder Tommy La Stella is projected at \$1.22 million.

The projected total in salaries for the arbitration-eligible players, excluding Russell, is \$35.8 million, according to the website.

--

The Athletic

How Javier Báez became the heart, brain and star of the Cubs

By Patrick Mooney

Javier Báez appears throughout Major League Baseball's 60-second postseason hype video narrated by Ken Griffey Jr.

"Respect the jersey," Griffey intones as Báez pulls at David Bote's jersey in the middle of the Cubs' home-plate celebration after a walk-off grand slam at Wrigley Field.

"They called him unprofessional," Griffey says before Báez blows a piece of bubble gum while finishing his home-run swing and hopping out of the batter's box, an image the Cubs turned into a bobblehead giveaway.

"No more talk, let the kids play," Griffey says, introducing the closing montage that shows Báez shaking a waffle maker in the dugout.

Báez lasted only 4 hours and 55 minutes in the postseason, playing all 13 innings and driving in the Cubs' only run in their 2-1 loss to the Colorado Rockies in the National League wild-card game. In late September, Báez faded in the NL MVP race, wearing down while playing all-out every day and covering for shortstop Addison Russell's administrative leave (which turned into a 40-game suspension under MLB's joint domestic violence policy with the players' union).

Christian Yelich and the Milwaukee Brewers got absurdly hot and overtook the Cubs on the first day of October in the NL Central tiebreaker. Now Yelich finds himself leading the Brewers into the NLCS, where Báez won the co-MVP award in 2016.

While he won't get the recognition from the Baseball Writers' Association of America for it, Báez was the glue that kept the Cubs together this season and prevented a system-wide breakdown in Theo Epstein's baseball paradise.

The amazing flashes that Báez showed throughout the 2016 playoff run came together for an entire season. The unrealistic comparisons to Manny Ramirez, Gary Sheffield and Roberto Alomar don't sound that crazy anymore after Báez put up a .290 batting average, 34 homers, 111 RBIs, 101 runs scored, an .881 OPS and 21 stolen bases while playing Gold Glove-caliber defense at second base, shortstop and third base.

While the positive spin around the Cubs became tipping their hats to the Brewers and pointing to 95 wins in spite of injuries and a difficult closing schedule, Báez spoke the truth at his Wrigley Field locker after last week's stunning wild-card loss, correctly explaining how the Cubs never got in rhythm and need to play with more focus and urgency next season.

Pay attention when Báez speaks, because he is naturally quiet, exceptionally intuitive and in many ways the heart and the brain of this team. He's a face-of-the-franchise talent on the level of Anthony Rizzo and Kris Bryant. When Epstein sometimes vents about the complacent nature of this team — like he did during the 71-minute end-of-season press conference at Wrigley Field — he isn't talking about the star player he inherited from the waning days of the Jim Hendry regime.

"Usually when we talk about Javy, we talk about the big physical tools, the unbelievable baseball instincts and intellect," Epstein said. "But one thing I know his teammates appreciate being around him every day is just his pure toughness. This guy puts his body on the line every day when he plays, gets beat up quite a bit and always finds a way to stay in the game, always finds a way to get in the lineup the next day.

"He just plays with a real edge and aggressiveness, which is great. Not everyone is wired that way, not everyone has to have the same baseball personality on the field, but he brings that and it's a much-needed ingredient."

Like in the middle of September when Báez chucked his bat and damaged the bathroom in the hallway that leads from Chase Field's visiting dugout to the clubhouse, breaking off a section of the sink and smashing part of the mirror. Later that night, Báez launched a two-run homer off All-Star lefty Patrick Corbin and heard the "M-V-P!" chants as a road player during a win over the Arizona Diamondbacks. The next day, the entire sink and mirror were gone from the wall.

Like in the middle of April when Báez immediately admitted his mistake after reliever Pedro Strop called him out for tossing his bat up in the air on a pop-out, a moment of frustration that led to a respect-the-game lecture from Pittsburgh Pirates manager Clint Hurdle through the media.

"He's really been like the leader we were expecting him to be," Strop said. "As a veteran, that's what I've been trying to teach him to be: 'You're going to be a leader of this team. You're going to be here maybe forever. You're one of those franchise guys, (like) KB, Rizzo.'

"(People) really don't know the effort he puts in to win a baseball game. Yeah, it's flashy. It's natural. He's a naturally flashy guy. He has style. But he does play with heart, and he does whatever he can to win a game."

Báez played in 160 out of 163 games, getting starts at second base (75), shortstop (52) and third base (18). Báez led the team by far in WAR (6.3), with Baseball-Reference listing Ben Zobrist and Jon Lester next at 3.3. Báez made adjustments while several other young hitters plateaued or regressed, absorbing the staff's new points of emphasis on offense as well as manager Joe Maddon's global process-oriented approach.

"I feel like I can slow down a little bit, let the game come back to me, make the pitchers throw more strikes," Báez said. "We know what we got. If we do simple things and don't go out there in a rush, we have nothing to lose. We got to keep our plan and just play hard, compete and not worry about the result."

The BBWAA, Twitter and the scouting community usually don't use this much imagination, but Maddon compared Báez to David Eckstein, the scrappy player who symbolized grit, overachievement and other old-school clichés on the Anaheim Angels team that won the 2002 World Series.

“(Javy’s) not afraid to voice his opinions in moments and situations,” Maddon said. “When you go out to the mound for that little scrum when you’re taking somebody out, he always has something that he’s seeing that he wants to relate to the rest of the group. David Eckstein was like that. I had David, and David had that same kind of a thing about him where he would see things. He’d come in off the field and I’d be standing there. We’d talk about maybe something I saw or something that he saw and we’d try to morph it together. Javy — I can communicate with him during the game just when he looks (into the dugout), little hand signs or thoughts or points.”

Whether it’s Russell’s off-the-field issues, Bryant’s injuries or the progress-isn’t-linear nature of player development, this season showed the risks in anointing stars and assuming most of the Cubs will just stay healthy and on an upward trajectory. But for someone who loves playing in a big city under the bright lights at Wrigley Field, Báez keeps a tight inner circle and has a farm in Florida.

Good luck trying to find Báez for a pregame interview, because he’s usually doing work somewhere off-limits to the media instead of sitting at his locker, checking his phone. Image isn’t everything, even for a guy with a seven-figure endorsement portfolio and a million Instagram followers.

“I don’t think he gets enough credit for being such a team-first guy,” Epstein said. “He cares so much about winning. He cares about his teammates, doing little things to help engage them and make them better. It’s awesome. Those intangibles behind the scenes are a big part of what makes him so valuable.

“Sometimes when a guy bursts onto the scene — and I’m not talking about anyone in this clubhouse at all — there’s a danger of them getting a big head or isolating themselves from their teammates or getting wrapped up in sort of the secondary stuff that comes with being a star player and a known figure. Javy was the opposite, man. He poured that energy back into the team and back out onto the field.”

After being mentioned in trade rumors for years — and dissected for what he didn’t do as a hitter and how he looked doing it — Báez finally got recognized as an indispensable part of this team and the kind of all-around player and grounded person you can build around. Once the sting disappears from this season — sometime after the Brewers and Los Angeles Dodgers finish the NLCS — maybe that will be one of the biggest 2018 takeaways. Like Junior Griffey says, let the kids play.

“If you turn on a game, you want to watch that guy play baseball,” said catcher Taylor Davis, who played with Báez at Class-A Daytona, Double-A Tennessee, Triple-A Iowa and as a September call-up for the Cubs. “He’s a polarizing figure in every sense of the word. Yelich is having an unbelievable year. We all know that. But what (Javy) does — and the way that he does it and the way that he interacts with the fans and the crowd and the way he carries himself — that’s what’s going to draw people back to this game. In my opinion, that’s an MVP. You’re a guy that’s going to bring people into baseball.”

--