

## **Indians setting framework at Winter Meetings**

Chernoff, Antonetti know roster work extends beyond Vegas

By Mandy Bell MLB.com

LAS VEGAS -- A lot of attention gets put on the handful of days that executives from every Major League club gather under one roof. Expectations of blockbuster trades during this short span are always high. Entering the 2018 Winter Meetings, it looked like the Indians were setting up to take all the headlines, but it has been quite the opposite.

Aside from a few rumors regarding Corey Kluber, the Indians kept as quiet as they could while having two of the top pitchers in the Majors available on the market. But just because the Winter Meetings are wrapping up, it does not mean the chance for a trade is over.

"I think everybody is focused on improvements to their team or just trades or free agents when they are here, so the number of contacts increases with teams," general manager Mike Chernoff said. "That doesn't necessarily mean they die down later, it just means over the three or four days that you are here, everybody is focused on this and solely this."

Even if no deals have been completed over the past few days, the focus on the constant negotiating has left Chernoff and president of baseball operations Chris Antonetti feeling the same way: "Tired."

"Every year I can say we feel exhausted by the end," Antonetti said. "I'm guessing you'd get the same answer from all of our peers."

Many expected the Indians to make a big splash in Sin City, trading either Kluber or Trevor Bauer. The hurlers may still be sporting their Cleveland caps for now, but that does not mean the executives haven't made headway. Antonetti said they were able to eliminate some teams who had "fallen by the wayside" from trade discussions and develop different ideas based on the market.

"I feel like there are things that we made some progress on, yes," Antonetti said. "Not necessarily always on the things that were top of mind coming in, so those things could evolve over the course of a few days, but I do feel like we made some progress on some things. Have a better understanding of the landscape of the market in different spaces."

Antonetti and Chernoff have kept all talk of potential deals confidential. As to whether the team is closer to completing a transaction than they were prior to the Meetings, both executives said they would not tip their hand prematurely.

"Until it's done, you never assume anything," Antonetti said. "We've had things fall through at every phase of the trade process. Literally, every step of the way. That's why we'll always say it's not done until we're calling players and they're informed."

The Indians still have some decisions to make in the remaining hours of the Winter Meetings, including whether or not to fill an open spot on the 40-man roster during Thursday's Rule 5 Draft.

"We're talking about it. We're not sure whether we'll do anything yet," Antonetti said. "We'll spend a little bit more time going through that and then make a decision. Some of it might depend upon which players are there when it's our turn to pick."

The conclusion of the Winter Meetings does not mean that trade talk will slow down or that the executives will take a day or two to rest. Antonetti said he and Chernoff landed in Cleveland after the Winter Meetings last year and sat at the airport for three hours to complete a deal.

So no matter how aggravating the rejections to potential trades have been, both Chernoff and Antonetti understand that everything can change with a phone call.

"I think we just recognize it's the realities of the job," Antonetti said. "You have to be persistent and find different ways to try to make things work and recognize that a lot of your efforts won't be fruitful, but inevitably there will be some that are."

## **Francona excited for Edwards, Naquin in '19**

By Mandy Bell MLB.com

LAS VEGAS -- It's no secret that the Indians' clubhouse could look drastically different in 2019 than it did the year before. With a handful of core players on the market as free agents and potential trades looming, manager Terry Francona believes maintaining the culture the team has built in that room falls on his shoulders.

"That's why we worked so hard at it in Spring Training, to build a base, and we'll do it again," Francona said. "You're right, we may not know yet who some of those names are. And it looks like this year we may have some turnover, maybe more than we've had in the past. But that will never be an excuse."

While most of the focus this offseason has been what players the Indians may be losing, as a manager, Francona has to keep his focus on the names left on his roster to begin prepping for the next season.

One of the two main areas of need for the Indians is the outfield with Michael Brantley, Melky Cabrera and Lonnie Chisenhall on the free-agent market. Despite the current holes, Francona seemed optimistic about his remaining options, especially right fielder Tyler Naquin.

"You know what, the whole thing is fluid right now," Francona said. "Because so often one movement necessitates the next. Like where Jason Kipnis plays. I mean, I know Naquin feels really good. And that's good, because that was hard for him what he had to go through. But he's in a really good place. Bradley Zimmer is coming. We know he's not going to be our center fielder at the beginning of the year. But that doesn't mean that he won't be at some point."

Andrew Miller, Cody Allen, Oliver Perez and Josh Tomlin are all up for grabs as free agents, leaving little to fill the bullpen. But one of the relievers remaining on the 40-man roster who has impressed Francona is 30-year-old Jon Edwards, who posted a 3.12 ERA in nine appearances last season.

"I think Edwards is a huge sleeper," Francona said. "He was pitching well enough last year where he had probably earned the right to be on the playoff roster. I think we thought enough about him and his future and what he's been through to not put him on the roster, and we told him that. Just because he had been rehabbing for a year and a half, to throw innings with that kind of intensity at that time of year, we didn't think was fair to him. We think he might actually be a really good bullpen guy."

Cleveland also has Brad Hand at the back end of the bullpen, and Francona said he believes Adam Cimber tried to do a little too much last year and will be good going into 2019.

With so much up in the air, Francona is excited about Carlos Carrasco. The right-hander received an extension through 2022, locking him in for next season's rotation.

"We're not going backwards. We don't want to go backwards," Francona said. "We want to continue to try to give ourselves a chance to win. And Carrasco wanting to be here, not grabbing every last top dollar, allowed that to happen. So I'm thrilled. Carlos has turned into one of the top probably 10 pitchers in baseball."

#### Rumor mill

Plenty of rumors have surrounded the Indians since the team made it public that it would be willing to listen to potential trades involving starters Corey Kluber and Trevor Bauer, but Francona made it clear to not believe everything you hear.

"I've seen the rumors," Francona said. "I would say so far 99.9 percent are not correct. I mean, [president of baseball operations] Chris [Antonetti] and [general manager Mike] Chern[off] talk to every team. They do their due diligence, but I think that some of this stuff just -- it's the Winter Meetings. It gets a life of its own; that's just the way it is."

No matter what, if any, trades end up happening, Francona knows that the result will only benefit his club despite the possibility of losing an ace.

"Well, I know I have faith," Francona said. "[Antonetti and Chernoff] are always so supportive. So I kind of just try to be supportive because this is their area, and they're good at it. And they've proven they're good at it. And at sometimes under some challenging circumstances, but they're trying to keep us healthy, competitive for the future. For next year, for the year after that, for the year after that."

#### Injury report

Danny Salazar, who underwent season-ending right shoulder surgery in July, is throwing again and has reached 90 feet. Francona said the timetable of his return will be completely up to Salazar.

Francona also noted that outfielder Leonys Martin is about six pounds away from reaching his weight prior to sustaining a severe bacterial infection in August.

### **Manager Terry Francona recognizes Cleveland Indians' balancing act, but says: "We're not going backward"**

By Paul Hoynes, [cleveland.com](http://cleveland.com) [phoynes@cleveland.com](mailto:phoynes@cleveland.com)

LAS VEGAS – Manager Terry Francona says the Indians aren't going anywhere.

Whatever you want to call what they're doing this winter, he says the goal is the same – to win the AL Central and get to October.

"I don't think we're going to do anything to make us worse," said Francona, who met with reporters Wednesday morning at the winter meetings at the Mandalay Bay Resort. "That's the best way I can answer it.

"They're trying to balance some things, which I think Chris (Antonetti, Indians director of baseball operations) has talked to you guys about probably every day. But we're never not trying to get better. We're just trying to do it differently."

Whether differently means trading Corey Kluber, Trevor Bauer or Edwin Encarnacion to relieve some of the pressure from having the biggest payroll in history, Francona has not lowered his goals.

"We're not going backward," he said. "We don't want to go backward. We want to continue to try to give ourselves a chance to win."

The Indians have won three straight AL Central titles. Their margin of victory has been 13 games, 17 games and eight games. Overall, they've had six straight winning seasons with Francona as manager.

But if the Indians trade Kluber or Bauer and perhaps Encarnacion or Yonder Alonso does that give their four division rivals a chance to draw closer? The Twins, White Sox, Tigers and Royals are in various stages of rebuilding, but they won't stay there forever.

White Sox manager Rick Renteria, whose team finished 29 games behind the Indians last season, thinks there may be a shift in power in the division.

"We have three clubs that are changing their direction a little bit," said Renteria, referring to the White Sox, Twins and Indians. "So absolutely (this could open the division up) . . . I still think that you've got to look at what you're capable of doing as a club. And maybe we can take advantage of what's happening."

The White Sox have acquired right-hander Ivan Nova from Pittsburgh and right-hander Alex Colome from Seattle this winter. Nova went 9-9 with a 4.19 ERA in 29 starts last season, while Colome went 5-0 with a 2.53 ERA in 47 games. Colome is expected to close some games for the White Sox.

Chicago is trying to make a big splash on the free-agent by courting Manny Machado and Bryce Harper. They think either player could be a cornerstone to help them turn into a contender.

Royals manager Ned Yost was asked about the Indians' grip on the Central loosening. He had a different answer than Renteria.

"This time of year you're looking at a lot of numbers," he said. "I don't fully trust these numbers, but our people have Cleveland winning 97 games (in 2019). Even though they've made some changes, the analytics people still hold them in very high regard.

"I think Chicago is getting better. I think the Twins have made really big strikes this winter. And I think we're going to be better."

The Royals finished last in the AL Central last season, 33 games behind the Indians. The Twins finished second.

Kansas City has signed free agent center fielder Billy Hamilton and utility man Chris Owings. Yost said the injection of speed from Hamilton and Owings, to go along with AL stolen base leader Whit Merrifield, was something the Royals needed.

"We just didn't have it last year," he said. "We just didn't have that speed that we had with Lorenzo Cain, Jarrod Dyson and Terrance Gore. Those little weapons you have on the bench. We definitely have them now and that's exactly what we wanted to get back to."

The Twins have added C.J. Cron, second baseman Jonathan Schoop and utility man Ehire Adrianza since the end of the season. They've expressed an interest in relievers Andrew Miller and Cody Allen, free agents from the Indians.

The Tigers have signed three free agents – left-hander Matt Moore, right-hander Tyson Ross and shortstop Jordy Mercer.

"I expect the teams in our division will continue to work to improve and they'll be better in 2019 than they were in 2018," said Antonetti. "Everybody in baseball has the same goal as we do, which is to try and win a World Series.

"They're trying to build on that path. So yes, we expect them to be better than they were last year."

### **What can the Cleveland Indians do to rescue the bullpen from the heavy seas of 2018?**

**By Paul Hoynes, cleveland.com | Posted December 12, 2018 at 10:40 PM | Updated December 13, 2018 at 07:15 AM**

LAS VEGAS -- The Indians' bullpen, a sea of tranquility for so long, spent last season in rough waters.

Cody Allen and Andrew Miller were never quite right and the set-up men were spotty until lefty Oliver Perez came along in June and the Indians traded for Brad Hand and Adam Cimber in July.

So what awaits the Tribe in 2019?

Allen, Miller, Perez and Josh Tomlin are free agents. Nick Goody and Danny Salazar are recovering from right elbow and shoulder surgeries, respectively. Cody Anderson ended last year healthy after undergoing Tommy John surgery in 2017, but he has not pitched in the big league since 2016.

The healthy arms on the 40-man roster include Hand, Cimber, Dan Otero, Tyler Olson, Neil Ramirez, Jon Edwards, Jefry Rodriguez, Ben Taylor, Chih-Wei Hu and Walter Lockett. Rodriguez, Hu and Lockett were acquired in trades this winter.

"We know that we have some work to do out there still," said manager Terry Francona on Wednesday at the winter meetings. "Oliver Perez kind of saved us last season. It's amazing when one guy pitches that well how it affects everybody else."

Francona named Edwards, who made just nine appearances for the Tribe last season, as a "huge sleeper" when it comes to making the pen. He added that it will be nice to have a healthy Goody back. He made just 12 appearances last season before injuring his elbow.

While Hand pitched well as a set-up man and closer after the trade from San Diego, Cimber struggled. He went 0-3 with a 4.03 ERA after going 3-5 with a 3.17 ERA with the Padres.

"I think Cimber was the typical guy who came in (to a new team) and tried to do too much," said Francona. "He's going to be good and Hand is one of the best pitchers in the game."

The Indians led the AL in bullpen ERA in 2017, but ranked 13th last season with a 4.60 ERA.

What Francona is looking for out of the reshuffled bullpen is consistency.

"The hardest thing for a manager is when you don't know what you're going to get (out of a reliever)," he said.

Thumbs up to Carlos Carrasco

While the Indians are talking about trading Corey Kluber or Trevor Bauer, another starting pitcher -- Carlos Carrasco -- signed a below-market extension that could keep him in Cleveland through 2023.

"Carlos wanting to be here, not grabbing every last top dollar, allowed that to happen," said Francona. "So I'm thrilled. Carlos has probably turned into one of the top 10 pitchers in baseball."

Carrasco went 17-10 with a 3.38 ERA in 32 starts last season. He's won 11 or more games in his last four seasons.

If the Indians do trade Kluber or Bauer, Salazar could be a candidate to replace them in the rotation. But health makes his role impossible to predict.

"He's already thrown a couple of times," said Francona. "We saw a little video of him on Tuesday. He's just out to 90 feet, but it's still nice to see a guy have a ball in his hand and throwing."

Francona said Salazar will set his own timetable. He has not been healthy since midway through the 2015 season.

Francona on Tribe's catchers, minus Yan Gomes

The trade of Yan Gomes has left Roberto Perez and Eric Haase as the Tribe's primary catchers. Perez is coming off the worst season in his career and Haase is a rookie.

Francona seemed satisfied with the arrangement for now.

"Roberto didn't swing the bat like he can last year," said Francona. "We know that. But his ability to run the game -- that's the biggest reason (we like him). His strength is running the game and keeping a pitcher going. That will only grow."

Perez hit .168 (30-for-179) and appeared in just 62 games last season.

Haase joined the Indians in September from Class AAA Columbus.

"We love Haase's development," said Francona. "Now, is he going to be the backup --- we don't know that yet. But it's going to be fun to watch him compete to do that."

Haase hit 20 homers for Columbus last season and 27 for Class AA Akron and Columbus in 2017.

Francisco Lindor made 153 starts in the leadoff spot last season for the Indians. (Phil Long, Associated Press)

In Cleveland the lineup card belongs to Francona

MLB Network filmed a round table discussion among general managers recently. One of the topics was the changing role of the big-league manager.

Royals GM Dayton Moore said his analytical department prepares a lineup for manager Ned Yost before every game. Yost can make any changes he deems fit.

Chris Antonetti, president of baseball operations, was asked if the Indians do that for Francona.

"No," said Antonetti. "I can't speak to how other teams do it, but that's not something we do."

Francona goes through a lot of information when he makes out his daily lineup. He also talks to Antonetti and GM Mike Chernoff for suggestions.

"But we don't give him lineups," said Antonetti. "We try to make sure he has good players to put in the lineup. That's our job."

Francona on the Tribe's outfield

The Indians' outfield, like the bullpen, was a source of a concern last season. The concern remains because outfielders Michael Brantley, Lonnie Chisenhall, Brandon Guyer, Rajai Davis, Melky Cabrera and Brandon Barnes are no longer around.

Chisenhall signed a one-year deal with the Pirates and everybody else is still a free agent.

So what does Tribe's outfield look like?

"The whole thing is fluid right now because so often one move necessitates the next," said Francona.

The Indians have seven outfielders on the 40-man roster, including converted second baseman Jason Kipnis and Bradley Zimmer, who is not expected to be ready for the start of the season because of surgery on his right shoulder.

There are a lot of questions. Where does Kipnis play? How healthy is Leonys Martin, who was struck down by a bacterial infection in August? Tyler Naquin is feeling good following surgery on his right hip and the Indians are excited to get a look at newcomers Jordan Luplow and Oscar Mercado in spring training. Is Greg Allen ready to play full time?

"So right now we've got names," said Francona. "Where they play, we don't know. Do we add? Who knows?"

Ron Gardenhire: Omar Vizquel fan

Detroit manager Ron Gardenhire saw a lot of Indians shortstop Omar Vizquel when he coached and managed the Twins. He was asked Wednesday if he consider Vizquel, appearing on the Hall of Fame ballot for the second year, worthy of Cooperstown.

"I've always said he's got to be in the Hall of Fame," said Gardenhire. "One of the best shortstops I've ever seen. He does things that you don't see other shortstops do.

"Defensively he was spectacular. He could bunt, hit. He knew how to beat you with his glove and even at the plate with his bat."

In closing, some names to remember

\* Francona was asked if he felt Miller was healthy after making five trips to the disabled list over the last three years with the Tribe: "I hope he goes to the National League. That's how confident I am he'll bounce back."

\* Former Indians players Jacob Cruz and Scott Elarton are at the winter meetings and coaching for the Pirates. Cruz is an assistant hitting coach for the big-league club. Elarton is a roving minor league pitching instructor.

\* Former Tribe pitcher Ken Schrom is at the winter meetings. He's still running Houston's Class AA club and says the Astros have plenty of talented players in the pipeline.

\* Carlos Santana would love to return to Cleveland and play for the Indians. "Carlos loves Cleveland," said someone close to Santana, who was recently traded to Seattle from Philadelphia.

\* Regarding Martin, who will go to camp ready to compete for the Tribe's center field job, Francona said, "He's within six pounds of his playing weight ... and that is a miracle in itself."

The bacterial infection that invaded Martin's blood system in August was life threatening.

\* Francona on how he fared at the gaming tables in Las Vegas: "You know the ATM machines that spit out cash? That's the only time I felt like a winner."

## **The anatomy of a three-team trade, and the story behind the Indians' acquisition of Trevor Bauer six years ago**

**Zack Meisel 2h ago 2**

LAS VEGAS — Chris Antonetti sat alone at a table in the Indians' hotel suite in Nashville. Terry Francona could sense Antonetti was frustrated, so he stuck around to console the Indians' general manager.

The organization had ushered in a new era two months earlier when it hired Francona to steer the ship. The plan was to contend, to challenge the Tigers in the AL Central.

There was just one problem.

"We didn't seem to have much pitching," Francona said. "We weren't really having a whole lot of luck finding ways to get it. And I know (Antonetti) was down."

The Indians' rotation featured Justin Masterson and Ubaldo Jimenez. Unproven commodities in Corey Kluber and Zach McAllister waited their turn. The pitching staff ranked last in the AL in 2012 with a 4.78 ERA as the club stumbled to a 94-loss campaign, costing Manny Acta his job.

So, the Indians were desperate for some reliable arms. And they knew the Diamondbacks were dangling a durable 21-year-old named Trevor Bauer.

The groundwork for acquiring Bauer began prior to the 2011 amateur draft. There was a chance he would fall to the Indians, who owned the eighth overall pick. Antonetti chatted with Bauer on the phone a couple of times in advance of the draft to gain a better understanding of his training habits and a better feel for his personality. The Indians met with him in person as well.

"It was a pretty deep draft," said Brad Grant, then the Indians' director of amateur scouting, "and we didn't want to make any assumptions, so we spent time on everybody."

Bauer preferred to join a team that preached progressive pitching philosophies — or, at least, flexible ones. His ultimate destination, though, was out of his control. The Diamondbacks selected him with the third pick, and the Indians snagged Francisco Lindor at No. 8.

Bauer quickly fell out of favor in Arizona, though. He clashed with his Class AAA manager and with Diamondbacks catcher Miguel Montero. The Indians hoped to pounce on a pitcher with plenty of potential, figuring he simply needed a change of scenery.

"We had a very robust dossier on Trevor before he became a professional," Antonetti said, "and we definitely referenced that at the time we were looking to trade."

They reached out to Arizona to discuss a deal. The Indians were aiming to trade Shin-Soo Choo, who had only one year remaining on his contract and, with Scott Boras as his agent, was eyeing a lucrative payday on the open market.

Arizona general manager Kevin Towers was seeking a shortstop, though. They relied upon 34-year-old Willie Bloomquist and 37-year-old John McDonald to man the position in 2012. The Indians didn't have a young shortstop to swap.

So, they turned to the Reds.

On the surface, it's pretty simple. The Reds liked Choo. The Indians liked Bauer. The Diamondbacks were fond of Cincinnati shortstop Didi Gregorius, who had debuted for the Reds that season.

This wasn't a three-player deal, though. It evolved into a nine-player trade.

It's difficult enough to complete a two-team trade. A three-team deal is exponentially more challenging to execute.

"That's why you don't see them happen that often," Grant said.

Antonetti said the Indians have held "some four-team discussions before," but never one involving five or more teams.

"Getting all parties to the table is really challenging," said Tribe general manager Mike Chernoff.

The Indians devoted much of their time at the 2012 Winter Meetings to searching for a deal with Arizona, but they couldn't pinpoint the proper combination of players to appease both sides. The three teams never met as a group. Antonetti essentially played all-time quarterback, making separate calls to Towers and to Reds general manager Walt Jocketty, trying to guide everyone toward a satisfying finish. They finalized everything about a week after the clubs departed Nashville.

"It's a lot of putting all the pieces together," Antonetti said, "like, 'OK, we think this might work. Will it work for you?' 'OK, this works for you, this other piece doesn't, so how do we figure it out?'"

"Usually there's one of the teams that's kind of helping put the pieces together, but that's not always the case. A lot of it just depends on who the teams are, what their trading histories have been, what the dynamics between the different teams are."

When Bauer received the call from his agent, he was sitting at Chipotle with a few friends. He stepped outside, learned about his relocation and then sat back down, casually informed his company of the news and finished his burrito.

"It was so toxic there," Bauer said, noting that he deserved some blame, too. "I wanted to quit baseball. I didn't want to play anymore."

And when the deal went down?

"I was actually invigorated again to play and to work and to train," he said.

The final arrangement looked like this:

Cleveland received: Trevor Bauer, Bryan Shaw, Matt Albers, Drew Stubbs

Cincinnati received: Shin-Soo Choo, Jason Donald

Arizona received: Didi Gregorius, Lars Anderson, Tony Sipp

Shaw was driving through the Arizona desert when a voicemail alert appeared on his phone. Towers had left a message insisting the reliever return his call as soon as possible. Shaw had spotty service, so his phone never rang. He called Towers, who relayed the details of the trade.

Before Shaw said anything, he lost cell service. He dropped the call.

He redialed Towers, who promptly quipped: "You didn't have to hang up on me."

The trade proved fruitful for the Indians, who leaned on Shaw's right arm for five years. After years of work and growth, Bauer has blossomed into one of the better pitchers in the league. All of that for one season of Choo and a few spare parts.

"We did have very good grades on (Bauer before the draft), but not to that elite of a level," Grant said. "He's made himself into that. If you're looking at him in college, you don't see that potential to be a Cy Young winner. He's progressively gotten better and better and better. Did we like him coming out of college, though? Yes, definitely."

The Indians constructed their rotation — the foundation of the roster — through trades. They acquired Corey Kluber from the Padres in another three-team deal that cost them Jake Westbrook. They obtained Carlos Carrasco from the Phillies in the Cliff Lee trade. They turned Vinnie Pestano into Mike Clevinger in a deal with the Angels.

The Bauer trade was as complicated as any of them, with three teams and nine players included in the final agreement. But once it was completed, it granted the Indians a clearer vision and a brighter future.

"I think what it takes is an understanding of what each team is trying to accomplish," Antonetti said. ... "It takes a lot of time. We spent weeks on that concept."

#### **Q&A: Terry Francona discusses roster turnover, trade rumors and his faith in the Indians' front office**

By T.J. Zuppe Dec 12, 2018 7

LAS VEGAS — Terry Francona's typically clean-shaven face was covered by the stubble of a Las Vegas shadow, a five-day growth that could have suggested that he'd spent much of his time at the blackjack table.

Unfortunately, reality paints a less thrilling picture.

Instead of eternally chasing desirable combinations of playing cards, Francona has spent many of the past few days pursuing favorable letter combinations while playing Scrabble on an iPad in the Tribe's suite, the sort of occasional mental breather needed after following the wide spectrum of trade scenarios the club has weighed this week.

Remember, this is a business trip.

After all, what happens in Vegas stays in Vegas impacts the organization for years to come.

Many of the whispers have been tied to two of their front-line starters, Corey Kluber and Trevor Bauer, as the team looks to adjust and reimagine their 2019 roster by creating financial flexibility while bringing back younger, controllable talent. Those goals sound reasonable and make some legitimate sense, but improving the outlook of the organization while not sacrificing the need to capitalize on a favorable division standing in the present is hardly an easy balance to strike.

Yes, we're far from seeing the complete picture — a reality that must be acknowledged if attempting to keep a level head — but the challenge of threading that needle opens the door to some inevitable skepticism.

"We're not going backwards," Francona said when asked about the team's immediate outlook. "We don't want to go backwards. We want to continue to try to give ourselves a chance to win."

In addition to the Kluber and Bauer rumors, other reports have also linked them to potential three-team swaps and other avenues to move salary. The contracts of Edwin Encarnacion and Yonder Alonso have been brought up in trade speculation, and let's not forget, they've already dealt Yan Gomes to clear some additional space to help facilitate future moves.

With much in the air, the team is in a weird state of limbo.

"I don't think we're going to do anything to try to make us worse," Francona said. "That's the best way I think I can answer it. (The front office is) trying to balance some things ... but we're never trying to not get better. Just try to do it different ways."

On Wednesday morning, under the bright spotlight of the Winter Meetings side stage, Francona met with a group of reporters to discuss the potential turnover of the Indians roster, address the rumors swirling around their pitching and express his thoughts on the state of baseball, rumors about a banning of the shift, and most important, talk about his current team.

You are potentially losing several players, free agents and core guys. Do you worry about the leadership or maybe the culture changing in the clubhouse?

Maybe it changes. Names are going to change. That's the way the game is. But when we leave Goodyear with 25 guys, we need to not ever have that be an excuse, "Oh, we might have a few new guys," or this or that. That's why we worked so hard at it in spring training, to build a base, and we'll do it again. You're right, we may not know yet who some of those names are. And it looks like this year we may have some turnover, maybe more than we've had in the past. But that will never be an excuse.

Does that burden fall on the manager?

I think it always does. I think you try to set a tone in how we're going to carry ourselves and what we want to be as a team. And then the more the players carry that out, the more meaningful it is. But that's the idea. That's why we try to talk about it every single day of spring training.

Some of the names maybe popping up in trade rumors are guys like Corey Kluber. He probably hasn't heard his name much over the years. Have you reached out to any of the guys who might be involved in rumors?

I texted with Klubs a couple weeks ago. I texted with most of them just to say hi. I'm sitting around here, up (in the suite), and I really don't have much to do. So, I just say hello to guys. I mean, I've seen the rumors. I would say so far 99.9 percent are not correct. Chris (Antonetti) and (Mike Chernoff) talk to every team. They do their due diligence, but I think that some of this stuff just — it's the Winter Meetings. It gets a life of its own; that's just the way it is.

Chris hopes the fans can look at the track record you guys have established over the past several years to hopefully offer some comfort through a time of uncertainty and potential turnover. Fan skepticism is inevitable, but how much faith do you feel in their ability to reshape the roster?

Well, I know I have faith. I know like we're sitting up there and I'm listening to all these conversations that they're having, and it kind of made me think about like when a game's over, how they respond with me through maybe some difficult times or frustrating nights. They're always so supportive. So, I kind of just try to be supportive because this is their area and they're good at it. And they've proven they're good at it — and at some times under some challenging circumstances. But they're trying to keep us healthy, competitive for the future. For next year, for the year after that, for the year after that. And in my opinion, they've done an outstanding job the last six years. But that doesn't mean you stop. You don't rest on your laurels. You don't. At least in my opinion, I've got a lot of confidence in how they do things.

There's been a lot of talk about the impact of the manager in today's game. How have you seen that change? Has the impact of a manager been reduced?

Sometimes, I think people — and you don't want to toot your own horn because I don't think that makes sense — but I think people that maybe say that don't quite understand the game very much. I think, sometimes, like, for guys that haven't been in a game, if you're in the dugout, it can go kind of fast. It can go kind of quick. But it's more than just — the baseball part's easy. There's a lot (to balance), keeping 25 guys that live together for about eight months going in one direction, that's probably the biggest thing.

Has your job changed or how has it changed since when you first started?

There's certainly more information. So, trying to decipher what you want, what's pertinent, what helps, what clutters, because that can get in the way sometimes. And our guys do a good job of knowing what information really helps me and getting it to me in a way that makes it applicable during a game or during a series.

Within a game, are there times when you know the numbers and you know what your gut is saying, but they don't necessarily align?

I'm not real comfortable talking about gut decisions. And the only reason I say that is because, I mean, I know there's times where the numbers don't add up. But you also need to know your people. And that's where I think maybe that's what guys are referring to when they say "their gut." You're betting on your people. And it's a long season. So, in a game in April, yeah, it might not be a good matchup, but you need this guy in October. So, you let them maybe fail a few times and maybe they start to figure it out. You feel obligated to know the numbers, but you also feel obliged to never forget that you're dealing with people.

Do you communicate more with players than managers did when you were a player?

Yeah. Shoot, I'd get in an elevator with Dick Williams he wouldn't say hello to you. I think it's for the good though. The reason we're doing this is because of the players and the majority of the time they're so much fun to be around. There are times when you're in charge you've got to tell somebody something they don't want to hear. But for the majority of the time, they're fun to be around. Make you feel a little younger than maybe you're supposed to.

There's been some more talk about the idea of eliminating the shift. What do you think about those discussions?

Yeah, and I may be in the minority now. I don't think you can dictate to teams competitive things. You know what I mean? You hear me say it sometimes, the unintended consequences. I think the game makes its changes sometimes they're a little slower than maybe you'd like. Hitters are going to adjust. I don't think we've seen it quick enough in our game, but it will happen. And you'll see hitters earning, making players play them more straight up. You know it just hasn't happened yet. We went through this with launch angle, hitters have forgotten the basics of fundamental hitting, but I think you'll see guys getting back to that. So, I hate to reward guys who don't use the field by making a rule change. If we did that every time, our game would be all over the map.

Terry Francona on the state of the Indians at the Winter Meetings: "I don't think we're going to do anything to make ourselves worse. ... We're not going backwards." (Daniel Clark / USA Today Sports)

With so many guys that can throw with incredible velocity, it's difficult to just string three hits together as opposed to hitting one over the fence. Do you think the current state of hitting is more of a byproduct of talented pitching?

Yeah, but if you're talking about stringing three hits together, the best way to do that is to use the whole field. That's why you see the guys that hit .300. If you look at their hit chart or the statistics, they're never the guys that are at the top of the league in exit velocity. Like José Ramírez, Altuve, those guys. They're in the second hundred because they use the whole field. Doesn't mean that they just scald every ball, but they get the barrel to it and they move the ball around the field. That's why they're so successful.

Ramírez rarely lacks confidence. But after finishing the season in a prolonged slump, how confident are you in his ability to put that behind him next year?

You've all seen him enough. He went through a really tough time. Hitters, pitchers do that. He's one of the best players in the game. I mean, he ended up being, what, third in the MVP voting? That's an incredible accomplishment. Wouldn't surprise me if he wins it at some point.

You lost Mark Budzinski to the Blue Jays. Have you discussed how to replace him on the coaching staff?



We're talking through that. Obviously the guys have a lot on their plate. We're kind of split whether we will this year or not.

Did you like the role, the responsibilities he had, or might the future of that role depend on the person you hire?

I would say both. One thing it did during the game, it took the outfield responsibilities off of (Brad Mills). It's helpful to him. He's got me in his ear the whole time. If he has to do one more thing, that makes it hard on him. The other thing that Bud did, there's no job too small for Bud, which is — not everybody can do that, which is really good. We didn't want to turn him into a secretary, because that's not fair. We're trying to figure out is there a guy that makes sense, and, if so, do we do it or do we wait a year? That's the things we're throwing around.

How do you view the current state of the outfield?

The whole thing is fluid right now. Because, so often, one movement necessitates the next. Like where (Jason Kipnis) plays. I mean, I know (Tyler) Naquin feels really good. And that's good, because that was hard for him (to deal with the late-season surgery). But he's in a really good place. (Bradley Zimmer) is coming. We know he's not going to be our center fielder at the beginning of the year. But that doesn't mean that he won't be at some point. Leonys (Martín) is back. I think he's like 6 pounds from being where he was, which is a miracle in itself. There's a possibility that Kipnis plays the outfield. We've got (Jordan) Luplow from Pittsburgh. So, right now we've got names. Where they play, we don't know. Do we add? Who knows.

Cody Allen and Andrew Miller are potentially leaving. Some of the guys that were hurt last year might contribute, whether it's Danny Salazar, Cody Anderson or Nick Goody. How do you evaluate your bullpen?

For the first time probably since I've been in Cleveland, our bullpen was inconsistent, even the names you said, Cody having issues from time to time. Andrew wasn't always healthy. Neil Ramírez had a stretch where he was lights out. Then he had stretches where he wasn't. That's probably the hardest thing for a manager is when you don't know what you're going to get. Even when (you talk about) certain guys, "He can do this, but he really doesn't do this. OK, try to stay away." When you don't know, that makes it hard. I think we're going to get a healthy Nick Goody back. That will help. I think (Jon) Edwards is a huge sleeper. He was pitching well enough last year where he had probably earned the right to be on the playoff roster. I think we thought enough about him and his future and what he's been through (coming back from Tommy John surgery) to not put him on the roster, and we told him that. Just because he had been rehabbing for a year and a half, to throw innings with that kind of intensity at that time of year, we didn't think was fair to him. We think he might actually be a really good bullpen guy. I think (Adam) Cimber was a typical guy that came in, tried to do too much. It probably hurt him a little bit. He's going to be good. And (Brad) Hand is one of the better pitchers in the game. We know that we have some work to do out there still.

Antonetti said Salazar is scheduled to start throwing again this week. What are your expectations for him this spring?

He's thrown a couple times. We saw a little video of him yesterday. He's just out to 90 feet right now. Now, it's still nice to see a guy have a ball in his hand and throwing. Where this goes and what the timetable is, is going to be completely up to Danny. But it will be fun to watch the progression. And when we see him on the mound again, that's going to be exciting for us, for sure.

Chris Tremie joined the Reds coaching staff. You guys really had a good relationship when he was the organization's Triple-A manager. How difficult will it be to replace him?

I think we're going to be in a good position. I know we haven't officially done anything yet. I'm also happy for Trem. He's going to a place where — Buddy Bell had a big influence in Trem as a young player; now he's going to have another influence in him. I'm happy for Trem. I'm confident we'll be in a good spot when the time comes to make an announcement.

Has your offseason preparation changed over the years with the way the game has evolved?

Not a ton. I use a computer now. I didn't used to. I guess that's changed. Now, I don't use it very well. No, I mean, I usually take a little break, and then I start to wander back into looking at things we want to do in spring training, start to look at the guys that are coming to spring training that aren't our mainstays — the younger players, the six-year minor (league) free agents — to make sure we're up to speed on all that. When they walk through the doors, we want them to know we know who they are and that they feel respected. And I talk to Millsy all the time about "Do we want to do anything different in spring training," things like that. But not too much.

How much confidence do you have in Roberto Pérez and Eric Haase following the trade of Yan Gomes?

That's why we were able to do that. (Pérez) didn't swing the bat like he can last year. We know that. But his ability to run the game — that's the biggest reason. And not only his willingness but his pride of running a game and keeping a pitcher going, we know that that's his strength. And that will only grow. And we love Haase's development. Now, is he going to be the backup? We don't know that yet. But it's going to be fun to watch him compete to do that because he's put himself in a place where he's ready to compete for that.

How tough was it to see Gomes go?

It's hard to see anybody go. I think it's unrealistic that you don't have turnover. I think we've actually had probably far less than most teams. But at some point, you get to a point in the progression where there's going to be some turnover, that's just the reality of it. And it doesn't have to be bad. Now, we have to do it right, and that's hard. I listen to those guys (in the front office) up there, man, it's like I was saying earlier, I'm trying to be how they are with me after a game, because I see how hard they're grinding.

(Top photo of Terry Francona: Daniel Clark / USA Today Sports)

## Indians have no plans of 'going backwards' as they reallocate, not rebuild

By Ryan Lewis

LAS VEGAS — The trade of an All-Star catcher and the rumors of a potential deal involving a two-time Cy Young Award winner have plenty of fans in Cleveland reaching for antacids in hopes that this isn't the beginning of a rebuild.

As the Indians have repeatedly said this week at baseball's winter meetings, though, deals like this aren't in an effort to stockpile prospects who won't step foot in Cleveland until a couple of future presidents have made their way through the White House.

"If we were rebuilding, we'd take a dramatically different approach," president of baseball operations Chris Antonetti said.

The Indians are in a position at which it has become unsustainable to operate as they have the last few years, when their payroll eclipsed the \$140 million mark. But as they attempt to find the right deal, which might include Corey Kluber or Trevor Bauer as a highly valuable starting pitcher, the goal is to contend in 2019 while also positioning their chess pieces in such a way that will put them in the best spot for 2020 and beyond, effectively extending their contention window.

Finding such a deal might prove to be easier said than done, as the Indians need talented but also controllable assets, which increases their own value. It's more of a reallocation of resources to different parts of the roster.

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Indians notebook: Manager Terry Francona doesn't see need for rule change with defensive shifts

December 12, 2018

"We're not going backwards," Indians manager Terry Francona said Wednesday. "We don't want to go backwards. We want to continue to try to give ourselves a chance to win."

The Indians have used Carlos Carrasco's recent extension as evidence of that sentiment. Within a week that Yan Gomes was dealt to the Washington Nationals, clearing \$7 million, Carrasco was extended with a deal that could keep him in Cleveland through 2023. The Indians picked up Carrasco's 2020 option and committed \$12 million in both 2021 and 2022, along with a \$14 million vesting option and \$3 million buyout for 2023.

"We traded Yan Gomes for a set of young players that feel like help us infuse some of that young talent and also extended Carlos Carrasco to the equivalent of free-agent dollars into the future, so I think we're making that trade-off all the time," General Manager Mike Chernoff said.

Francona, under contract through the 2020 season, said he has no fear of the club's direction.

"Well, I know I have faith," Francona said. "They're always so supportive. So I kind of just try to be supportive because this is their area and they're good at it. And they've proven they're good at it, and at some times under some challenging circumstances, but they're trying to keep us healthy, competitive for the future. For next year, for the year after that, for the year after that."

The Indians are fighting a battle on two fronts. They want to contend for a World Series in 2019, which in the short run means addressing their outfield and/or bullpen and likely dealing from a surplus. At the same time, they want to add controllable pieces that might make room for additional moves down the road in 2020, 2021 and beyond.

It's not as simple as a contending team with money to spend dealing to a rebuilding team only looking for prospects. The Indians are trying to play both sides.

It also brings into question not only what return the Indians receive for a valuable player like Kluber or Bauer, but how their own landing spot affects the Indians' chances in October. If the New York Yankees or Los Angeles Dodgers end up with the best offer for, say, Kluber, the Indians might weigh the consequences of putting him on another team's postseason rotation.

"So I think we would evaluate whatever the player return would be back on the surface, irrespective of who we were trading with," Antonetti said. "I think what we would be concerned about is what's the value of the players we're trading, what's the value of the players we're getting back and that will largely drive the decision. Once we have that information, we will then layer on. Are we making a competitor better and, if so, how does that affect our outlook, especially on the upcoming season?"

The Indians, during this whirlwind week at the winter meetings, have been clawing through other teams, trying to find the right deal to maximize the roster, address their biggest needs and balance the need to win now and beyond next season.

It's a complicated goal. But the idea behind it is to reallocate, not rebuild.

## Indians notebook: Manager Terry Francona doesn't see need for rule change with defensive shifts

By Ryan Lewis

LAS VEGAS — Major League Baseball is continuing its ongoing battle with pace of play, an ever-existing war against longer games or at least ones with less action within them.

But, not all of the ideas being tossed around might have the intended impact or a proper way to be enforced.

One of the larger discussions is the idea of eliminating the defensive shift in an effort to get more balls in play. While some recently instituted measures have been aimed at speeding up games — like clocks in stadiums counting down the commercial breaks or hitters needing to stay in the box — others can affect teams' strategies during games.

Aside from that element, baseball tends to be a cyclical game that adjusts to different trends that emerge. Right now, the three true outcomes (home run, strikeout, walk) are dominating games. A rule change, here, might not be needed or warranted.

It would also be difficult to enforce. Would teams simply not be allowed to have more than two players on either side of the infield? What's to stop a fielder from jumping from one side as the pitch is released? What if a team wants to bring in a fifth infielder?

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December 12, 2018

"Yeah, and I may be in the minority now, I don't think you can dictate to teams competitive things," Indians manager Terry Francona said Wednesday at baseball's winter meetings. "You hear me say it sometimes, the unintended consequences. I think the game makes its changes, but sometimes they're a little slower than maybe you'd like. ...

"Hitters are going to adjust. I don't think we've seen it quick enough in our game, but it will happen. And you'll see hitters making players play them more straight up. It just hasn't happened yet."

Hitters over the last few years also started, to a larger extent than before, focusing on launch angle and hitting over shifts rather than grounding into another one. But that, too, Francona said he sees as potentially cyclical.

"We went through this with launch angle and [guys getting under the ball] that hitters have forgotten the basics of fundamental hitting, but I think you'll see guys getting back to that," Francona said. "So I hate to reward guys who don't use the field by making a rule change. If we did that every time, our game would be all over the map."

#### Rocky Mountain slugger?

Much of the talk involving the Indians has focused on Corey Kluber and Trevor Bauer. The Indians continue to search for trade options through a multitude of possibilities, though, which has opened the door to a wide array of potential avenues.

One of those involves potentially dealing Edwin Encarnacion or Yonder Alonso, which could open the door for a deal for Carlos Santana from the Seattle Mariners. That scenario with Santana was reported as being possible on Tuesday.

Encarnacion, meanwhile, was reportedly being targeted by the Colorado Rockies, and it was reported again on Wednesday, this time by the Denver Post. The report called Encarnacion a "legitimate target" for the Rockies.

Encarnacion is still owed \$25 million and has a club option for the 2020 season.

#### Sleeping giant

The Indians have much to figure out concerning the makeup of their 2019 bullpen. As currently constructed, Adam Cimber, Nick Goody, Tyler Olson, Dan Otero, Neil Ramirez and others could all be candidates for expanded roles to make up for the expected losses of Andrew Miller and Cody Allen.

Another option could be a larger role for Jon Edwards, whose name was brought up by Francona when speaking to reporters Wednesday. Edwards last season pitched for the first time since 2015 after dealing with multiple arm injuries, posting a 3.12 ERA in 8 2/3 innings.

Edwards might have made the postseason roster had the Indians not wanted to be cautious with him after such a lengthy road back to health. But, as Francona said again on Wednesday, he had earned that right. And Edwards figures to be among those with a chance to make a larger impact in the Indians bullpen next season.

"I think Edwards is a huge sleeper," Francona said. "I think we thought enough about him and his future and what he's been through to not put him on the roster, and we told him that. ... We think he might actually be a really good bullpen guy."