

## **HOF inductees Jones, Thome share a history**

By Mark Bowman MLB.com @mlbbowman

NEW YORK -- Chipper Jones and Jim Thome tussled during a benches-clearing brawl during their Minor League days, competed against each other during the 1995 World Series and spent some time as National League East rivals. But the two are now close friends, who will spend the next few months replacing some of their normal hunting tales with talk about their upcoming induction into the Baseball Hall of Fame.

After being elected to the Hall of Fame on Wednesday night, Jones and Thome traveled to Manhattan to join fellow electees Trevor Hoffman and Vladimir Guerrero for an afternoon news conference. Jones and Thome reminisced and praised the separate paths each took after arriving at the Major League level as third basemen.

"When I first heard of Chipper, I think the thing you instantly think of is the name," Thome said. "You think about name like Babe Ruth and Mickey Mantle. Chipper will go down as one of those iconic names in the game."

As Jones was establishing himself as one of the greatest switch-hitters and third basemen in baseball history, playing his entire career for the Braves, Thome was compiling 612 career home runs while primarily serving as a first baseman or designated hitter for six teams.

Most of Thome's matchups against the Braves came when he played for the Phillies from 2003-05, which were also the final three seasons of Atlanta's streak of 14 consecutive division titles.

"[Thome] was just donkey strong," Jones said. "It was impressive to see what he did to some baseballs."

Jones was first introduced to Thome's brute strength in 1993 when he and his Richmond Braves teammates found themselves in the midst of a benches-clearing incident after a Charlotte pitcher threw a pitch behind Ryan Klesko's head.

As the opposing players converged neared the plate, Thome pinned Jones up against the backstop until cooler heads prevailed. The incident certainly hasn't damaged their friendship, as the two exchanged phone calls and texts on a regular basis leading up to the Hall of Fame election.

"Watching him, he had this way about him and this aura about him," Thome said. "It wasn't arrogant. It was very confident. Getting to know him and getting to speak to him, then you see the sincerity and think, 'This guy is a good guy.'"

"We've got a lot in common," Jones said. "We're kind of in the hunting industry on the side. We've been talking over the past few weeks and months, saying how cool it would be if we both went in together."

Thome has great admiration for how durable and productive Jones remained while playing the physically taxing position. Thome struggled defensively as he spent the first few seasons of his career at the hot corner and was just starting to get more comfortable at the position when the Indians transitioned him to first base in 1997.

"It was a very demanding position and the respect I have for a guy like Chipper to do it [for so long] was just incredible," Thome said.

"Personally, I think the best move for me was to move off third base and go to first base, with the history of my back that I fought later in my career. I think the amazing thing about [Jones] going in is it's an iconic position with an iconic player that did wonderful things throughout his whole career, from day one when I saw him [playing for Triple-A Richmond] and when I saw him play for Atlanta."

When a reporter asked Thome, Hoffman and Guerrero if they would trade their election to the Hall of Fame for a World Series ring, Jones laughed and said, "I'm glad I don't have to answer that one."

Thome chuckled and said, "Yeah, that's because you beat us."

While they might not spend a significant amount of time reminiscing about the Braves beating Thome's Indians in the 1995 World Series, the two certainly found plenty to talk about and in the process, it appears they are, in a way, are still competing.

"He works for the Braves and I work for the White Sox," said Thome, who like Jones serves as a special assistant. "You don't give a lot of information. But you always ask how you're doing. I know they have some great players in the Minor Leagues. We do as well. There's always that cat-and-mouse game you have to play."

## **Tribe invites righty Claiborne to Majors camp**

By Jordan Bastian MLB.com @MLBastian

CLEVELAND -- The Indians will have an opening or two in their bullpen this spring, so gathering an assortment of non-roster possibilities was part of the team's offseason plan.

On Friday, Cleveland found another one in right-hander Preston Claiborne, who signed a Minor League deal with the team and was extended an invitation to attend Spring Training with the big league club. Claiborne gives the Tribe 20 non-roster invitees, including 12 pitchers, with a little less than three weeks remaining until the start of camp.

Indians pitchers and catchers are scheduled to report to Arizona on Feb. 14, with the first official workout slated for Feb. 16. The remainder of the position players will report on Feb. 18, leading up to the Tribe's first full-squad workout on Feb. 20.

Claiborne, 30, has big league experience with both the Rangers and Yankees. The right-hander appeared in one game for Texas last season, but logged 62 games for New York between the '13-14 campaigns. Overall, Claiborne has a 4.05 ERA with 60 strikeouts against 24 walks in 73 1/3 innings in the big leagues. For his career, the righty has limited right-handed hitters to a .226 average (.684 OPS).

Claiborne -- who throws a fastball, slider and changeup -- had a 1.89 ERA with 42 strikeouts and 15 walks in 38 innings with Triple-A Round Rock last year.

As things stand, the Indians' bullpen projects to include closer Cody Allen and relief ace Andrew Miller, along with Dan Otero, Zach McAllister, Nick Goody and Tyler Olson. The last spot (or spots, if manager Terry Francona goes with an eight-man relief corps) is up in the air.

Beyond Claiborne, the pitchers who will be in camp with Cleveland as non-roster invitees include Jeff Beliveau, Livalvero Bonilla, Louis Head, Cameron Hill, Evan Marshall, Josh Martin, Alexi Ogando, Neil Ramirez, Cole Sulser, Adam Wilk and Robert Zarate.

#### **Inbox: Will Tribe spend more on FA market?**

There was a report saying the Indians were in talks with Lorenzo Cain before he signed with the Brewers. Does that surprise you? I thought the Indians were tapped out financially.

-- Ed A., Cleveland

Shortly after news spread that Cain had reached his five-year, \$80 million deal with the Brewers, a report by ESPN's Jerry Crasnick noted that the Cubs, Giants, Dodgers and Indians each expressed interest in the veteran outfielder. Was it surprising? On a need level, no. A right-handed-hitting outfielder fits Cleveland's roster puzzle, and Cain looked like a possible solution.

That said, yes, it was surprising from a financial standpoint. After Cleveland inked free-agent first baseman Yonder Alonso to a two-year, \$16 million pact last month, Chris Antonetti, the team's president of baseball operations, said that signing "will represent the vast bulk" of the team's offseason payroll flexibility. So, how was it then that the Indians were in on a player (Cain) who netted \$16 million annually over five years?

MLB.com confirmed that the Indians were in on the Cain sweepstakes, but the situation was a bit complicated. Cleveland would have needed to create some more payroll space in order to add a player making that kind of money in 2018. That means, for example, that someone like Jason Kipnis (set to earn \$13.7 million in '18 and \$14.7 million in '19, and the subject of trade rumors all winter) may have needed to be traded to make such a signing possible.

What the news of the Indians' interest in Cain does show, however, is that the Tribe is not sitting on its hands, while dozens of free agents wait for the winter freeze to thaw. It might also show that, while Cleveland does not have a surplus of available funds, it is looking for ways to still upgrade its roster with an impact acquisition. Antonetti has a history of having surprise moves up his sleeve (Andrew Miller and Edwin Encarnacion in recent years), so maybe it is still too early to count Cleveland out on the free-agent front.

A Danny Salazar-Domingo Santana trade seems like a match made in heaven. The Brewers need pitching and we need a young, controllable right-handed bat. How likely do you think a trade like this is?

-- Adam T., Long Island, N.Y.

From a value standpoint, that actually would be a realistic one-for-one trade. Santana is 25 years old and under contractual control through 2021. Salazar is 28 and under control through '20. Last year, Santana had a breakout season for the Brewers, hitting .278 with 30 homers and an .875 OPS. He hits from the right side and plays right field. That fits Cleveland's needs. Salazar is coming off two injury-marred seasons, but he has been an All-Star and still has front-line starter potential.

During the Winter Meetings, Antonetti said it has become increasingly difficult to make trades in recent years. One thing that can create a better environment for getting a deal done is a situation of surplus. In this case, the additions of Christian Yelich and Cain give the Brewers a surplus of outfielders. On the Indians' side, they have a surplus of rotation options heading into Spring Training. That is a good base for trade talks.

Here's what I could see holding back the Indians in this scenario: the depth behind the Major League rotation. True, Cleveland has a great starting staff with Corey Kluber, Carlos Carrasco, Trevor Bauer, Mike Clevinger, Josh Tomlin and Salazar. That's six arms for five jobs. Someone will be the odd-man out come Opening Day -- unless there is an unforeseen setback.

Behind that group, the Indians have an option in lefty Ryan Merritt, but the number of experienced options for the rotation gets thin behind him. If any injuries arise, or if someone takes a major step backward, suddenly that sixth arm (Clevinger, Tomlin or Salazar) becomes critical. It is rare to make it through a full season (and playoffs) with only five starters. That makes trading someone like Salazar a risk.

@joshhodnichak

What do you think a comparable package of Indians prospects would have looked like for Yelich? Josh/Chapel Hill, NC

The Brewers acquired Yelich from the Marlins in exchange for outfielder Lewis Brinson, infielder Isan Diaz, outfielder Monte Harrison and right-hander Jordan Yamamoto. Brinson (No. 1), Diaz (No. 6) and Harrison (No. 14) were among Milwaukee's Top 30 prospects, per MLB Pipeline.

Looking at the Tribe's farm system, catcher Francisco Mejia (No. 1 prospect) would surely have been a required piece. From there, it likely would've taken two more from Cleveland's Top 10 list. That includes prospects like righty Triston McKenzie, first baseman Bobby Bradley and shortstop Yu-Cheng Chang, among others.

@kennykraly

@MLBastian Do you think 2018 is Danny Salazar's last chance to prove himself and to get better for The Tribe? #IndiansInbox I feel like I answered the same question about Carrasco multiple times between 2011-14. There were injuries, inconsistent pitching, stints in the bullpen and trade rumors. History is seemingly repeating itself with Salazar. Cleveland remained patient with Carrasco, and he eventually emerged as a top-of-the-rotation arm and Cy Young contender. What the Indians do not want to do is give up on a player too soon, only to see him blossom in another uniform. That is another reason why I think Cleveland is reluctant to trade someone with Salazar's potential.

@rover914

If all outfield options are healthy and Melvin Upton looks like a bounce back player, how do you shape the outfield/platoon combos?

If Michael Brantley (recovering from right ankle surgery) isn't ready for Opening Day, things could get interesting. Kipnis would be an option to slide to left field to start the season in that scenario. Or, if Cleveland can go out and acquire a corner outfielder, Lonnie Chisenhall could adjust accordingly, playing right or left field. If all are healthy, Brantley would be in left, Bradley Zimmer in center and Chisenhall in right when a righty was on the mound. Melvin Upton Jr. (if he makes the Opening Day roster) could then be a versus-lefty option for all three spots, but especially in the corners. This still feels like a puzzle with a piece or two missing.

@s\_telesman

@MLBastian I'm sure spring training will play a factor but any insight into what Tribe is thinking with Allen and Mejia going into 2018? Also, any chance we see chisenhall return to 3B this season (probably not)? #IndiansInbox

I think the days of Chisenhall playing third are done, barring some sort of emergency scenario where Jose Ramirez, Yandy Diaz, Giovanni Urshela and Erik Gonzalez are suddenly unavailable. Greg Allen could be a possibility for the bench, but it seems most likely that he will open the season with Triple-A Columbus, get regular playing time and continue his development. Mejia will probably open in Triple-A as well, but he is knocking on the Majors' door. If an injury or poor play comes up with one of Cleveland's catchers, Mejia looks to be waiting in the wings.

### **Indians land two on Top 100 Prospects list**

By Jordan Bastian MLB.com @MLBastian

CLEVELAND -- The Indians are smack dab in the middle of a real contention window, in which winning the World Series is the primary focus. In recent years, highly touted prospects like Francisco Lindor, Bradley Zimmer and Tyler Naquin have ascended through the farm system to help the big league club in that quest.

As the core of Cleveland's Major League roster gets older, and contracts begin reaching expiration dates, the question becomes: Which current prospects can keep the window open in the future? MLB Pipeline's Top 100 prospects list is a great place to start, and the Indians have two players -- catcher Francisco Mejia and pitcher Triston McKenzie -- on the newest version of the rankings.

In the unveiling of the Top 100 in an MLB Network special on Saturday night, Mejia was ranked 11th overall and McKenzie came in at 24th on MLB Pipeline's annual list. Mejia, who will be in camp with the Indians this spring, was rated as baseball's top catching prospect, while McKenzie checked in at ninth among all right-handed pitching prospects.

The annual ranking of MLB's Top 100 prospects is assembled by MLB Pipeline Draft and prospect experts Jim Callis, Jonathan Mayo and Mike Rosenbaum, who compile input from industry sources, including scouts and scouting directors. It is based on analysis of players' skill sets, upsides, proximity to the Majors and potential immediate impact to their teams. Only players with rookie status entering the 2018 season are eligible for the list. Players who were at least 25 years old when they signed and played in leagues deemed to be professional (Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Cuba) are not eligible.

Angels pitcher Shohei Ohtani -- the No. 1-ranked prospect -- spent the past five seasons pitching in Japan, but is 23 years old. The rest of the top five (in order) includes Ronald Acuna (Braves), Vladimir Guerrero Jr. (Blue Jays), Eloy Jimenez (White Sox) and Gleyber Torres (Yankees).

As part of the Top 100 rankings, MLB Pipeline assigns prospect points to each team based on the players' place on the list. The No. 1 position is worth 100 points, followed by 99 for No. 2, 98 for No. 3 and so on. Cleveland's 167 points were the most among the 11 teams with two or fewer prospects and more than three teams who had at least three prospects on the list. The Indians had the 17th-highest prospect point total among the 30 franchises.

Mejia, 22, turned in a .297/.346/.490 slash line with 14 home runs, 21 doubles, 52 RBIs, 52 runs scored and seven steals in 92 games with Double-A Akron last year. The switch-hitting catcher also threw out 30 percent of would-be basestealers. That showing came after Mejia's breakout performance in '16, when he had an .896 OPS between Class A Lake County and Class A Advanced Lynchburg and made national headlines with a 50-game hitting streak.

The Indians promoted Mejia to the Majors for the final month of the season, but Cleveland was in the midst of its American League-record 22-game winning streak, and was jockeying for position in the playoff picture. Under the circumstances, the young catcher appeared in only 11 games for the Tribe.

Following the regular season, Mejia went to the Arizona Fall League, where he hit .365 in 15 games and tried his hand at third base. The idea was to introduce some versatility into Mejia's game, given that he is close to being ready for the Majors and Cleveland has two veteran catchers (Roberto Perez and Yan Gomes) locked in at the moment.

Both Mejia and McKenzie were a part of the Futures Game this past summer.

McKenzie, 20, spent the entire 2017 season with Lynchburg, going 12-6 with a 3.46 ERA and 186 strikeouts against 45 walks in 143 innings (25 starts). Since being selected in the first round (42nd overall) in the 2015 MLB Draft, the righty has posted a 2.68 ERA with 11.6 strikeouts per nine innings and a 4.4 strikeout-to-walk rate in parts of three professional seasons.

### **Cleveland Indians add another bullpen candidate in right-hander Preston Claiborne**

By Paul Hoynes, [cleveland.comphoynes@cleveland.com](mailto:cleveland.comphoynes@cleveland.com)

CLEVELAND, Ohio -- The Indians are bringing another pitcher to spring training in hopes of helping their bullpen.

They've signed right-hander Preston Claiborne to a minor-league deal with an invitation to big-league spring training. Pitchers and catchers report to Goodyear, Ariz., on Feb. 14.

Claiborne, 30, went 3-1 with 16 saves and a 1.89 ERA last year for Class AAA for the Texas Rangers. He struck out 42 and walked 15 in 38 games for Round Rock. Claiborne made one appearance for the Rangers, allowing three runs on five hits.

He did not pitch at Triple-A after Aug. 12 because of a sore right elbow.

The Yankees drafted Claiborne in the 17th round in 2010. He made it to the big leagues for the Yankees in 2013 and 2014, making 62 appearances. He owns a 2.92 ERA in 212 minor league games.

Claiborne is the 12th pitcher the Indians have invited to spring training on a minor-league deal. They're looking to replace departed free agent relievers Bryan Shaw, Joe Smith and Boone Logan.

### **Cleveland Indians needed to dump salary to have a shot at signing Lorenzo Cain**

By Paul Hoynes, [cleveland.comphoynes@cleveland.com](mailto:cleveland.comphoynes@cleveland.com)

CLEVELAND, Ohio - The Indians, at least when it comes to free agency, were supposed to be tapped out. Busted.

So what were they doing in negotiations for free agent outfielder Lorenzo Cain? Cain came to terms on a five-year, \$80 million deal with Milwaukee on Friday. The Cain signing came right after the Brewers acquired Christian Yelich, another outfielder, in a deal with Miami.

The Indians have been looking for a right-handed hitting outfielder all winter. Yes, they signed Melvin Upton to a minor-league deal, but that has not stopped the search.

But their pursuit of Cain was based on them making another trade or two to create salary space on the roster. Those trades did not happen in time to prevent Cain from signing with the Brewers.

The Indians' payroll could top \$135 million this year. For them to add a player like Cain, somebody would have had to go. Jason Kipnis and/or Danny Salazar are two of the most likely candidates. The Indians have depth in the infield and starting rotation.

The Indians owe Kipnis \$13.5 million this year and \$14.5 million in 2019. His club option for 2020 includes a \$2.5 million buyout. Salazar will make \$5 million this year.

Cain, 32 in April, hit .300 (175-for-585) with 15 homers and 49 runs last year for Kansas City. He scored 86 runs and stole 26 bases in 28 attempts.

The Indians head into spring training with a starting outfield of three left-handed hitters - Michael Brantley in left, Bradley Zimmer in center and Lonnie Chisenhall in right. Cain, who bats right-handed, has been a center fielder most of his career, but has also played the corner positions.

Kansas City and the Indians play in the AL Central so Cain is no stranger to Chris Antonetti and Terry Francona. They felt if they could make a trade in another area, that the veteran right-handed was worth a gamble. Based on the slowness of the free agent market, the Indians felt there was a chance they could sign Cain to a three-year deal.

The Brewers now have an excess of outfielders with the additions of Cain and Yelich. They also been looking for help at second base and in the rotation.

Right fielder Domingo Santana has been the subject of trade rumors all winter. Last year he hit .278 (146-for-525) with 30 homers and 85 RBI for the Brewers. Santana, a 6-5, 220-pound right-handed hitter, struck out 178 times and posted a .875 OPS.

Santana, 25, would be a good fit for the Indians. But he would not come cheaply. He's not eligible for arbitration until after the 2018 season and he isn't eligible for free agency until 2022.

## **Is there something cooking between the Cleveland Indians and Milwaukee Brewers? Hey, Hoynsie**

By Paul Hoynes, cleveland.com

Hey, Hoynsie: With the Brewers having a surplus of outfielders and needing starting pitching, is there any chance that the Indians might trade Danny Salazar for Domingo Santana? – Paul Kipfstuhl.

Hey, Paul: In a way such a deal almost makes too much sense.

The Brewers do have an excess of outfielders with the addition of Lorenzo Cain and Christian Yelich. The Indians, meanwhile, have a surplus of starting pitching. They also have second baseman Jason Kipnis and the Brewers have been looking for a second baseman.

It's so easy to connect the dots that I would think the two teams have had some conversations. The Indians could use Santana, a right-handed hitting outfielder. The Brewers, who have gone all in to try and win the NL Central, could use Salazar's arm.

The Indians, however, love Salazar's arm. They've waited through two injury-shortened seasons to see if he can be a force in the rotation. It's definitely a situation to watch.

Will Tribe be in rebuild mode by 2020?

Hey, Hoynsie: With the way the Tribe's player contracts are structured, by the year 2020 at the latest, they'll be in rebuild mode. With that said, do you think the Tribe's reluctance to sign Carlos Santana, Jay Bruce, Austin Jackson and the rest is a realization that they can't have a \$20 million player on the payroll when they're rebuilding? – Jean Butcher, Cleveland.

Hey, Jean: In 2020, they'll still have the ability to bring back Francisco Lindor, Jose Ramirez, Yonder Alonso, Jason Kipnis, Bradley Zimmer, Edwin Encarnacion, Yandy Diaz, Yan Gomes, Roberto Perez, Francisco Mejia, Tyler Naquin, Abraham Almonte, Corey Kluber, Trevor Bauer, Carlos Carrasco, Danny Salazar, Mike Clevinger, Nick Goody, Tyler Olson and Dan Otero.

That roster is light in the outfield and bullpen, but it still has an excellent rotation and infield. It doesn't look like a total rebuild would be needed, just some smart additions. As for the \$20 million a year player, they'll pay Encarnacion that much in 2019 and again in 2020 if they exercise his option.

I heard the same complaints at the start of this decade about the Indians never having a \$10 million a year player. Think about this, if they were willing to offer Lindor a reported \$100 million extension at the end of spring training last year, somewhere along the line of that deal he'd probably be making close to \$20 million a year.

What about Manny Machado?

Hey, Hoynsie: Have the Indians made an offer to Baltimore for third baseman Manny Machado? – Randy, Cleveland.

Hey, Randy: They have inquired about Machado. They wouldn't be doing their job if they didn't. But the asking price is high, probably too high for the Tribe because Machado would be a rental.

Machado, a free agent after the 2018 season, just signed a one-year, \$16 million deal with the Orioles.

What's in store for Yandy Diaz?

Hey, Hoynsie: How will the decision to move Jason Kipnis back to second base affect Yandy Diaz? – Mike, Foley, Ala.

Hey, Mike: The Indians have given every indication that Kipnis will return to second base with one hitch – he still has to be on the team. In other words, opening day is still a long way away and a lot can happen.

If Kipnis isn't traded, Diaz will compete for a bench job. He has two options left so he could return to Class AAA Columbus and work on hitting the ball in the air to take advantage of his power.

Too many lefties?

Hey, Hoynsie: I remember a few years back when Manny Acta was managing the Indians. He had way too many left-handed hitters on the roster. It looks like they're going back to that again with Kipnis, Lindor, Ramirez, Brantley, Alonso, Lonnie Chisenhall, Tyler Naquin and Bradley Zimmer. The only right-handed hitters they have are catchers Yan Gomes and Roberto Perez. Why is that? – Jeff Lewis, St. Ives, Australia.

Hey, Jeff: I think you're forgetting Edwin Encarnacion and the fact that Lindor and Ramirez are switch-hitters. Brandon Guyer, who could start the year on the disabled list, bats right-handed and Abraham Almonte is another switch-hitter. Yandy Diaz bats righty as well.

But your point is well taken. The Indians definitely could use an established right-handed hitter. That's one of the reasons they went after Lorenzo Cain.

Will Michael Martinez help Tribe?

Hey, Hoynsie: Do you think Michael Martinez has a chance to make the 40-man roster? With the amount of time Jason Kipnis spent on the DL last year, along with the Tribe's entire starting outfield, I think there's a need for him. – Evan Hausch, Akron.

Hey, Evan: Martinez will go to camp on a minor-league deal, but there's a good chance you could see him added to the Tribe's 40-man and 25-man roster sometime during the season. He's been doing it for the last three years. He has the trust of manager Terry Francona and that's important.

Could Danny Salazar close?

Hey, Hoynsie: Why wouldn't the front office consider moving Danny Salazar to the bullpen? He has outstanding potential to be the closer of the future. With Cody Allen and Andrew Miller scheduled to be free agents after the 2018 season, Salazar could get used to his new role. I think he could be a dominant reliever. – Michael D'Alessandro, North Olmsted.

Hey, Michael: The Indians made a similar move with Jose Mesa in 1994 and the next year they were in the World Series with him as their closer. Mesa, however, was bigger and much more durable than Salazar. I wonder if Salazar's right arm could hold up making 60 to 70 appearances a year.

At the winter meetings, manager Terry Francona said he prefers Salazar as a starter, but these things have a way of changing. The worrisome thing is that Salazar has been hurt for the last two years. He's not going to help, no matter what his role, if he can't stay healthy.

What's Bobby Bradley's timetable?

Hey, Hoynsie: How close is Bobby Bradley to making his big-league debut? He seems to have great power, although he still strikes out a lot and doesn't walk. Based on where he's at now, 2020 would seem to be a reasonable guess. I hope he doesn't turn out to be another Jesus Aguilar. – Shawn Marshall, Garfield Heights.

Hey, Shawn: Bradley was a third-round pick in 2014 out of Harrison Central High School in Gulfport, Miss. He had a solid year at Class AA Akron in 2017, maintaining his power and lowering his strikeouts from 170 in 2016 to 122. Just as importantly, he improved defensively at first base because the Indians don't view him just as a DH.

From Akron he went to the Arizona Fall League where put up so-so numbers. He hit .230 with two homers, but struck out 32 times in 74 at-bats. He drew two walks.

I would think the Indians would like to see him in Cleveland before 2020, but players progress at their own pace. If and when he does get to the big leagues, I hope he's given more of a chance than Aguilar, who hit .265 with 16 homers and 52 RBI for the Brewers last year.

### **Cleveland Indians: The Jason Kipnis question, outfield issues -- Terry Pluto (video)**

By Terry Pluto, The Plain Dealer [terrypluto2003@yahoo.com](mailto:terrypluto2003@yahoo.com)

1. When the Cleveland Indians play their fifth game of the season April 3, Jason Kipnis will turn 31. The Indians will be playing the Los Angeles Angels on that day, and Kipnis will likely be starting at second base.
2. It's tempting for fans to write off Kipnis. He had a miserable 2017 season, batting .232 (.705 OPS) with 12 HR and 35 RBI. He opened the season on the disabled list with right shoulder inflammation. Then came two trips to the disabled list because of hamstring problems.
3. Kipnis' career breaks down two ways: a) When he's healthy, he approaches All-Star level. b) When he's not, he seems to be hurt most of the season.
4. The last time Kipnis had an injury-marred season was 2014, when he had the dreaded oblique strain and batted .240 (.640 OPS) with six HR and 41 RBI.
5. He came back in 2015-16 to bat .289 (.817 OPS), averaging 16 HR, 67 RBI and 13 stolen bases. He made the 2015 All-Star team. He stayed healthy. If he stays healthy, he can play like that again.
6. The Indians have lost Carlos Santana (Phillies), Jay Bruce (Mets) and Austin Jackson (Giants) in free agency. They have added Yonder Alonso to play first. But the lineup is not as strong as it was when the season ended. The Indians need Kipnis to revert to the form that made him an All-Star in 2013 and 2015 ... and a guy who batted .275 (.811 OPS) with 23 HR and 82 RBI in 2016.
7. The Indians did look at trading Kipnis to the Mets. Not sure what they would have received in return, but that deal (and others) appear to be dead, at least for now. The Indians are focused on Kipnis staying healthy and producing as he can.
8. Kipnis has \$13.6 million (2018) and \$14.6 million (2019) left on his contract. He also has \$2.5 million guaranteed (of \$16.5 million) in 2020. That makes him hard to trade. More revealing, Kipnis doesn't want to be traded.
9. I admired Kipnis for coming off the DL late in the 2017 season and willingly switching to center to replace the injured Bradley Zimmer. Kipnis had not played the outfield since 2009, his first year of pro ball. He did a decent job in September, and batted .273 (9-for-33) with a homer and five RBI. He is a team player.
10. Manager Terry Francona has decided to return Kipnis to second base. Here was Francona's exact quote: "More than likely, he'll play second. The winter isn't over yet. The way we're aligned, that's what we're prepared to do."

11. Jose Ramirez will be at third. Ramirez is close to a Gold Glove-quality second baseman and told me "second is my favorite position."

12. Ramirez also told me he "was willing to play anywhere." He was an above average third baseman in 2016-17, when he played 136 games there. Ramirez gives Francona a lot of options. If needed, Ramirez can also play left field, as he did for 50 games in 2016. He even played some shortstop early in his career.

13. So much depends on Kipnis. He needs to come to training camp in the best shape of his career. He's listed at 5-foot-11, 195 pounds. The key will be having his hamstrings in shape as well as his right shoulder.

14. When Kipnis was in town last weekend for Tribefest, he talked of "having a chip on his shoulder" to prove his critics wrong. He talked of strengthening his hamstrings and shoulder and being more flexible. He said all the right things. He remains a very important player for the Tribe.

#### ABOUT THE TRIBE

1. Francona was very upbeat about Melvin Upton: "We visited with him before we signed him. It was one of the highlights of the fall. He's healthy, in a really good place. It would not surprise me if he came in and made a really good impression."

2. I believe Upton is one of the reasons the Indians didn't push hard to re-sign Jackson, who agreed to a two-year, \$6 million deal with the Giants. The Indians were able to help Jackson recover from his 2016 knee surgery. He signed a minor-league deal for 2017, then made the team in spring training.

3. Jackson was productive, batting .318 (.869 OPS) with seven HR and 35 RBI. He hit .352 vs. lefties and played center and left field. But Jackson also had trips to the disabled list for a toe injury and a quad strain. Durability is an issue.

4. Upton is 33. He had thumb surgery last season and played only a dozen games in Class AAA. In 2016, he batted .238 (.693 OPS) with 20 HR, 61 RBI and 27 stolen bases. He also struck out 155 times in 539 plate appearances for San Diego and Toronto.

5. Upton has had an up-and-down career. He has had some miserable seasons (2014-15, batting .198 with .580 OPS with 21 HR in 1,028 plate appearances).

6. Like Jackson, Upton is a right-handed batter more effective vs. lefty pitchers. In 2015-16, he hit .267 (.844 OPS) vs. lefties, .235 (.660 OPS) vs. righties. He can play a respectable left and center field, or at least he did in 2016.

7. The Indians outfield is filled with lefty hitters: Michael Brantley, Bradley Zimmer and Lonnie Chisenhall. There also is Tyler Naquin, who had only 37 at bats with the Tribe in 2017.

8. I asked Francona about Naquin, who hit .296 (.886 OPS) with 14 HR and 43 RBI in 116 games in 2016: "His career is right in front of him. It happens to a lot of players where they come up and have a brief amount of success and then have some struggles. That doesn't mean he's out of sight, out of mind. We have seen him do it before. No one is giving up on him."

9. Brantley (ankle) and Chisenhall (calf muscle) had significant injury issues last season. Zimmer broke his hand and needed surgery in September. Naquin could be factor if the outfielders continue to get hurt.

10. Righty-hitting Brandon Guyer can bash lefties when healthy. He had injury problems much of last season, with wrist surgery in October. He may not be ready for the start of the season. "(If) we get him back to healthy, that changes our outfield," said Francona.

11. The right-handed hitter who can help somewhere is Yandy Diaz. As a rookie, he hit .263 (.679 OPS) with 13 RBI last season. He opened the year with the Tribe, struggled and was sent back to the minors. Diaz returned after the All-Star break, batting .304 (.810 OPS) in 108 plate appearances.

12. Francona said the plan is to play Diaz at third, "and not bounce him around like last year." In spring training, Diaz was learning the outfield. Then Kipnis got hurt, and he switched to third base for the rest of the season.

13. I've been boosting Diaz since 2016. He is career .331 hitter (.874 OPS) in 134 games at Class AAA. Diaz doesn't hit for much power, but he's a very disciplined batter. He came to the Tribe from Cuba in 2014.

14. Against lefties, the Indians could play Edwin Encarnacion at first base and DH Diaz. While the Indians say they don't plan to use Diaz much in the outfield, I wonder if that can change in spring training. It's not a natural position for him, but perhaps can he become adequate in time.

#### **Indians waiting to see how proposed MLB rule changes might affect games: 'Once it's implemented into the game, we'll see what happens'**

by Ryan Lewis

Major League Baseball has a new round of proposed rule changes aimed at speeding up the pace of play, though this time the alterations might have to be implemented with more force.

Lowering the average time of games has been a crusade of commissioner Rob Manfred for the past several seasons. Recent rule changes with pace of play in mind have included hitters keeping one foot in the batter's box in most instances, in-stadium clocks requiring players to be ready by the end of commercial breaks, the doing away of pitchers having to throw four balls to initiate an intentional walk, how long a managerial challenge can last, and so on.

This new round of proposed changes is centered on a pitch clock and limiting the number of mound visits during a game. According to reports from the Associated Press and a memo obtained by Yahoo! Sports, the proposed changes could include a 20-second pitch clock for pitchers to get set and a limit of six mound visits per game that don't result in a pitching change, as well as only one mound visit per inning, regardless whether it's from a coach, catcher or infielder. The batter would also have to be in the box with at least five seconds remaining on the pitch clock.

Multiple offenses by the same player to the pitch clock would result in either a ball being called against the pitcher or a strike being called against the batter if he is not ready in time.

As for the mound visits, a second visit in the same inning — regardless if it's from a coach or player — would require a pitching change, as would the seventh non-change visit of the game.

The details of the proposal could be altered, but the thinking behind the initiatives is clear.

The players union rejected the most recent proposal, but MLB could unilaterally implement these changes for the 2018 season. Manfred has said he would prefer to have an agreement with the players. But MLB could still implement the changes without it after a year of negotiations.

Major League Baseball has experimented with a pitch clock in the minor leagues since 2015. To take it to the major-league level, though, would be a new wrinkle in the game.

Many are opposed to the idea — since, after all, baseball is the lone major team sport without a clock, which is part of its beauty — but it's entirely possible that this becomes another rule change that causes an uproar at first and then blends into the game. Many other significant rule alterations, such as recent changes regarding how a player can slide into a base or home plate, have already done just that.

Having a clock affecting play might feel unnatural, but baseball has evolved before, and this could just be another case.

The questions around the pitch clock primarily revolve around how it might affect a pitcher's thought process and timing. But it's unclear to what extent it might affect anything.

"In the grand scheme of things, you're trying to execute to get an out," Indians pitcher Josh Tomlin said. "It's tough to say you get a certain amount of time to go, 'I have to get [Mike] Trout out and I'm thinking about what I can do here, and I have to go.'"

"Instead of sitting back, thinking about it, taking deep breaths — there's so much emphasis on those big moments — to say you have a certain amount of time on it, I don't know if it's right or wrong. I really don't.

"We've never seen that in the game. Once it's implemented into the game, we'll see what happens. If it never gets that way, so be it. It's still baseball."

Indians starter Trevor Bauer said he's been involved in the proposals and the discussion, but wasn't yet in a position to offer a clear opinion one way or another.

"It'll be what it'll be," Bauer said. "And when we get to spring and [we'll be] working through trying to handle it in the best possible way so we don't affect the game. ... We're trying to work together with MLB and do something that's good for all of us."

Indians manager Terry Francona pointed out a possible hurdle with teams adjusting to a potential limit on mound visits. Especially with technology, it would hinder a pitcher's ability to work with his catcher to change signs or to make sure they're on the same page.

"The hardest thing for us is, with the technology in place, teams have a lot of your pitches," Francona said. "It's not that hard. When you have people who are smart sitting up there watching every pitch on TV, you're going to have everybody's signs. We don't want them to have them, so a lot of times the catcher has to go out there and make a quick trip to the mound. That's probably going to be the one that sets up more people than the other stuff."

Major League Baseball seems determined to lower the average game time below the three-hour mark. Perhaps putting a clock on a pitcher is one step too far, like putting a runner on second base in extra innings. Perhaps this won't affect much of anything at all or shave enough time off the game times to really matter.

But as Tomlin said, it's still baseball. Players will adjust, even if this pitch clock is implemented against many players' wishes. All sports evolve, which includes baseball trying to mold itself into something resembling a more consumer-friendly product to the average fan.

## **Jim Thome's first ballot Hall of Fame election puts him in elite company | Jeff Schudel**

By Jeff Schudel, The News-Herald & The Morning Journal

Being elected to the Baseball Hall of Fame on the first ballot, as former Indians slugger Jim Thome was on Jan. 24, needs some perspective to realize how great the accomplishment is.

Joe DiMaggio, the legendary Yankees' center fielder whose 56-game hitting streak is still a record, was elected to the Hall of Fame the fourth time he was on the ballot.

Former Dodgers pitcher Don Drysdale, with a lifetime record of 209-166 and a remarkable 2.95 ERA, was on the ballot nine times before finally gaining the required 75 percent of votes.

Harmon Killebrew, who played 22 seasons (exact number Thome played) with the Washington Senators, Minnesota Twins and Kansas City Royals, was elected the fourth time he was on the ballot.

Thome as a first ballot Hall of Famer is part of an elite group of 54 that includes Babe Ruth, Ted Williams, Bob Feller, Stan Musial, Mickey Mantle, Willie Mays, Hank Aaron, Jackie Robinson, Nolan Ryan, Ken Griffey, Jr. and Frank Robinson, to name a few.

Thome is expected to go into the Hall of Fame as an Indian, the team he played with for 13 seasons. He is undecided about whether he should be shown with the Chief Wahoo or the Block C cap for his plaque.

Thome hammered 612 home runs in an era in which players like Sammy Sosa, Mark McGwire and Manny Ramirez used performance-enhancing drugs to gain power. The PEDs tainted their accomplishments, and obviously the Hall of Fame voters noticed by boycotting the three on their ballots. Ramirez received 93 votes (22 percent). Sosa received an embarrassing 33 (7.8 percent) votes.

"I'm at a loss for words," Thome said at his home in Burr Ridge, Ill., during an interview conducted by Indians director of baseball information Bart Swain. "It's every kid's dream to play in the major leagues, but you never imagine a call like that.

"When Jack O'Connell (secretary/treasurer of the Baseball Writers' Association of America) said his name, and I knew it was from New York, the emotion and vibe was like no other. A call from the Hall of Fame is one of the most special things a player can receive. You don't do it alone. I'm so blessed to be in this situation. It's just incredible. Words can't describe what a guy feels when the Hall of Fame calls and says you're a first ballot Hall of Famer."

Thome played with the Indians from 1991 to 2002 and 22 games in 2011. He played three full seasons and part of another with the Phillies, plus three full seasons and part of another with the White Sox. He also played for the Twins, Dodgers and Orioles.

"Looking back, I've been so fortunate to have played in the major leagues for 22 seasons with great players, with great organizations that cared about baseball and truly wanted the best for their guys," Thome said. "I think I reaped the rewards of all those organizations that really cared about their players."

Thome talked about the honor of playing with the Indians in the 1990's and predicted Omar Vizquel, named on 37 percent of the ballots in his first year of eligibility, will be in the Hall of Fame some day soon.

"I love Omar," Thome said. "He stood out for me above everybody else because he could do so many things. He was a smart player, great defensive player and made himself into a tremendous hitter. Even more than what he did on the field, he electrified the clubhouse every day."

Thome thanked former Indians hitting coach and manager Charlie Manuel, who was also Thome's manager in Philadelphia. Thome also thanked his father, Chuck, who saw his son's first game and last game as a major leaguer.

## **Judge and Stanton bat back-to-back? Who cleans up in Boston? Answering baseball's five biggest lineup questions**

Buster Olney

When Joe Torre managed the Yankees, he sometimes liked to jot down possible batting orders on a piece of paper. His scribbling didn't necessarily have to be on a lineup card; it might be on a napkin or the back of an envelope or a notepad. Like a calculus student working through an equation, Torre just wanted to see what it looked like -- how it fit together in balance, in strengths and weaknesses.

Alex Cora and Aaron Boone have probably been going through the same exercise the past couple of months, as they prepare to take over as managers of the Red Sox and Yankees, respectively, and the same could be true for more experienced managers, as well, from Joe Maddon to Craig Counsell to Bruce Bochy.

Soon enough, they'll start filling out the lineup cards for real, now that the start of the exhibition season is about a month away. Batting orders change more than ever in this era, often shaped through the advice (or orders) of front offices, according to the matchups of the day, the strengths and weaknesses of the pitching, hot or cold streaks of those in the order, nagging injuries. Wednesday's well-considered, well-constructed lineup might be blown up by Thursday afternoon.

Here are some of the more interesting lineup quandaries throughout MLB.

### 1. Where does Boone place Aaron Judge and Giancarlo Stanton in the Yankees' lineup?

I wrote in the fall about the logic behind Judge hitting leadoff, because of his high on-base percentage and the fact he'd probably get an extra 20 plate appearances or so over the course of the season. But hitting him leadoff also means consigning him to about 20 percent of his plate appearances without a chance of somebody on base.

Judge and Stanton could bat back-to-back, 2 and 3 or 3 and 4, but that would create an opportunity for an opposing manager to deploy right-handers with good sliders -- which has been a challenge for Judge and Stanton in the past. So Boone might be more likely to place a left-handed hitter in between Judge and Stanton -- maybe Greg Bird, perhaps Didi Gregorius -- to extract a toll on any opponent who wants to keep a good right-hander in to face Judge and Stanton.

### 2. Who will hit second for the Giants?

In a division in which San Francisco faces left-handers Clayton Kershaw, Robbie Ray, Alex Wood, Rich Hill, Patrick Corbin and others, the Giants have sometimes had to battle with a left-handed-heavy lineup. The addition of right-handed hitters Evan Longoria, Andrew McCutchen and Austin Jackson changes that -- and the alterations will be in play on Opening Day, when San Francisco faces Kershaw.

Now Bochy must decide how he will align them. McCutchen will hit near the top of the order, of course, and given Buster Posey's lack of speed, it figures McCutchen could hit third and Posey fourth. Jackson might be the leadoff hitter against lefties.

Bochy figures to want a left-handed hitter to break up that group of right-handed hitters. Because he has always viewed Brandon Crawford as more of a run-producer, Crawford might hit fifth or sixth. That leaves either Joe Panik or Brandon Belt to bat second, and both are good hitters with solid OBP.

It might simply come down to who happens to be swinging well -- if Panik is, he could bat second, with Belt hitting seventh, or vice versa.

### 3. Where does Mike Trout bat in the Angels' lineup?

The Angels greatly improved the overall depth of their lineup with the addition of second baseman Ian Kinsler and third baseman Zack Cozart, as well as Justin Upton. Kinsler has hit leadoff for a lot of his career and could fill that role for Anaheim.

After the arrival of Upton last season, Scioscia used Trout in the No. 2 hole, with Upton behind him, presenting a power threat to opposing pitchers. What that'll mean, of course, is the Angels will start with a string of right-handed hitters, so Scioscia could use the left-handed hitting Kole Calhoun in the cleanup spot, with Cozart, Pujols and maybe lefty Shohei Ohtani in some arrangement.

But Trout could be at No. 2, which more and more seems to be where a lot of teams are placing potent lineup weapons -- as opposed to the prehistoric use of the spot for a guy adept at bunting.

### 4. Who will bat cleanup for the Red Sox?

Three spots seem set for Boston. Mookie Betts has established himself as the bona fide leadoff man, where his ability to get on base and speed can be put to use. The left-handed hitting Andrew Benintendi will follow the right-handed-hitting Betts. If the Red Sox sign J.D. Martinez - which is what some rival executives expect, given the limited big-money interest in Martinez in this winter's market -- then he likely would hit third.

After that, Cora could go with the player swinging the best in the moment, whether it's Hanley Ramirez, talented third baseman Rafael Devers, or maybe even Dustin Pedroia after he comes back from his knee surgery.

### 5. Who hits leadoff for the Cubs?

As the Talking Heads said: Same as it ever was. Last year, Maddon used more than half a dozen hitters in the leadoff spot over the course of the season, opening the year with Kyle Schwarber and following with everyone from Jon Jay to Ben Zobrist to -- memorably -- Anthony Rizzo, who batted .300 in 14 games in the No. 1 spot. The Cubs' leadoff hitters were mediocre, flatly: They tied for 16th in the majors in runs and were 18th in OBP, at .324.

It appears Maddon is set at 2-3-4, with the right-handed-hitting Bryant, the left-handed-hitting Rizzo, and the right-handed-hitting Willson Contreras. The Cubs played their best last season when those three were rolling together in August.

This leaves the same cast of options from which Maddon will choose a leadoff hitter: Schwarber, who has devoted himself to losing weight this offseason and demonstrating that he can be a viable left fielder; Jason Heyward, who had a .326 on-base percentage last year; infielders Javier Baez or Addison Russell; or the center fielder du jour, whether that's Albert Almora Jr. or Ian Happ -- or maybe Zobrist, if he recovers from a tough 2017.

It seems inevitable Maddon will again consider Schwarber, because of his ability to take a walk. But he'll have to hit a little more to make that happen, and early on in the season, Maddon might prefer to protect Schwarber from the pressure of the leadoff spot and give him a chance for some sustained early success.

Long winter, long-term ramifications?

There is a thick groundswell of conversation taking place among players about the disastrous free-agent market and how it came to be, with some veterans beginning to discuss the adjustments that need to be made before the players' association prepares for the next round of collective bargaining talks. How that manifests itself in the days and weeks ahead remains to be seen, but some agents and players believe the annual union meetings this spring could be telling.

A few broad lines and suggestions heard on the players' side:

1. Some agents believe there was not a proper adjustment to the growing number of teams choosing to bypass the winter market and -- fill in the blank for yourself -- tank or rebuild. Jerry Dipoto, the general manager of the Mariners, offered words the other day that perfectly described the current state of this offseason when he said, "You could argue you're going to compete with more clubs to get the first pick in the draft than you would to win the World Series."

MLB offseason

Some folks on management side believe there could be anywhere from eight to 12 teams positioning themselves for the top of the draft in 2019, including the salary-dumping Miami Marlins, and simply declining to spend money on possible improvements. Incredibly, the Marlins have only \$137 million in commitments moving forward -- or less than what the Diamondbacks owe Zack Greinke. It is through tanking/rebuilding that tens of millions of dollars that might theoretically be available are not being spent on veteran talent.

In the past, the union has been resistant about a system that forces teams to reach a minimum floor of spending, because the only way that might happen could be through a hard cap.

But agents already are spitballing in earnest about how to deal with the issue of tanking.

2. In the next round of negotiations, it would make sense for union leadership to use a larger group of agents as a sounding board or focus group to draw on their experience about what might work or what might not work. They should provide the boots-on-the-ground perspective for the union, because they talk to teams constantly, they talk to general managers, they have a sense of what's needed. Within hours after the conclusion of the last CBA talks, some agents who felt shut out of the process precisely forecast the cold free-agent conditions we saw last winter and that we are seeing again this winter -- the lower-than-expected luxury-tax levels serving as a hard cap, the huge volume of free agents working against the veteran players, etc.

3. The players' association might consider constructing a sturdy analytics department, to better match what the union now faces on the team side -- increasingly functional, highly efficient front offices.

Like the Congressional Budget Office, a beefed-up analytics group could serve to better anticipate market trends, such as a movement at a particular position or the expectations for a class of free agents (which is guaranteed to be large again next year because of the enormous number of veterans who will have to settle for one-year contracts before the start of the 2018 season).

A lot of agents do their own statistical work, but individual players and agents alike could draw on a union analytics group that evaluates the market. If a competing agent working to lure a player from a competitor promised a big salary, there would be an independent group the player could pull from to check the reality of the math.

In 1994-95, a common refrain heard around the union-MLB talks was that the union always won because it had the best lawyers. These days, there are longtime agents privately advocating for greater firepower on their side through analysis or negotiating advice.

• Next weekend, J.D. Martinez's agent, Scott Boras, is scheduled to be in Boston for an event, so it'll be interesting to see whether Boras and the Red Sox meet about the slugger. Earlier this winter, industry sources indicate, Boston's first offer to Martinez was \$100 million over five years. Arizona also has some degree of interest in bringing back the basher. ... The Indians haven't spent much money this winter, but they are hopeful about what free-agent signing Melvin Upton Jr. might provide. He'll probably get an opportunity early in the season, when Michael Brantley and Brandon Guyer will still be working their way back from injury. ... On the podcast the other day, Tim Kurkjian discussed the Hall of Fame voting -- stories about Chipper Jones, Jim Thome, Vladimir Guerrero and Trevor Hoffman -- and the addition of Alex Rodriguez to the Sunday Night Baseball booth; Jesse Rogers talked about the Cubs and the free agency of Jake Arrieta; and a long goodbye to old friend Mark Simon. ... Also: Past podcast conversations with Chipper Jones and Thome.

**Nick Cafardo / SUNDAY BASEBALL NOTES - There's a logjam in free agency, and Rich Hill says players are concerned**

By Nick Cafardo

The best seat for Super Bowl LII needs a "Season Ticket"

The free agent logjam may have been broken Thursday by the aggressive Brewers, who signed outfielder Lorenzo Cain to a five-year, \$80 million deal on the same day they acquired outfielder Christian Yelich from the Marlins.

The only major positional free agent who had signed prior to Cain was Jay Bruce, who took a three-year deal for \$38 million with the Mets. Some believe it's far less than what Bruce should have received.

A few relievers have signed, but mostly in the two- and three-year range.

Cain represented the most "normal" deal of the offseason.

Dodgers lefthander Rich Hill is one of many players concerned about the logjam in free agency. Hill has been going through his normal workouts in preparation for the season.

"How the free agent market has been going has been disconcerting this offseason and a lot of players are concerned about it," Hill said. "That's one thing I'm upset about and I know a lot of guys feel that way. The representation hasn't been that great. I just feel baseball, especially values of the teams are extremely high. The equity in the players is going down. Players just want what's fair."

Hill's right that Major League Baseball has gone from a \$7 billion industry to \$12 billion over the last decade.

"I consider myself very fortunate with the contract I signed (three years, \$48 million) . . . but now it's something that doesn't seem very fair what's going on and we're only 2½ weeks from spring training and there are 110 free agents out there. It's really bad," Hill said.

Hill said that MLB's pace of play discussion is "like a decoy to mask what's going on with the free agent market." Most players, including Hill, are against a 20-second pitch clock.

"There's a huge major issue looming," Hill said. "Who knows what's going to happen? You have a guy like Logan Morrison out there who hit 38 homers. You've got great pitchers like Jake Arrieta and Yu Darvish out there and there's been no movement on any of these guys.

"That's something that needs to be addressed. You work so hard to get to free agency. You go through the ups and downs in the minors. You get there and, sorry, it's not what you thought it was. It's very concerning for a lot of guys.

"As we get close to spring training — we talk about the hot stove — this is going to be an inferno when spring training kicks off."

"There's a million excuses out there," he added. "When we get to spring training, will everybody panic and sign? If you were supposed to receive a three- or a five-year deal, will you just sign a one-year deal? If that happens, I don't know what the word is, but it's disgusting to do that."

Hill also sees where managers and coaches are put into a bind as they try to get their teams together.

"If the company has a good year and makes triple what they made the year before and the workers are doing their job well, you should pay them accordingly," Hill said.

Hill also said the luxury tax penalties hurt players, giving teams a reason not to offer fair market contracts even though franchise values are so high.

Each team received about \$33 million last year when the Disney Company purchased a streaming media technology created by MLB. And the new corporate tax structure (down to 21 percent) will benefit teams as well.

Hill wonders how many free agents will remain without jobs when spring training ends.

"There comes a time when your skills diminish and I understand that, but with 2½ weeks to go [until camps open], how many of those players won't get signed? Last year's [free agency] was bad, but this year was worse. It's continuously going in the wrong direction for players.

"You put in all that time and effort to get to that point in your career. It takes a long time to get there. If you prove yourself as a valuable asset, you should reap the benefits of that. They're grading out players differently now, and I understand the metrics of the game and I've benefited from them. But guys are good because they're good. They can play at the highest level."

Most of the big moves this offseason have come via trades. And the payroll-slashing Marlins have driven that market, sending Giancarlo Stanton to the Yankees, Marcell Ozuna to the Cardinals, Yelich to the Brewers, and Dee Gordon to the Mariners. They're also likely to deal righty Dan Straily before spring training.

Hill is watching things closely. He feels his Dodgers, who lost to the Astros in the World Series, will be right there again and hopefully win it this time.

The Dodgers have been pretty quiet this offseason. They sold off Adrian Gonzalez, Scott Kazmir, and Brandon McCarthy to the Braves and got Matt Kemp back. They also signed reliever Tom Koehler.

#### SYMPATHY FOR JETER

Glavine would've done the same

Tom Glavine, whose ownership group lost to Derek Jeter's in the bidding to buy the Marlins, had this advice for Jeter: "For the short term, just put on your earmuffs and execute your plan if it's a plan that you truly believe in."

Glavine added, "In the long term, I think Derek will be fine. He comes from a winning organization and I'm sure he's picked up some things from that experience."

Glavine said that if his group had purchased the Marlins, he probably wouldn't have done anything differently than Jeter's group other than improve the bad public relations during this transitional offseason.

"You don't go into the business to perennially lose money," Glavine said. "Depending who you talk to, they were losing a lot of money on a yearly basis. The only way to get that under control is to get your payroll under control, and everyone knew what that meant even though it's an unpopular stance to have to take. We were of the same mind-set as to the moves that had to be made to get payroll under control."

He added, "I think you can certainly question how they have handled it. I don't think they've done themselves any favors from a PR standpoint, but in terms of business moves, I don't know we would have done a whole lot different. We certainly targeted many of the same things. Obviously one contract stands out [Giancarlo Stanton's], so I don't think that would have been any different."

Glavine said his group, which at one time included Tagg Romney, was in it until the "11th hour. We ended up having a really good chance of getting it. We just had one investor kind of change what he wanted to do and that was the nail in the coffin for us and Major League Baseball moved on.

"We had everything ready to go where it needed to be. We actually may have been the front-runner, but once the structure changed internally it changed things from MLB. If it had happened sooner, we could have rectified it. Major League Baseball was ready to move. I don't blame them for acting on it."

Glavine said he devoted two years to the process of gathering investors and changing up his group. While disappointed, he said he would do it all again in pursuit of another major league team.

Glavine remains active with the Braves as a broadcaster and spring training instructor, and one of his sons is a pitcher at Auburn University.

Glavine said the Braves should rebound from their international signing scandal, which cost then-general manager John Coppolella a lifetime ban by MLB. Glavine expects new GM Alex Anthopoulos to turn things around.

"Certainly everything they went through is a black eye," Glavine said. "They lost money and prospects in the mix. In terms of what they're doing at the big league level, they have good, young talent and one of the best, if not the best, minor league systems in baseball. They can develop those guys and get them in the big leagues or use them for more established major league talent in trades.

"They're a ways away from being a contender in the NL East, but they're moving in that direction."

Glavine was also thrilled to see Chipper Jones join the growing Braves family in the Baseball Hall of Fame. Jones, Glavine, Greg Maddux, John Smoltz, Bobby Cox, and John Schuerholz now represent the Braves dynasty from the 1990s to early 2000s in Cooperstown.

Apropos of nothing

1. The Brewers have certainly addressed their offensive needs by adding Christian Yelich and Lorenzo Cain. There was a little surprise around baseball that Milwaukee invested so much in another hitter when it needs starting pitching help. Will the Brewers pay up for Yu Darvish, Jake Arrieta, or even Alex Cobb? Owner Mark Attanasio has already come too far to not go for it and try to compete with the Cubs and Cardinals in the NL Central.

2. Doug Gladstone and Rod Nelson have done tremendous work in exposing the injustice of MLB players who played prior to 1980 and didn't accrue 43 service days to qualify for a pension. In their research, Gladstone and Nelson found 215 former players do not receive any pension from MLB under those circumstances, 649 players are receiving an annual payment through the agreement by the union in April 2011, and 146 players who were receiving a payment are now deceased. Players who accrued at least 43 service days after 1980 are currently guaranteed a pension of \$34,000. The maximum pension is \$220,000. However, the pension can't be passed on to a beneficiary when the player dies.

3. The Giants and Yankees are at a point where they have to move money in order to add to their rosters. The Giants, who have already traded for Andrew McCutchen and Evan Longoria, still need a center fielder (recently signed Austin Jackson is viewed more as a fourth outfielder). The Yankees would like to add a starting pitcher but would need to move a contract to do so, preferably Jacoby Ellsbury, which will be a challenge for GM Brian Cashman. Cashman has Chance Adams and Justus Sheffield in the minors as viable options to fill out the rotation if needed.

4. Do the Marlins deal catcher J.T. Realmuto or do they build around him? Realmuto could bring back pitching prospects, which the Marlins desperately need. The Marlins' other decision is on starter Dan Straily. He's going to an arbitration hearing but is still affordable. Straily won't bring back a top pitching prospect, so the feeling is the Marlins may be better off keeping him. The Marlins are going to need a few veteran players to fill positions. It'll be interesting to see who falls to them on one-year deals with the promise they could be flipped at the trade deadline.

5. We're waiting for the next splash to be made by Theo Epstein and the Cubs and it will likely come in the form of a front-line starter — either signing Darvish or re-signing Arrieta. Cobb could be another option given his relationship with Joe Maddon in Tampa Bay.

6. GM Dan Duquette reports that inquiries on Manny Machado have pretty much stopped and it appears Machado will be with the Orioles this season, at least until the trade deadline. Duquette, in search of pitching, indicated he's not close to acquiring it entering the weekend.

7. Domingo Santana and Keon Broxton are now being shopped by the Brewers after they picked up Yelich and Cain, but can either outfielder bring an impact pitcher in return? The feeling is probably not, unless Milwaukee puts together a package. That leaves the Brewers likely having to sign a pitcher.

Extra innings

From the Bill Chuck files — "In 2016, the Red Sox had the second-fewest zero home-run games with 36 (13-23 record). In 2017, the Red Sox led the AL in games in which they did not homer (57) and went 24-33 in those games. In 2015, the Sox had 58 homerless games (19-39), the same number they had in 2012." . . . Also, "Last season, J.D. Martinez and Mookie Betts each had at least one extra-base hit in 56 games. Martinez had 74 XBH and Betts had 72." . . . Happy birthday, Phil Seibel (39) and Lyle Overbay (41).

Boston Globe LOADED: 01.28.2018