

Marshall defining determination at Tribe camp

Veteran eyes bullpen job, 2 1/2 years removed from nearly tragic injury

By Jack Magruder Special to MLB.com

GLENDALE, Ariz. -- The five-inch scar that runs down the right side of Evan Marshall's scalp is an unavoidable reminder that anything can happen -- and that anything can be overcome. Marshall still tools around in his Dodge Challenger Hellcat muscle car, although it is parked back home in Wichita, Kan. Wife Allie and dog Butters remain his rocks and his foundation.

And he still throws 94 mph despite a career that was briefly stalled after he was struck in the head by a line drive on Aug. 4, 2015, while pitching in a Triple-A game for Arizona's Reno affiliate.

It could have been a tragic detour. The ball, traveling 105 mph, struck Marshall in the right temple. He suffered a fractured skull, and 90 minutes later he underwent emergency surgery to relieve swelling and bleeding of the brain.

Marshall made such progress that he was back in the Majors with Arizona in 2016 and with Seattle last season. He occasionally is asked to take part in programs put on by the Barrow Neurological Institute in Phoenix, which supervised his outpatient therapy. Barrow uses Marshall as a model of complete recovery.

A National League West scout contacted Cleveland manager Terry Francona after Marshall signed with the Indians over the winter.

"He said, 'That's my pick to click,'" Francona said. "He said, 'His ball, there's a lot to like.'"

Spring Training: [Info](#) | [Tickets](#) | [Schedule](#) | [Gear](#)

Marshall, who relies on a sinking fastball that moves, really liked what he saw from the Indians while he was deciding where to go in free agency, and the organization has only become more attractive during his time in camp.

"You look around, you see [Corey] Kluber, you see [Carlos] Carrasco. Obviously I knew [Trevor] Bauer," said Marshall, who was drafted in the fourth round by the D-backs in 2011, the same year they took Bauer third overall.

"There are some big names in here, and you see how hard they work," Marshall said. "Everything behind the scenes, you understand why they are as successful as they are. They earn every inch that they get."

A non-roster invitee on a team that has a reputation of giving everyone in camp a fair shake, Marshall is vying for a place in a strong Cleveland bullpen that appears to have a least one job open after the offseason losses of setup men Bryan Shaw and Joe Smith.

"This is a really great team, and they lost some assets in free agency," said the 27-year-old Marshall.

"So there's an opportunity where they have a couple of holes that they are going to ask guys in-house to step up to try to take, or look for it elsewhere. I would like to try to be that elsewhere."

Marshall, a right-hander, has given up a run in two appearances this spring. He pitched a scoreless inning and was credited with the victory in Thursday's 8-7 win over the Dodgers.

"Very good," Francona said of that outing. "The first couple, guys are getting their legs under them. The ball came out very, very well. I think we were all pleased. Velocity, movement. A couple of good breaking balls"

Marshall was a bullpen mainstay as a rookie in 2014, when he was 4-4 with a 2.74 ERA in 57 appearances with the D-backs after being recalled early in the season. He recorded the victory in his first Major League appearance and had holds in his next two outings while developing into a primary setup man.

A Spring Training injury set him back in '15, and he spent much of that season in Reno before the injury.

The fact that Marshall is back on the mound is testament to not only the treatment he received, but also his will to return.

"It was a severe brain injury," Dr. Christina Kwasnica, the medical director of rehabilitation at Barrow, said three weeks after Marshall was struck.

"It was a hit right in the wrong part of the skull, where the skull is thin. Right below there is an artery, and so he had immediate bleeding. And even with the fastest medical care you could get, he was very close to having a very bad outcome for this."

Napoli to return as Indians DH today

By Jack Magruder Special to MLB.com

GLENDALE, Ariz. -- Mike Napoli will DH against the Brewers today in his first Cactus League appearance since rejoining the Indians earlier this week.

Against the backdrop of a slow free-agent market, the veteran slugger was invited to Major League camp on a Minor League deal. Even though Cleveland appears set at first base and DH with Edwin Encarnacion and Yonder Alonso, Napoli has the opportunity to stay game-ready until an opportunity presents itself. Whether that opportunity is with the Tribe or another club, he will always be grateful for the Indians' generosity this spring.

It speaks to the bond that developed between Napoli and the Indians in his one season in Cleveland, when he had career-highs with 34 homers and 101 RBIs for the 2016 team that reached the World Series.

"We all understand what is going on," Napoli said. "For them to give me an opportunity, I'm very grateful for it. Hopefully I'll be able to be picked up or leave with this team. This came up, and I wanted to take full advantage."

Napoli, who had 267 career homers, spent time with a host of other unsigned free agents in the IMG workout camp earlier this spring, but there is no substitute for game situations and game reps.

"To be able to come here and get into some baseball shape and be able to get on the field, I'm excited about it," he said. "It's run really well around here. It's a fun place to be, especially going through the days of Spring Training when things get long and you start champing at the bit to get going. It's a great group of guys. I feel good. I'm just going to embrace everything."

Bench coach Brad Mills applauded the organization for bringing in Napoli.

"It's a quality organization, and they care about people," Mills said. "It will be fun to see him get some swings in."

Right-hander Josh Tomlin, firmly ensconced in the starting rotation while Danny Salazar works his way back from a shoulder setback, scuffled against a mostly "B" lineup in a 13-4 loss to the Giants on Saturday.

Tomlin struck out four, but he gave up five runs on six hits in two innings while throwing 44 pitches. Two ground balls found holes for singles, and he also gave up a long double to former teammate Austin Jackson and a two-run homer to Gorkys Hernandez in a four-run second inning.

"He kept the ball down really well," said Mills, who managed the game in place of an ill Terry Francona.

"Some of the other pitches got too much of the plate. The thing with Josh that is so great, no matter what happens, he still goes with his game plan to get to that command. Once he can get that, we'll have the Josh Tomlin we've seen.

"That's one of the reasons he needs to get out there as many times as he can-- to throw the pitches and get that command."

Position battles

Giovanny Urshela played second base and hit his first homer of the spring Saturday. He is competing for a spot on a bench that will likely have only three position players, including one catcher, as Cleveland is expected to open the season with 13 pitchers.

Urshela, who has played mostly third base in his two Major League seasons, is 8-for-15 with two doubles and four RBIs in six games. With Jose Ramirez able to play second and third, there would be a fit.

Erik Gonzalez, another candidate for a reserve spot, is 3-for-9 in four games.

Injury update

- Francona and second baseman Jason Kipnis were away from camp with the same flu-like symptoms that kept away Andrew Miller for a few days. Several Cactus League clubs have been afflicted by the bug. The Dodgers sent 25 players and staff home Thursday because of the flu.

- Outfielder Brandon Guyer (wrist) was able to hit off a tee for the second day in a row on Saturday, a spring first.

Up next

Right-hander Corey Kluber is scheduled to start against Milwaukee at Maryvale Baseball Park at 3:05 p.m. ET on Sunday in a matchup available on Gameday Audio. Kluber is expected to go three innings after giving up a run in two innings in his Cactus League debut.

Cleveland Indians' bats go cold in 13-4 spring training loss to San Francisco

By Joe Noga,

CLEVELAND, Ohio -- It certainly wasn't the longest winning streak in recent memory for the Cleveland Indians, but a modest five-game Cactus League victory binge died quietly Saturday at the hands of the San Francisco Giants.

San Francisco's offense collected 19 hits, including five home runs in a 13-4 rout of Cleveland at Goodyear Ballpark.

The Indians, who won an American League record 22 straight games from Aug. 24 to Sept. 14, saw their spring training record drop to 6-3-1 while the Giants improved to 3-5-1 in exhibition play.

San Francisco's hit parade kicked off early when ex-Indians outfielder Austin Jackson led off the game with a base hit against Tribe starter Josh Tomlin.

Jackson, who signed in the offseason with the Giants after hitting .318 in 85 games for Cleveland last year, came around to score on a base hit by Mac Williamson that put San Francisco in front, 1-0.

Tomlin, making his second spring start, allowed five earned runs in two innings of work. He gave up six hits, including a two-run home run in the top of the second inning to Giants right fielder Gorkys Hernandez that put San Francisco ahead 5-0.

Cleveland scored single runs in the third and fourth innings on a solo home run by Giovanni Urshela and a sacrifice fly by Rob Refsnyder.

Edwin Encarnacion belted a two-run home run in the sixth to draw the Indians within a run at 5-4. Encarnacion, who hit 38 home runs and drove in 101 last season, hit his first of the spring off San Francisco's Reyes Moronta on a 2-0 pitch.

Dan Otero and Matt Belisle each worked a scoreless inning of relief for the Indians while Cameron Hill pitched two scoreless with a pair of strikeouts.

The Giants scored three times in the top of the seventh inning and added five more in the ninth. Williamson finished 3-for-4 with a two-run home run in the seventh inning, and ex-Indians outfielder Jerry Sands blasted a two-run shot in the top of the ninth inning.

Dylan Davis added a run for San Francisco with a solo home run off Cleveland's Louis Head.

Cleveland's offense, which averaged 14 hits per game during the five-game winning streak that started Tuesday against Oakland, managed just three hits against the Giants. The Tribe's defense also struggled, committing four errors, including an errant pickoff attempt by Tomlin in the first inning.

The Indians were without manager Terry Francona and second baseman Jason Kipnis, who were fighting a nasty flu bug that has been making its way around camp.

Next: The Indians travel to Maryvale Baseball Park in Phoenix to face the Milwaukee Brewers. Corey Kluber is scheduled to start for Cleveland, with Zach McAllister and Tyler Olson also slated to appear. Slugger Mike Napoli is also expected to make his spring training debut at DH. Right-hander Jhoulys Chacin gets the start for the Brewers.

Cleveland Plain Dealer LOADED: 03.04.2018

Jose Ramirez, celebrity or not, has his flow going strong for the Cleveland Indians

By Paul Hoynes,

CLEVELAND, Ohio - Jose Ramirez says he doesn't know if he's a celebrity or not.

"Ask the fans in the Dominican about that. Or ask the fans up here," Ramirez said through an interpreter at the Indians' spring-training site in Goodyear, Ariz. "I don't know."

But when he went home to the Dominican Republic after last season, he couldn't go anywhere in his hometown of Bani without crowds of children following him.

"It's always like that," said Ramirez. "When I go back home the kids go crazy when they see me."

Now for the real question, do any of them walk like Ramirez? Before anyone knew what kind of player Ramirez would be, they knew about his walk. The 5-9 Ramirez walked into the Indians clubhouse in 2013 like he'd been there for 10 years. Head up, chin and chest out, he was the epitome of no fear and no worries.

So have his young fans copied his walk?

Ramirez shook his head and said, "Yeah, they've got their flow going."

Flow, to Ramirez, can mean a person's walk or the color of their hair. Ramirez, who has spent most of his time with the Indians with blond or orange hair, has been outdone this spring by his locker mate Francisco Lindor. Not only did Lindor get a buzz haircut, he dyed what was left platinum blond.

Francisco Lindor only going blonde in spring, has other hairstyles in mind for Cleveland Indians

Ramirez is planning a counterattack.

"Frankie doesn't have as much flow as I have," said Ramirez. "When the season starts, I'm going to have pink hair."

Ramirez, no matter what his hair color, has been a revelation. The switch-hitter hit .318 (186-for-585) with 56 doubles, 29 homers and 83 RBI last season. He posted a slash line of .318/.374/.583 and an OPS of .957.

His accomplishments included being the AL's starting third baseman in the All-Star Game and finishing third in the AL MVP race. He tied NL MVP Giancarlo Stanton with 91 extra base hits. The 56 doubles, by the way, were tied for the AL lead.

"He has become one of the best players in the game," said manager Terry Francona.

When a reporter was going through Ramirez's accomplishments from 2017, it was mentioned that he won the Silver Slugger award for AL third basemen.

"I won a Silver Slugger?" said Ramirez in mock surprise. And he said it in English, thanks to his work with team interpreter Anna Bolton.

Ramirez is the AL Player of the Week

An MLB.com video taken this winter shows Ramirez returning to the field that he practiced on when he was growing up in Bani. He tossed rolled up fruit boxes to kids, who hit them with broom handles. Then he helped other youngsters with fielding drills.

"I think it's a great example for them," said Ramirez. "I played on this exact same field. There coaches can say 'there's Jose Ramirez. He used to play here.' It's a great example for those kids."

Danny Salazar tells a story about how Ramirez, before he signed with the Indians at 16, played in a league in the Dominican against much older players. Some had played in Class AA, others were trying to get signed by teams.

Fans would bet on the games. If a player hit a home run, sometimes there would be money on home plate waiting for him.

"That's why he's so good," said Salazar.

Ramirez was indeed good in 2016, hitting .312 (176-for-565) with 46 doubles, 11 homers and 76 RBI. He bounced between left field, third base and second base. He scored 84 runs and stole 22 bases in 29 attempts.

Then he followed it with an even better season in 2017. Like Lindor, he has set a hard course for himself. Even a good season might not compare to the last two.

"I don't worry about pressure," said Ramirez. "I don't believe in pressure. I just go out and do my work and whatever happens, happens."

Over the winter there was talk about Ramirez playing second base if the Indians traded Jason Kipnis. Last season he made 86 starts at third and 65 at second because Kipnis made three trips to the disabled list.

The Indians did not trade Kipnis, who is scheduled to start at second base. Ramirez, however, did not stress about where he would play this season.

"I have my same routine," he said. "Training at the gym. Training at the beach, where I run in the sand. I take ground balls and work on my swing. I prepare the same way no matter what.

"In reality, I don't worry about where I'm going to play. I'd play catcher. It doesn't matter. I just want to keep playing and keep doing the hard work and keep giving my very best."

Cleveland Plain Dealer LOADED: 03.04.2018

Would the Cleveland Indians be 'shaking in their boots' if they signed Jose Bautista? Hey, Hoynsie

By Paul Hoynes, cleveland.com phoynes@cleveland.com

Hey, Hoynsie: Since we have some clarity in the Mike Napoli signing, it got me thinking about another right-hander power bat from the 2016 postseason. What about Jose Bautista? Is there concern with his locker-room presence or Ryan Merritt's shoe collection that would keep the Tribe from signing him to a minor-league deal? - Eric Vittardi, Broadview Heights.

Hey, Eric: I think the Indians have enough veteran right-handed hitting outfielders in camp. Not sure how much shoe shaking would be going on in the Tribe locker room if Bautista was signed, but Edwin Encarnacion would probably be able to smooth things out.

The Indians did talk to Bautista after the 2016 season, but I don't think there was much of a connection this winter.

Indians' Ryan Merritt responds to Jose Bautista 'shaking in boots' comment

Hey, Hoynsie: The Indians were among the pioneers of locking up young players to long-term contracts before they were eligible for arbitration. But if players can't get big deals when they finally reach free agency around the age of 30 - like we're seeing this winter - do you think agents will rethink the wisdom of making those multiyear deals early in a player's career? - Dean McLean, Northfield Center.

Hey, Dean: I think we've already seen that with players such as Francisco Lindor, Bryce Harper and Manny Machado turning down extension offers. Still, every player is different. Do you think Jose Ramirez regrets signing his five-year, \$26 million extension last year?

Great players are always going to get paid. Even in a market like this. But what's wrong with taking the money early, if you're not sure you're going to get it late?

Hey, Hoynsie: Has the Tribe shown any interest in Jose Bautista, Carlos Gonzalez or Greg Holland? At this point of the offseason, it seems like the Indians could get a good deal on a short-term contract. -- Jake Maier, Parma.

Hey, Jake: You're right, it's a buyer's market. But from what I've been told, the Indians' free agent credit card is maxed out. The only way they could jump back into the market would be to trade a player already on their roster.

Hey, Hoynsie: Against lefties this year, are the Indians planning on using Yonder Alonso as the primary first baseman or are they going to use Edwin Encarnacion at first? I saw that last year Alonso started only 27 games at first against lefties and Edwin started 23 games at first for the Indians. - Jimmy Vanek, Kirtland.

Hey, Jimmy: Manager Terry Francona has said Alonso is going to play a lot of first base this season. I take that to mean he'll play against his fair share of left-handers. He also said Encarnacion will move over to first against some lefties. I think it will be the same kind of arrangement that Francona used in 2016 with Mike Napoli and Carlos Santana and in 2017 with Encarnacion and Santana.

Yonder Alonso crushes a solo home run first as an indian

Hey, Hoynsie: I like Mike Napoli as much as the next guy, but can you explain the fit here? - Eric Vittardi, Broadview Heights.

Hey, Eric: The fit is that there is no fit. The Indians are doing Napoli a favor.

They brought him into camp so he can get ready for the season and sign with another team because they don't have a spot for him. That's what Francona is saying and I think you've got to take it at face value.

Unless there is an injury in camp between now and opening day, Napoli will not be playing for the Indians come opening day.

Hey, Hoynsie: I think the idea that if a team is losing in the ninth inning it can insert whatever part of the lineup it wants - is interesting. The more I think about it, the more it makes sense. The defense could put in their best relief pitcher. The idea should be talked about. It's food for thought. - Mary McLaughlan.

Hey, Mary: I can see why this would be attractive, but can I be honest with you? I hate this idea. I might be able to live with a rule that would allow a team to put a runner on second base in extra innings, but this idea - at least to me - takes the whole concept of roster building and throws it out the window.

What's Bill Selby famous for in Cleveland? Hitting a walk-off, grand slam off Mariano Rivera in the ninth inning. If there was ever a David vs. Goliath moment, that was it.

A rule like this would mean there would be no more Billy Selby moments. No more unexpected, out-of-nowhere finishes. One more thing - how many closers would be headed for Tommy John surgery at the All-Star break with such a rule?

Hey, Hoynsie: Now that Chief Wahoo will not be on the Indians' uniforms after the current season, what is the chance that the organization uses the script I on uniforms and merchandise? I think the script I captures the identity of the Cleveland Indians. - Greg Hudson, Medina.

Hey, Greg: I'm sure the Indians will come up with a new logo for 2019. I was not a fan of the script I. To me it looked like a script J.

Hey, Hoynsie: OK, it's time for you to do some serious research. Please tell us how President Trump's Tax Cuts and Jobs Act could potentially impact MLB trades and what MLB is doing to address the situations? - AZCardman, Gilbert, Ariz.

Hey, AZCardman: You're kidding, right? All I can say is "Witch Hunt" and "There is no collusion."

Hey, Hoynsie: Please explain what the Indians' philosophy was concerning Jay Bruce? He signed a three-year deal for \$13 million a year with the Mets, but the Indians signed Lonnie Chisenhall for \$10 million and Michael Brantley for \$12 million. Both these players have been injury prone and Bruce could have protected Edwin Encarnacion in the lineup. - Steve Dimonski, Medina.

Hey, Steve: I don't think the Indians were ever serious about bringing Bruce back even though he played well for them. What made Chisenhall and Brantley attractive, beside their talent, was they were one-year investments.

One more thing, Chisenhall is going to make \$5.875 million this year, not \$10 million.

Jay Bruce 2-Run Homerun vs Yankees | Indians vs Yankees Game 1 ALDS

Hey, Hoynsie: I have been following Richie Shaffer ever since the Tribe signed him. He seems like he has a lot of power and is ready for the big leagues. Does he have a realistic shot at making the team out of spring training or will he be sent back to Class AAA? - Bob Price, Erie, Pa.

Hey, Bob: Shaffer is certainly making a good impression early in camp. He has a ton of power and can play a couple of different positions. But unless something unexpected happens, I can't see him making the big league club out of spring training.

Indians could be rewarded for being patient with Brantley | Jeff Schudel

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

The Indians went into training camp determined to be patient with Michael Brantley as he rehabs from ankle surgery and they are maintaining that program.

The 30-year-old left fielder was injured on Aug. 8. He had surgery soon after the season ended.

Brantley has begun moving laterally to mimic defensive movements, manager Terry Francona told reporters at spring training in Goodyear, Ariz. Earlier in camp, he was working on straight ahead running and decelerating as he ran.

Brantley wants to play in the season opener March 29 in Seattle, but the Indians would rather wait if he isn't 100 percent by then. Brantley could start the season on the disabled list for the second straight year. The Indians were cautious with his shoulder rehab in spring training last year. That strategy was prudent. He made the All-Star team and was hitting .299 when the ankle injury ended his season. He played in 90 games in 2017.

Nick Cafardo / SUNDAY BASEBALL NOTES - Baseball union's revenue-sharing grievance will likely hit a dead end

By Nick Cafardo

The bad feelings between the Players Association and Major League Baseball continued this past week when the union filed a grievance against four teams it feels aren't spending their revenue-sharing money properly, or at all. Does the union have a point? Does it have a chance of winning this dispute or is this merely a grievance designed to make the union look strong in the eyes of its constituency?

Our legal expert believes the union probably has little chance of proving that the Tampa Bay Rays, Oakland A's, Pittsburgh Pirates, and Miami Marlins haven't spent their revenue-sharing money properly. But what's ironic here is the big-market teams that contribute hard-earned profits to small-market teams are likely rooting for the Players Association. Big-market teams hate revenue sharing. They hate giving millions of dollars in profits to other teams. In the past, some have said small-market teams haven't spent revenue-sharing gains in improving their product on the field.

The collective bargaining agreement spells out the do's and don'ts of using revenue-sharing money:

"Teams may not use their receipts to service acquisition debt or any other debt that is unrelated to past or future efforts to improve performance on the field; payments to individuals other than on-field personnel or personnel related to player development; payments to entities that do not have a direct role in improving on-field performance; and distributions to ownership that are not intended to offset tax obligations resulting from Club operations.

"If the Commissioner rules there have been violations he 'directs the Club to change aspects of its plan, including the level of competitive effort reflected in the plan, or take other actions as he considers appropriate (including escrow of a portion of a Club's revenue sharing payments).'"

Everything baseball every Monday-Friday during baseball season, and weekly in the offseason.

And then there's this: "The [Players] Association has the burden in any proceeding under the Grievance Procedure of demonstrating that the Club's use of its revenue-sharing receipts was in violation of this subparagraph 5(a). In any such Grievance, the Arbitration Panel shall consider, among other things: (i) the Club's expenditures on scouting, player development, and player payroll; (ii) the Club's long-term strategy for improving competitiveness; (iii) the uses that the Club has historically made of revenue-sharing receipts; and (iv) the overall financial position of the Club."

What the union is charging isn't easy to prove.

The Rays have certainly never been big spenders, but this offseason they have traded Evan Longoria (the longtime face of their franchise), Jake Odorizzi, and Steven Souza Jr., cut Corey Dickerson, opted not to re-sign Logan Morrison, and are trying to trade Chris Archer, currently their highest-paid player. The Rays did sign Carlos Gomez and acquired power hitter C.J. Cron.

The Pirates traded away Andrew McCutchen and Gerrit Cole to reduce payroll burdens, and have added only Dickerson and Bryce Brentz. The Pirates contended in the NL Central the last few years, but they haven't tried to look competitive this offseason.

The Marlins gutted their team and make no bones about how they can't compete. New ownership, led by Derek Jeter, indicated the only way they could make this work was to drastically reduce payroll by selling off their all-world outfield of Giancarlo Stanton, Marcell Ozuna, and Christian Yelich. They also traded away Dee Gordon.

The perpetually rebuilding A's have stadium issues that contribute to their reduced payroll.

Our legal expert also brought up the possibility that MLBPA executive director Tony Clark is under tremendous pressure to do something major, based on the fact that so many good players remain unsigned.

Last week, Clark indicated the problem in free agency may not be with the teams that are around or over the luxury tax threshold, but rather with the teams that aren't trying to win.

Are the Rays, Pirates, Marlins, and A's tanking? You sure can make a case for at least three of them; the A's seem to be trying.

Nothing in the CBA says a team can't employ 25 players who make the major league minimum, but if they're accepting revenue-sharing money, they must show a plan as to what they're doing with the money. The union really had no choice but to pursue a grievance.

Major League Baseball has said the suit has no merit. Our legal expert agrees. He also agrees that there's no collusion among the owners, though they are executing the rules under the basic agreement that call for minimal increases to the luxury-tax threshold and reset triggers that the players agreed to.

"Our revenue-sharing receipts have decreased for seven consecutive seasons while our major league payroll has more than doubled over this same period," Pirates president Frank Coonelly said in a statement last week. "Our revenue-sharing receipts are now just a fraction of what we spend on major league payroll. We also have made significant investments in scouting, signing amateur players, our player development system, and our baseball facilities."

Rays owner Stu Sternberg said, "I think we're beyond what compliance is. We're very judicious in how we spend our money, but it's spent in a lot of forms and payroll is one of them."

Jeter said in a statement, "As we have done since the day we took over in October, we will continue to do everything we can to build a foundation for sustained success and improve this organization — which has not made the postseason since 2003 and has gone eight seasons without a winning record."

Clark needed to show some fight and pushback against MLB. He needed to show his constituency that he'll fight for them, even if the fight is just a shot in the dark. MLB has had the upper hand all offseason and it appears it will win this fight, too.

HE'LL MANAGE FINE

Astros' Reddick is a big fan of Cora

Josh Reddick was the starting right fielder for the world champion Astros last season, following stops with the Red Sox, A's, and Dodgers. Boston sent him to Oakland (in a package for Andrew Bailey) following the 2011 season. Reddick had 4½ strong seasons with the A's before he was sent to the Dodgers, along with Rich Hill, at the 2016 trade deadline. A few months later, he signed a four-year, \$52 million contract with Houston.

Reddick and new Red Sox manager Alex Cora joined the Astros at the same time, Cora as bench coach.

"Always good to see someone like Alex get a big league managing job," Reddick said. "He was such a big piece for us. We want him here, but you've got to be happy for him. He's got a good team over there and it's a great city for baseball."

Reddick said Cora should be able to handle Boston because of his experience as a player there.

"He knows the extent of how it's going to be. A lot of media . . . a lot of them around. Tough task but he can handle it. Very fun, but very tough city to play in," Reddick said.

Josh Reddick's path to a World Series championship started with the Red Sox, A's, and Dodgers before culminating in Houston.

Reddick said he and his teammates have briefly discussed repeating as world champions.

"We've touched on it but we're not here to reinvent anything," he said. "We're just trying to win again. Every year is different and there'll be different challenges. I know we'll have a bull's-eye on our backs and I think we're up for that challenge. We've added some really good players, so I think we have the potential to be a great team again.

"Last year was my first year here and I was impressed with the way things were done and the approach this organization had to winning."

Reddick said he expects Cora to be a very good manager based on his experience with him last season.

"Alex was a great influence on me," Reddick said. "He taught me how to be a better base stealer. I always thought I had decent speed, but I never got good jumps. Alex taught me how to look for things from the pitcher to get off the bag better. I think he did a great job just picking out the subtle things that can make a big difference, so I'm expecting he's going to be a very good manager."

Apropos of nothing

1. It was interesting to hear Alex Cora talk about how much his years working at ESPN helped him forge a managerial career. Cora said his experience with the network enabled him to deal with general managers and managers, and he also had discussions about coaching with other ESPN talent, such as former basketball coach P.J. Carlesimo. Cora thinks new Yankees manager Aaron Boone also benefited from his time at ESPN.

2. Insurance on preexisting injuries is becoming a big issue. The Red Sox' negotiations with J.D. Martinez are a good example. Insurance policies on a contract of about \$100 million run about \$2 million per year, but the insurance usually doesn't cover the entire deal. It also comes with a high deductible, a deterrent for teams.

3. Tell me why veterans such as Jose Bautista, Matt Holliday, and Jayson Werth can't help a contending team?

4. Travelers Insurance is giving back by rebuilding baseball fields in Yabucoa, Puerto Rico, which is where Hurricane Maria made landfall. The company is also providing new baseball equipment and gift bags for children. About half of the Travelers volunteers on site are from Connecticut. The fields will be used by the local little league and softball leagues, which have well over 500 participants.

5. Lots of talk on Baltimore radio stations about the possibility of Peter Angelos selling the Orioles. The feeling is he could fetch about \$1.8 billion. The team is already in an interesting situation with both GM Dan Duquette and manager Buck Showalter entering the final years of their contracts and Brady Anderson taking on a bigger role in the organization.

Updates on nine

1. Neil Walker, 2B, free agent — The Royals were unsuccessful in trying to bring Walker aboard. His asking price was too high. The Royals were hoping to bring in Walker on a minor league deal, with the chance to make the big club.

2. Mike Napoli, 1B, Indians — Don't think I've ever seen a situation where a player got signed so he could wind up with another team. Terry Francona basically said that Napoli deserved to be in a major league camp so he can audition for other teams, even though the Indians likely won't keep him.

3. Dennis Eckersley, Hall of Famer — Eckersley wants to put the whole David Price situation to rest. He hasn't changed his mind about clearing the air with Price, feeling he doesn't need to. He just wants to wipe the slate clean.

4. Carlos Gonzalez, OF, free agent — The Orioles seem like the right fit for Gonzalez. Dan Duquette has made it a ritual to come up with a proven player who excels at hitter-friendly Camden Yards (think Nelson Cruz). Would Gonzalez accept a one-year pillow deal? He may have to.

5. Alex Cobb, RHP, free agent — The feeling among teams is that while Cobb is a desirable commodity, his agents haven't come down enough in asking price for a deal to make sense. The Brewers, Twins, and Yankees seem like legitimate landing spots for the 30-year-old, who went 12-10 with a 3.66 ERA for the Rays last year after recovering from Tommy John surgery. Teams are looking at a three-year deal, but pitchers of Cobb's caliber and age want more. It may not exist in this market.

6. Chris Archer, RHP, Rays — One American League GM just shook his head and looked aghast when asked about his interest in Archer. "Love to have him, but our farm system wouldn't function properly if we met the price Tampa Bay is asking," he said. Can't blame the Rays for trying. He's their last remaining big asset.

7. Miguel Cabrera, 1B/DH, Tigers — The Tigers have not received any inquiries about one of the greatest righthanded hitters ever. Two reasons: his subpar 2017 season and his unmanageable contract. The Tigers would be more than willing to assume some of the financial burden, but even that hasn't spurred any trade talks.

8. Jonathan Lucroy, C, free agent — With the dearth of catching — especially catchers who can hit — Lucroy remains one of the surprising unsigned players on the market. The Nationals could eventually explore Lucroy, as their attempts at trading for J.T. Realmuto have fallen short as they are unwilling to include outfield prospect Victor Robles in the deal. Lucroy, 31, split last season between the Rangers and Rockies and hit just .265 with six homers and 40 RBIs.

9. Adam Lind, 1B/DH, Yankees — Another smart signing by the Yankees. If Greg Bird gets hurt or isn't producing, the lefthanded-hitting Lind is there to step in with that short porch in right field.

Extra innings

From the Bill Chuck files — "In 2017, Mookie Betts led the Red Sox with 24 homers. The last time Boston did not have a 25-homer hitter was in 1992, when Tom Brunansky led with 15 homers. In the last 55 games of his 2017 season, J.D. Martinez hit 25 homers." . . . Also, "The Indians led the majors with 71 homers versus lefties last season. The Angels had the fewest with 30 (but have added Ian Kinsler and Justin Upton for a

full season, and Zack Cozart), while the Red Sox had 31 (and now have J.D. Martinez).” . . . Happy birthday, Rubby De La Rosa (29) and Lee Tinsley (49).

Boston Globe LOADED: 03.04.2018

Peter Gammons / Gammons: Less is more for the Red Sox, who hope a new pitching philosophy fuels a long postseason run

By Peter Gammons

In Fort Myers, Fla., February had turned to March and not one of Boston's anticipated five starters had thrown in a game. Eduardo Rodríguez was being brought along with a yellow flag because the medical staff wanted to guarantee the stability of his right knee, which underwent minor surgery in October. The others—Chris Sale, David Price, Rick Porcello and Drew Pomeranz—worked daily on throwing exercises, then each day threw preparatory bullpen sessions in pairs, monitored by pitching coach Dana LeVangie and consultant Brian Bannister, as if the two coaches were antique clockmasters.

From the outset, the plan was to roll back the rotation's spring training workloads. “The overall idea is to be prepared for the season so that we win the division, not just qualify for the wild card, with the big-picture goal to win in October,” says one of the front office executives involved in the planning.

Sale has been among the top five Cy Young finishers in each of the last five years. Price and Porcello have each won that award. The front office's contention on Sale is that last September, and in his Division Series start against the Astros last year, his stuff didn't tick down. Rather, they thought his problem was command, which they feel resulted from his workload and the fact that he comes out for every inning throwing gas, gas, gas. “Sale as a starter goes after it from the first inning as if he's a closer coming into a jam,” says the official.

Sale had an 8.38 ERA in his two postseason appearances last year. Porcello has started two games in two Octobers in Boston and given up seven earned runs in 7 1/3 innings. Price, for his career, is 127-68 with a 3.22 ERA during regular seasons but 2-8 with a 5.03 ERA in October.

Price has been a workhorse for most of his career (averaging 243 innings, including the postseason in 2014 through 2016). Porcello has thrown 200 innings in three of the last four years. If the goal is to go deep into October—and Boston has won just one post-season game since winning the World Series in 2013—you try to think things out.

The Red Sox also know that Rodríguez is coming off knee surgery, Pomeranz has some injury history and has never thrown 180 innings and Steven Wright's 2017 season ended with a knee surgery. They are less than \$5 million from the \$237 million luxury tax trigger that would punish them in the amateur draft and international market—a problem an opposing GM says “is serious, because by 2020 the window is slamming shut for a rebuild”—that they do not want to face.

Which is why Boston's front office, LeVangie, Bannister, manager Alex Cora, et al, has taken this approach with the staff. And many clubs around baseball are doing something similar. Cora was with the Astros as Charlie Morton did what no one had ever done—start and win Game 7 of the ALCS (against the Yankees), then come out of the bullpen, throw five innings and close out and win Game 7 of the World Series (against the Dodgers). Morton threw 140 innings during the season.

In fact, A.J. Hinch closed out the World Series using starters Lance McCullers and Morton for four innings apiece. Granted, it was the end of three tough postseason series. But it worked, and it could work during the season with, for instance, two multi-inning relievers and a starter called up from Triple-A for a day.

Then there is the historic perspective: only 15 pitchers threw at least 200 innings in 2016, and only 15 threw at least 200 innings in 2017. As Mike Petriello of MLB.com points out, those are the lowest totals of any seasons in history save those strike-shortened campaigns in 1981 and 1994.

Then this chart that traces the game's timeline since the designated hitter was adopted in the American League in 1973:

No. Pitchers w/200 IP	No. Pitchers w/ 210	
1973	64	50
1983	50	40
1993	52	40
2003	44	29
2007	38	19
2013	36	19
2015	28	13
2017	15	2

“The game constantly evolves,” says Arizona general manager Mike Hazen. Fans watched as the Indians, with their rotation in tatters, rode their bullpen to Game 7 of the 2016 World Series, then saw Hinch utilize every facet of his pitching staff—with starters McCullers, Brad Peacock and Morton playing major roles out of the bullpen—en route to the championship in 2017. “Of course, what Justin Verlander gave us with the length of his starts was incredibly important to where we got,” says Hinch. “But we were fortunate to have several pitchers who could start and be effective out of the bullpen.”

“I think the way the game has evolved from showcases to the big leagues has changed the way we use starters and relievers,” says one GM. “We used to see starters come out throwing 91 or 92 and dial it up to 98 when they needed it late in games. We used to see it with guys like Jim Palmer or Nolan Ryan, Bob Gibson.” (I once covered a game when pitching coach Ray Miller let me see Palmer's pitching chart, which showed that he hit every speed from 68 to 93.)

“Now with all the velocity in the game we see starters come out throwing 96 in the first inning,” says Hazen. “That often can't be maintained. But everyone has relievers throwing 96 to 100.” Hey, the Yankees have seven relievers who can go between 96 and 100-something mph.

"We can attest to that," Twins manager Paul Molitor says of the Yankees. "But few teams in history have had that deep and powerful a bullpen. In most cases, you have to have a balance. I still like to have starters who can get us to the sixth inning or later, because few teams can sustain a bullpen without those guys."

Mets manager Mickey Callaway, who had so much success with the Indians pitching staff working under Terry Francona, says "I think teams are doing it because they value relievers more, and getting better relievers and getting better depth in their pen. And having guys [with options] who can go up and down from the minor leagues really helps." Callaway suggested to Joel Sherman of the New York Post that with the injury history of the Mets' very talented staff, two or three multi-inning relievers and optionable callups are potential ways the team could maneuver throughout the season.

The Cubs have had the best starters' ERA in baseball over the last three seasons combined. Joe Maddon is a strong proponent of the importance of rest over the long, sometimes hot season. He doesn't like players taking batting practice on the field. He doesn't manage every game as if the Cubs must win. Hence, in 2017 Jon Lester was the only pitcher to make as many as 32 starts and led the staff with 180 1/3 innings. Nine pitchers started games. The Cubs are built with depth for the long haul, with their pitchers and position players alike.

Teams work hard at preparing matchups. Dave Roberts uses the Dodgers bullpen not by innings, but by matchups. In the playoffs, they studied lineups in such a way that, for instance, Kenta Maeda knew against whom he would match up. In the playoffs, when the Cubs had right-handed hitters in the 5-6-7 spots in the order, Maeda knew he would face them, so from 5 P.M. until he went into the game four-and-a-half hours later, he could prepare.

Callaway has always believed in having relievers who can get hitters out from both sides of the plate. "Bryan Shaw was hugely important to us," says Callaway. "He could pitch a lot. He got lefthanded batters out better than right-handers. He changed matchups." One of the many reasons the Yankee pen should be so good this season is that right-handers Dellin Betances, David Robertson and Chad Green dominate lefties.

As one travels from complex to complex this spring, the more one hears that 180 innings is the new 210. "We'd all love to have pitchers who can throw 280 effective innings like Ryan and Mickey Lolich and Luis Tiant," says one manager. "But this is 2018. How effective are guys in this generation and baseball culture throwing 200-something innings and trying to pitch into November?"

Clayton Kershaw is the best pitcher of the 21st century. He is uber-competitive, accountable, dedicated. His post-season ERA is 4.35. To those who lived in the 1960s and '70s, those post-season numbers preclude historic greatness. But that is absurd. "The load he's carried for seven months a season may be similar to what happened to Sale last season," says one executive. To compare Kershaw in today's game, with the home runs, the shrunken ballparks, lowered mound and altered strike zone, to a Lolich or Gaylord Perry is simply invalid.

The postseason has evolved from best-of-seven World Series to a month that could require a wild card team to use its best starter for the play-in game, then go through one five- and two seven-game series. As clubs study rest and nutrition, and the Players Association argues for a day off each week and fewer 5 A.M. road trip arrivals (especially in the post-amphetamine era), every potential avenue that could keep players at their peak-performance level for the long haul is open.

"If you're a contender, you realize in October, the unexpected happens," says one club executive. "Corey Kluber gets hurt. Kenley Jansen gives up a game-tying home run in the ninth inning to Marwin González. But the parade is the ultimate goal, and so in the first week of March we're looking at the best ways not simply to get to October, but how to go deep into October."

The Athletic LOADED: 03.04.2018

Olney: What's behind the decline and fall of the stolen base?

Buster Olney

Jose Altuve has hundreds of games to play before he reaches his 30th birthday, and he is among the most prolific base stealers of his generation. But as he waited for his turn in batting practice at the Astros' camp last week, he mentioned that he probably will again never come close to reaching his career-high of 56 steals, accomplished in 2014.

Too much risk, he concluded. Altuve was referring to a specific concern he has, but he might as well have been speaking more broadly, for the entire industry.

The number of stolen bases is generally declining. It might just be that this trend is part of another cycle in baseball, merely a precursor to a time when teams will again find value in players capable of taking 90 feet on the bases without the need for a swing of the bat. Or it might be that, in a sport in which risk assessment now drives everything from free-agent investments to the development of young pitchers, the base stealers have become the outlier, like motorcyclists without helmets.

The Disappearing Stolen Base

YEAR	STEALS
1987	3,585
1997	3,308
2007	2,918
2017	2,527

In 2017, there were only three players with 40-plus stolen bases -- Dee Gordon, Billy Hamilton and Trea Turner. There were also only three in 2015 -- Gordon, Hamilton and Charlie Blackmon. Before 2015, there hadn't been three or fewer (in any non-strike-shortened season) since 1967, when only Lou Brock and Bert Campaneris reached 40.

Some evaluators chimed in with some reasons for the decline in stolen bases:

1. Generation Long Ball: Everybody seems to aspire to rack up home runs these days, from sluggers like Giancarlo Stanton and Aaron Judge to pitchers like Madison Bumgarner and Jake Arrieta. Last year, 117 players generated 20 or more homers; 29 had 20 or more stolen bases. In

spring training this year, the Cubs, Rays and other teams are counseling their players on how to get the ball in the air, and are probably devoting more time to that concept than on getting a good break from first base.

But the change is not only about the focus on the hitters -- it's also in the strategy used when there's a baserunner at first base.

"I don't think these [players] even want someone running on the bases ahead of them," one evaluator said. "I think their feeling is, you get on base and I'll go deep and drive you in."

In other words: It's easier for a hitter to focus on clubbing the ball if they don't have to concern themselves with giving a runner at first an opportunity to steal a base, or be distracted by the movement of the baserunner. And if the baserunner successfully moves to second, the pitcher and catcher might be more apt to work carefully to the hitter and be less apt to throw a meaty strike.

For a lot of players, it has become less about taking the extra 90 feet and focusing on the 360 feet they can stroll around the bases if they blast a homer.

2. Injuries: Ask any big-time baserunner about Rickey Henderson and his 1,406 steals and they will marvel at Henderson's endurance, particularly for someone who slid headfirst. Despite his incredibly aggressive style, Henderson managed to mostly avoid the finger, hand and wrist injuries that all baserunners risk.

Altuve's moneymakers are his hands and wrists; he needs to do what he can to keep that part of his body healthy. The same is true for Mike Trout and Carlos Correa, who both tore thumbs running last year and missed many weeks.

These days, teams prescribe and adhere to innings limits for pitchers to keep them healthy and productive over a longer period of time. MLB changed the plate-blocking rules in an effort to keep catchers such as Buster Posey on the field.

For Altuve, for Trout and for a lot of front offices, the potential big-picture gain from a stolen base -- an additional 90 feet in one potential rally in one game of 162 -- might not be worth the increased risk of injury.

3. Instant replay: The Nationals' Turner is among the best base stealers in the big leagues, and he mentioned an impact of replay discouraging for baseball thieves: Unlike previous generations of runners, Turner and his peers must now be absolutely sure to maintain contact with the base all the way through the end of the slide. Henderson was fast and powerful in how he took bases, slamming headfirst into bases -- and wayward fielders -- like a linebacker, and undoubtedly, there were times in Henderson's career when he would come off the bag as he zoomed over it.

You cannot do that anymore because of the managerial challenges and the many camera angles on slow-motion replay. For base stealers such as Turner, this means going into second base with a little more control -- and maybe a fraction less reckless speed, which just adds to the risk of getting caught.

4. The percentages: The Cardinals' Tommy Pham was incredulous as he shared in a conversation recently about a prolific base stealer of a bygone era who would sometimes get thrown out 20 or 25 times in a season. "You have to be at 80 percent," said Pham, who was at the edge of that line last year, successfully stealing 25 bases in 32 attempts (78.1 percent). Pham is correct -- through the use of analytics, teams have determined that if you are below 80 percent in your success rate, then you probably shouldn't run. The numbers say it's just not worth the risk. Brett Butler stole more than 40 bases five times in his career, from 1981 to 1997. But if he played in the current era, it's possible that his front office would've ordered his manager to hold him rather than have him get thrown out 28 times in 66 attempts, which is what happened in 1991.

The players whose value is built on the volume of bases they steal seem to be going the way of the ace pitcher who throws complete games.

5. Pickoff manners have changed: When a visiting pitcher throws to first base, he'll draw loud boos from the home crowd, and the reaction only gets louder on a second throw, or a third or a fourth. There was a time when players responded to this more than they do these days; they felt some peer pressure to move the game along, and so they'd relent and throw the ball homeward.

But players and their bosses don't seem as concerned about this anymore, in the college game as well as MLB. Rather, they are more focused on the task at hand. If the best method for slowing a base stealer is to throw to first base over and over and over -- wearing out the runner physically and mentally -- they will do that, pace of play be damned. Pitchers will step off, they will look over, or maybe they'll just hold the ball, doing what they can to disrupt the base runner.

"If you've make up your mind you're going to stop a baserunner from going," one evaluator said, "you can do that, with only a few exceptions, like Billy [Hamilton]."

6. The slide step and streamlined deliveries: As pitchers work to make their mechanics more efficient, with less margin for error, some have refined their deliveries -- such as Stephen Strasburg, who pitches without a windup even when there are not runners on base. In 2012, Strasburg gave up 14 stolen bases in 16 attempts. In the past three seasons, he has surrendered a total of 14 steals in 23 attempts.

Not every pitcher is as good as Strasburg at slowing a running game, of course. Last year, the Braves' Julio Teheran gave up 26 steals, and opponents went 21-for-23 against the Phillies' Aaron Nola. But more and more, pitchers are perfecting their mechanics, aided by the new and improved technology. Fourteen runners tried to steal against Zack Greinke last season and only five were successful, and opponents went just 4-for-8 against the Cardinals' Carlos Martinez.

7. The focus on catcher defense: Going back to the days of "Sandlot," the typical catcher was big, burly and powerful, probably chosen for the position because of a lack of speed. The prototypical catcher was someone like the Braves' Javy Lopez, who might have some defensive deficiencies but also contributed 30 bombs a year.

MLB Pitchouts Since 2007

YEAR	PITCHOUTS
2017	129
2016	194
2015	257
2014	335
2013	309
2012	478
2011	554
2010	550
2009	478
2008	636
2007	790

But these days, catcher is mostly a defense-first position, with bodies like cornerbacks and safeties rather than O-linemen. Teams prefer catchers with quick feet, with the ability to move well behind the plate. Tall catchers, such as the 6-foot-5 Matt Wieters, have become dinosaurs. Catchers are now often former infielders, like the 5-foot-10 Austin Barnes -- and most of them throw effectively. Gary Sanchez is a throwback catcher, in his size and hitting power, but he, too, throws well.

The fact is that the archenemies of the elite base stealers are better than they used to be. "I don't think any position has changed more in the last two decades than catcher," one executive said.

Maybe the art of stealing bases will be in vogue again in another couple of decades, if the juiced baseballs go away, if pitchers are eventually required to work under the weight of a pitch clock with runners on base.

Because of the decline in stolen bases and the heightened game planning that goes on for every pitch, the number of pitchouts has plummeted, with managers (and catchers and pitchers, perhaps) unwilling to swing a ball-strike count in favor of the batter.

News from around the majors

One scout who walked away from the matchup between Justin Verlander and Noah Syndergaard was deeply impressed by the progress of both. Verlander was clocked at 95-97 mph. "He looks like the old Verlander," the scout said. And Syndergaard hit 100 mph over and over in the first inning. The scout scoffed at the concern that Syndergaard was merely trying to ramp up his velocity and working to register three digits on the radar gun. "His delivery was in control," the scout said. "He didn't overthrow one pitch."

- The Cubs' staff believes that the players have arrived in camp more focused this year on small tasks, on getting better. ... Gleyber Torres might be the Yankees' second baseman of the future, and it's still possible -- but a long shot -- that the Yankees could consider a short-term option like Neil Walker at the position. But 23-year-old Tyler Wade could have a serious shot at holding down the position on Opening Day after hitting .310 with a .382 on-base percentage in Triple-A last season. ... On the podcast last week, Red Sox president David Dombrowski talked about the process of chasing down free-agent slugger J.D. Martinez, and about whether he works to sell the idea of playing in Boston to players and their agents.