

## **Tribe could get creative at Winter Meetings**

By Anthony Castrovince MLB.com @castrovince

One need not stretch the metaphoric muscles much to come up with some kind of allegory linking the gambling that goes down in Las Vegas with the wheeling and dealing that goes down at baseball's Winter Meetings. That the two will be intertwined at the Mandalay Bay Resort & Casino this coming week makes for easy cornball copy.

So let's be clear that the pun is honestly not intended when we say that the stakes are pretty high for the Cleveland Indians right now. These Winter Meetings could take place in Dutch John, Utah (not exactly a gambling mecca), and we'd still be saying much the same.

That's because the Indians, who already dealt All-Star catcher Yan Gomes to the Nationals last week, are entertaining some major, franchise-altering moves right now. For reasons we've gotten into before and will get into again below, Cleveland has to be open to concepts that address current Major League needs and shore up the long-term contention outlook.

And yes, that could mean moving Trevor Bauer or two-time Cy Young Award-winner Corey Kluber.

With Patrick Corbin and Nathan Eovaldi off the free-agent board and the starting-pitching market percolating, the Meetings could be the ideal environment for president of baseball operations Chris Antonetti and general manager Mike Chernoff to definitively decide which direction they're going to go. Though the days of drawing up deals on bar napkins are long gone, the efficiency of the Meetings, where the front offices of every club are gathered in one building for four days, still can have the impact of putting deal discussions in a sort of time compressor. Activity can escalate quickly.

So we'll see what's in the cards (OK, that pun was intended) in the coming days. For now, here's where things stand with the Meetings about to begin.

### **Club needs**

The Indians need tangible help in their outfield (where Michael Brantley's departure from an already iffy alignment looms large) and in their bullpen (where the free-agent departures of Andrew Miller and Cody Allen loom large), but, first and foremost, they need the salary relief it would take to adequately fill those needs (see below for more on the payroll picture). That's why there is so much talk about Cleveland potentially dealing a starting pitcher in a trade that directly (talent) or indirectly (money) influences these areas.

### **Whom might they trade?**

With the club having already dealt from one area of valued depth with the Gomes deal and Carlos Carrasco locked into a new contract extension, all eyes are on Kluber and Bauer, and either would be capable of bringing back a team-altering trade haul. Cleveland has had conversations with clubs about both players, and there is a sense in the industry that the Indians might be more inclined to move Bauer than Kluber. Of course, given the difficulty of making a deal in which two contenders both get better, it's possible neither pitcher is moved. It's possible that the Indians would try to attach Jason Kipnis, who is owed just north of \$14 million and is coming off two below-average seasons, to either pitcher in a deal.

### **Prospects to know**

The Indians are far more inclined to dealing from areas of depth on the Major League roster to impact that roster than doing a more traditional prospects-for-big-leaguers deal. With that said, their most valuable chips down on the farm are arguably right-hander Triston McKenzie (No. 1 on the Indians' top prospects list per MLB Pipeline), third baseman Nolan Jones (No. 2) and, given his position and near-readiness, shortstop Yu Chang (No. 6).

### **Rule 5 Draft**

Unlike a tourist sauntering out of the Mandalay Bay buffet after his third piece of pie, the Indians' 40-man roster is not quite full. So they do have the room to add a player during the Rule 5 Draft. The Indians left their No. 23-rated prospect, Oscar Gonzalez, unprotected in the Rule 5, though he is only 20 years old and hasn't played above A-ball, so he wouldn't be the safest bet to stick on a big league roster for the duration of 2019.

### **Payroll summary**

The gist of the Indians' winter is that they're suffering significant free-agent losses with very little accompanying salary relief because of in-house raises and arbitration cases. The Tribe has already carried franchise-record payrolls each of the past two seasons, and it is not raising the payroll. That's why the front office is trying to creatively address the needs of a maturing roster, potentially with a major trade.

## **Senate follows House in passing bill to honor pioneer Larry Doby**

Associated Press

CLEVELAND -- The U.S. Senate has passed legislation to honor former Cleveland Indians center fielder Larry Doby, the American League's first black ballplayer, with the Congressional Gold Medal.

Ohio Sens. Sherrod Brown, a Cleveland Democrat, and Rob Portman, a Cincinnati-area Republican, recently announced passage of the bill, which awaits President Donald Trump's signature.

Republican Rep. Jim Renacci of Wadsworth helped gain House approval earlier.

Larry Doby became the first black player in the American League, joining the Cleveland Indians less than three months after Jackie Robinson broke baseball's color barrier in the NL. Kidwiler Collection/Getty Images

Doby became the American League's first black player in July 1947, two months after Jackie Robinson broke baseball's color line with the National League's Brooklyn Dodgers. Doby was a seven-time All-Star, leading the 1948 Indians to the world championship.

Born in Camden, South Carolina, Doby played high school sports in Paterson, New Jersey, and served in the Navy. He died in 2003.

### **Napoli retires big bat after 12-year career**

By Matt Kelly MLB.com @mattkellyMLB

Longtime slugger Mike Napoli announced his retirement Saturday via a statement released through his Twitter account.

"After much thought and consideration with my family, I have decided to retire from the game of baseball," Napoli said. "I dreamed about playing baseball since I was a little kid growing up in Hollywood, [Fla.], and I was lucky enough to get paid to play a kids game for 18 years."

Napoli, 37, was a free agent, and he hadn't suited up for a big league club since 2017, when he hit 29 home runs over 124 games for the Rangers. The former first baseman and catcher signed a Minor League deal with the Indians last spring, but he tore the ACL and meniscus in his right knee during a Triple-A game in April and underwent season-ending surgery.

Napoli began his MLB career with the Angels in 2006 and played for four franchises over a 12-year span.

"I was blessed to be mentored by great people at the beginning of my career with the Angels and was able to bring that winning attitude to each clubhouse that I was fortunate to be a part of," Napoli said. "I hope to be remembered as someone who always tried to keep the clubhouse atmosphere light and inclusive, making sure that everyone was respected by his peers while leading by example, both on and off the field."

"Most importantly, I am proudest of positively affecting people's lives and putting smiles on people's faces by simply being myself, reflecting the way I was brought up in South Florida."

Napoli's grit and professionalism endeared him to several fan bases, most notably in Cleveland where his powerful swings to the left-field seats inspired the "Party at Napoli's" catchphrase. The 2012 All-Star finishes his career with 267 homers and 744 RBIs while having played in three World Series, including Boston's championship run in '13.

### **Here's what my ideal Cleveland Indians 25-man roster for 2019 looks like: Joe Noga**

By Joe Noga, cleveland.com | Posted December 09, 2018 at 07:17 AM | Updated December 09, 2018 at 07:40 AM

CLEVELAND, Ohio -- Before the real wheeling and dealing begins, let's step into Chris Antonetti and Mike Chernoff's shoes and see what shakes out.

Baseball's winter meetings are set to get underway Sunday in Las Vegas, and now is as good a time as any to put on the general manager's hat for a day and build an ideal (under the current circumstances) Cleveland Indians roster for the 2019 season.

Tribe beat writer Paul Hoynes and I will each take a shot at playing GM with a payroll budget of about \$135 million. We can trade anybody on the roster or sign free agents and decide which players on the 40-man roster will be sent to the minors provided they have options remaining.

This exercise is not intended to be a set-in-stone prediction of what Cleveland's final roster will look like. Rather it's more of a wish list given the Indians' current situation faced with a free-agent exodus and pressing needs in the bullpen and outfield.

We're also guided by the club's obvious need to cut payroll and acquire young talent with controllable contracts while remaining competitive in the American League Central Division.

Assume the obvious

Under this scenario, I see all of the Tribe's remaining free agents signing with other clubs. That includes Michael Brantley, Andrew Miller and Cody Allen as well as in-season pickups such as Oliver Perez.

But first, a trade

Indians get: OF Yasiel Puig, OF Alex Verdugo and LHP Alex Wood.

Dodgers get: RHP Corey Kluber, INF Yu Chang.

In order to keep what you've got, you've got to use what you have. Cleveland's biggest source of depth is its starting pitching and the most valuable trade piece is two-time Cy Young Award winner Corey Kluber. In this scenario, the two-time defending National League champion Los Angeles Dodgers are looking for one more ace arm to pair with Clayton Kershaw and get them over the hump in October. While Kluber's recent postseason struggles (0-2, 10.2 ERA, 9 HR in his last four playoff starts) might seem alarming, he remains one of the most consistent pitchers in baseball since 2014, and he would make the Dodgers rotation a dominant force in the NL West.

Puig will make about \$11.3M in arbitration and has incentive to have a monster year ahead of free agency. That money would come off the books in 2020, giving the Indians much needed salary relief. Wood gives the Indians a left-handed starter, something they have not featured in the rotation since TJ House started 19 games in 2014 and Scott Kazmir 29 in 2013. But the real centerpiece is Verdugo, L.A.'s top outfield prospect who is not eligible for arbitration until 2022. The 22-year-old has a plus arm that would play well in right field and has good command of the strike zone at the plate. He hit .329 in 91 games at Triple-A Oklahoma City with 10 homers and 47 strikeouts in 343 at-bats.

Sign 'em up

With what little free agent money they have left, the Indians would do well to sign St. Louis reliever Bud Norris, 34, to a two-year deal worth about \$12M to set up closer Brad Hand. Norris posted a 3.59 ERA, with 10.5 K/9, 3.3 BB/9, 1.25 HR/9, and 42.6 percent ground-ball rate in 57 2/3 innings, including 28 saves in 2018. He had a sub-3.00 ERA through August before a rough September.

So, that leaves us with a \$135 payroll budget to work with in this exercise. Below are the 25 players I'd put on the roster. I managed to come in slightly under budget based on salary projections from MLBtraderumors.com and Spotrac.com.

#### Starting pitchers

Carlos Carrasco, \$9.5M

Carrasco and the Indians reached a contract extension that will keep the righty in Cleveland through at least 2022, but the deal does not change his 2019 salary, which remains well under market value for a guy who has logged 200 strikeouts in three of the last four seasons.

Trevor Bauer, \$11.6M

Expect Bauer follow all the way through with his arbitration hearing again this year, and likely come out on top. Win or lose, he's more interested in what other people think he's worth, and he would be willing to risk coming up short at the table in order to find out. Newsflash: he won't come up short at the table this year. MLBtraderumors.com predicts Bauer with about a \$5M raise in 2019.

Mike Clevinger, \$600K

Clevinger won't be the only front-of-the-rotation big leaguer pitching for just over the league minimum this year. But if he has a repeat of his 2018 campaign, his "surplus value" will skyrocket as he heads into his arbitration years.

Alex Wood, \$9M

2019 could be the year Wood gets back to his All-Star form of 2017 and sets himself up for a big free agent payday in 2020.

Shane Bieber, \$558K

One of the reasons the Indians would be more comfortable trading Kluber away is the emergence of Bieber, who could grow into a position as one of the rotation's mainstays for the next five seasons.

#### Relief pitchers

Brad Hand, \$6.5M

Hand's contract was a big reason the Indians went after him at the trading deadline last year. He's signed through 2021 when his salary climbs to \$10 million.

Bud Norris, \$6M

At 34, Norris moved from the rotation to the bullpen and had a monster season. He saved 28 games for the Cardinals and had a 42.6 percent ground ball rate in 57 2/3 innings.

Adam Cimber, \$558K

Terry Francona said he is looking forward to being able to use Cimber in a role more similar to the one in which he had success during the first half of 2018 in San Diego.

Neil Ramirez, \$1M

Ramirez avoided arbitration by signing last week. Antonetti said Ramirez pitched some very meaningful innings for the team in 2018. "Hopefully he's on the path to being a regular contributor for us moving forward," Antonetti said. "He's got good stuff and we've seen what he's capable of doing when he's right and at his best."

Tyler Olson, \$600K

In 13 appearances after returning from injury in August, Olson did not allow a run and only surrendered five hits while facing 36 batters. That's more like the production he showed in 2017 and what the Indians hope he gives them in 2019.

Dan Otero, \$1.3M

Otero allowed a career-high 12 home runs in 58 2/3 innings and his FIP (fielding independent pitching) shot up to 4.76. The Tribe is banking that Otero can return to his 2016 form that saw him post a career-best 7.3 strikeouts per nine innings.

Danny Salazar, \$4.5M

If the Indians can't move Salazar by trade, they will have to find a place for him in the bullpen. Assuming the rotation has enough healthy arms, the 28-year-old righty will need to make the adjustment. He has four career relief appearances in the regular season and three in the playoffs. Salazar can become a free agent next year and is playing 2019 at a discounted salary after missing all of 2018 while making \$5 million.

#### Catchers

Roberto Perez, \$2.6M

Following the trade of Yan Gomes to Washington, Perez assumes the starting catching duties and must rebound from a dismal 2018 at the plate where he hit .168 with two homers and 19 RBI. More will be expected of the 29-year-old as he takes over behind the plate. "He's demonstrated that ability to lead our pitching staff," Antonetti said. "He's caught some of the most meaningful games that we've played over the last 5-6 years. Including that run in the 2016 postseason."

Eric Haase, \$558K

Haase will be 26 on Dec. 18 and has played nine games in the big leagues. In 2017 and 2018, he hit 27 and 20 homers, respectively, at Class AA Akron and Class AAA Columbus. The Indians are certain to bring in a bargain veteran catcher as an insurance policy against the inexperienced Haase, but expect the rookie to get his shot at making the club in spring training.

#### Infielders

Edwin Encarnacion, \$21.6M

Reports have the Indians shopping Encarnacion to teams such as Tampa Bay that can afford to take on his considerable salary. In two seasons with Cleveland, Encarnacion has done exactly what the Tribe signed him to do: hit home runs and drive in runs. But his batting average and power numbers have dipped slightly as he enters his age 36 season. The Dominican slugger could be a trade chip later in the season if the Indians are looking to shake things up.

Yonder Alonso, \$8M

One of the darlings of the "launch angle revolution," Alonso hit 23 homers and drove in a career-high 83 runs in 2018, but his OPS dipped to .738, below his career average of .745 and he struck out more times (123) than he ever had before in a single season.

Jason Kipnis, \$14.6M

A year ago at the winter meetings the Indians were trying to trade Kipnis and the remaining (at the time) \$28 million he was owed for 2018 and 2019. Not a lot has changed since then, thanks largely to Kipnis' dismal start to the 2018 season at the plate where he hit below .200 as late as mid-June. Though the 31-year-old did rebound to post respectable numbers in the second half of the season (.246 BA, 11 HR, 42 RBI, .783 OPS) after July 1.

Jose Ramirez, \$6.2M

Ramirez has finished in the top five in American League MVP voting the last two seasons and is signed to an extremely club-friendly contract that keeps him in Cleveland through 2022.

Yandy Diaz, \$600K

Diaz hit .312 in just 109 at-bats, but if the Indians need to move Kipnis back to the outfield (again) in order to slide Ramirez back to second base, it might be time to give the young Cuban infielder a full-time shot at playing third base.

Francisco Lindor, \$10.5M

Part of the reason the Indians are scrambling to clear payroll space is Lindor's arrival at salary arbitration. He stands poised to make about \$10 million more than he did last season and could challenge Kris Bryant's \$10.8 million record for a first-year arbitration contract. After 2019, Lindor's salary figure is only going to go up, so the need to keep clearing space will continue.

#### Outfielders

Leonys Martin, \$3M

Finally healthy after a serious infection cost him the final two months of last season, Martin should have something to prove to the team that sent shortstop Wili Castro to Detroit for him at the trade deadline last year. The 31-year-old will be a free agent in 2020.

Yasiel Puig, \$11.3M

Acquiring the mercurial Puig in a trade is a risky move, but the 28-year-old Cuban will be in his final year of arbitration eligibility and playing for a free-agent contract in 2020. The Indians have long needed a right-handed power bat, and Puig slugged .494 last season with 23 homers and 63 RBI. He also stole 15 bases and has surprising speed (when healthy), while his arm in right field is among the best in the game.

Jordan Luplow, \$558K

The Indians picked up Luplow in a minor trade last month, probably with the idea that he could be a fourth outfielder and provide some depth as a backup. In this scenario, I've got Luplow penciled in as a starter if he can beat out Greg Allen and Tyler Naquin. But I would expect the Indians to make a move to pick up another outfielder during the season if Luplow fails to impress.

Tyler Naquin, \$600K

Naquin had just started to turn the corner at the plate last season before injuries cost him a huge chunk of playing time. The Indians are hoping Naquin can return to his 2016 form that saw him hit .296 in 111 games with an OPS of .886 as he finished among the finalists for AL Rookie of the Year. If Naquin falters, the Tribe would have Verdugo waiting at Class-AAA Columbus to take his spot under the premise of this exercise.

Greg Allen, \$558K

Allen endeared himself to Tribe fans as well as manager Terry Francona last season as he plugged into pretty much any spot the Indians needed him in their patchwork outfield. Allen developed into a more consistent hitter as well, posting a 10-game hitting streak in August.

#### Put it all together

After adding up the salaries, I've arrived at a total payroll of \$132.3 million for 2019. That's under the \$135M threshold we started out with for this exercise and gives the Indians room to make a few additional moves here or there if they decide to during the season.

### **Cleveland Indians listening to trade offers on Edwin Encarnacion and Yandy Diaz**

**By Paul Hoynes,**

CLEVELAND, Ohio – It's always good to have a backup plan. A Plan B if Plan A falls through.

If the Indians aren't able to get what they want for starting pitchers Corey Kluber or Trevor Bauer in a trade, they're willing to move in different directions to keep their payroll in check and still be favored to win the AL Central in 2019. A longer October run than they've experienced the last two years is part of that goal as well.

One of those directions is a potential trade for Edwin Encarnacion or Yandy Diaz. Teams such as the Tampa Bay Rays have asked about them and the Indians are listening.

Encarnacion, 36 in January, has done exactly what the Indians signed him to do – hit home runs and drive in runs from the middle of the lineup. But he's entering the last season of a three-year, \$60 million deal and trading him and a portion of his \$20 million contract may be less painful than parting with Kluber or Bauer. Encarnacion's deal includes a \$20 million club option for 2020 with a \$5 million buyout.

Last season Encarnacion hit .246 (123-for-500) with 32 homers and 107 RBI. In 2017 he hit .258 (143-for-554) with 38 homers and 107 RBI. Encarnacion's batting average has dropped and his strikeouts have increased since he left Toronto, but he is still a middle-of-the-order threat.

The usually low-budget Rays are looking for offensive upgrades and have money and talent to spend.

That the Indians are talking about moving Diaz is interesting. He's been a man without a position for the Indians, but one scenario this offseason had the Indians starting him at third base, moving All-Star third baseman Jose Ramirez to second and playing second baseman Jason Kipnis in left field in 2019.

Diaz, 27, hit .312 (34-for-109) with five doubles, one homer and 16 RBI in 39 games for the Indians last season. Over the last three seasons, he's worn out Triple-A pitching at Class AAA Columbus, but he still has one option left.

A trade of Diaz wouldn't give the Indians much financial relief. He's making just over the big-league minimum, but he could be added to a deal to make it more attractive.

If Diaz is traded, the Indians could move Ramirez back to third and play Kipnis at second. Kipnis would also be a likely trade chip if the Indians are unable or unwilling to trade Kluber or Bauer. Kipnis, 32 in April, will make \$14.7 million in 2019. The Indians hold a \$16.5 million club option on Kipnis for 2020 with a \$2.5 million buyout.

Chris Antonetti, director of baseball operations, touched on the different paths the Indians are considering taking to remain dominant in the AL Central and create payroll flexibility when he said, "We're focused on the two goals: we want to make sure we have a team that's capable of winning the American League Central in 2019 and then also better position our team for success beyond that.

"There are a variety of different ways that can happen with a variety of different impacts on our payroll. What those opportunities will be for us over the next coming weeks to execute on those goals, I don't know for certain. But we'll actively explore them."

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### **Indians sign left-hander Anthony Gose to minor-league deal**

Ryan Lewis Beacon Journal/Ohio.com @ByRyanLewisDec 8, 2018 at 12:29 PM

The Indians on Saturday signed left-handed pitcher and former outfielder Anthony Gose to a minor-league deal that doesn't include an invitation to the big-league camp next spring.

Gose came up through the minor leagues as a speedy outfielder with the Toronto Blue Jays and Detroit Tigers before converting to the mound. He hasn't appeared in a major-league game since 2016. Last year at Double-A, he posted a 6.52 ERA in 19 1/3 innings.

Gose had an unceremonious exit with the Tigers in 2016 after an altercation with Triple-A manager Lloyd McClendon that resulted in a demotion.

His up-and-down road through baseball now turns to Cleveland, where he'll provide some pitching depth in the minors.

### **Party's over: Mike Napoli announces retirement in heartfelt message**

By Joe Noga, cleveland.com jnoga@cleveland.com

CLEVELAND, Ohio — The Party at Napoli's is officially over, but one of baseball's most likable sluggers says he's ready to move on to the next phase of his career.

Mike Napoli, who became a fan favorite in Cleveland after clubbing 34 home runs and leading the Indians to the World Series in 2016, announced his retirement from playing following a 12-year career in the majors.

Tribe fans will fondly remember the Hollywood, Florida native as much for the "Party at Napoli's" T-shirts that became popular during Cleveland's playoff run as they will his his tape-measure home runs.

Napoli, who was playing at Class AAA Columbus in the Indians farm system when he suffered a season-ending knee injury in April, did not make it back to the big leagues after playing 2017 with the Texas Rangers. He announced his decision in a heartfelt post on Twitter.

An All-Star in 2012 with the Rangers, Napoli won a World Series title with Boston in 2013. He finishes his career with a .246 batting average including 267 home runs and 744 RBI. He had a career .821 OPS and struck out 1,468 times.

Napoli made his major league debut for the Los Angeles Angels on May 4, 2006, against Detroit, hitting a home-run in his first at-bat against Justin Verlander. His solo homer against Verlander in Game 3 of the 2013 American League Championship series proved to be the only run in a 1-0 Red Sox win.

Napoli thanked his family and his agent and mentioned the clubs with which he made his three World Series runs: Texas (2011), Boston (2013) and Cleveland (2016).

"Most importantly, I am proudest of positively affecting peoples' lives and putting smiles on peoples' faces by simply being myself, reflecting the way I was brought up in South Florida," Napoli wrote. "I played through many injuries as well as major surgeries and I would do it all over again the exact same way."

This past winter Napoli went unsigned until the Indians brought him to spring training on a minor-league deal. Manager Terry Francona and the rest of the organization thought highly of Napoli and wanted to give him a chance to come to camp and prove he could still play. The Indians didn't have a spot for him but they wanted to give him an showcase for other teams.

When spring training ended, Napoli agreed to go to Columbus, the Indians' top farm club, but he struggled there. On April 17, he tore a knee ligament trying to catch a foul ball in a game for the Clippers.

Following surgery in June, Napoli said that he wanted to stay in the game after his playing days end. He said it was gratifying to hear that people think he has what it takes to be a manager some day.

"It's something I want to do," Napoli said. "This is what I know. I've done this for a long time now, so, whether I play or not next year, in my future, I see me being on a staff somewhere and being able to give back and helping any way I can."

That opportunity could present itself this offseason as the Indians have openings on their minor league managerial staffs. Triple-A manager Chris Tremie was recently hired by the Reds to serve as their major league field coordinator. That could open up a potential spot for Napoli on the club's Single-A or Double-A staffs.

Napoli specifically mentioned Francona and his relationship with the Tribe skipper in sounding hopeful that there could be a place for him to do so within the organization.

"To be able to manage people and get the best out of people, I know the game," Napoli said. "I'm pretty sure that in this organization I'd be able to start somewhere from the bottom up and try to move my way up and be able to do that."

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### **Here's my perfect Cleveland Indians' 25-man roster for 2019: Paul Hoynes**

By Paul Hoynes, cleveland.com

CLEVELAND, Ohio -- In the last two regular seasons the Indians have won 193 games. In the postseason, they've gone 2-6 and failed to advance past the first round.

With a growing payroll, an aging position player roster, and lukewarm attendance, the Indians have decided to walk a difficult path this winter in preparation for 2019. They're contemplating trading a high-priced veteran or two to create some breathing room in the payroll, but still field a strong team capable of winning their fourth straight AL Central title and doing more damage than they absorb in October.

With that in mind Joe Noga and I are going to take a swing at putting together our perfect 25-man roster with a payroll at or below \$135 million. That was the Indians' payroll last season, which set a franchise record.

My payroll for 2019 with a nip here and a tuck there comes in at \$117,041,000.

Starting pitching: \$29,070,000

The Indians have done a great job developing and putting together their current starting rotation. It's a shame to put a dent in it, but that's what I'm going to do.

I've traded Trevor Bauer to the Phillies for right-handers Zach Eflin and Adonis Medina and left-hander JoJo Romero. Eflin will take Bauer's spot in the rotation.

Medina and Romero are in the minors and a year or two away from the big leagues. But they're two of the Phillies' top five prospects. Romero made 18 starts at Class AA last season, striking out 100 in 106 2/3 innings.

OK, so Bauer is gone, but I'm not done trading yet. Terry Francona has done a great job managing an outfield that during most of his tenure has only included one full-time player. But Michael Brantley is a free agent and he's not expected to return.

So I'm going to trade young starters Shane Bieber and Triston McKenzie to Seattle for outfielder Mitch Haniger. Seattle GM Jerry Dipoto has traded just about everyone else on the roster, but says Haniger is untouchable. But he needs starting pitching and Bieber is coming off a great rookie season and McKenzie is the Tribe's top prospect.

So who takes Bieber's spot? I'm going to open the season with Adam Plutko. Danny Salazar, if healthy, and Cody Anderson will be in reserve.

The ace stays

Two-time Cy Young winner Corey Kluber, the subject of trade rumors since the end of ALDS, will lead the Tribe's rotation again in 2019. He's coming off a 20-win season.

It was a tough decision to trade Bauer instead of Kluber. Bauer is younger and has more upside. This just felt like the right time to trade him to maximize his value. He has two years left before free agency and the longer you wait, the more expensive he gets and the less you can get in return.

Kluber is signed through 2019 with club options for 2020 and 2021.

2019 salary: \$17.5 million with club options for 2020 and 2021.

A well-timed extension

The Indians extended Carlos Carrasco's contract through 2022 with a club option for 2023. After exercising his 2019 option at the end of last season's World Series for \$9.75 million, they exercised his 2020 option for \$10.25 million and added two more years at \$12 million a year.

Carrasco said he'd like to spend his entire big-league career with the Tribe.

2019 salary: \$9.75 million.

Shine on Sunshine

Mike "Sunshine" Clevinger is coming off a big season, going 13-8 with a 3.02 ERA. He reached 200 innings and topped 200 (207) strikeouts for the first time in his career.

Clevinger could move up in the rotation with the trade of Bauer.

2019 salary: \$620,000 (projected). The MLB minimum for 2019 is \$555,000. Clevinger earned \$558,500 last season.

The new guy from Philadelphia

Right-hander Zach Eflin went 11-8 with a 4.36 ERA for the Phillies last season. He's 24 and a first-round pick of the Padres in 2012.

Bauer was projected to make \$11.6 million in 2019, but Eflin has just over two years in the big leagues and isn't eligible for arbitration. So if Eflin makes about \$600,000 in 2019, the deal represent an \$11 million savings in payroll for the Indians.

2019 payroll: \$600,000.

A chance for Plutko

Right-hander Adam Plutko split last season between Class AAA Columbus and the Indians. He went 7-3 with a 1.70 ERA in 14 starts, throwing a no-hitter and flirting with another, at Columbus.

Plutko, promoted six times to the big-league club, went 4-5 with a 5.28 ERA in 17 games, including 12 starts, with the Tribe.

2019 salary: \$600,000.

The bullpen: \$23,055,000

The Indians' bullpen needs help. After several solid seasons, the pen fell on hard times last season. They went 15-29 with a 4.69 ERA. In 2017, they had the lowest bullpen ERA.

With closer Cody Allen and lefties Andrew Miller and Oliver Perez hitting the free agent market, the prospects for 2019 don't look especially good.

But with the money the Tribe saved in the Bauer deal, I'm going to re-sign Allen to a one-year deal, loaded with incentives, so he can have a chance to re-establish his value and hit the free agent market again in 2020.

But the pen still needs help, so I'm going to send Yandy Diaz to Tampa Bay for reliever Diego Castillo. The Rays are looking to upgrade their offense and have shown interest in Diaz and Edwin Encarnacion.

The closer

Brad Hand will start his first full season as the Tribe's closer in 2019. The Indians acquired him from San Diego in July for catching prospect Francisco Mejia.

Hand went 0-1 with a 2.28 ERA in 28 games for the Tribe. He was 8-for-10 in save situations after the trade. For the season he was 32-for-39.

2019 salary: \$6.5 million. Hand is signed through 2020 with club option for 2021.

Return engagement for Cody Allen

Allen, the Indians' franchise leader in saves, didn't have the season he wanted in 2018. It wasn't a great way to enter the free agent market so I felt there was a chance to re-sign Allen for one year to have him do a re-set.

Allen is versatile and can easily handle the set-up role, while giving Hand a break at closer.

2019 salary: \$8 million.

The Indians get themselves an opener

The Rays created the opener last season, a relief pitcher who started the game and pitched one or two innings before making way for a more traditional starter.

Diego Castillo was one of the trailblazers and now he'll be pitching for Francona, who knows how to mix and match a bullpen. Last year Castillo went 4-2 with a 3.18 ERA in 43 games, including 11 starts. He struck out 65 and walked 18.

2019 salary: \$585,000. Castillo isn't eligible for free agency until 2022.

Adam Cimber. (Chuck Crow, The Plain Dealer)

The reliever who delivers from down under

Adam Cimber came to Cleveland with Hand from San Diego in July. He pitched well for the Padres, but had some trouble adjusting to the AL.

Cimber went 0-3 with a 4.05 ERA in 28 games covering 20 innings for the Tribe. He struck out seven, walked seven and allowed 26 hits.

The Indians still feel he can be effective against right-handed hitters.

2019 salary: \$585,000. Cimber has one year in the big leagues and three options left.

Dan Otero. (Chuck Crow, The Plain Dealer)

Dan Otero looking to bounce back

After two strong seasons with the Indians, Dan Otero struggled in the pen in 2018. He posted a 5.21 ERA and allowed a career-high 12 homers.

Otero, as usual, threw a lot of strikes. He was charged with five walks, but only one was unintentional.

2019 salary: \$1.3 million.

The left-on-left lefty

Tyler Olson was perfect in 2017. He made 30 appearances for the Indians and never allowed a run.

Perfection faded quickly in 2018, but Olson still put together a decent season after coming off the disabled list. He posted a 4.94 ERA, but still struck out 40 batters, while walking 12 in 27 1/3 innings.

Lefties hit just .182 (10-for-55) against him.

2019 salary: \$585,000.

What can the Indians expect from Danny Salazar?

If Salazar is healthy, he can help in the rotation or bullpen. But he missed all of last season with a sore right shoulder that eventually needed surgery.

Salazar, who has always been a starter, began a throwing program in November following his surgery. But it's hard to imagine him rejoining the rotation in the near future because he hasn't been healthy since the first half of the 2016 season.

Right now he's still a long shot to help the Tribe in 2019.

2019 salary: \$4.5 million.

Consistency needed

When Neil Ramirez was good last season, he was very good. When he was bad. ... well, you get the idea.

Ramirez and the departed Oliver Perez saved the bullpen when it needed it the most in late May and early June. He recorded 17 straight scoreless outings from May 28 through July 6, covering 15 1/3 innings and eight holds. After July 6, Ramirez's ERA jumped to 6.38 as he had trouble keeping the ball in the park.

He did strike out 51 batters, while walking 18, in 41 2/3 innings.

2019 salary: \$1 million.

The infield: \$57,035,000

Let's move around some furniture

I'm keeping the infield the same as opening day 2018. Yonder Alonso will be at first, Jason Kipnis at second, Jose Ramirez at third, Francisco Lindor at short and Edwin Encarnacion at DH.

Max Moroff, acquired from Pittsburgh in the Erik Gonzalez deal, is going to be the utility infielder. It would have been nice to move the salaries of Kipnis or Encarnacion, but the Indians would have had to pay too much of those salaries to make a deal work.

I also didn't want to take Encarnacion's bat out of the middle of the lineup. Seventy homers and 214 RBI in two years is hard to replace.

First base

Alonso hit .250 (129-for-516) with 23 homers and 83 RBI in his first year with the Indians in 2018. His 81 RBI ranked second among AL first basemen and his .738 OPS ranked third.

Alonso struggled in the second half, but overall hit .298 (70-for-235) with runners in scoring position.

2019 salary: \$8 million.

Second base

Kipnis, for the second straight season, ended the year playing center. He'll move back to second base for 2019.

Kipnis had a terrible start to the season, but finished with 18 homers, 75 RBI and a .704 OPS. Through June 15, he was hitting .197 (49-for-249). He hit .260 (73-for-281) the rest of the way.

2019 salary: \$14.5 million

Third base

Everyone says Jose Ramirez plays better at second base than third, but he didn't look that good to me when the Indians moved him off the hot corner to make room for Josh Donaldson in September.

I'm going to try and keep Ramirez at third the whole season, but his versatility is a bonus. The key question is can he find his swing again after going into a six-week slump that cost him the AL MVP award?

Ramirez still finished third in the AL MVP voting for the second straight year. He hit .270 (156-for-578) with 39 homers, 105 RBI and a .939 OPS. He scored 110 runs and went 30-30.

2019 salary: \$3.75 million.

Francisco Lindor. (Chuck Crow, The Plain Dealer)

Shortstop

Lindor is going to get paid this winter. For three-plus seasons he's been paid just above the MLB minimum, but this offseason he's eligible for arbitration for the first time. After three All-Star Game appearances, one Gold Glove, one Platinum Glove and two Silver Sluggers, he brings an impressive resume to the bargaining table.



2019 salary: \$10.2 million (projected).

Edwin Encarnacion. (Joshua Gunter, cleveland.com)

Designated hitter

The Indians signed Encarnacion to anchor the middle of the lineup and hit the ball out of the park. That's just what he's done with 30 or more homers and 100-plus RBI over the last two seasons.

Yes, he's streaky, but almost all power hitters are. His average and OPS has dropped over the last two years, but those are the kind of things that happen when power hitters age.

2019 salary: \$20 million.

Max Moroff (right). (Barry Reeger, special to PennLive)

Utility infielder

The Indians acquired the switch-hitting Moroff from Pittsburgh as part of the Erik Gonzalez deal. He can play third, short and second and has spent parts of the last three seasons with the Pirates.

Moroff hit .186 (11-for-59) with three homers and nine RBI last season in Pittsburgh. Over the last three years at Triple-A Indianapolis, Moroff hit .220 with 29 homers and 120 RBI.

Eric Stamets and spring-training invitee Mike Freeman will offer competition in Arizona.

2019 salary: \$585,000.

The catchers: \$3,085,000

The Indians traded starting catcher Yan Gomes to the Nationals for three players -- outfielder Daniel Johnson, right-hander Jefry Rodriguez and a player to be named. The trade made Roberto Perez the starting catcher and rookie Eric Haase the backup.

There are a lot of veteran catchers on the free agent market and I'm leaning toward adding one just before start of spring training. But right now Perez and Haase are the top two catchers.

Starting catcher

Perez has been waiting to be the starting catcher. It would appear the chance is at hand.

Perez is coming off his worst offensive season when he hit just .168 (30-for-179) with two homers and 10 RBI. But he did a good job behind the plate as Tribe pitchers posted a 3.76 ERA when he caught.

He just got back from winter ball in the Dominican Republic, where he swung the bat well. Perhaps that will get him pointed in the right direction for spring training and beyond.

2019 salary: \$2.5

Backup catcher

Haase, drafted in the seventh round in 2011 by the Indians, made his big-league debut in September. In his last two years in the minors, he hit 27 homers in 2017 and 20 in 2018 so he has some pop.

Haase appeared in just nine games for the Indians. At Class AAA Columbus, he threw out 48.5 percent (33-for-68) of the runners who challenged him.

2019 salary: \$585,000.

The outfield: \$4,796,000

I'm going to start Haniger in right field. Then I'll platoon Greg Allen and Leonys Martin in center. If Martin isn't fully recovered from the illness that knocked him out of last season and has to open the year on the disabled list, I'll go with Allen and Tyler Naquin in center.

Right now, however, it looks like Naquin will open the season at Class AAA Columbus. He has one option left and is coming off hip surgery.

Jordan Luplow will get the first shot in left field. He came to the Indians from the Pirates in the Erik Gonzalez deal. He has one option left.

That's a four-man outfield, which is thin, but Allen can play all three positions and Kipnis has shown he can play the outfield if needed. Bradley Zimmer is still recovering from right shoulder surgery. Antonetti said he should be available for the bulk of the season, but he's going to need recovery time in the minors before he returns to the big leagues.

By the way, I've got Melky Cabrera's phone number on speed dial just in case.

Right field

The price for Haniger was high, but he's a perfect fit. He can play every day in right -- he also made 26 starts in center last season -- while slashing .285/.366/.493 with 26 homers.

Haniger is under control for four more years and isn't eligible for arbitration until 2020.

2019 salary: \$620,000.

Center field

Switch-hitter Allen turned in a solid season in 2018, despite bouncing between Triple-A Columbus and Cleveland five times. He hit .257, stole 21 bases in 25 attempts and played all three outfield spots.

Allen spent most of his time in center, making 65 starts and appearing in 78 games. He needs to improve against lefties (.208) to be a better platoon/full-time option.

2019 salary: \$590,000. Allen won't be eligible for arbitration until 2022.

Center field

The Indians acquired Martin from Detroit at the July 31 trading deadline. He played just six games before being struck with a life-threatening bacterial infection that ended his season.

Martin hit .255 (81-for-318) with 11 homers and 33 RBI for the Tigers and Indians last season. He's a left-handed hitter who hits righties well, but struggles against lefties. Allen, a switch-hitter, also struggles against lefties, which doesn't make them a great platoon, but right now it will have to do.

2019 salary: \$3 million.

Left field

Luplow, 24, has spent parts of the last two seasons with the Pirates. In 64 games, he hit .194 (33-for-170) with six homers and 18 RBI.

Last season at Class AAA Indianapolis, he hit .287 (90-for-357) with eight homers, 49 RBI and a .824 OPS. Defensively, he's spent most of his time in left and right field.

Luplow, a right-handed hitter, has 112 days of big league service time. He's not eligible for arbitration until 2022.

2019 salary: \$585,000.

Cleveland Plain Dealer LOADED: 12.09.2018

### **On Francisco Lindor, Albert Belle and 3 other things about MLB's winter meeting in Las Vegas**

By Paul Hoynes, cleveland.com

CLEVELAND, Ohio -- The winter meetings begin Sunday in Las Vegas. The last time the meetings were in Vegas was 2008 when the Indians signed free agent closer Kerry Wood and acquired Joe Smith and Luis Valbuena in a three-team deal with the Mets and Mariners.

Wood was supposed to be a critical piece to an Indians team that was expected to do big things in 2009. They lost 97 games.

The Indians didn't have a winning season until Terry Francona took over as manager in 2013. Francona is still managing the Indians, who have averaged 97 wins over the last two seasons.

Smith has come and gone twice from the Indians since 2008 and Valbuena was killed in a car accident on Thursday night after a winter-ball game in his native Venezuela.

This year the Indians come to Vegas at a crossroads. They're trying to let the air out of a franchise-record payroll by trading one of their cherished starting pitchers, while still maintaining the ability to win a fourth straight AL Central title.

With that as a background -- along with the bright lights and clanging slot machines of Vegas -- here are five things to look for at the winter meetings.

What does Manny Machado mean to Francisco Lindor?

Manny Machado and Bryce Harper are the top free agents available this winter. They are said to be looking for deals in excess of 10 years and \$300 million. Lindor, a shortstop like Machado, is three years away from free agency, but whatever team signs Machado will set the footprint to the kind of deal that may be awaiting him.

It will also give the Indians an idea of what kind of mountain they have to climb to try and keep Lindor beyond free agency. Or convince them once and for all that the closer Lindor gets to free agency, the bigger trade chip he becomes.

Lindor has already turned down an extension worth a reported \$100 million. The Indians offered it just before the start of the 2017 season following his first full year in the big leagues. Since then Lindor has gone to two All-Star Games and won two Silver Slugger awards.

For comparisons sake, Machado, 26, hit .297 (188-for-632) with 37 homers, 107 RBI and a .905 OPS for the Orioles and Dodgers last season.

Lindor, 24, hit .277 (183-for-661) with 38 homers, 92 RBI and a .871 OPS.

Will Cooperstown call Albert Belle, Joe Carter, Orel Hershiser or ... ?

On Sunday candidates on the Today's ERA Game ballot will find out if they've been elected to Hall of Fame in Cooperstown.

Seven of the 10 candidates have connections to the Indians and Cleveland. Albert Belle, Joe Carter, Harold Baines, Orel Hershiser and Lou Piniella played for the Indians. Charlie Manuel managed them, while Yankee owner George Steinbrenner grew up in Cleveland. Piniella is on the ballot as a manager.

Last year the Modern Baseball Era committee elected Jack Morris and Alan Trammell after their time on the Baseball Writers Association of America ballot expired.

To be elected, a player, manager or executive must receive 75 percent of the vote. A 16-member panel will do the voting on Sunday.

Will interest increase in the Tribe's starting pitchers in Sin City?

The Yankees and Phillies set their sights on left-hander Patrick Corbin, but he signed a six-year, \$140 million deal with the Nationals on Tuesday.

It's true free agents cost only money, but if the Yankees and Phillies don't like what's left on the free-agent pitching market, it seems they could engage, or re-engage, with Indians on the talents of Corey Kluber and Trevor Bauer. Carlos Carrasco is off the market after signing an extension on Thursday through 2022

Some of the free-agent pitchers still on the market include J.A. Happ, Dallas Keuchel, Charlie Morton, Gio Gonzalez and Lance Lynn.

Will Bryce Harper sign during the winter meetings?

Bryce Harper is from Las Vegas, so that would certainly create some buzz if he'd sign sometime next week. But Scott Boras is his agent and he usually takes the long route when he's representing one of top free agents in the game. Last year, Boras client Eric Hosmer didn't sign with San Diego until Feb. 18.

As Boras is fond of saying, "It really doesn't matter what time dinner is as long you're the steak."

The Nationals, Harper's old team, has already offered him a 10-year \$300 million deal. Harper turned it down and the Nationals owner Mark Lerner said that's as far as the team will go.

Will any of the Tribe's free agents sign this week?

The Indians have free agents strewn all over the market. The only ones who have signed so far are Josh Donaldson and Lonnie Chisenhall. Donaldson signed a one-year deal with Atlanta for \$23 million, while Chisenhall signed for one year with Pittsburgh for \$2.75 million.

So what about the rest of the Tribe's free agents? Guys like Michael Brantley, Cody Allen, Andrew Miller, Josh Tomlin, Melky Cabrera, Rajai Davis, Brandon Guyer, Adam Rosales, Oliver Perez and Brandon Barnes.

Could they find a home this week?

It's been reported that Brantley's agent has made it know that he could play some first base next season if his new team needs him there. He has not played first base since the minors.

### **Cleveland Indians: Talkin' Carlos Carrasco contract extension and Tribe trade considerations – Terry Pluto**

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

#### **ABOUT CARLOS CARRASCO**

1. Signing Carlos Carrasco to a contract extension means the Indians won't trade him in the off-season. They have promised the pitcher that much. It would be disingenuous to learn from Carrasco that he wants to stay and is willing to sign a very reasonable (by MLB standards) extension — and then trade him.
2. The Indians touch base with the agents for their players often during the off-season. It was from those conversations they learned of Carrasco's wish for a longer deal. He was under contract for 2019 (\$9.75 million) and the team had a \$9.5 million option on him for 2020.
3. The new contract is this: \$9.75 million (2019), \$10.25 million (2020), \$12 million (2021) and \$12 million (2022). There is a \$14 million option for 2023, with a \$3 million buyout.
4. In the insane market for starting pitching, this is a bargain. But the Indians are taking some risk. Carrasco will be 32 on March 21. He had Tommy John elbow surgery in 2011. He has been on the disabled list four times in the last three years — twice because he's been hit with line drives.
5. It seems Carrasco sometimes is wearing a bullseye instead of a number. The right-hander also has dodged several line drives up the middle. But the bottom line is over the last four years, Carrasco has averaged 180 innings, his typical record was 15-9 with a 3.33 ERA.
6. Carrasco has been the Tribe's Roberto Clemente Award nominee. He has done a lot in the community. Great teammate. Wants to play. Good pitcher willing to value security on a team-friendly deal. Good move for both sides.
7. The Indians gave Jake Westbrook a three-year, \$33 million contract extension before the 2008 season. After five starts, his elbow blew up and he needed major surgery. He missed nearly two years.
8. The story had a happy ending as Westbrook became part of a 2010 trade bringing a minor leaguer named Corey Kluber to the Tribe. The Indians know there is a risk signing the 31-year-old Carrasco to a four-year extension. They also know how Carrasco has followed Kluber's lead in terms of conditioning and preparing for each start.

#### **ABOUT TRADE RUMORS**

1. The signing of Carrasco to an extension takes him off the trading market. It puts the focus on Trevor Bauer and Corey Kluber during the upcoming winter meetings in Las Vegas.
2. Paul Hoynes of Cleveland.com reported the Indians would be willing to listen to trade offers for Edwin Encarnacion. That's true. In fact, they have been trying to get some serious talks going to take the \$25 million (he has \$20 million in 2019 and a \$5 million 2020 buyout) contract. Trading him sounds like a long shot.
3. The Indians obviously are looking to dump some payroll. They took a big hit the last two years, reaching the middle of the pack in payroll with an attendance and cable TV contract in the bottom third of the Majors. They have traded a lot of prospects — Francisco Mejia, Justus Sheffield, Clint Frazier, Willi Castro and Conner Capel. Now, they want to add some young players.
4. This was a surprise to me: The Indians have the second oldest team in the Majors (29.9 years) in 2018. Toronto (30.3) was the leader. That's according to Statista. It's not huge – 10 teams are between 29-30 years old in average. But I never thought of the Tribe as having one of the older rosters. It's also why the team wants more young players. That's why I was a bit surprised Hoynes also mentioned Yandy Diaz as possibly being traded.
5. The outfield is a major problem. Right now, it would be Jason Kipnis (left) with Greg Allen and Leonys Martin (center) and Tyler Naquin/Jordan Luplow platooning in right field. Trading Corey Kluber or Trevor Bauer is a way to add help in the outfield and the bullpen (another problem area).

6. When the Indians traded Mejia to San Diego for relievers Brad Hand and Adam Cimber, they knew it could be a deal they'd regret in a few years. But they wanted to make a run back to the World Series in 2018. The bullpen collapse of Andrew Miller and Cody Allen made it imperative the Indians add relief. Hand did pitch well for the Tribe (0-1, 2.28 ERA, 8 saves).

7. Hand is under contract two more years, so the Indians have him to anchor the back of the bullpen. Allen and Miller are likely gone via free agency. The Indians still want to win the Central Division and try to make another run in the playoffs, so Hand is important to that. They also think Cimber can develop into a Joe Smith-type reliever.

8. That said, Mejia batted .328 (.946 OPS) with seven home runs and 23 RBI in 132 plate appearances in Class AAA for San Diego. The Indians had some doubt about him being a regular catcher, but they know he can hit.

9. The Yan Gomes trade was difficult for me and most Tribe fans. It was primarily a pay-cutting move as he was set to earn \$7 million in 2018. The prospects coming in return from Washington are not blue chippers in the Mejia class. Outfielder Daniel Johnson was ranked No. 8 on Washington's prospect list by Baseball America. He'll probably open 2019 at Class AA Akron.

10. Baseball America on Johnson: "He can run, play all three outfield positions and has a cannon for an arm, but no one is sure how much he'll hit. He ranked as the Nationals' No. 8 prospect entering the year but hit just .267 with six home runs in 89 games at Double-A Harrisburg. He missed time with a broken hamate bone. He followed up by hitting .145 in the Arizona Fall League. At his best, Johnson has a contact bat that drives balls the opposite way into the left-center gap."

11. The Indians also acquired pitcher Jefry Rodriguez in the trade. Baseball America wrote: "Rodriguez ranked as the Nationals' No. 24 prospect entering last season. He was 3-3, 5.71 ERA in 14 appearances (eight starts) as a rookie. Rodriguez has power stuff with a 95 mph fastball and a hammer power curveball, but he's still learning to control it."

12. The Tribe is relying on Roberto Perez and rookie Eric Haase to handle the catching duties, unless they find someone else. In the last two years, Haase combined for 47 HR between Class AA Akron and Class AAA Columbus.

13. Gomes made the 2018 All-Star team. He had injury problems from 2015-2017, never playing more than 105 games in a season. He's an excellent defensive catcher when healthy with some power. We'll see how the Indians are able to replace him, but he'll be missed.

14. If the Indians fail to make a big trade at the Winter Meetings, it's worth remembering the Tribe laid the ground work for the Trevor Bauer deal in the 2013 Winter Meetings. The three-way deal was finished a few weeks later.

#### ABOUT DANNY SALAZAR

1. Yes, the Indians gave Danny Salazar a \$4.5 million deal, slightly less than the \$5 million he was paid in 2018. He also did not pitch a single inning in 2018. He's battled injuries since making the 2016 All-Star team. He had shoulder surgery on July 2. He is expected to start throwing in Goodyear in the next few weeks.

2. Salazar is like a lottery ticket. The Indians have no idea if the 28-year-old can be healthy. But they do know it's in his financial interest to try to pitch. And Salazar has a career 38-33 record with a 3.82 ERA.

3. Baseball is insane in terms of what it will pay for starting pitchers. The Padres signed Garrett Richards to a two-year, \$15 million deal. He is expected to miss all of 2019 recovering from Tommy John elbow surgery. In the last three seasons, he has pitched only 149 innings in 28 starts because of injuries.

4. Washington signed Patrick Corbin to a six-year, \$140 million deal. The lefty is a solid starter. He was 11-7 with a 3.15 ERA last season. Over the previous three years, Corbin was 30-33 with a 4.03 ERA. That was for Arizona in the National League, where it's easier to pitch because of no DH. He does have Tommy John surgery in his background, but \$140 million? OK...

Cleveland Plain Dealer LOADED: 12.09.2018

#### **Nick Cafardo / SUNDAY BASEBALL NOTES - Here's what could happen at baseball's Winter Meetings**

By Nick Cafardo

The Nationals, Phillies, Braves, Cardinals, Yankees, and Mets are upgrading. The Mariners, Diamondbacks, and Indians are deflating. The Red Sox are maintaining.

That's the summary of the Hot Stove activity thus far. But we expect the best is yet to come as the Winter Meetings start Sunday at the Mandalay Bay Resort and Casino in Las Vegas. There's plenty to come, such as the destinations of Manny Machado and Bryce Harper, the top free agents on the market.

We may not know where these two fine players will end up by the end of the meetings on Thursday, but we'll likely see a number of trades and signings take place in Vegas. Agents and teams seem more eager to get things done quickly after the gridlock of last winter. Nobody seems to want that to happen again.

So, what could happen at the Winter Meetings?

#### AL East

Boston Red Sox — The Sox are trying to maintain as much of their historic team as possible. The signings of Steve Pearce and Nathan Eovaldi have helped that. They'd love to get Craig Kimbrel back, but he'd have to take a hometown discount. Otherwise, they'll be shopping for relievers and trying to make a deal with Joe Kelly, as well.

Related: Red Sox keeping band together in quest to repeat, but is it the right move?

New York Yankees — James Paxton was a nice pickup, but the Yankees have their eyes on one more starter, and they will also have to address a couple of late-inning relief openings. Zach Britton and David Robertson are both free agents and must be re-signed or replaced. Never, ever rule them out of Harper or Machado. Machado makes more sense given their need at shortstop, where Didi Gregorius will miss half

the season after Tommy John surgery. They will also move Sonny Gray, which could land them a reliever or prospect they could move in another deal.

Tampa Bay Rays — Every once in a while you hear they're after a high-priced pitcher, which isn't their M.O. But they would like to add to their starter arsenal and still do their "opener" experiment but on a more limited basis. If they're looking for a veteran, then old friend James Shields, who pitched for the Rays for seven years, or Charlie Morton might be a nice fit with their younger pitchers.

Toronto Blue Jays — The Jays need a bit of everything, and eventually they'll have a tremendous young infield led by Vladimir Guerrero Jr., Bo Bichette, and Cavan Biggio. Players such as Andrew McCutchen or Adam Jones would fit nicely with the young guys. They are also competing for a starting pitcher, possibly Dallas Keuchel.

Baltimore Orioles — The Orioles could purge this team even more under new management. They need two or three really good drafts where they pick near the top. In the meantime, they could purge this team even more by trying to deal Alex Cobb.

#### AL Central

Cleveland Indians — It's a shame this team is being dismantled, but when you lose Michael Brantley, Yan Gomes, Josh Donaldson, Andrew Miller, and Cody Allen, etc., it means you're bailing out. They recently extended Carlos Carrasco, so it would stand to reason he's off the trade market. That leaves Corey Kluber and Trevor Bauer very much in play for deals. Kluber, a two-time Cy Young winner who won 20 games in 2018, could bring back a haul of young players, and there will be a significant market. But the Indians won't settle, they'll need to get major prospects back in any trade for Kluber.

Minnesota Twins — The Twins already made a significant signing in Jonathan Schoop, who had a terrible 2018 season but is a major talent. The Twins also will try to add a couple of back-end bullpen pieces, and they have the ability to do so given their payroll. Last season they were in on Yu Darvish, so they're willing to spend a little money if they feel it will relaunch them into the mix in the Central, which it may with the Indians deflating.

Detroit Tigers — The Tigers are in Year 3 of their reload and they would likely want to shed more money in the form of righthander Michael Fulmer and right fielder Nicholas Castellanos, both of whom could entice teams in need of pitching and offense.

Kansas City Royals — The big question here is would the Royals deal All-Star catcher Salvador Perez? Any established team ready to win would love to have him. If the Marlins' J.T. Realmuto is too expensive, Perez would also be costly in terms of players the Royals would need to get back in any deal. Also, the Royals will look to add a center fielder. Billy Hamilton has been rumored as a possible add.

Chicago White Sox — After trading Chris Sale and their entire rotation for prospects, the White Sox are at the point where they need to show some progress in terms of contending. They are still taking calls on first baseman Jose Abreu, but there's an organizational debate on whether they should move him before the big money starts or keep him.

#### AL West

Houston Astros — The Astros want a first baseman with power, which is why they've inquired about Abreu and were also in on Paul Goldschmidt before he was traded to St. Louis. They are likely losing Morton and Keuchel in free agency, though there's still a possibility one or both re-sign. Marwin Gonzalez is also a free agent and has been a key guy for them. He, too, could be re-signed. The Astros signed free agent Robinson Chirinos, but they may not be done on the catching front, as they've had major interest in Realmuto, and could always pursue Perez.

Oakland Athletics — One priority appears to be re-signing free agent Jed Lowrie. Beyond that, you never know what the A's might do. They'll entertain bringing back catcher Jonathan Lucroy. There's been speculation about reacquiring Gray from the Yankees, but they don't want to give up what the Yankees had to pay originally for him. They need starting pitching, so we'll see at what level their ownership will allow. They also have to think about a long-term deal for Kris Davis, the premier power hitter in baseball, who will be a free agent after the 2019 season.

Seattle Mariners — General manager Jerry Dipoto has done a lot of tearing down of his 89-win team, and he's probably not done. He'd probably like to move Jay Bruce and Carlos Santana, older players he had to acquire in deals. He'd also like to move second baseman Dee Gordon and veteran righthander Mike Leake.

Texas Rangers — The Rangers need pitching and it'll be interesting to see where they get it. Gray could be a trade option. Free agents J.A. Happ, Leake, Drew Pomeranz, Mike Fiers, and Lance Lynn are all in play. They're also exploring Japanese lefthander Yusei Kikuchi.

Los Angeles Angels — The Angels need to sign a significant starting pitcher such as Keuchel, Morton or Happ. Or trade for Kluber. They also need bullpen help, and there are plenty of relievers out there. But their biggest priority might be to work out a deal for Mike Trout, who can become a free agent at the end of the 2019 season.

#### NL East

Philadelphia Phillies — They obviously have the bucks to spend as a result of their lucrative television deal, and when their owner says they may even get "a little stupid" in their spending, you know they're not going to sit still. After acquiring Jean Segura from the Mariners, who will play shortstop it appears, if they're interested in Machado they'll have to convince him to play third. Money talks. If the offer gets between \$350 million and \$400 million, that might be a very loud voice. The Phillies also need pitching, and with Patrick Corbin and Eovaldi off the market, that likely leaves them competing for Happ or possibly getting themselves in position for the Cleveland guys — Kluber or Bauer. Philadelphia doesn't seem to be Zack Greinke's kind of place, but he's the type of pitcher they need. The Phillies may also be in the market for a closer, and it wouldn't be shocking to see them in the Kimbrel mix, though Miller and Britton might be more their cup of tea.

Washington Nationals — The Nationals may not be done yet after inking Corbin to a six-year, \$140 million deal, and adding catchers Kurt Suzuki and Gomes (in a trade with Cleveland). Will their remaining resources go toward a second baseman or an elite reliever? Not sure they'll be all-in with someone such as Kimbrel, but more on the Britton, Miller, and Adam Ottavino level. And at second base, could it be Brian Dozier, DJ LeMahieu, or even a reunion with Daniel Murphy? Owner Ted Lerner said the Nationals can't go beyond the 10-year, \$300 million deal they have offered Harper.

New York Mets — With Robinson Cano and Edwin Diaz on board after a deal with Seattle, the Mets couldn't possibly be thinking of dealing Noah Syndergaard, could they? It wouldn't make sense to build up with those acquisitions and then trade your second-best pitcher, would it? The Mets, under new president of baseball operations Brodie Van Wagenen, are going for it. The division is going to be tremendously competitive after the Phillies, Braves, and Nationals finish making moves.

Atlanta Braves — They've done a good amount already with the signings of Brian McCann and Donaldson. While GM Alex Anthopoulos claims most of their resources have been tapped, they need to address their pitching. They will get in on Happ, Keuchel, or Kluber. They need a veteran presence in the rotation. They also need a bullpen boost. Some have pointed to a Kimbrel reunion, but not sure the Braves want to spend that kind of money on a closer.

Miami Marlins — The only team in the division that won't compete in 2019, but the Marlins possess one of the most-coveted players in Realmuto. The trouble is that the unrealistic asking price may have scared off top suitors such as the Nationals and Astros, both of whom made bids and then moved on to other catchers. There's still plenty of interest from the Mets and others, but it will take the Marlins coming down from their demand of three top prospects.

#### NL Central

Chicago Cubs — We're not sure where the Cubs fall in terms of wanting to stay under the luxury-tax threshold. They need to improve their offense, but may not be able to go for Machado or Harper. They will look for bullpen pieces after losing Jesse Chavez and Justin Wilson in free agency, and Brandon Morrow (elbow) won't be ready to start the season. They have had their sights on veteran reliever Joakim Soria. This is still a team to watch. There has been Kris Bryant speculation all offseason, but I'd be surprised if he got traded.

St. Louis Cardinals — They traded for their big bat in Goldschmidt, so now let's see if Kimbrel becomes their next big acquisition. It was thought that Harper would be on their wish list, but he may now be off with the Goldschmidt trade. That would put Matt Carpenter at third base permanently.

Milwaukee Brewers — They could re-sign free agent Wade Miley, and if they did they'd be done with pitching help. They could also be a Gray candidate. With Mike Moustakas gone, Travis Shaw will likely return to third base, and the Brewers would seek a second baseman with Schoop signing with the Twins. The Brewers could pursue someone such as Logan Forsythe.

Pittsburgh Pirates — Their focus will be at shortstop. They could re-sign Jordy Mercer or pursue someone of the Jose Iglesias ilk in free agency. They let Josh Harrison go, so they may be looking for another infielder and cheap bullpen help. The Pirates are willing to deal catcher Francisco Cervelli in the right package.

Cincinnati Reds — It seems like a huge year for the Reds' management team, which needs to show the fans some progress. They have made noise that they're after a couple of big-ticket items, including Keuchel, to anchor a young staff, and A.J. Pollock to replace Hamilton in center. We'll see. Given that it's a tough division, free agents may be hesitant to go there and have the team struggle.

#### NL West

Los Angeles Dodgers — The two-time World Series runners-up have entertained Harper but will likely not pursue Machado with Corey Seager returning after Tommy John surgery. Harper would be an intriguing bat from the left side in an already stacked lineup. It would likely allow them to deal one of their other lefthanded hitters. The Dodgers have done a great job of getting to the World Series, but there has to be pressure to do something to get over the hump. Their fan base is likely watching this offseason closely.

San Francisco Giants — So much has been said about the possibility of Madison Bumgarner being moved. It would be rather shocking, but it's not out of the realm of possibility. Several teams, including the Yankees, Phillies, Braves, Angels, and A's could fit. The Giants also need to revamp their offense with an entire new outfield. They'll dip into the Pollock, Brantley, and Nick Markakis waters for sure, and also try to acquire some power. They made a big attempt at Giancarlo Stanton last year and came up short. Power guys such as Nelson Cruz and Mike Moustakas make some sense, though Cruz is more of a DH.

Colorado Rockies — They would love to upgrade their catching and offense at the same time, so free agents Wilson Ramos and Yasmani Grandal could be in play. They would love to get Realmuto, but who wouldn't? They will likely lose Ottavino to free agency and would have to replace him with someone like Allen or Kelly. They also need one more legitimate starting pitcher, and they could very well pursue a deal for Cobb.

Arizona Diamondbacks — They gave it their best shot for a couple of years, but now payroll is becoming an issue, and they're being forced to move on from key players such as Goldschmidt and Pollock. The Diamondbacks will look for lower-cost replacements. Who knows if McCutchen's cost will come down or whether Hamilton could fit? They may re-sign Clay Buchholz.

San Diego Padres — GM A.J. Preller has slowly but surely built the major league team to where he may start adding substantive pieces. Wil Myers doesn't fit the lineup, so he's trade bait for a starting pitcher. After acquiring Eric Hosmer last season, Preller wants to keep adding major league talent to become competitive by 2020. Wouldn't be a shock to see the Padres go after a front-line free agent starter, and they have interest in Kikuchi.

### **As the MLB winter meetings near, let's take a look at the Royals' objectives there**

BY SAM MCDOWELL

Royals second baseman Whit Merrifield discusses his hit streak and leading baseball in base hits.

During a span of 72 hours in a haven for those with a risk-seeking propensity, the top brass of 30 MLB teams will gather in a hotel and install, tweak and refine offseason blueprints. The league's winter meetings, scheduled for Monday-Thursday in Las Vegas, annually produce some of the most lively maneuvering of the offseason. Trades. Free agency.

The Royals will take part in the conversation. But the likelihood is they won't be leading them.

For a team in the midst of a rebuild — even if the front office has started to avoid that word — expect more remodeling than a tear-down, more tinkering than significant adjustments.

Royals general manager Dayton Moore previously expressed a desire to "get the payroll under control," a motive that will drive the agenda in Vegas. The Royals stood at \$103 million on opening day last year, and have already shed major salary with in-season trades and players they elected not to bring back for 2019.

"We have to get our major-league payroll under control (and) more manageable so we're in a better position in 2020 and 2021 and beyond to do some things that we believe impact our major-league team in a more positive way and win more games," Moore said after the season.

Even so, there are needs that will require addressing. The bullpen is priority No. 1 this winter. The Royals' relief crew posted a 5.04 earned run average in 2018, worst in the American League.

Moore previously said an addition to the bullpen would likely come later in the free-agency window, but those plans are susceptible to change should the right deal present itself. The Royals' recent addition of Chris Owings, a utility player who will serve as a backup middle infielder and outfielder, is a base for the type of moves the club will target. They could opt to provide more competition for the starting center field job, with Brian Goodwin and Brett Phillips the primary options currently on the roster. Billy Hamilton, a player the Royals previously liked, could be a fit after he was non-tendered last week by the Reds. Hamilton is a light hitter, but his top-line speed and defense could be better suited for the spacious outfield at Kauffman Stadium.

The winter meetings will pit the league's general managers within the same dwelling for three days, a position that often leads to the most active trade talks of the entire winter.

The Royals have trade assets. In fact, if they chose to make their full roster available, they'd have one of the top assets on the market.

Leadoff hitter Whit Merrifield led the majors in hits and steals this year, and he has four years of club control remaining. It makes him a desirable target. But Moore has voiced a preference to make Merrifield part of the club's transition toward brighter days. And in the realm of ridding the organization of the term "rebuild," trading Merrifield would be a difficult sell.

The Kansas City Star LOADED: 12.08.2018

## Royals Winter Meetings preview: Is Billy Hamilton on the radar? Is Mike Moustakas an option?

By Rustin Dodd Dec 7, 2018

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — It's fair to say that the Royals have a type.

The club has long coveted premium athletes, prioritizing baserunning and defense like few others. For years, the front office has desired elite defenders to roam the spacious confines of Kauffman Stadium.

General manager Dayton Moore calls them "action-type" players, and the definition is simple: They are runners who can test a defense. They are defensive players who will compete for Gold Gloves in the middle of the diamond. They are the kind of athletes who would be picked first on the playground at recess, no matter the sport.

One player who fits that description is former Reds center fielder Billy Hamilton, the lithe speedster who was non-tendered last week and became a free agent. It's no surprise that Hamilton has surfaced on the Royals' radar in advance of next week's Winter Meetings in Las Vegas.

The Royals were one of many teams that tried to trade for Hamilton in his final years in Cincinnati, according to The Athletic's Jayson Stark. The club is expected to look at Hamilton again as the industry migrates to the Mandalay Bay Resort & Casino for the offseason's premier event.

THE IRONY OF THE #REDS NON-TENDERING BILLY HAMILTON: I CAN THINK OF AT LEAST 4 TEAMS IN LAST 2-3 YEARS WHO THOUGHT THEY'D AGREED TO A TRADE FOR HIM.#GIANTS #INDIANS #MARINERS #ROYALS

REDS REVERSED COURSE ON ALL OF THEM, PRESUMABLY B/C OWNERSHIP LOVED BILLY. ENDED UP WITH ZILCH

— JAYSON STARK (@JAYSONST) DECEMBER 1, 2018

Hamilton, 28, was once one of the top prospects in baseball, a center fielder with incomparable speed and exceptional stolen-base numbers in the minor leagues. Yet his offensive skill set never quite developed across six seasons in Cincinnati. He batted just .245 with a .298 on-base percentage and little pop. He struggled to get on base. The Reds, who paid Hamilton \$4.6 million in 2018, opted to cut ties with the outfielder rather than enter his final season of salary arbitration.

The Royals, however, could be a good fit. They do not have a strong incumbent in center field, and they possess one of the largest outfields in baseball at Kauffman Stadium, where Hamilton's speed and defensive ability could offer strong value. And if Hamilton is seeking a more significant role than fourth outfielder and pinch-runner, the Royals could potentially offer regular playing time, seeking to maximize his defense while hoping for a bounce-back on offense.

Hamilton has averaged more than 1.2 WAR on defense across the last four seasons, according to Baseball Reference. Yet his offense has torpedoed his overall value. He has been worth more than 2.0 wins above replacement just twice in his career, posting 2.5 WAR in 2014 and 2.8 in 2016. He stole just 34 bases last season after averaging 58 during the previous three years.

For now, it's unclear whether Hamilton has interest in playing in Kansas City. The Royals, who spent \$3 million this week on another non-tendered player, infielder/outfielder Chris Owings, to push their current obligations to close to \$85 million, are seeking to keep their payroll in the \$90 to \$92 million range.

The club also has options in center field in Brett Phillips and Brian Goodwin. Phillips, 24, was acquired last season from Milwaukee in the Mike Moustakas trade and has batted .222/.291/.362 with 95 strikeouts in 245 MLB plate appearances. He also posted strong defensive numbers in a small sample size in 2018.

Phillips also has options remaining, meaning he could be sent to Triple-A Omaha to start the season. Goodwin, 28, has been a replacement-level player across parts of four seasons in Washington and Kansas City. He hit .266/.317/.415 in 27 games last season after being acquired in a trade from the Nationals.

In short, Hamilton could be a name to watch as the Royals travel to Las Vegas next week. Here are some other storylines to keep an eye on:

Starling expected to sign minor-league deal

It's been more than a week since the Royals elected to non-tender center fielder Bubba Starling, the much-maligned, often-injured former first-round pick, but the expectation in the industry is that Starling will return to Kansas City on a minor-league deal.

The club has already re-signed right-hander Andres Machado to a minor-league deal. The team also non-tendered reliever Jason Adam and first baseman Samir Duenez. Those players could also be candidates for minor-league deals.

Starling, 26, played in just 20 games in 2018 while battling an oblique issues and a dislocated finger after falling out of bed in a fluky incident in July. (Starling was days away from reporting back to Omaha to resume his season.)

#ROYALS MINOR LEAGUE OUTFIELDER BUBBA STARLING WILL BE SIDELINED FOR APPROXIMATELY SIX WEEKS AFTER SUFFERING A DISLOCATED LEFT INDEX FINGER. THE INJURY OCCURRED OFF THE FIELD DURING A VISIT HOME LAST WEEK.

— KANSAS CITY ROYALS (@ROYALS) JULY 19, 2018

The lost year represented the latest setback for the fifth overall pick in the 2011 draft.

Starling is expected to return to the Royals and start the season at Triple-A Omaha. If healthy and productive, he could position himself for his major-league debut in 2019. But seeking relief on their 40-man roster, the club is taking a cautious, wait-and-see approach.

Is Moustakas an option to return?

Moore told The Athletic last month that the club likely will avoid long-term contracts and significant financial investments for the second straight offseason.

Does that policy rule out the possible return of third baseman Mike Moustakas? It would appear so — but we can never say never.

Moustakas, 29, will be seeking a long-term free-agent contract after missing out on one in his first trip to free agency last winter, but another sluggish market could re-introduce the Royals to the equation. Yet the club could seek to maintain flexibility on its roster, offering playing time to



Hunter Dozier and Cheslor Cuthbert at third base instead. The club will also have top prospect Nicky Lopez, a second baseman, waiting at Omaha. Moore said last month that Lopez also has the ability to play third base.

The other priority: The Rule 5 draft

After the Owings signing, the Royals have 37 players on their 40-man roster, so they have plenty of room for one or two additions in the Rule 5 draft, which takes place the Thursday morning of the Winter Meetings.

The club struck gold last winter with the selection of right-hander Brad Keller, who blossomed into one of the best rookie starters in the American League. The sheer volume of available players makes analysis and predictions difficult, yet the Royals, drafting second behind the Orioles, will have their pick of almost any Rule 5-eligible player in baseball.

That means any player who is not on a 40-man roster, was 18 or younger when drafted and is entering their fifth Rule 5 draft; or any player not on a 40-man roster, was 19 or older when drafted, and entering their fourth Rule 5 draft.

The Royals were active last season, initiating two trades to acquire players higher in the draft. With space on their 40-man roster and the organization in rebuilding mode, they could look to acquire multiple players again.

The Athletic LOADED: 12.08.2018

## **Twins aren't expected to roll the dice at Major League Baseball's winter meetings**

By La Velle E. Neal III Star Tribune

The Twins have filled their opening at second base, assembled options for first base and feel comfortable with four-fifths of their starting rotation.

That leaves one position, maybe two, left on their shopping list as they head to Las Vegas this week for the annual Major League Baseball winter meetings. They will be on the lookout for relief help, with a market that has several free agents available and a few available by trade. And, if the right opportunity presents itself, they could make another move to boost the offense.

The Twins have indicated that next season will be about allowing their young core to continue to develop. So they won't be in the Manny Machado and Bryce Harper free-agent sweepstakes, likely will pass on starting rotation upgrades and have been one of a few teams to not be linked to a trade with the Mariners, who are tearing apart their roster.

But there's still work to be done as the Twins join 29 other clubs at the Mandalay Bay Resort and Casino for the annual weeklong verbal banquet.

"Going into the winter meetings, we have a good idea of what our general approach will be while we are there and who we need to meet with," Twins Chief Baseball Officer Derek Falvey said. "But the reality is that as soon as you get there, things start changing and there are different conversations that take place that you weren't anticipating."

The Twins were on the hunt for a starting second baseman last week and signed 2017 All-Star Jonathan Schoop, who had an awful 2018, to a one-year, \$7.5 million contract Thursday. With the retirement of Joe Mauer, they needed a first baseman. So last month they claimed C.J. Cron off waivers from the Rays. Cron, who hit 30 homers last season, was signed to a \$4.8 million deal to avoid arbitration.

Those could end up being their most noteworthy acquisitions. The only chance the Twins could pull off a surprise is if someone such as Nelson Cruz becomes affordable enough to make him the full-time designated hitter in 2019. They prefer to use different players in the role next season, but that is the only position where they could add a player.

The Twins appear to be comfortable with their options for the starting rotation. Jose Berrios went 12-11 with a 3.84 ERA last season and pitched in the All-Star Game. Kyle Gibson went 10-13 with a 3.62 ERA. Jake Odorizzi, acquired after camp opened, stumbled to 7-10 with a 4.49 ERA.

Falvey spoke highly of Michael Pineda, the former Yankees righthander who spent 2018 rehabbing from elbow surgery, as if he is already counted as part of the rotation. Pineda's elbow is fine, but a sore right knee kept him from pitching for the Twins in September.

"[Pineda] looks great working out in Florida," Falvey said. "We feel like he's a guy who, when we signed him, the whole anticipation was for this season and the upside he could provide in the rotation."

Lefthanders Adalberto Mejia and Stephen Gonsalves and righthanders Kohl Stewart, Zack Littell, Aaron Slegers, Chase DeJong and Fernando Romero are candidates for the last spot in the rotation. The Twins didn't get involved in talks for free agents Patrick Corbin, Nathan Eovaldi and J.A. Happ. Corbin has signed with the Nationals, Eovaldi re-signed with the Red Sox and the Yankees reportedly want to bring back Happ.

But the Twins could get involved in talks for free-agent relievers Cody Allen or Kelvin Herrera. They could spend hours in their suite talking with agents Sam and Seth Levinson, who represent Allen, Jeurys Familia and Adam Ottavino, all of whom could boost the Twins relief corps.

The Twins also are willing to move the starters who don't win a spot into the rotation into the bullpen. Falvey mentioned Mejia as a possibility, and rumblings about moving Romero, who can throw 97 miles per hour, to the bullpen have started again.

"In terms of bullpen, that's the group you always kind of feel like you are monitoring and seeing what's out there and we can certainly add to that group," Falvey said.

"We do feel really good about some of our young arms, guys that might even slide from that starter group. Some of those guys could end up in the bullpen.

"But I would anticipate this week that a lot of those conversations will pick up."

## **Twins' to-do list at baseball's winter meetings**

By La Velle E. Neal III Star Tribune

- Find a ninth-inning guy: The Twins finished last season without a designated closer, so they need one. Keep in mind that the Twins aren't expected to be ready to take over the AL Central, so they won't break the bank here.

- Consider more relief help: The Twins could use other late-inning options while Trevor Hildenberger, Taylor Rogers and Trevor May continue their development.
- Consider adding a bat: A veteran slugger would look good in the middle of the order, but the Twins might decide to rotate a few players through the designated hitter spot.
- Explore potential trades: Teams are interested in dealing with the Twins because of their strong farm system and young major league core. Will the Twins use those potential trade chips?
- Prepare for the Rule 5 draft, maybe: Thursday's additions of Jonathan Schoop and Ronald Torreyes filled up the 40-man roster, so the Twins would have to clear space to draft a player. This could be the rare year they sit out the major league phase.

**Star Tribune LOADED: 12.09.2018**

### **Winter Meetings: Tigers will shop free-agent bargain aisles to fill roster holes**

Chris McCosky, The Detroit News

Detroit — If you are bargain hunting, the best deals typically come after the top-shelf stock is sold.

That's how the Tigers played it at last year's Winter Meetings. And, most likely, that will be their approach this week as the baseball industry conducts its massive annual trade show in Las Vegas. While contending teams bid on Bryce Harper, Manny Machado and other elite free agents, the Tigers and the rest of the rebuilders are expected to wait to see what's left and discounted on the rack.

But there is a different dynamic in play this year. Players, particularly those not considered top-shelf worthy, are more motivated to get their deals done quicker. Seeing so many quality players sit on the shelf without jobs into and through spring training last season changed the mind-set of a lot of mid-level players.

Newly signed Tigers left-hander Matt Moore spoke on this last week.

"This was my first taste of free agency and I wasn't exactly coming off the most desirable season," he said. "And especially, after the last two or three years when the market, even for guys coming off a great season, was extremely volatile, to say the least.

"To work out a deal this early, I feel like I was kind of lucky. I didn't have to fall into that category of having to push this thing down the road."

The Twins were able to sign second baseman Jonathan Schoop to a one-year deal for \$7.5 million this week. Even though he struggled after being traded to the Brewers last season, he's 27 and was an All-Star in 2017.

He might've been able to get more money, certainly a multi-year deal, had he waited it out. But his camp decided the security of the bird in hand (\$7.5 million for a year) was better than hoping there'd be two in a bush somewhere else.

Understand, though, the Tigers aren't spending \$7.5 million on any one player — they may not spend that much for free agents in total. They haven't spent the last two-plus paring down their payroll, finally getting under the luxury tax threshold and getting to where they should receive a revenue-sharing check instead of paying a revenue-sharing bill, to blow it out again in the second year of the rebuild.

The Tigers aren't going to be big spenders in free agency until the new foundation is built and they are ready to be legitimate contenders again — think 2021, 2022.

"Right now, I don't know what payroll is going to look like," general manager Al Avila said at the end of the season. "It could very easily come down. It could very easily stay neutral. I'm trying my best, obviously, not to make it any higher because that's not where we want to go.

"It's my goal to set up the organization and its foundation moving forward for success, and the best way to do that is to bring payroll down so we can continue to accumulate prospects."

Avila cited the Milwaukee Brewers as a creditable model. Keep acquiring prospects, keep trying to find undervalued talent (like they did with Niko Goodrum last year) and, "try to make more good decisions than bad ones."

The Tigers opted not to tender contracts to veteran leaders James McCann and Alex Wilson, mostly because it saved them about \$6.5 million. That gives you an indication of the kind of deep-dive bargain hunting they will be doing the rest of this offseason.

"It's getting the payroll down and accumulating prospects," Avila said. "We're going to bring guys through here, we're going to look at them. A good thing right now is that a lot of these guys that were in Double-A are going to be in Triple-A who, in the near future, are going to be in the big leagues."

Adeiny Hechavarria is one of the shortstops on the Tigers' shopping list.

That's the mission. Maybe we will see the likes of catcher Jake Rogers, shortstop Willi Castro, outfielder Daz Cameron and pitchers Beau Burrows, Kyle Funkhouser, Matt Manning or Franklin Perez at some point in 2019. But it won't be until that group — which also includes infielder Isaac Parades and pitchers Casey Mize, Matt Manning and Alex Faedo — gets established that the Tigers will resume spending real money on players.

In the meantime, there are holes to fill. And with more agents coming to Vegas this week motivated to get contracts for their clients, perhaps the Tigers won't come home empty.

Avila and his lieutenants will arrive in Las Vegas Sunday and at the top of their priority list will be to sign a veteran shortstop. Adeiny Hechavarria, Jordy Mercer and Freddy Galvis are certainly among the candidates.

Two other intriguing possibilities. Miguel Cabrera has spent the offseason working out with Royals shortstop and free agent Alcides Escobar. He may be too expensive, but he'd be worth investigating. Also, the Orioles non-tendered Tim Beckham. The Tigers could offer him a one- or two-year shot at redemption.

Though they paid Moore \$2.5 million, with another \$1 million in incentives, they most likely are seeking another veteran starting pitcher. The pool of pitchers in their price range isn't overwhelming — Edwin Jackson, Brett Anderson, Tyson Ross, Jeremy Hellickson, Marco Estrada, etc.

Trenton native and former Eastern Michigan standout Matt Shoemaker is also available. After battling injuries the last two seasons, he was non-tendered by the Angels.

With Wilson gone from the bullpen, the Tigers may also be dipping into the deep pool of available relievers. They may choose to use their Rule 5 pick on a relief pitcher, as well.

With McCann gone, the Tigers are left with a young and relatively inexperienced catching duo — second-year Grayson Greiner and John Hicks, who will also play some first base and DH, manning the catching position.

Still, the Tigers don't appear interested in adding another veteran to the mix. They signed Bobby Wilson, who has played parts of nine seasons in the big leagues and will be 36 in April, to a minor-league contract. For now, he is the veteran third catcher likely to start the season in Triple-A Toledo.

But Chris Herrmann, 31, who came up in the Twins organization under manager Ron Gardenhire, was non-tendered by the Mariners. Gardenhire talked often last season of his desire for a third catcher on the big-league roster, one who can fill in at first base and outfield. He often mentioned Herrmann as that kind of player.

Another non-tendered player the Tigers may consider is left-handed power threat Justin Bour, if he's not out of their price range. He's a 30-year-old first baseman and designated hitter who has hit 20 or more home runs the last three seasons and four of the last five.

He stands to get a raise above the \$3.4 million he made last season splitting time between the Marlins and Phillies. He'd be a good fit, though. A left-handed bat that could replace Victor Martinez (retired) as the everyday DH, or share first base and the DH role with Cabrera.

That would allow Hicks to concentrate on catching, figuring he and Greiner would share the duties close to a 50-50 split.

As for the procurement of prospects, Avila has but one blue chip to play, and that is right fielder Nick Castellanos, who is entering his final year of team control. To this point, there hasn't been a lot of meaningful interest from teams, except from the Astros, who have reportedly made preliminary inquiries.

Pitchers Matthew Boyd and Shane Greene could also draw some trade interest. Both are arbitration-eligible. According MLBTradeRumors.com, Greene could get as much as \$4.8 million in arbitration and Boyd up to \$3 million.

Other arbitration-eligible players include Castellanos (\$11.3 million), Blaine Hardy (\$1.2 million), Michael Fulmer (\$3 million), Daniel Norris (\$1.4 million) and Drew VerHagen (\$900,000).

Assuming all that money will eventually be added to the payroll (roughly \$25.6 million) — they were all tendered — it's hard to see the Tigers spending much more than another \$5 million to \$7 million on free agents going forward.

The meetings begin in earnest on Monday and conclude with the Rule 5 draft on Thursday.