



CHICAGO CUBS DAILY CLIPS

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March 13, 2018

- Chicago Tribune, **Jose Quintana expects better run support and more wins with Cubs**
<http://www.chicagotribune.com/sports/baseball/cubs/ct-spt-cubs-notes-jose-quintana-run-support-20180312-story.html>
- Chicago Tribune, **Cubs' Mike Montgomery believes tweak in delivery will make him sharper — as reliever or starter**
<http://www.chicagotribune.com/sports/baseball/cubs/ct-spt-cubs-mike-montgomery-delivery-20180312-story.html>
- Chicago Tribune, **Hard to say goodbye after Jake Arrieta's classy note, but Scott Boras made it easy to leave**
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- Chicago Tribune, **Cubs' Jose Quintana to throw simulated game to stay on schedule**
<http://www.chicagotribune.com/sports/baseball/cubs/ct-spt-cubs-jose-quintana-20180312-story.html>
- Chicago Sun-Times, **Cubs' Jose Quintana tired of the .500 life: 'I want more wins. This is my year'**
<https://chicago.suntimes.com/sports/cubs-jose-quintana-tired-of-the-500-life-i-want-more-wins-this-is-my-year/>
- Chicago Sun-Times, **Jake Arrieta writes of 'dreams turned reality' in farewell letter to Cubs**
<https://chicago.suntimes.com/sports/cubs-jake-arrieta-letter-twitter-phillies/>
- Daily Herald, **How Happ, Almora could affect center field, leadoff spots for Chicago Cubs**
<http://www.dailyherald.com/sports/20180312/how-happ-almora-could-affect-center-field-leadoff-spots-for-chicago-cubs>
- The Athletic, **What the Cubs' secret weapon can do for Yu Darvish**
<https://theathletic.com/270991/2018/03/12/inside-the-yu-darvish-pursuit-with-the-cubs-secret-weapon/>
- The Athletic, **Can Jake Arrieta fight off his steady decline in Philadelphia?**
<https://theathletic.com/270590/2018/03/12/can-jake-arrieta-fight-off-his-steady-decline-in-philadelphia/>
- Cubs.com, **Cubs' 25-man projection for Opening Day**
<https://www.mlb.com/cubs/news/cubs-roster-features-more-depth-for-2018/c-268544048>
- Cubs.com, **Quintana tosses sim game to stay on track**
<https://www.mlb.com/cubs/news/cubs-lhp-jose-quintana-throws-simulated-game/c-268526846>

- NBC Sports Chicago, **Can the Cubs' bullpen move on from all those postseason walks and provide a safety net for Brandon Morrow?**
<http://www.nbcsports.com/chicago/cubs/can-cubs-bullpen-move-all-those-postseason-walks-and-provide-safety-net-brandon-morrow>

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Chicago Tribune

Jose Quintana expects better run support and more wins with Cubs

By Mark Gonzales

Cubs left-hander Jose Quintana has a strong feeling that as long as he fulfills his duties, the victories that eluded him in the past will finally show up.

“With any players, you set expectations,” Quintana said Monday after throwing 63 pitches in five innings of a simulated game at Sloan Park. “I want more wins. I think this is my year, our year. ... I’ll get ready every five days and have a good chance to win games. I know hitters make the best for us every single game. We can hit.”

The Cubs scored 822 runs last season, second to the Rockies in the National League.

Quintana, 29, didn’t single out his former team, the White Sox. But during his 5½ seasons with the Sox, Quintana was often the victim of poor run support. He received two runs or fewer in 57 percent of his 169 starts with the Sox. In 2016, Quintana managed a career-high 13 wins with a career-low 3.20 ERA in 32 starts despite a nine-start stretch in which he received one or no runs of support.

Quintana was 0-7 during that stretch from May 14 to June 28, during which he posted a 4.58 ERA.

The simulated game against minor-league batters allowed Quintana to work on specific facets, particularly his changeup to left-handed hitters late in counts. He plans to throw 85 pitches in his next start.

Working way back: Left-hander Drew Smyly is enjoying every minute with his teammates while recovering from Tommy John surgery.

“This is an outstanding place to go to work because of the guys, and the facilities are top notch,” Smyly said. “It might be hard during the season showing up here rehabbing and watching the team on TV, but right now it’s fun showing up every day.”

Smyly said he will continue his throwing program for the next three weeks before taking a week off and then throwing off a mound at the team’s complex in Mesa. His rehab schedule calls for him to stretch his throwing program soon from 120 feet to 135 before throwing off a mound.

“I’m getting close,” said Smyly, who has a 31-27 record and 3.74 ERA in five seasons but hasn’t pitched in a major-league game since the end of 2016 with the Rays. “It’s still a long way, but getting on that mound in a few weeks will be a big step. I’m looking forward to it.”

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Chicago Tribune

Cubs' Mike Montgomery believes tweak in delivery will make him sharper — as reliever or starter
By Mark Gonzales

Mike Montgomery is at peace with the likelihood he will open the season in the Cubs bullpen.

But in the event Montgomery is summoned to the rotation — his preference — the 6-foot-5 left-hander believes he's more equipped to succeed in either role.

Montgomery said a tweak in his delivery that run prevention coordinator Tommy Hottovy suggested could correct the occasional control lapses that have hindered his effectiveness.

"It's amazing the technology and information we get," said Montgomery, who will start Tuesday against the Padres at Peoria Sports Complex. "I had no idea. We'll see how hitters react to it."

Hottovy, 36, who pitched for the Red Sox and Royals in 2011-12, saw on video that Montgomery's stride was longer and his arm angle lower in 2017 than it was in 2016 — his breakthrough season that motivated the Cubs to acquire him from the Mariners.

Montgomery has noticed that by taking a shorter stride, he's able to stay vertical through an overhand delivery and put a sharper break on his curve and his other pitches.

"I was told my stride was longer on certain pitches, especially the curve," Montgomery said. "I need that pitch sharp to get more swings and misses. That's the age of baseball we're getting into. I've been able to apply it this spring.

"I've been thinking about it a lot when playing catch, and it has transitioned when I've been throwing my bullpens. I'll continue to get stretched out and see how it shakes out while going through the normal soreness of spring training."

As long as Montgomery is assigned to the bullpen, which seems likely with the current five starters remaining healthy and effective, he believes he'll need the curve as a strikeout weapon to complement his four-seam fastball.

"One of the things I conveyed (to the coaching staff) is that sometimes I'll need to be more of a sinker/contact (starter) than a four-seam/curve guy," Montgomery said. "Because if I need a double play, I'll have the ability to get the grounder. Or if I need a strikeout, I'll have the (curve). I did more of that in 2016."

Montgomery posted a 2.10 ERA that season with only two home runs allowed in 42 relief appearances and had a 3.38 ERA in seven starts with the Mariners and Cubs. But his lack of sharpness was evident out of the bullpen in 2017, when he walked 34 in 61 1/3 innings.

Montgomery's knack for performing well in spot starts increases his value to the Cubs. He allowed one run in 13 innings in consecutive starts against the Reds and Pirates while filling in for the injured Jon Lester in late August.

"If you don't have depth, you ain't going to the dance and playing in that last game," manager Joe Maddon said. "He supplies all that."

Any disappointment over the likelihood of not opening the season as a starter has virtually vanished because of the Cubs' efforts to make Montgomery a more effective pitcher regardless of his role.

"I'm comfortable here and I'm getting better because of how good they are with pitching," Montgomery said. "It's been fun for me."

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Chicago Tribune

Hard to say goodbye after Jake Arrieta's classy note, but Scott Boras made it easy to leave
By David Haugh

Nothing but class screamed off the page Monday night as former Cubs pitcher Jake Arrieta used perfect penmanship to craft a poignant farewell note under the heading "Chicago."

"A four-and-a-half year stretch that would forever change our lives," Arrieta wrote of his Cubs tenure. "Thanks to so many amazing people all holding one another to a very high standard."

Who said Arrieta couldn't close?

Praise for the bearded Cubs legend came easily after reading his carefully chosen words to the city he called home from 2013 through 2017. But so did a measure of pity.

Nobody will feel too sorry for the professional athlete who just signed a contract with the Phillies guaranteeing \$75 million over the next three seasons. But even if Arrieta never would admit it, you wonder if a small part of him regrets listening so obediently to so-called super agent Scott Boras, whose unrealistic demands always made it difficult to envision the right-hander remaining a Cub. Arrieta might have been the one standing outside the Phillies team plane in a tweet Monday night, but behind the scenes it was Boras who gassed up the jet and devised the flight plan.

Did Arrieta's smile look a little forced? No matter how excited Arrieta sounds when the Phillies introduce him Tuesday in Florida, how happy can one of baseball's most competitive pitchers really be after leaving a perennial World Series contender for a team that will consider a .500 season successful?

Arrieta followed Boras' advice all the way out of town, from Wrigley Field to Citizens Bank Park, which Philly.com on Monday called "a home run factory." He trusted baseball's system, and the broken system let him down as much as his agent.

More than anything, Boras' greed got in the way of Arrieta riding off in the sunset as a Cub in a baseball city that would have adored him through his last pitch. Of course, those intangibles don't always help increase the commission. Agents driven solely by the bottom line often let dollar signs blur their perspective.

Go ahead and point out all the extenuating circumstances about the unprecedented slow pace of the free-agent marketplace but Boras never showed interest in seizing any of the opportunities to hammer out a long-term deal with the Cubs – and, over the past two years, several existed. The latest came in January when USA Today reported the Cubs were willing to bring Arrieta back on a four-year, \$110 million deal. But it takes two sides to make a deal.

Feel free to fawn over Boras, who Forbes said "deftly negotiated another creative contract," that reports say has the potential of reaching \$135 million in incentives over five years. But remember what Boras

always insisted Arrieta was worth, an absurd total well beyond the maximum he can make with the Phillies.

Baseball executives believed Boras sought a contract in the \$200 million range, comparing Arrieta to aces in that contract bracket such as Justin Verlander of the Astros and Max Scherzer of the Nationals. You don't have to be a sabermetrician to conclude something went amiss if Arrieta settled for 38 percent of that amount. No way the 75-page binder Boras distributed to MLB owners at the winter meetings projected Arrieta to sign a deal worth only \$75 million guaranteed. That total is \$15 million less, by the way, than the five-year, \$90 million deal Jeff Samardzija signed for with the Giants two years ago.

The man with the colorful language — “He’s a big squirrel with lots of nuts in his trees,” Boras bragged — failed to back up his big talk as Arrieta was left scrounging for free-agent scraps three weeks before spring training.

The only bigger surprise across baseball might have been Mike Moustakas — another Boras client who heeded his advice to stay patient — returning to the Royals on a one-year, \$6.5 million contract after some projections estimated the third baseman would command a package around \$80 million.

Arrieta’s former Cubs teammates gave him the respect he earned upon learning the news, and the front office moved on long ago after Boras made his outlandish conditions clear. The Cubs wisely preferred Yu Darvish over Arrieta anyway because the Japanese star figures to pitch at a higher level over the next several years. The six-year, \$126 million contract the Cubs signed the 31-year-old to last month represented the price of playing poker. Darvish offers an upgrade over Arrieta, by most accounts, and gives the Cubs perhaps the deepest starting rotation in the National League.

But it’s important to note, amid the tributes and farewells, that the Cubs never would have been in a position to choose between the two right-handers had Boras ever budged or Arrieta instructed his agent to pursue a deal to stay. Neither did. Had Boras ever made keeping his client in a first-class, comfortable environment conducive to winning a higher priority than signing the richest contract possible, Arrieta still might be a Cub. Instead, Arrieta chose to obey Boras, who lost a stare down with MLB owners.

The next letter the new Phillies ace writes should be simpler, shorter but just as emphatic. He can address it to his agent.

Three words will suffice: Thanks for nothing.

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Chicago Tribune

Cubs' Jose Quintana to throw simulated game to stay on schedule

By Mark Gonzales

While most of his Cubs teammates are enjoying the first of their two days off, left-hander Jose Quintana is scheduled to pitch in a simulated game Monday at their spring training complex.

The workout is scheduled merely to keep Quintana on schedule with the rest of his fellow starters. Quintana is currently scheduled to pitch the Cubs' fourth game at Miami on April 1.

In other news, reliever Williams Perez, who was cut by the Cubs prior to the start of spring training, was cleared of charges in his native Venezuela following the accidental shooting of pitching coach Cesar Quintero last month, a source said Monday.

The Cubs' spring training roster remains firm, but Perez, 26, is cleared to sign with another team. Perez was 9-9 with a 5.18 ERA in 34 appearances with the Atlanta Braves during the 2015-16 seasons and was 7-10 with a 5.01 ERA in 23 starts at Iowa, the Cubs' Triple-A affiliate, last summer.

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Chicago Sun-Times

Cubs' Jose Quintana tired of the .500 life: 'I want more wins. This is my year'

By Steve Greenberg

MESA, Ariz. — Another 11-victory season, like the one he had in 2017, isn't going to cut it for Cubs left-hander Jose Quintana. Thirteen victories, which would match his career high set in 2016 with the White Sox, won't do, either.

The whole .500-ish lifestyle for Quintana — career record: 57-57 — has gotten really old.

"I want more wins," he said Monday at Sloan Park after throwing five innings in a simulated game against Cubs minor-leaguers. "I think this is my year. This is our year."

It's basically a two-step approach for Quintana, 29, as he enters his seventh big-league season. Step 1 is to continue doing what he has done throughout his career. Step 2 is to bask in the run support provided by an offense that actually can push runners across the plate.

That is, assuming the Cubs keep hitting for him better than the Sox did.

Only a handful of major-league pitchers received less run support than Quintana did during his time on the South Side. In nearly two-thirds of his starts with the Sox — he made 169 in all — the Sox scored twice, once or not at all while he was in the game. Is it any wonder he came to the Cubs last July with a 50-54 record that belied the excellence of his overall numbers?

The beginnings of his two "seasons" in 2017 told the tale. Through four starts in April, Quintana had worked 23 1/3 innings and seen his record sink to 0-4; the Sox had scored a pathetic two runs total for him. Compare that with his first four starts with the Cubs: 24 innings, 13 runs of support and a 2-1 record on the way to a post-trade mark of 7-3.

"We've got a really good team here, and I saw that support the second half when I played here," Quintana said. "It's really exciting when you see that. . . . We have really, really good hitters, so I hope to get that support all [this] season and win more games for the team."

Boosted significantly during his 14-start stint with the Cubs, Quintana received 107 runs of support last season; his previous career high was 93. The Sox just never seemed to hit for him.

Chris Sale, for example, had it far better. In 2014-16, Sale threw 609 1/3 innings and received 310 runs of support; Quintana threw 614 2/3 innings and received only 268 runs of support.

Quintana worked on some little things Monday, primarily his changeup against left-handed hitters and fastballs in against right-handers. After his outing, he had nothing but positive things to say about the way he's progressing through camp, the experience of being with the Cubs from the start of the season, the enjoyment of getting to know new rotation mates Yu Darvish and Tyler Chatwood and what he expects will be the sort of run support he hasn't seen before.

The Cubs scored 118, 150 and 113 runs for Jake Arrieta the last three seasons. They scored 121 for Jon Lester in 2016 and again in 2017. Quintana is looking at what might be the difference between that old .500-ish lifestyle and something more propitious.

“I’ve got the goal to [have] more wins and just be ready,” he said. “Get ready every five days and have a really good chance to win games. And I know the hitters will make the best for us every single game. We can hit, so we’re good.”

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Chicago Sun-Times

Jake Arrieta writes of ‘dreams turned reality’ in farewell letter to Cubs
By Steve Greenberg

MESA, Ariz. — Jake Arrieta said goodbye Monday night.

In a Twitter post entitled “Chicago,” the Phillies’ new three-year, \$75 million man shared an image of a handwritten note that began with his recollection of joining the Cubs.

“In the midst of what felt like never ending adversity and failure, I was traded to the Cubs on July 2nd, 2013,” Arrieta wrote. “This day was the beginning of a four and a half year stretch that would forever change our lives. On the verge of walking away from the game I love dearly, Theo [Epstein] called and the transformation began. I looked myself in the mirror, as well as my two year old son and pregnant wife knowing in my heart that everything was about to change.”

In four-plus seasons with the Cubs, Arrieta won 68 games and had a 2.73 ERA. There were no-hitters, a Cy Young award, World Series victories — in all, his performance made him one of the greats in club history.

“Going to work every day was an honor for many reasons,” he wrote, “from the storied history of the organization, to the high character individuals I was surrounded by year after year. Three consecutive NLCS appearances, two NL Central titles, and a World Series championship ... the first in 108 years. Childhood dreams turned reality.”

Arrieta signed “49” after these closing words:

“I was lucky to have dedicated teammates that willingly shed blood, sweat, and tears to achieve our goals. I will miss going to battle with all of you, but look forward to competing on opposite sides moving forward. Lastly, thanks to all Cubs fans around the world for standing with us, and investing in us even when times were tough. You will all be missed dearly. Thanks for the memories.”

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Daily Herald

How Happ, Almora could affect center field, leadoff spots for Chicago Cubs
By Bruce Miles

For two years, the Cubs enjoyed stability in center field and at the leadoff spot from Dexter Fowler.

That changed last year after Fowler signed with the St. Louis Cardinals. In 2017, Cubs manager Joe Maddon used 11 different leadoff hitters, and five different players started in center field.

Fowler was an island of stability in Maddon's world of ever-changing lineups. Those lineups will change on a daily basis again this year, but some interesting things are happening in center field, and those things may have an impact on the leadoff spot, as well.

Second-year man Ian Happ is having a good Cactus League season, and he is making his case to be the center fielder and leadoff man.

Albert Almora Jr. has been waiting in the wings for what seems like forever to take over as the regular center fielder.

"It's really wide open, and I'm not hyper-concerned," Maddon told reporters last week regarding the leadoff spot. "I think that's been overblown with us. If you look at the numbers last year, the eventual number of runs scored was pretty darn good.

"Would I love to have Rickey Henderson? Absolutely. Lou Brock would be a good option, too. If you don't have that, it's about trying to match up your better on-base percentage guy."

Happ and Almora offer different skill sets, and both were former first-round draft choices of the Cubs.

With Happ, the Cubs get versatility and power. He can play the infield and the outfield, even if his defense can use some polish. The switch-hitting Happ came up from Class AAA Iowa last May and wound up with a hitting line of .253/.328/.514 with 24 homers and 68 RBI in 413 plate appearances. His home-run-to-flyball ratio was 25.3 percent. Kris Bryant had a ratio of 16 percent, and Anthony Rizzo was at 16.9 percent.

"On our team and in our lineup, any spot is good to hit in," Happ told cubs.com. "Leadoff spot, being able to set the table for those guys would be great."

Almora went .298/.338/.445 with 8 homers and 46 RBI last year in 323 plate appearances. He is a heady player even if he does not offer for much power. The ZiPS system of fangraphs.com projects him at .272/.306/.409 with 9 homers and 50 RBI this year. It has Happ at .255/.325/.488 with 28 homers and 85 RBI.

Of Happ, fangraphs.com says: "Ian Happ played great last season. Between Triple-A and the majors, he hit .260 with 33 HR and 10 SB (stolen bases). The only aspect of his game holding him back was high MLB strikeout rate (31 percent). His .316 BABIP (batting average on balls in play) was the only reason he could keep his (batting average) over .250. There is no reason he can't put up similar numbers in 2018."

It offers this analysis on Almora: "Another year, another unclear path to playing time for Albert Almora. The center-field job is his to lose, theoretically, but rest assured the Cubs will creatively divvy up reps to Javier Baez, Ian Happ, Ben Zobrist, Kyle Schwarber, Jason Heyward ... everyone. Moreover, Almora doesn't project to outplay any of them by a margin that suggests he deserves a larger share of the pie. He'll likely see something like 60 percent of the action in center field. When he's on the field, he's good for batting average and not much else."

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The Athletic

What the Cubs' secret weapon can do for Yu Darvish

By Patrick Mooney

MESA, Ariz. – Shortly after the Los Angeles Dodgers popped champagne bottles at Wrigley Field last October, Cubs president Theo Epstein assigned Mike Borzello a project: break down Yu Darvish as an opponent and formulate a plan for how the Cubs would deploy his dazzling array of pitches.

Jake Arrieta had already heard the roar from the crowd of 42,000-plus, tipping his cap as he walked off the mound in the middle of Game 4 of the National League Championship Series. Arrieta beat the Dodgers knowing it would probably be his farewell moment in a Cubs uniform, though he had no clue he would have to settle for a three-year, \$75 million guarantee from the Philadelphia Phillies.

Around this time, the Cubs also fired pitching coach Chris Bosio as part of a major shake-up to Joe Maddon's staff, while Darvish experienced a meltdown during two World Series losses to the Houston Astros where he may have tipped pitches. Amid the uncertainty, Epstein trusted Borzello, the catching/strategy coach who helps run the team's game-planning system, to start breaking down video and doing background work on Darvish.

"It was almost like 'in case' he kind of becomes affordable, we want to be ready," Borzello said. "It started right after the season ended, kind of a just-in-case thing. And then all of a sudden, it became real."

Borzello laughs at being the "Forrest Gump" of baseball, the guy who always seems to be on the edges of the pictures. His dad grew up in Brooklyn with future Hall of Famer Joe Torre, who became his godfather and brought him along for the ride as the bullpen catcher when the New York Yankees won four World Series titles between 1996 and 2000.

Borzello became friendly with Derek Jeter, Alex Rodriguez and Dale Sveum, who would hire him for Year 1 of Epstein's rebuild in Chicago. Borzello studied pre-Statcast homemade scouting reports alongside Mike Mussina. New Cubs hitting coach Chili Davis let Borzello live rent-free in his apartment on Manhattan's Upper East Side. Borzello caught the ball when Mariano Rivera discovered his magical cutter one night at the old Tiger Stadium in Detroit.

Borzello followed Torre to the Dodgers and was there when Kenley Jansen – a former minor-league catcher – found the cutter that would make him an \$80 million closer. The system the Cubs used to create value in short-term assets like Ryan Dempster, Scott Feldman and Jeff Samardzija – and construct a World Series winner around Kyle Hendricks, Arrieta and All-Star shortstop Addison Russell – is rooted in Borzello's time on the West Coast with Brad Ausmus.

Borzello checked in with his Dodger sources, trying to get a feel for Darvish's personality and how he operated.

"You're trying to get information," Borzello said. "'Do we have any chance? Do you know him well to know if he wants to even entertain the thought of being a Cub?'"

"You're not getting concrete answers, but you're getting a little bit that kind of tells you something. But we were prepared from Day 1 – when the season ended – to be in the running. And we were hoping he was interested."

In a slow-moving market where Arrieta's news didn't break on Twitter until the day the NCAA brackets were unveiled, the Cubs didn't meet with Darvish until the week before Christmas.

The group at the Dallas-area resort included Epstein, general manager Jed Hoyer, pro scouting director Kyle Evans, two Wasserman agents and run prevention coordinator Tommy Hottovy, the former big-league pitcher who acts as a trusted go-between for the front office, coaches and players.

Throughout the offseason, Borzello and Hottovy spent hours and hours on the phone, breaking down not only Darvish, but also Tyler Chatwood, Shohei Ohtani and a list of Plan B pitchers.

"It was me and Tommy, going back and forth, day after day," Borzello said. "Tommy and I work together, but we're doing the same job separately. We kind of give ourselves some time and then we match up and see if we agree on a lot of things. He may see something I didn't or vice versa where you're like: 'God, if we had him, we could do this, we could do that.'"

The thinking behind Darvish's six-year, \$126 million contract is that the four-time All-Star still has untapped potential and something to prove. The Cubs are betting big on the pitching infrastructure that helped Arrieta blossom into a Cy Young Award winner and turned Hendricks into a World Series Game 7 starter.

"I think it's going to open up a whole new world for him," Hendricks said. Plus Darvish already has every single pitch that Borzello could want to incorporate into a scouting report.

"Exactly," Hendricks said. "Borzello, man, he's just salivating, watching him during bullpens and (thinking) what he could do with him."

To be clear, this isn't a revolutionary plan or an overnight change. The Dodgers and Texas Rangers – the team that gambled more than \$110 million when first Darvish left Japan – are both well-run organizations that understand the balance of scouting and analytics. Even Hendricks – who has an easy-going personality and an economics degree from Dartmouth College – at first resisted some of Borzello's suggestions about things like pitch sequencing and locations.

"There's initial reservations about trusting somebody that you don't know," Borzello said. "But over time, it's about showing them and backing it with information and then convincing them that what I might ask them to do won't put them in harm's way. It's really going to help them.

"You build that relationship over time and explain why you're asking for certain things to happen. You hope that you're dealing with a mind that at some point is accepting of it. With Kyle, it took time. Jon Lester, same thing."

Borzello had The Talk with Chatwood on Saturday inside a video room at the Sloan Park complex in Mesa. The Cubs invested three years and \$38 million in Chatwood's curveball spin rate, mid-90s velocity, age-28 potential and future performance away from Coors Field.

"(It's) discussing his pitch mix from the last few seasons," Borzello said, "breaking it down and showing him how predictable he is, asking him why. Why is there so little usage of certain secondary pitches? It's kind of taking his temperature on why he is who he is – and why he hasn't done certain things that I'm going to ask him to do.

“You do it with all new guys. I use examples of Kyle Hendricks and Jon and show them who they were prior to arriving here. [Someone] may never have thrown a left-on-left changeup before – and now last year he threw 50 in our system. Just showing them examples.”

It might be a stretch for Darvish to reinvent himself at the age of 31 – after more than 2,100 innings in professional baseball – but there’s always room for improvement.

Hendricks has called Borzello a secret weapon. Maddon has compared Borzello to an NFL defensive coordinator. Borzello has given Darvish space, watching every bullpen session and live batting practice, getting feedback from the catchers and analyzing it again on video. Borzello sees a five-pitch mix that reminds him of Arrieta at the height of his powers, the ball moving up and down, in and out and constantly changing speeds, like something out of a video game.

“It’s similar to Jake where you have so many different options,” Borzello said. “It’s more about finding out who (Darvish) is and then seeing what he’s comfortable with – and then finding out how accepting of being uncomfortable he might be.”

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The Athletic

Can Jake Arrieta fight off his steady decline in Philadelphia?

By Sahadev Sharma

For those who were holding onto that last bit of hope that perhaps Jake Arrieta would make a Dexter Fowler-like return to the Cubs this spring, it’s time to officially let go. Even before Chicago added Yu Darvish to open camp this February, Arrieta was already a longshot to return to the North Side of Chicago.

Now that Arrieta has reportedly agreed to a three-year, \$75 million deal with the Phillies, everyone can turn the page on a very successful run. He’s worth the financial risk for Philadelphia, but what will his future performance look like?

Team president Theo Epstein has been clear that the team has the utmost respect for what Arrieta did for the organization and freely admits that the current version of the Cubs — perennial contenders — would not exist without what Arrieta was able to do during his four-and-a-half-year tenure with Chicago.

“None of us have rings without Jake Arrieta,” Epstein said earlier in the spring. “He was as instrumental as anybody in the turnaround of this franchise. He helped lift the culture with the way he approached things. He won a ton of big games for us. We’re all huge fans of his. We wish him well. We wish his family well.”

As much as the Cubs are fans of Arrieta as a person and player, he just wasn’t an offseason priority.

Arrieta made a decent amount of sense for the Phillies. For a team that has suggested it could contend in 2018, Philadelphia’s rotation was a clear issue. After Aaron Nola, there were just too many question marks to really believe in that group as a playoff threat. But in Arrieta, the Phillies now have another top-of-the-rotation starter. It also doesn’t hurt to show next winter’s free-agent class that the team is committed to spending to help supplement the young talent the organization is developing.

Arrieta may not be a lock to reach 200 innings — few pitchers are anymore — but since 2014, he's 20th in the league with 751 1/3 innings pitched. He will demand the ball in the biggest moments and manages to take it up a notch on the mound when the situation asks for it.

He pitched a complete game shutout in the 2015 wild card win in Pittsburgh. He took a no-hitter into the sixth inning of Game 2 of the 2016 World Series and struck out nine and allowed just two earned runs over 5 2/3 innings in a must-win Game 6 six days later. Arrieta was on the mound for the Cubs' only win during last season's NLCS.

Those accomplishments hold weight on a big league team. Arrieta wasn't shy in the clubhouse, but he wasn't the type to hold court either. His historic 2015 Cy Young season was spurred by elite conditioning and a pristine diet. There's value in having that type of person around a young ball club.

Of course, the most value would come from what Arrieta can do on the field. There will be a lot of talk about Arrieta's performance over the last three seasons. He has a 2.71 ERA during that span while averaging 31 starts and 198 innings a season. But those numbers are a bit misleading and that's where the risk comes in for Philadelphia.

Arrieta's Cy Young-winning performance in 2015 weighs heavily during that three-year span, making all three seasons look special. Arrieta certainly has been special for a period of time in his career, but the problem is it's rarely identified correctly. Many believe that Arrieta broke onto the scene that season, but he was actually brilliant in 2014, as well. After missing the month of April with a shoulder issue, Arrieta posted a 2.53 ERA in 25 starts that year, averaging just under 6 1/3 innings per start while striking out 27.2 percent of the batters he faced and walking just 6.7 percent.

It was around that time that Arrieta seemed to reach his peak fitness level, as he stopped worrying about his mechanics. He had returned to the crossfire delivery that was drilled out of him in Baltimore, he was teeming with confidence and he was able to speak eloquently on how he was able to control his body and mind on the mound while also describing just how important his diet and workout plans were to his success.

From the start of 2014 through May 2016, there were few who were as good as Arrieta.

His performance on June 30, 2014 stands out in particular. The Cubs were trudging through another poor season when they opened a series against the Boston Red Sox at Fenway Park. Arrieta was dominant that Monday night, carrying a no-hitter through 7 2/3 innings and ending the night with 10 strikeouts, one walk and just one hit allowed. As he walked off the field in the eighth inning, the Fenway crowd roared in appreciation of his impressive performance. It wouldn't be the last time Arrieta would wow a crowd on the road.

Despite missing the first month of the season, some still took notice of Arrieta's dominance as he garnered down-ballot Cy Young votes and truly set up what was to become an unforgettable 2015.

Arrieta seemed invincible at times during the 2015 season. Anyone who followed his brilliant performance in the second half recalls the comparisons to Bob Gibson and the incredible statistical feats. Arrieta reached a transcendent level, transfixing much of the city of Chicago and the entire baseball world with his sublime performance.

He peaked by doing in Los Angeles what he was unable to the year prior in Boston: finish off a no-hitter. By leaning on his dominant hard slider, Arrieta limited the Dodgers to only two baserunners while racking up 12 strikeouts in the process.

His Cy Young win that season was well-earned. The former top prospect was able to shake off the bust label in impressive fashion while helping the Cubs reach the playoffs for the first time in seven years.

It was early in the 2016 season that Arrieta finally started to look human again. He tossed the second no-hitter of his career in his fourth start of the season — making it easy to overlook the fact that his walk rate was rising and he wasn't being as efficient with his pitches. By the end of 2016, his walk rate was up to 9.6 percent and his once-devastating slider wasn't nearly as effective.

Arrieta's two-seam fastball velocity peaked in 2015 at 95.2 mph. It dropped to 94.4 in 2016 and was all the way down to 92.5 mph last season. His slider velocity dipped progressively as well, but more worrisome was the fact that he was struggling to get batters to chase the swing-and-miss pitch, so he relied on it significantly less often than he had in the past.

Arrieta would often talk about how he didn't have the same feel for the pitch and his usage of the slider dipped from 29.5 percent in 2015 to 18.7 percent and 14.2 percent in 2016 and 2017, respectively. Batters offered at the pitch 57.4 percent of the time in 2015, but they began to lay off and that number dropped to 49.3 percent in 2017. What was once a dominant put-away pitch has now become an offering he goes to less frequently than his curveball.

Arrieta was still a strong pitcher in 2017, but in reality, it was the continuation of a steady decline from his 2015 peak.

Arrieta's crossfire delivery requires near-perfect balance and timing, the products of elite core and hip strength. Arrieta's workout regime and diet in 2015 allowed him to reach those lofty heights and pull off one of the more brilliant stretches of pitching ever. But the slightest of dip from that dedication to fitness and diet was going to affect his command with such a rugged delivery. As would the natural deterioration of the body that comes with aging. It was nearly impossible for Arrieta to avoid the decline from special to merely average.

But don't tell him that. Arrieta is still as confident as ever. He acknowledges that a lot came together for him in 2015, but if you ask him if he can reach that level of performance, he'll likely tell you he can. After a rough first half for both the Cubs and himself last season, he came out of the All-Star break on a mission, and talked as if he were prepared to dominate once again.

His words turned into action, as Arrieta rattled off a 1.69 ERA in his next 11 starts before a right hamstring injury sidelined him.

But, even during that stretch, he still wasn't able to miss bats like one would hope (21.8 percent strikeout rate during those 11 starts). His curveball was working well and he showed flashes of the slider he once had, but it was never as consistent as it was when he was at his best.

And while he may suggest otherwise, the reality is that Arrieta's delivery is so hard to maintain and repeat, especially as he ages, it's hard to see him ever reaching those heights again. Assuming health, he should provide above-league-average innings for the Phillies in 2018, something that group desperately needs. A staff leader that is used to winning and can bring that expectation back to Philadelphia is on his way. If not in performance, symbolically, Arrieta can be for the Phillies what Jon Lester was to the Cubs when he arrived in 2015. Whether Arrieta can avoid continuing his steady decline is much less clear.

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Cubs.com

Cubs' 25-man projection for Opening Day

By Carrie Muskat

MESA, Ariz. -- When the Cubs began Spring Training, it was easy to guess at what the final 25-man Opening Day roster would be. So, what have we learned since the first prediction?

Manager Joe Maddon has named not only his Opening Day starter -- Jon Lester -- but how the rotation will line up for the beginning of the season. Kyle Hendricks will follow Lester, then newcomer Yu Darvish, Jose Quintana and Tyler Chatwood.

What's become evident this spring is that there is more depth, especially regarding the pitching.

"This is probably the best group of other pitchers that we've had in camp -- younger pitchers, guys we've picked up from other groups," Maddon said on Sunday. "It's much greater competition, better arms, guys who you see could help us this year more easily than in the past."

That list includes Randy Rosario, Justin Hancock, Alberto Baldonado, Duane Underwood Jr. and David Garner. In Maddon's early years with the Cubs, he couldn't list four pitchers who might contribute.

"I like what we've done -- not a little but a lot," Maddon said.

This spring, the focus has been more on the new coaches getting to know the players. What will the Cubs' 25-man roster look like on Opening Day? Here's an updated projection:

Catcher (2): Who will back up Willson Contreras? It will depend on whether the Cubs want Victor Caratini to get more at-bats at Triple-A Iowa or believe he can continue to develop in a part-time role in the big leagues. Chris Gimenez got a vote of confidence from Lester after the veteran catcher caught the lefty on Friday. Said Maddon on Gimenez: "He's very bright and willing to share his opinion. He's not afraid, he knows how to play well when he's not playing often. Not everybody can [do that]. He communicates really well with his pitchers, he communicates well with everybody. On the other hand, Caratini is looking really good, too, behind the plate and at the plate."

First base (1): The only question here is who will play first when Anthony Rizzo takes a day off. It's tough to get Rizzo to rest -- his goal is to play 162 games -- but he also has seen the benefits when he does get a breather. Ben Zobrist will likely get some playing time at first this spring.

Second base (2): Zobrist was slowed this spring by a back problem and missed the first 11 games, so Javier Baez has gotten the most playing time there and most likely will do so during the regular season. But Baez had to come out of a game March 8 when he felt a pull in his left hamstring. An MRI showed minimal damage, and the Cubs will be careful. It will be something to keep an eye on.

Third base (1): This is Kris Bryant's fourth season, and his spot. The biggest change for Bryant this spring has been working with new infield coach Brian Butterfield, and so far, so good. Bryant just doesn't get to the ballpark as early as Butterfield, who is in camp at 3 a.m. each day.

Shortstop (1): Addison Russell made back-to-back solid plays behind Lester in the lefty's last start Friday, and has looked sharp this spring. Maddon wants to keep Russell in RBI spots in the batting order. Baez is the backup.

Utility (2): Versatility is key to winning a spot on Maddon's roster. Ian Happ has shined in center field but can also sub at second base if needed. Happ most likely will share time in center with Albert Almora Jr. The left-handed option on the bench will be Tommy La Stella, who batted a career-high .288 last season. La Stella also can back up Bryant at third.

Outfield (3): Happ and Almora Jr. are expected to share center field with five-time Gold Glove Award winner Jason Heyward in right. The Cubs have seen progress by Heyward this spring as he continues to work on his swing, now with new hitting coach Chili Davis. Heyward has hit a couple balls to left-center. Kyle Schwarber and Zobrist are expected to share left field. A svelte Schwarber needs to avoid the slow start he had last season, which prompted the Cubs to send him to the Minor Leagues in June.

Starting pitching (5): The rotation is the envy of most teams. The Cubs have three pitchers who were Opening Day starters last year in Lester, Darvish and Quintana. Hendricks could get that assignment on quite a few teams. And how many teams would like Chatwood as their No. 5 guy? All have looked sharp this spring. The goal is to keep them healthy.

Bullpen (8): Maddon likes to use the word "thick" to describe his bullpen. You could also say it's deep and talented. Right-hander Brandon Morrow is the new closer, the fourth in the last four years, and if he can't go, Maddon feels he has several options, including Pedro Strop, Carl Edwards Jr., Steve Cishek, and Justin Wilson. The Cubs will carry eight relievers, and Justin Grimm, Brian Duensing and Mike Montgomery are on the list.

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Cubs.com

Quintana tosses sim game to stay on track
By Carrie Muskat

MESA, Ariz. -- The rest of the Cubs had Monday off, but Jose Quintana stayed on his schedule and threw 63 pitches over five innings in a simulated game against Minor Leaguers at Sloan Park.

"Honestly, I like real games," Quintana said. "This is a good time to practice. Today I worked more on my changeup."

In his next outing, the lefty was expected to throw about 85 pitches as he preps for his first full season with the Cubs. They acquired him last July from the White Sox in exchange for Eloy Jimenez.

The White Sox ranked 12th in the American League last season in runs, with 706, while the Cubs were second in the National League, with 822. In Quintana's 18 starts with the White Sox, they averaged 2.83 runs per game, while the Cubs averaged four runs per game in his 14 starts with them.

"We have a really good team," Quintana said of the Cubs. "I saw that support in the second half. I'm just going to try to keep the games close to win. I hope we can get that support all season."

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NBC Sports Chicago

Can the Cubs' bullpen move on from all those postseason walks and provide a safety net for Brandon Morrow?
By Vinnie Duber

The Cubs have a super rotation with four guys who could be No. 1 starters on other teams. They have a lineup packed with young position players that even in a down year managed to score the second most runs in the National League.

After reaching three straight NL Championship Series, this team looks primed for another run at a World Series.

That's not to say there aren't questions, of course. And if there is a hole on this club, it might be found out in the bullpen, where efforts to bring back All-Star closer Wade Davis didn't pan out and Brandon Morrow, who hasn't regularly worked as a closer in a decade, is the new ninth-inning man.

Morrow brings plenty of success from last season, when he was stellar in high-leverage situations for the Los Angeles Dodgers. He pitched in every game of the World Series as the Dodgers came one win away from a championship.

But closing is a different animal, as plenty of baseball folks will tell you.

"There is something about the ninth inning, and the last three outs are the toughest and the last out is the toughest," Cubs manager Joe Maddon said during the early days of spring training. "I think the big thing about that is you really have to have a short memory because you're going to screw up once in a while. I think the guys that handle the failure the best are the guys that play — in combination with having good stuff — but the guys that handle the bad moment better are the guys that can really do that job. Because you're not going to get that opportunity unless you have good stuff. You have good stuff, you have great ability, how do you handle the bad moment? And I think that really separates these guys."

The Cubs have all the confidence in the world in Morrow. But what happens if Morrow can't translate general late-inning success to ninth-inning success? What happens if Morrow doesn't work out in the closer's role? Then what for a Cubs team with such high, "World Series or bust" expectations?

Certainly there are options. Carl Edwards Jr. and Pedro Strop have years of late-inning experience with this team. Justin Wilson is being hyped as a strong bounce-back candidate after his rough go of things after being acquired from the Detroit Tigers last summer. Steve Cishek, also signed this offseason, has a lot of closing experience from his days with the Miami Marlins and Seattle Mariners.

"We've got eight guys down there, eight guys that can go get three outs in the ninth inning. I truly believe that," Justin Grimm said. "It'll be fun to watch. It's so funny, certain guys, it's just rising to that occasion. And you see a different pitcher out of them in different situations. It's going to be a lot of fun. I've always had faith in every single guy down there. I watch them work, I watch them throw their bullpens. Pretty impressive stuff."

"(Wilson) can, Strop can, CJ can, Cishek's done it. We've got a lot of guys that fit into that category," Maddon said. "The days that Morrow's not available, it could be anybody."

"Anybody on this team can close the game," Edwards added.

All that confidence is great, especially heading into a season where the expectations are what they are. But don't be surprised if a large number of Cubs fans don't share that confidence.

As good as the North Side relief corps was during the regular season in 2017 — the 3.80 bullpen ERA was the third best in the NL — the playoffs were a completely different story. In 10 postseason games and

37.2 postseason innings, Cubs relievers posted a grotesque 6.21 ERA, walking 27 batters compared to striking out just 35.

Now, bullpen pitching wasn't great across the league last postseason. The world-champion Houston Astros saw their bullpen turn in a 5.40 ERA and issue 26 walks, just one fewer than the Cubs. But the Astros also played seven more games, with their relievers pitching nearly 25 more innings and striking out almost 30 more batters.

Edwards alone walked six guys and gave up six runs in 4.2 innings of work, an 11.57 postseason ERA. Strop walked three batters in 5.1 innings. Wilson faced just two hitters in one appearance, unreliable after he gave up 10 earned runs and walked 19 hitters in just 17.2 regular-season innings after joining the Cubs. Grimm didn't pitch at all during the 2017 postseason after a rough season that saw him shuttled back and forth between the big leagues and Triple-A Iowa and finish with a 5.53 ERA.

So there's a reason for folks to feel that the safety net past Morrow might not be all that safe.

But the Cubs have done work to assure that's not the case. Maddon and plenty of others are expecting big things from Wilson, who converted 13 of 15 save opportunities as the Tigers' closer prior to last summer's trade. Cishek has 121 career saves, including 25 in 2016, when he finished 40 games for the Mariners. He was one of the more effective closers in the game during a three-year stretch with the Marlins during which he recorded 88 saves.

And then there's new pitching coach Jim Hickey. Maddon's old partner in crime with the Rays, Hickey is confident in how things will play out in the bullpen. But he's focused on getting those walks down.

Theo Epstein and Jed Hoyer said repeatedly during the offseason that they intended to fix the strike-throwing problem that Hoyer said went through the pitching staff like a "disease." Hickey's all for being the cure for that ailment.

"I think there is something that a coach can do to help, however it's just simply making them aware or encouraging them. And I really think that walks, especially out of the bullpen, are a little bit more of a mindset than they are anything physically or mechanically wrong," Hickey said last month in an interview with NBC Sports Chicago. "You come into a situation where maybe you give up a base hit and maybe it changes the game, so you're a little bit reluctant to throw the ball over the plate. Now it's 1-0, now it's 2-0, so you maybe nibble a little bit.

"So I think it's more of a mindset, and once the group gets the mindset of 'attack, attack, attack,' it'll be contagious. And I think it is contagious. I think last year it was probably contagious in that there was more walks than you would like, and I think as you turn the corner and head the other direction, that would be contagious, as well.

"I have very few outcome goals in a season. I don't sit there and say, 'I want to lead the league in earned-run average' or 'I want to lead the league in strikeouts.' That would all be great. Or 'I want to lead the league in batting average against.' But that one thing, that one outcome goal that I always have for a staff is to have the least amount of walks in the league. And I think at the end of the day, especially with the talent that's out there, if that is the case, it's going to be an extremely successful season."

And it sounds like buy-in won't be a problem.

"I can prove a lot," Edwards said. "Starting with strikes."

