

## **Indians send Alonso to White Sox, free up cash**

By Anthony Castrovence and Mandy Bell MLB.com

CLEVELAND -- When the Indians acquired both Carlos Santana and Jake Bauers in a three-team deal with the Mariners and Rays on Thursday, the writing was on the wall for Yonder Alonso, who was no longer a clear roster fit on a team suddenly loaded with first-base types.

That wall did not lie. The Indians traded Alonso to the division-rival White Sox on Friday for Minor League outfielder Alex Call. The club officially announced the deal on Saturday morning.

"We had been in conversations with a variety of teams [about] Yonder as we were moving things forward with the three-team trade with Seattle and Tampa Bay," Indians president of baseball operations Chris Antonetti said. "So we developed an understanding and a landscape for Yonder -- and the White Sox emerged as a potential option for us in the last few days. ... This is the concept that we felt makes the most sense for us and that's why we moved it forward."

The real key to the deal was the Indians' ability to move the entirety of the \$8 million owed to Alonso in 2019, as well as the \$1 million buyout of his vesting option in '20. Taken in totality with the swap two weeks ago that sent Yan Gomes to the Nationals and the aforementioned three-team deal swung at the conclusion of the Winter Meetings, the Indians have shaved roughly \$18 million off their '19 payroll.

"I think we've had a couple of goals going into the offseason and that's first and foremost trying to make sure we have a team that's capable of winning the American League Central in 2019, but also position the organization for sustaining success beyond that," Antonetti said. "There are a couple [of] ways to do that. One is to infuse young, controllable talent into the organization and the second element of that is to manage our finances -- and we feel like the series of [moves] we've made up to this point advances both of those goals."

That savings has significance in a marketplace where the Indians have listened to offers for starting pitchers Corey Kluber and Trevor Bauer. They don't have nearly the financial incentive to move one of their controllable starting stalwarts that they once did. Although Antonetti did not take any potential trade option off the table, the Indians can conceivably use the money saved in the three completed swaps to fill their Major League needs without robbing from their signature strength.

"It's still relatively early in the offseason," Antonetti said. "So I think what we will continue to do is be aggressive -- taking opportunities to improve our position moving forward. Whether that's a 2019 impact or it's gonna help us sustain success beyond 2019, we'll have to see what opportunities present themselves."

If we were to boil the activities of the last few days down to their essence, the Indians swapped in Santana for Encarnacion and Bauers for Alonso, gaining 2019 salary relief and sacrificing Yandy Diaz, a '19 Draft pick and Minor Leaguer Cole Sulser. Though he obviously has nowhere near the established track record of Alonso (who had a .738 OPS, 23 homers and 19 doubles in his lone season with the Tribe), Bauers could profile as a sort of younger, cheaper version -- a left-handed bat with on-base ability and potential for 20-homer pop as his isolated power improves. Bauers comes with some added defensive versatility, having experience in the corner-outfield spots though he is most comfortable and valuable at first base.

"We feel like he's a developing, young hitter [who has] got a good approach at the plate with emerging power," Antonetti said. "... We think he has a lot of ingredients to be a successful Major League player."

Of course, salary relief comes with a cost of a different sort. In making these deals, the Indians created a new hole in their infield, where Diaz was penciled in for regular at-bats at third base. At the moment -- and in case you haven't noticed, the Indians' roster is a moving target -- Jose Ramirez could return to third base and Jason Kipnis might return to second. But that only adds to the riddle that is and has been the outfield, where Jordan Luplow is the only external addition of the offseason to date who profiles as big league ready.

So as was the case with the previous two trades the Indians made, the Alonso deal will best be judged when the entirety of the offseason is taken into account -- and only the Marty McFlys among us are capable of that. But the Bauers addition was a clear precursor to an Alonso trade, and the Indians did not take long to drop the other shoe. He goes to a White Sox club that could use Alonso's arrival as a lure (beyond the hundreds of millions of dollars) to try to attract Alonso's brother-in-law, Manny Machado.

Alex Call posted a .248/.345/.415 line between two levels in 2018.

Alex Call posted a .248/.345/.415 line between two levels in 2018. MILB

As far as what the Indians got back in the Alonso deal, Call is considered an organizational depth piece. The 24-year-old split 2018 between Class A Advanced Winston-Salem and Double-A Birmingham, turning in a combined .248/.345/.415 line with 12 homers and 28 doubles in 505 plate appearances.

"We do think [Call] has some ingredients to be a pretty good hitter," Antonetti said. "He showed good patience at the plate and we think there's an opportunity for his power to continue to develop. In fact, his exit velocity has increased a little bit over this past season and we're hopeful that trend can continue."

Again, though, the real addition was the subtraction of salary -- and that might result in the ability to retain Kluber and Bauer.

## **How did Yandy Diaz land in Tampa Bay as part of Cleveland Indians' 3-team trade? Hey, Hoynsie**

CLEVELAND, Ohio -- Do you have a question that you'd like to have answered in Hey, Hoynsie? Submit it here or contact him on Twitter at How did Yandy Diaz end up with the Rays?

Hey, Hoynsie: Do you have any insight as to why Yandy Diaz was traded to Tampa Bay as part of Thursday's three-team deal with the Indians, Rays and Seattle? It doesn't seem logical. -- Glen Ray.

Hey, Ray: The Indians acquired Jake Bauers from the Rays for Diaz. He's an outfielder-first baseman that they've liked for a while. The Rays, on the other hand, have had Diaz on their radar for a while as well.

The Tribe originally had traditional two-team deals worked out with Tampa Bay and Seattle. They were going to send Diaz to the Rays for Bauers and Encarnacion to the Mariners for Carlos Santana. But it became a three-team deal to help pay the cost of Santana and Encarnacion's contracts.

The Rays sent Seattle \$5 million to help pay for Encarnacion's contract, while the Mariners sent the Indians \$6 million to help pay Santana's contract.

Bauers is younger than Diaz (23-27) and has shown more pop in the big leagues (11 homers to 1). The fact that he can play first base and left or right field also worked in Bauers' favor.

Must Indians trade Corey Kluber or Trevor Bauer to get big hitter?

Hey, Hoynsie: I'm OK with the Indians' payroll juggle and bringing Carlos Santana back. But the only way I see that they get past Houston and the other top teams to reach the World Series is to trade a starting pitcher for a big outfield bat. Does the Indians' front office have the drive to go get a game changer on the offensive side? -- James Lisi, Santa Barbara, Calif.

Hey, James: They're probably sitting on the blueprint for just such a deal right now. But the fact of the matter is they've saved about \$21 million for 2019 with the trades they've made. That may allow them to keep the rotation intact -- at least for one more year -- and add offense through free agency or another trade.

Did the Indians hurt their offense by trading Edwin Encarnacion?

Hey, Hoynsie: What's your take on why the Indians moved Edwin Encarnacion? I don't think we improved offensively and we didn't save any money. What is the angle? -- Reif Blackburn.

Hey, Reif: Encarnacion certainly has been more productive than Carlos Santana in his career. I think the Indians feel that Santana is younger than Encarnacion (32 to 35) and that they're saving some money for the 2019 season by swapping contracts.

Encarnacion will make \$20 million in 2019, while Santana will make \$15.5 million in 2019. Santana was originally scheduled to make \$17.5 million in 2019, but they'll receive \$2 million from Seattle to help reduce his contract.

Have the Indians had trouble developing outfielders?

Hey, Hoynsie: Is the search for outfielders an indictment against the Indians' farm system? It is unfortunate that they're considering trading a top-tier starting pitcher to fill holes in the outfield. -- Chris Wheeler, Denver.

Hey, Chris: I think indictment is probably too harsh a word. I think they've been unfortunate with injuries to No. 1 picks Bradley Zimmer and Tyler Naquin. We've seen flashes of their talent, but not on a consistent basis.

Switch-hitter Greg Allen, a sixth-round pick in 2014, has shown promise over the last two years. But they have not been able to find and develop a Manny Ramirez or Albert Belle-type outfielder. Then again, they were elite, Hall of Fame-caliber players.

How about Yu Chang at second base for the Indians?

Hey, Hoynsie: Are the Indians considering Yu-Chang at second base? He's young, under control and a good athlete. Jason Kipnis is probably gone after 2019 so adding Chang makes a lot of sense. -- Tommy Maines, Waynesboro, Pa.

Hey, Tommy: Chang has spent a limited amount of time at second, playing mostly shortstop and third. He had a great Arizona Fall League season at third and impressed the right people.

He's probably in line for a big-league promotion sometime in 2019. What about this scenario? After 2019, Kipnis turns free agent, Jose Ramirez moves to second base and Chang plays third. Just a thought.

It's Carlos Santana the sequel: run for your lives

Hey, Hoynsie: Carlos Santana? Again? Was he that much more of a bargain? Why would Cleveland bring back a guy who does not hit for average, rarely hits well in high leverage situations and is a perennially-low RBI guy? Huge regression at first base. I was so happy to see him leave. Please tell me they plan on using Santana's \$500,000 buyout. -- Anton Kress, Placerville, Colo.

Hey, Anton: I hate losing the threat of Encarnacion in the No. 4 spot. But I think Santana helps the offense because because of his ability to walk and make contact. He is not the all-or-nothing hitter that Encarnacion was the last two years with the Tribe.

I also think he's a better first baseman than the departed Encarnacion and Yonder Alonso.

Did Mitch Haniger come at too high a price?

Hey Hoynsie: I could not agree more with you on your 25-man ideal roster for 2019. It keeps the Indians strong with financial flexibility. -- Mike Graham, Carlsbad, Calif.

Hey, Mike: Thanks for the kind words, but I think you are in the minority. It was pointed out to me -- several times -- that I probably got out over my skis when I traded Shane Bieber and Triston McKenzie to Seattle for outfielder Mitch Haniger.

It is good not to be the lone voice in the wilderness.

How will Tribe handle Carlos Santana, Jake Bauers at 1B and DH?

Hey, Hoynsie: So does this mean the Indians are going with Jake Bauers at first base and Carlos Santana at DH? -- Dan Dendorfer.

Hey, Dan: Chris Antonetti, president of baseball operations, felt the two would probably share the two positions. Bauers can also play the outfield and I would not be surprised if the Indians add a veteran DH/pinch hitter before the start of spring training.

### **Ryan Lewis: Indians have earned patience, but must keep foot on gas**

Ryan Lewis

It's all about what comes next.

The Indians' party line from the winter meetings was clear: Their goals this offseason have to do with reallocating and retooling the roster in order to maintain their contender status in 2019 while also setting up 2020 and beyond.

Thus far, they've pulled off three significant deals to try to accomplish those goals. All-Star catcher Yan Gomes was shipped off to Washington, a three-team deal brought in Carlos Santana, Jake Bauers and \$6 million in cash and, late Friday night, Yonder Alonso was dealt to the Chicago White Sox.

Some skittish fans have already started reaching for the Tums after hearing the names being traded, expecting the worst — meaning either a rebuild or a severe slash in payroll.

But that doesn't tell the whole story of how these deals have set up the Indians to accomplish their multifaceted goals. The Indians aren't soaring into an all-or-nothing 2019 in which they mortgage their future, nor are they diving into a long-term rebuild.

Indians president of baseball operations Chris Antonetti said last week at Major League Baseball's winter meetings in Las Vegas that if the Tribe was rebuilding, it'd look much different than this. Manager Terry Francona echoed that sentiment, saying the team has no plans of going "backwards" in 2019.

#### 2 battle fronts

The blueprint for the Indians involves a battle on two fronts. The first initiative is to contend in 2019. That takes positional and financial flexibility compared to where the Tribe stood a few weeks ago. The second is to position the roster and resources in such a way as to allow additional moves a year from now and beyond to extend the contention window as far as possible, which means holding off for as long as the Indians can the type of rebuild every team of their market size eventually must go through.

One domino falls, then another, then another. The Gomes trade was a start, saving roughly \$7 million in payroll while dealing from a surplus with Roberto Perez now primed to take over as the starter. The three-team trade that brought in Santana and Bauers repositioned the roster and saved some payroll. That deal led to the Alonso trade (since he was now expendable with Bauers at first base), which saved another \$8 million in 2019 salary.

The Indians likely aren't significantly better on paper than they were before these trades, but the three deals — along with a few other smaller transactions — haven't seen the club fall far in 2019 and have repositioned it to better address needs in the outfield and bullpen through free agency or another trade.

The question is this: What will the Indians do with the at least \$18 million in salary savings, along with the \$6 million in cash received from Seattle? Does it simply allow them to pull off another major trade without having to attach a bad contract? Does it go back into free agency to address their roster needs?

The benefits could be significant depending on the next move.

Owner Paul Dolan and the front office have earned the benefit of the doubt, though it's also fair to say they must keep their foot on the gas as long as possible to keep it intact. The Indians poured money into the roster once it was clear they could contend. Their payroll soared north of \$140 million for the first time in franchise history, ranking them in the middle of the pack in the league, which means they have been spending above their market size for multiple seasons. The front office was given the green light to spend money and made aggressive deals that in the past might not have been as likely.

But in terms of the fan base, much of that goodwill will be lost with a severe slash in payroll that doesn't end up addressing the roster or, worse, a sudden rebuild.

The good news for those fans is that the latter is not coming, at least not yet. And it should be noted that, eventually, it'll be the smart move baseball-wise to tear down the roster, but it won't be because of financial reasons. Contention windows are cyclical, and waiting too long can be costly in the long run. But that's not 2019.

#### The real value

The real value in these trades rests with the potential they bring for a corresponding move. That's the key in all of this.

Francona said in Las Vegas that he certainly has faith in Antonetti, General Manager Mike Chernoff, Dolan and the entire Indians front office. But he also knows it isn't time to relax, which Antonetti and Chernoff also echoed at the winter meetings.

"In my opinion they've done an outstanding job the last six years," Francona said. "But that doesn't mean you stop. You don't rest on your laurels. You don't. But at least in my opinion, I've got a lot of confidence in how they do things."

Antonetti said at the winter meetings the front office hadn't been given a specific payroll number from ownership, and that the budget could fluctuate based on opportunity. Thus far, they've pulled off the moves to create such an opportunity.

Will the funds be able to be reallocated into the roster?

"That remains to be seen," Antonetti said during a conference call Saturday. "We've had a couple of goals going into the offseason, and that's foremost trying to make sure we have a team that's capable of winning the American League Central in 2019 but also position the organization for sustained success beyond that.

"There are a couple ways to do that. One is to infuse young, controllable talent into the organization. The second element of that is to manage our finances. We feel like the series of moves we've made up to this point advances both of those goals."

Antonetti and Chernoff have done well to reposition their resources to be able to fight this battle on two fronts, which is much more complicated than simply going one direction or another. Indians ownership has gone above and beyond in recent years to give them the necessary monetary leeway to bolster the roster.

It needs to continue.

The Indians have earned the benefit of the doubt and the fan base's patience, as Dolan has proved the last two-plus years that the team is willing to increase payroll to build a contender. And within this contention window with an opportunity to return to the World Series, the next major move(s) can bring everything together.

But if those resources aren't given to Antonetti and Chernoff, and the Indians are silent the rest of this winter with their hands effectively tied, the fan base's response won't be as quiet.

Ryan Lewis Akron Beacon Journal LOADED: 12.16.2018

### **Cleveland Indians: Does the Carlos Santana deal set up more trades to come? Terry Pluto**

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

#### **ABOUT THE TRADES**

1. The Edwin Encarnacion/Carlos Santana deal with Seattle was driven a lot by money. The Indians don't believe Santana will deliver the same power numbers as Encarnacion, who has hit at least 32 HR in each of the last seven years. His lowest RBI total in that span was 98.
2. Encarnacion will be 36 next season. His bat is slowing down a bit. He used to be an OK first baseman, but at this stage of his career his best position by far is DH. The Indians whacked \$11 million from their payroll in 2019. They'll pay Santana about \$14 million while Encarnacion will make \$20 million in 2019 – plus he has a \$5 million buyout for 2020. That meant the Tribe owed him \$25 million.
3. Tribe President Chris Antonetti said the move gives the Indians more "payroll flexibility." Exactly what that means for 2019 is unclear. They also traded Yan Gomes for prospects, and that cut another \$7 million in the process. But it doesn't mean the Indians will suddenly be in the free agent market.
4. I don't know how much the Indians plan to cut from their \$134 million payroll in 2018, but cost-saving is happening. Fans can debate the economics and return to the "Tribe is cheap" mantra. But regardless of what Major League Baseball says, not having a salary cap leads to teams such as Cleveland, Cincinnati, Kansas City and Pittsburgh going through payroll slashes at various times.
5. The Indians continued the payroll cutting by sending Yonder Alonso and the \$9 million he's owed in 2019 to the White Sox for Alex Call, a 24-year-old outfielder. Call split the season between Class A and Class AA, batting .248 (.760 OPS) with 12 HR and 58 RBI. He's just a so-so prospect, a former third-round pick in 2016.
6. The trades of Encarnacion Alonso and Gomes could mean the the Indians will keep their starting rotation together, despite all the serious trade talks centering on Corey Kluber and Trevor Bauer. Or maybe that means if they do trade a starter, they are in a better position to bring back a player with a higher salary than they would have done a week ago.
7. The Indians still could trade a starter. My sense is they wanted to move Encarnacion before making a final decision on any trade dealing with Bauer or Kluber. The Indians now have a clearer payroll picture than they did when the winter meetings opened last week.
8. I had forgotten the Phillies traded Santana to Seattle only 12 days ago. They signed him to a 3-year, \$60 million deal before the 2018 season. But when all the money moves around, the Indians will only owe Santana \$29 million over the next two seasons.
9. Meanwhile, Seattle supposedly wants to trade Encarnacion. The Mariners are in a youth movement. When the Indians signed Encarnacion before the 2017 season, it was with the hope of returning to the World Series in the next year or two. He was paid \$35 million over the first two seasons. In the third season, it rises to \$25 million for 2019.
10. The Indians like Santana: "We have a long history with him and we know what makes him tick," said team president Antonetti. Manager Terry Francona has long appreciated Santana because the first baseman is durable, draws a lot of walks, has some power and is a switch-hitter. The Indians deemed the lefty-hitting Alonso very expendable, preferring Santana at first along with sometimes being the DH.
11. The 32-year-old Santana missed only one game in 2018 for Philadelphia. His .229 batting average was the lowest of his 9-year career. His .766 OPS was second-lowest. His 24 HR and 86 RBI were about normal for him. Santana had his usual dismal early-season problems at the plate. He was hitting only .209 at the All-Star break, then batted .256 after. I'm not going to dwell on those stats. Tribe fans watched Santana for eight years and know he doesn't heat up until the weather does. That also seemed to be the pattern for Encarnacion.
12. The Indians spent the off-season trying to find a trading partner for Encarnacion. Because he's mostly a DH, that eliminated the National League teams. Because of his hefty contract, the natural trading partners were big market teams such as New York, Boston and the Angels. All have DHs making big money.

13. I thought the Indians were going to give Yandy Diaz a chance to establish himself as the team's third baseman in 2019. I thought wrong. He was traded to Tampa Bay for 22-year-old Jake Bauers.

14. Diaz is 27. The knock against Diaz is his lack of power – one HR in 265 big league at-bats over two seasons. In that span, he batted .283 (.727 OPS). Maybe he won't hit for power. But a guy who makes contact, draws walks and hits for average (with a decent OPS) has value in the strikeout-crazed game played today.

15. Last season, Diaz didn't receive much playing time, yet he hit .312 (.797 OPS) in 109 at-bats. The Cuban import played 282 games over four seasons at Class AAA Columbus, batting .319 (.848 OPS).

16. Tampa Bay VP Chaim Bloom told The Athletic's Juan Torbio: "The key in this deal is how we feel about Yandy Diaz. We really like his bat. He hasn't gotten an opportunity to play with regularity at the major league level, just being blocked by some of the players the Indians have had. ... He hits the ball to all fields, hits the ball really, really hard and has a chance to drive the ball more as he continues to develop as a hitter."

17. The Diaz/Bauers deal came down to two front offices with different opinions about two players who have yet to establish themselves in the majors. The Indians obviously like Bauers more than Diaz. Antonetti called him "an above-average first baseman" who also can play left field.

18. Bauers was fast-tracked to the majors at the age of 22. According to the Tampa Bay Times, he batted .244 (.852 OPS) in his first 48 big league games, .150 (.520 OPS) in his last 48. That added up to .201 (.700 OPS) with 11 HR and 48 RBI. He struck out 104 times compared to 54 walks.

19. A few days before the trade was made, Tampa Bay Manager Kevin Cash said this about Bauers during his winter meetings press conference: "He's been about the youngest player at every level he's played. He tends to struggle and then figure it out ... this year, he just didn't have time to figure it out (before the season ended)."

20. More Cash on Bauers: "He's hit at every level where he's been. He has helped our infielders because he gives them confidence when they throw to first base."

21. Bauers batted .268 (.781 OPS) with 18 HR in 184 Class AAA games in 2017-18. In Class AA (2016-17), he was .275 (.771 OPS) with 19 HR in 204 games. In his 6-year minor-league career, Bauers played 414 games at first, 145 in the outfield.

22. Depending upon how Bauers plays in spring training, he could open with the Tribe or at Class AAA. He is best at first base, but supposedly can play a decent left field – a wide-open position at the moment.

23. The trade of Diaz means Jose Ramirez probably will start at third base, where he made the All-Star team. Jason Kipnis will move back from the outfield (where he ended the season) to second base.

24. I keep hearing that the Indians remain aggressive on the trade front. They know the roster has flaws in the outfield and bullpen. They also want to add prospects because they traded several in the last few years in an attempt to win now – Justus Sheffield, Clint Frazier, Will Castro and Francisco Mejia.

25. Also in the Bauers deal was Tribe minor-league pitcher Cole Sulser. He's 28, and the right-handed reliever had an 8-4 record and 3.86 ERA between Class AA and AAA for the Indians last season. He joins Tampa Bay having never pitched in a regular-season MLB game.

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### **What's next for the Cleveland Indians following Yonder Alonso's trade to the Chicago White Sox?**

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

CLEVELAND, Ohio – The Indians, in the span of two days, have continued to reshape their roster by trading Yonder Alonso, Edwin Encarnacion and Yandy Diaz to the White Sox, Seattle and Tampa Bay, respectively.

Alonso was traded to the White Sox on Friday night for minor league outfielder Alex Call. Encarnacion and Diaz were traded Thursday in a three-team deal with the Rays and Mariners.

So what's next? It's only mid-December. Are the Indians still looking to trade Corey Kluber or Trevor Bauer? And who is going to hit in the middle of manager Terry Francona's lineup?

When asked about the potential trades of Kluber and Bauer, Chris Antonetti, president of baseball operations, said in a Saturday morning conference call, "It's still relatively early in the offseason. I think what we will continue to do is be aggressive to improve our position moving forward whether that's to impact the 2019 team or beyond."

The Indians, starting with the trade of Yan Gomes on Nov. 30, have saved about \$21 million in payroll for the 2019 season. The White Sox assumed the remaining \$9 million left on Alonso's contract. Antonetti was asked if that money would be used to improve the roster for the upcoming season.

"That remains to be seen," said Antonetti. "We've had a couple of goals going into the offseason and that's foremost trying to make sure we have a team that's capable of winning the American League Central in 2019, but also position the organization for sustained success beyond that.

"There are a couple of ways to do that. One is to infuse young, controllable talent into the organization. The second element of that is to manage our finances. We feel like the series of moves we've made up to this point advance both of those goals."

Regarding the middle of the lineup, Encarnacion made 112 starts in the cleanup spot and 25 in the No. 5 spot last season. Alonso made 77 starts in the No. 5 spot. Diaz made 10 starts in the cleanup spot, three in the No. 5 spot and seven in the No.6 spot.

Depending on what happens the rest of the winter, it will be interesting to see if Francona will keep switch-hitters Francisco Lindor and Jose Ramirez hitting first and third. Lindor, hitting leadoff, tied Mookie Betts for the MLB lead in runs with 127 last season. Ramirez, meanwhile, hit 39 homers and drove in 105 runs out of the No.3 spot.

Lindor or Ramirez could easily slip into the No. 4 spot, but their absence at the top of the order would be missed.

Antonetti said Santana and Bauers should fit well in the middle of the lineup.

"I think we've acquired two guys who can do that in Carlos Santana and Jake Bauers," he said. "Again they have a little bit of different offensive profiles. But they're both productive major league players who not only contribute offensively, but defensively as well. The add some versatility to our roster beyond that."

Santana, who spent his first eight years in the big leagues with the Indians, hit .210 (60-for-286) with nine homers and 42 RBI in the No.4 spot last season for Philadelphia. He appeared in 82 games batting cleanup and posted a .717 OPS. Santana hit .265 (27-for-102) with eight homers and 20 RBI in the fifth spot for the Phillies. He posted a .909 OPS.

Bauers, who made his big-league debut last season, spent most of his time hitting third for the Rays. He batted .183 (31-for-169) with seven homers, 29 RBI and a .678 OPS.

Antonetti said when they were discussing the three-team deal with Seattle and Tampa Bay, they were also trying to find a trading partner for Alonso. When that deal happened, the trade of Alonso was put in motion.

"We feel this trade (Alonso to Chicago) frees up opportunity for both Jake Bauers and Carlos Santana to maximize their impact on our team," said Antonetti. "And that was one of the primary motivating factors in doing this."

Alonso hit .250 (129-for-516) with 23 homers and 83 RBI last season. He appeared in 145 games and posted a .738 OPS.

Right now the trades of Gomes, Encarnacion, Alonso, Diaz and Erik Gonzalez and the free-agent departures of Lonnie Chisenhall and Josh Donaldson have taken 77 homers and 284 RBI off the Tribe's stat sheet from 2018. The arrivals of Santana, Bauers, Jordan Luplow and Max Moroff have added 41 homers and 150 RBI. That means the Indians are still looking at a deficit of 36 homers and 134 RBI.

The White Sox drafted Call with their third-round pick in 2016 out of Ball State. The right-handed hitting Call, 24, can play all three outfield positions. He split last season between Class A Winston-Salem and Class AA Birmingham, hitting a combined .248 (107-for-431) with 28 doubles, 12 homers and 58 RBI. Call drew 60 walks and posted a .760 OPS in 123 games.

"With Alex we feel we're acquiring another upper-level prospect," said Antonetti. "He's got a great reputation for being a blue-collar player that goes about the game the right way. We feel he has the ingredients to develop into a productive major league hitter."

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### **Trade Kluber or Bauer? There's a method to Cleveland's madness**

Buster Olney

The Indians' ongoing effort to reduce their payroll in the immediate future has been a subject of great debate, with some wondering why Cleveland's ownership would force major changes to a group that is a prohibitive favorite to win the AL Central in 2019. They ask why the Indians wouldn't look to add to Corey Kluber and Trevor Bauer, rather than trading one of them, which could happen in the days ahead.

But there's more to what the Indians are doing than shedding money; they're driven by more than an effort to manage the bottom line. The Indians are also trying to better position the franchise to remain competitive, in this era of tanking, for the years after Kluber, Bauer and Francisco Lindor are with other clubs.

The Indians executed one of the most significant trades of the winter, a three-team deal with the Rays and Mariners, and through the swap of players and cash, they reduced their 2019 payroll obligations. They traded designated hitter Edwin Encarnacion, acquired Carlos Santana, sent Yandy Diaz to the Rays and got a dollop of cash, and these are the headline pieces of the deal.

But the Indians also landed Jake Bauers, who made his major league debut for the Rays last season. Bauers was a seventh-round pick by the Padres in 2013 out of Marina High School in Huntington Beach, California, and through his first seasons in pro ball, he performed above that initial draft projection. After posting a .789 OPS in the Midwest League in 2014, while being 3½ years younger than the average age of players at that level, the Rays plucked him away from San Diego as part of the Wil Myers blockbuster deal. Bauers has continued to progress and was ranked as MLB's No. 45 prospect by Baseball America last spring before reaching the big leagues last season at age 22. From the free agents set to cash in to the big-name stars sure to come up in trade rumors all winter long, keep up with all of the latest action.

Bauers hit well at the outset: After going 4-for-5 against the Nationals on June 25, his 18th game in the big leagues, he was hitting .297. The league adjusted to him, and Bauers struggled over the last three months, and he finished at .201, with a .390 slugging percentage.

But Bauers demonstrated a good feel for the strike zone in his first taste of the big leagues, swinging at pitches outside of the zone just 24.4 percent of the time. Among 247 hitters who accumulated at least 350 plate appearances in the big leagues, that ranked 35th (coincidentally, Carlos Santana ranked 34th). That ability to pick through pitches will continue to be an important building block for Bauers, who played 76 games at first base for the Rays and 20 in the outfield.

Bauers and Santana also increase the defensive functionality of the 2019 Indians. Encarnacion is strictly a designated hitter at this point, and the Indians could never find a position for Diaz. Santana might wind up getting a lot of at-bats at DH, with Yonder Alonso manning first base, and Bauers playing there if the Indians move Alonso. But Santana is fine at first base, if necessary.

Through their push to win in 2016 and 2017, and deals like the move for Andrew Miller, the top of the Indians' farm system thinned. What they have aimed to do this winter is to improve the organization's layer of talent underneath Lindor, and Bauers now becomes an important part of that. Whatever they get in return for Kluber or Bauer will become part of that.

At this stage, Cleveland seems like a lock to win the division in 2019, behind what should be at least a solid rotation of Kluber or Bauer, plus Carlos Carrasco, Mike Clevinger and Shane Bieber. But through the signing of Carrasco to an extension, the Indians can now project a rotation core in 2022 of Carrasco, Clevinger and Bieber, which should be good enough to compete, as division rivals like the White Sox and Tigers improve.

The practice of tanking has become increasingly popular among MLB teams, with some executives working under the belief that they should either be all in or all out. If the Indians can make the right decisions and successfully pick the right prospects in trades, they may be able to avoid that sort of quandary.

There are more difficult choices along the way, most notably with Lindor, who has already turned down a \$100 million offer from the Indians, in the spring of 2017. After Manny Machado and Bryce Harper sign, and presumably raise the ceiling for what's possible for a superstar free agent, the lure of the open market will grow for Lindor. After the 2019 season, the Indians will come face-to-face with this reality: If they don't trade Lindor before he reaches free agency after the 2021 season, he'll walk away. Next winter, they might have to consider Lindor trade proposals.

Over the past six seasons, they've averaged 90 victories a year, reached the playoffs four times and played to Game 7 of the World Series in 2016. If they can develop or add through trades players like Bauers, the Indians can continue to win, and that's a future they're trying to shape this winter, beneath the budget managing.

### **GM Rick Hahn calls trade for Yonder Alonso — Manny Machado's brother-in-law — 'a baseball deal'**

Mark Gonzales    Mark Gonzales Contact Reporter

Despite Yonder Alonso being the brother-in-law of marquee free agent Manny Machado, White Sox general manager Rick Hahn said he had no ulterior motive to the acquisition of Alonso from the Indians.

"Fundamentally, this is a baseball deal," Hahn said Saturday during a conference call to elaborate on the trade of Alonso for minor-league outfielder Alex Call. "We feel this makes us better. We feel Yonder fits in between the lines, in the clubhouse and helps further what we're trying to accomplish in 2019 and beyond.

"The potential ancillary benefits to it, in terms of relationships with others, really can't be part of pulling the trigger and making the decision to acquire a big-league player — especially a veteran one with this type of contract commitment."

Hahn never mentioned Machado or Bryce Harper, the other major free agent on the market, by name. But it's no secret the Sox are pursuing each star player, despite the club having lost 100 games in 2018 and facing stiff competition from well-financed teams.

Nevertheless, the trade late Friday created some curiosity because Machado is married to Alonso's sister — and Alonso, 31, plays the same position as slugger Jose Abreu, who is entering the final year of his contract.

But Hahn insinuated Abreu and Alonso can co-exist, adding that Abreu was happy with the trade and that he and Alonso are friends who exchanged text messages Friday night after they learned of the deal.

"We feel (Alonso) provides a nice balance in our lineup and has nothing but a great reputation in terms of his game preparation, his professionalism and the element of veteran leadership that he will add to our clubhouse," Hahn said.

"We envision both he and Abreu getting the bulk of the (at-bats) between first base and the (designated hitter) spots. How that exactly breaks down will be a managerial decision and something Ricky (Renteria) can get into more detail with ... over the course of the season as things evolve."

Alonso's contract includes an option for 2020 — for \$9 million or a \$1 million buyout — that vests automatically if he has 550 plate appearances in 2019 or a combined 1,100 plate appearances in 2018-19. Alonso had 574 plate appearances in 2018, batting .250 with 23 home runs and 83 RBIs.

"We do view him as a nice fit over the both the 2019 and 2020 season," Hahn said.

Meanwhile, Hahn said Daniel Palka, who smacked 27 home runs and drove in 67 runs during his rookie season, could play more in the outfield. The 6-foot-2, 220-pound Palka started 40 games as the DH, 40 in right field and 22 in left last season and has worked this offseason to get in better shape to play the outfield, Hahn said.

"I know Daniel, at 27, doesn't want to be a full-time DH," Hahn said. "He still believes he can contribute on the defensive side of things."

The Sox and Indians started discussing Alonso only after Hahn and the Sox's contingent left the winter meetings in Las Vegas on Thursday. The Sox had been interested in Alonso since his college days at the University of Miami in 2006-08. The Reds selected him with the seventh pick in the 2008 draft — one pick ahead of Gordon Beckham.

The Sox pursued Alonso as a free agent last winter.

## **Bill Madden / How to fix boring MLB Winter Meetings and other thoughts from Machado-Harper-Realmuto show**

By BILL MADDEN

Another Winter Meetings have come and gone, once again with not a whole lot accomplished, and after hearing various GMs expressing their dread of spending the better part of five days holed up in their hotel suites, surrounded by their analytics geeks, texting away with little or no personal contact and baseball talk with the outside world, you have to wonder if this is yet another baseball tradition that has passed its time.

Used to be the Winter Meetings were a Hot Stove haven for baseball and its fans – a week of free publicity in the middle of its offseason, like no other sport, where GMs, front office execs, managers, scouts, and even owners convened and socialized, actively swapping stories and players, a lot of times over cocktails in the hotel bar. Now, it has dissolved into nothing more than a 24-hour-a-day, week-long infomercial for the MLB Network, with panel after panel of baseball scribes and talking TV heads rambling on about trades and potential signings that never happen. At least at the Winter Meetings anyway.

“The problem,” said former Cubs executive and Dodgers GM Ned Colletti, “is that you have clubs with payrolls of \$200 million and clubs with payrolls of \$60 million and teams are shopping in different markets for their needs and different dollars to fill them. To line up these two is very difficult without a deadline. Without a deadline, teams find it a lot easier to say ‘no’. Look what happens in July where there is a deadline. Every year, there’s a flurry of activity and it’s coming from 30 different places. Imagine if there was a deadline at the Winter Meetings where everyone is in the same place?”

Years ago, there WAS a deadline at the Winter Meetings, at least for trades between leagues. If a deal could not be reached by the last day of the meetings, clubs had to wait until the next inter-league trading period in spring training.

“I don’t know if there needs to be a deadline but there does need to be some sort of break for the GMs,” said Red Sox GM Dave Dombrowski. “In recent years the job has become a 24-hour, 365-day-a-year job. There is no offseason. I do agree that people tend to respond to deadlines. I’m also not quite sure why it is, but even the free agents seem to be signing later and later.”

This past week it seemed like 90% of the MLB Network time was spent on Bryce Harper and Manny Machado as the huddled masses waited with much anticipation for Scott Boras’ grand arrival at the Winter Meetings and his state-of-the-Harper address. There was no way either of them was signing with anyone in Las Vegas. Boras and Machado’s agent, Dan Lozano, are going to drag this out as long as they can. The Phillies, who have said they may very well spend foolishly to get what they want this winter, remain engaged on both Machado and Harper. Problem is, neither of them want the Phillies.

Boras and Lozano apparently also have the White Sox heavily in on Harper and Machado respectively — especially after Chicago acquired Yonder Alonso, Machado’s brother-in-law, from the Indians Friday. But given White Sox Board Chairman Jerry Reinsdorf’s longstanding very public disdain for Boras, and his rigid stance on wild spending, it’s hard to envision a marriage with either of those two big free agents. Boras is content to string the Phillies and White Sox along while waiting for the Dodgers – where Harper really wants to go – to clear payroll and outfield depth by moving Yasiel Puig and Matt Kemp before stepping up to the plate. Same with Machado, who has privately expressed his desire to be a Yankee, unless the Phillies throw caution to the wind and blow him away with a 10-year/\$300 million deal. Another free agent who has privately told people he’d like to be a Yankee is Daniel Murphy, who, as a lefthanded hitter who puts the ball in play and can fill in at second or first and will come fairly cheap, as in a two-year deal, would seem a perfect fit for them, especially if they can’t get Machado for something far less than 10 years/\$300M.

Besides the non-stop Harper/Machado chatter, the Winter Meetings were dominated by the Marlins’ shopping of catcher J.T. Realmuto. Mets GM Brodie Van Wagenen has been relentless on this one, as he should be, and if sacrificing shortstop Amed Rosario is really the stumbling block for him, here’s something to consider. When Mets GM Frank Cashen acquired Gary Carter as the centerpiece for a future championship team, he gave up an All-Star shortstop in Hubie Brooks plus three top prospects. Shortstops are a whole lot easier to find – as Cashen did with Rafael Santana – than franchise catchers.

### **As slow starts to baseball's hot stove league become the norm, are the winter meetings still necessary?**

**Paul Sullivan**

Another year of baseball’s winter meetings has come and gone, and most of the top free agents remain available.

In addition to the two competing for the biggest contract — Bryce Harper and Manny Machado — there’s Craig Kimbrel, who reportedly hopes to become the first nine-figure reliever, and potential closers Zach Britton and Andrew Miller. Among the available hitters are Nelson Cruz, Michael Brantley, A.J. Pollock, DJ LeMahieu and Marwin Gonzalez. A smorgasbord of talent is there for the taking, almost two months into the offseason.

All of them will sign sooner or later, just like in last year’s slow market. But the lack of movement during the annual meetings, which MLB Network televises almost nonstop, makes the affair seem anachronistic. How many times can you listen to reporters discuss the possibility of a J.T. Realmuto deal?

Only 16 official moves were announced during the three days in Las Vegas: six waiver claims, six signings, three trades and one player (Troy Tulowitzki) released. It was a snoozefest from start to finish.

“There’s a buzz today,” one TV host said Wednesday, clearly trying to create interest with an absence of real news.

It makes you wonder whether the meetings are even necessary in this day and age, when team executives can text or teleconference with each other or with agents from their offices instead of traveling across the country to talk. Red Sox President Dave Dombrowski came up with a good idea, suggesting baseball should consider an offseason deadline for making moves, which would force teams and agents to work quicker to get things done.

“I don’t really know what’s happened where it has changed,” Dombrowski said, according to masslive.com. “It just doesn’t seem to be very important for people. I have suggested that the game needs to look at that.

“The reality is that if you’re a general manager or an assistant general manager, there is no downtime for people. ... Everybody needs a break at some point. They need to change the rules or something where there’s some downtime. Every other sport has it other than ours. It goes longer and longer.”

The July 31 trade deadline is one of the best days in baseball. The winter meetings have become three of the dullest.

"It's amazing how people work toward deadlines," Dombrowski said.

#### Money matters

Baseball's luxury-tax threshold is \$206 million in 2019 and rises to \$208 million in 2020 and \$210 million in 2021. That doesn't give the Cubs much operating room the next three seasons unless they shed some salary, and it's why they're not expected to get into the mix for Harper, who was rumored last season to be interested in the Cubs, according to Peter Gammons.

The White Sox, on the other hand, are able to do whatever they want this offseason. They ranked 29th in payroll at \$71.3 million before rosters expanded Sept. 1. The only team behind them was the Rays (\$70.5 million).

Declining James Shields' option and non-tendering Avisail Garcia gave them even more room to maneuver, which is why a Harper or Machado signing is a real possibility, even if both players are asking for a contract averaging \$35 million or more.

It seems too early in the rebuild for the Sox to put all their eggs in one basket, but it's not unprecedented. The Tigers signed premier free agent Ivan Rodriguez to a four-year, \$40 million deal after a 119-loss season in 2003. Rodriguez said he thought the Tigers were on their way up.

"Pudge said to me: 'I know that division. That division could be mine,' " Rodriguez's agent, Scott Boras, said.

By 2006, the Tigers were in the World Series. Boras is also Harper's agent.

Looking at the American League Central, Harper can see the Sox could contend sooner than later. Jeff Samardzija theorized in the spring of 2017 that the Sox decided to rebuild knowing that.

"Detroit is probably getting a little older and Cleveland is hot right now," Samardzija said. "So maybe let that train die down a little bit and then come in (and contend) in a couple years."

Two years later, the Tigers are in the early stages of a rebuild, while the Indians have dealt Edwin Encarnacion and might have to deal Trevor Bauer or Corey Kluber for budgetary reasons.

The Sox might not contend in 2019 or '20 even with Harper or Machado, but they definitely would narrow the gap with the Indians.

The waiting is the hardest part

The Harold Baines Hall of Fame controversy reminds me of the days of the Nellie Fox Society, a group of Chicago attorneys who pushed the Hall candidacy of the popular former White Sox second baseman during the early 1990s.

A career .288 hitter and 12-time All-Star, the 5-foot-9 Fox won the AL MVP award in 1959 and was a good glove with elite contact skills, once going 98 consecutive games without striking out. Still, many writers considered Fox a borderline candidate — a very good player with a few great years — like many other stars.

In 1985, 10 years after his death and in his 15th and final year on the Baseball Writers' Association of America ballot, Fox fell two votes shy of election. He was named on 295 of 395 ballots, or 74.68 percent — less than half a percentage point below the necessary 75 percent. It was a tough end to Fox's candidacy, like losing a no-hitter with two out in the ninth.

Tribune baseball writer Jerome Holtzman tried to come to Fox's rescue, arguing Fox's vote total should be rounded up to 75 percent. Batting averages are rounded up, he said — a .2995 hitter would be listed at .300 — so why not Hall of Fame votes? Holtzman wrote an open letter to Hall of Fame President Ed Stack stating Fox's case, requesting Fox be awarded "the customary mathematical reckoning: that 74.7 percent is 75 percent."

Holtzman struck out. Three weeks later, the Hall of Fame released a statement saying the board of directors "expressed its sympathy in the Nellie Fox situation, but did not feel that it was proper to change the rules for election to admit any candidate named on less than 75 percent of the ballots cast."

Fox finally became eligible again on a veterans committee ballot in 1991. By this time the Nellie Fox Society had been created, and the attorneys sent a five-page petition in the form of a legal brief to committee members. It looked like Fox was in the on-deck circle for the Hall, but the committee instead selected maverick owner Bill Veeck and Yankees second baseman Tony Lazzeri. Fox reportedly was three votes shy this time.

Five years later, Fox finally received the necessary 75 percent of a 15-member panel. But the rule at the time allowed only one inductee per year from the veterans committee, and because Jim Bunning got one more vote than Fox, the Phillies pitcher got the nod.

At long last, Fox got his reward when the veterans committee met again in 1997. Committee member Ted Williams said afterward he lobbied for Fox.

"I made a comment in the meeting that he was one of my coaches when I managed the Washington (Senators)," Williams said. "There was never a more bear-down, hard-nosed little guy than Nellie Fox. I'm just as happy as I can be that he's in the Hall of Fame. He was a tremendous player and is very deserving. I know he took a lot of hits away from me."

Baines' selection sparked a debate over his stats and the presence of two of his friends, Sox Chairman Jerry Reinsdorf and former Sox manager Tony La Russa, on the voting committee. Baines' great moment was marred, and the controversy isn't likely to subside soon with BBWAA voting for the Class of 2019 due Dec. 31.

As the Fox saga suggests, few will remember this episode years from now.

Baines is a Hall of Famer, and no one can take that away.

White Sox announce trade for Yonder Alonso

12/15/2018, 11:59PM

ByDaryl Van Schouwen

In a short-term move with potential implications for a bigger, long-term endeavor, the White Sox acquired first baseman Yonder Alonso from the Cleveland Indians.

The Sox gave up 24-year-old minor-league outfielder Alex Call in the trade, announced Saturday. It's an intriguing acquisition because Alonso is the brother-in-law of free-agent infielder Manny Machado, whom the Sox are expected to meet with this week.

General manager Rick Hahn wouldn't link the deal to Machado in any fashion, even though everybody else was doing so for obvious reasons.

"I hate to disappoint you, but I have not read every story that has mentioned his brother-in-law. ... It's out there, huh?" Hahn said in a lighthearted tone. "Fundamentally, this is a baseball deal. We feel this makes us better. We like how Yonder fits between the lines, in the clubhouse, and he helps further what we're trying to accomplish in 2019 and beyond.

"The potential ancillary benefits to it in terms of his relationship to others really can't be part of pulling the trigger and making a decision to acquire a big-league player, especially a veteran with this type of contract commitment."

Also, the Sox already have a highly regarded first baseman in All-Star Jose Abreu, who has one year left on his contract. Hahn talked to Abreu before the deal was announced and said Abreu was "enthusiastic" about the trade.

"He's probably the ultimate team guy, and he felt good about the addition of a good player and someone he's good friends with," Hahn said.

Manager Rick Renteria will determine how time is divided between Abreu and Alonso at first base and designated hitter, the latter a role Abreu doesn't care for.

"Jose just wants us to win," Hahn said. "He also knows there is benefit from getting off his feet some time."

The Sox have hinted all along they would prefer to keep Abreu, so the trade doesn't necessarily signal a desire to move what figures to be a \$16 million salary through arbitration. Alonso, 31, who will earn \$8 million in 2019, could be used in a first base/designated hitter rotation with Abreu.

"Alonso provides a proven offensive performer from the left side of the plate, and he also brings a veteran presence on and off the field," Hahn said. "Yonder has a solid reputation around the league as a professional and a great teammate."

After non-tendering corner infielder/DH Matt Davidson, who hit 20 home runs in 2018, the Sox seemed to be opening more opportunities for left-handed-hitting outfielder Daniel Palka, who hit 26 homers with a .240/.294/.484 batting line.

Palka struggled defensively at the corner outfield spots, but Hahn said "there's certainly the chance [Palka can be a regular outfielder]."

"At age 27, Daniel doesn't want to be a full-time DH," Hahn said. "He still believes he can contribute on the defensive side of things, and he has worked hard this offseason already. He told [hitting coach Todd Steverson] recently he's back down to his college weight.

"We like what he brings in terms of his power, and we feel his offensive game will improve as he rounds that out as a pro."

The Sox agreed to terms with free-agent catcher James McCann on a one-year deal Friday. Hahn had said acquiring a catcher was on his to-do list this offseason, but adding a first baseman such as Alonso came as a surprise, considering the Sox' fondness for Abreu, 31, and his valued leadership.

Alonso, a left-handed bat who is better defensively than Abreu, will be under club control for 2020 with a \$9 million option. After batting .250 with 23 home runs and 83 RBI in 145 games, his move to another club appeared imminent after the Indians traded for first baseman Carlos Santana and first baseman/outfielder Jake Bauers on Thursday.

Machado and Bryce Harper are the two biggest free agents on the market, and the Sox are pursuing both. And with only \$33 million in pre-arbitration salary commitments for next season, they have the payroll flexibility to afford at least one of them.

Would they commit to \$50 million or more for two players for one season, the likely combined cost for Harper and Machado for one season? Moving Abreu would be one way of creating even more space. Acquiring Alonso suggests they're leaving no stone unturned in a bid for Machado.

In the end, they may end up with neither. So while going after Harper and Machado as long-term, nine-figure pursuits, the Sox continue to check off short-term needs for 2019. McCann's one-year deal, for a reported \$2.5 million, will be announced pending a physical, a source said. The Sox also traded for starting pitcher Ivan Nova on Tuesday and for reliever Alex Colome last week.

Call batted .248/.345/.415 with 12 homers and 58 RBI between Class A Winston-Salem and Class AA Birmingham in 2019. The Sox are stacked with outfield prospects at the A and AA levels, and Call, a 2016 third-round draft pick, is not ranked among the Sox' top 30 prospects.

Daryl Van Schouwen

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## Nick Cafardo / Too many teams are tanking and that's leading to dwindling competition

By Nick Cafardo

The 89-win Mariners and the 91-win Indians are starting to dismantle their teams. So what's going to be left for true contenders in the American League?

Is it just a three-team race among Boston, New York, and Houston?

Tampa Bay and Oakland won 90 and 97 games respectively, but they have become up-and-down franchises. Some years they're really good and some years they're not. The Rays signed veteran righthander Charlie Morton to a two-year, \$30 million contract, which shows a willingness to compete. Oakland has rotation issues and has yet to re-sign their heart and soul player, Jed Lowrie.

It's not a stretch to say the American League has gotten worse. Maybe there are opportunities for teams such as the Twins and White Sox to improve and have a better chance of unseating the Indians in the Central. But now there are as many teams dismantling than building up. How far are the teams building up — such as the Twins, White Sox, Rangers, and Angels — going to go?

And there are teams such as the Orioles, Royals, and Tigers who make no pretenses about rebuilding.

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

So the Red Sox have a great opportunity to repeat. The competition wasn't great last season, which is why the Sox were able to win 108 regular-season games. They just demolished the non-competitive teams. No wonder attendance was down. Who wants to watch the Red Sox play the Orioles or the Tigers or anyone in the AL Central other than the Indians?

Something has to be done to address this. There's simply too much tanking. The Seattle situation is ridiculous. You can't win 89 games and not think if you make the right moves you could improve and make the postseason.

When so-called experts declare the 2018 Red Sox one of the great teams of all time, or the greatest Red Sox team, you really have to look deeper and consider who they were playing. Yes, the 108 wins was extraordinary. Yes, they were a great team, but . . . The Yankees and Astros were two very good teams last season and either could have won the World Series, but when you have two teams winning 100-plus games in the same division, a third winning 90 and the rest falling off the shelf, what's that say about the competition?

Baseball really needs to get its act together. There's too much tanking going on. The Indians have been a solid organization for a long time. To suddenly start peeling off pieces, and talking to teams about trading a great pitcher such as Corey Kluber, who is relatively inexpensive compared with pitchers of his success, is mind-boggling.

And it's not just happening in the American League. The Arizona Diamondbacks, such a competitive team in the NL West, have now traded All-Star first baseman Paul Goldschmidt to the Cardinals and allowed Patrick Corbin to become a free agent and sign with the Washington Nationals.

Diamondbacks GM Mike Hazen's reality is he couldn't afford to sign Goldschmidt or Corbin long term, leaving two gaping holes. The team also will lose center fielder A.J. Pollock. All of which has left manager Torey Lovullo having to piece things together.

"We believed that this could have been a possibility where we lost Paul. But I don't think we're in a rebuild or reload," Lovullo said. "I think we still have some capable players that are going to help us win some baseball games. Where that lands, I'm not sure. I was attached to Paul, and it's a once-in-a-generation player. I asked [Hazen] are you sure this is something that needs to be done? He would walk me through the steps and educated me and taught me as to why this had to happen for the organization. As I got more educated, I saw his point of view."

Scott Servais also is dealing with managing a Seattle lineup and pitching staff that won't look nearly the same as in 2018.

"We've given up a lot of great players," Servais said about the losses of Robinson Cano, Edwin Diaz and James Paxton. "If we were to line up today with this club, I like our lineup. Maybe it's not as potent as last year. But we're not done in the offseason yet. But we're looking long term, here. What's best for the organization and how do we put ourselves in that upper echelon. You look at the American League right now, and what the Red Sox were able to do, we see Houston a lot, where the Yankees are at, what Oakland has done. Us taking a step back helps us catch up."

Indians manager Terry Francona has predictably shrugged off comments that the team is tearing things down.

The Indians will lose free agent outfielder Michael Brantley and relievers Cody Allen and Andrew Miller. They traded All-Star catcher Yan Gomes to the Nationals and slugger Edwin Encarnacion to the Mariners. Kluber and Trevor Bauer are available in deals.

"I know I have faith," Francona said about the Indians' front office. "I know like we're sitting up there and I'm listening to all these conversations that they're having, and it kind of made me think about like when a game's over how they respond with me, through maybe some difficult times or frustrating nights. They're always so supportive. So I kind of just try to be supportive because this is their area and they're good at it. And they've proven they're good at it. And at times under some challenging circumstances, they're trying to keep us healthy, competitive for the future. For next year, for the year after that, for the year after that.

"And in my opinion they've done an outstanding job the last six years. But that doesn't mean you stop. You don't rest on your laurels. You don't — but at least in my opinion I've got a lot of confidence in how they do things.

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

The Indians obtained Carlos Santana from the Mariners in a swap for Encarnacion. Santana had been traded by Philadelphia to Seattle. Now there's speculation the Mariners will flip Encarnacion to a contender who needs a slugger — such as Tampa Bay or Houston.

All of this activity is in the name of reducing payroll and long-term commitments. These teams make a ton of money and it's a shame there's this urgent need to dismantle and then rebuild. Some of the matchups and games are getting so lopsided they're not worth watching.

Boston, New York, and Houston will dominate. Tampa Bay and Oakland will be competitive. Who knows now about the Indians and Mariners. Who knows about anything in this league anymore.

## Apropos of nothing

1. Who was the J.D. Martinez of the Oakland A's — the guy that offered intangibles and helped the rest of the offense as well as performing on his own? "I think Jed [Lowrie] was our guy last year for us," A's manager Bob Melvin said. "And the most experienced guy, switch-hitter, understands mechanics both sides, understands what he needs to do to be successful. But also understands the analytics, too. He understands launch angles and exit velocities and was a nice kind of player-coach for us to help [hitting coach Darren Bush] out with some of our younger guys, too. Yet to be determined whether or not we'll have him back, but I would say if you're picking a guy that was like that, it would be Jed for us."
2. There's a belief in Chicago that Joe Maddon could be managing his last season with the Cubs unless the team has major success in 2019. But Maddon doesn't see it that way. "The concept that Theo [Epstein] and I have any kind of a disengagement or a lack of philosophical sameness is untrue," Maddon said. "We have great conversations. And we're definitely almost a hundred percent on the same page all the time. Philosophically we're really aligned well. So when I have to answer those questions to my mom, that makes it more difficult. That's what bums me out a little bit."
3. New Blue Jays manager Charlie Montoyo was given the keys to a brand new car that has occupants such as the best prospect in baseball in Vladimir Guerrero Jr. and other top prospects, such as Cavan Biggio and Bo Bichette, who are likely to play in the big leagues during next season. "What this team reminds me a little bit of is Boston five years ago when Mookie Betts was there, and finished last, and look where they are now," Montoyo said. "So that's my hope. Boston, the team they have now, that all these kids become players like that. That's my hope and I think that's what's going to happen."
4. Colorado manager Bud Black was asked about this possibly being Bruce Bochy's final year with the Giants after three World Series championships. "Well, I hope it's not his last year," Black said. "I truly mean that, because Bruce is great for the game. I think historically, what he's done in his entire career, and more recently with the Giants, winning three world championships, that's fantastic work. But my relationship with Bruce, especially the last number of years, has become a little closer. His impact has been a big one. I think a lot of other managers have looked at Bruce to see how he's done things. And for me there's been no better in-game manager strategically than Bruce. I always felt as though when the game started, there was never going to be a mistake on his side."
5. Aaron Boone showed his respect for scouts when he attended the Scout of the Year award dinner at the Winter Meetings. Boone's grandfather, Ray, was a longtime Red Sox scout. Boone, who won 100 games as the first-year Yankee manager, hopes to catch the Red Sox. "Obviously they were an unbelievable team this year, a monster," Boone said. "But we also understand that we feel like we're very much on level ground with them. We've obviously got areas that we need to improve to kind of close that gap but we feel like when we're at our best we're as good as any team in the world. What they did really well, I think from a lineup standpoint they were just so dynamic. Really balanced. MVP caliber seasons in what Mookie [Betts] and J.D. [Martinez] were able to do. You saw it manifest itself in the postseason with their ability to just get big hits in tough spots. The ability to also get the ball out of the ballpark. The ability to steal bases. Athletic group. It was a real dynamic offense. And I think it proved to be the best offense in the game throughout the year."

## Updates on nine

1. Joe Kelly, RHP, Dodgers — No question Kelly got a great deal from the Dodgers at three years, \$25 million. His stuff will play even better in the National League, according to one American League executive who feels the weaker lineups will give Kelly a huge advantage. Kelly had 15 teams interested in his services. One problem: Kelly will disappear at times and has a history of hitting ruts.
  2. Dave Dombrowski, president of baseball operations, Red Sox — Dombrowski isn't alone in his recommendation to have the league impose free agent signing deadlines and trade deadlines in the offseason so the process doesn't drag on. The lack of activity at the Winter Meetings is ridiculous. The league is getting bad publicity because the sport's biggest winter showcase is resulting in minimal transactions. The free agent signing deadline should be the last day of the Winter Meetings. And if a player is not signed by then, then not until the beginning of spring training. Teams and agents have plenty of time between the end of the World Series until mid-December to figure out what they want to do.
  3. A.J. Pollock, CF, free agent — Pollock leads a list of available outfielders after Andrew McCutchen was signed by the Phillies. Pollock makes sense for the Giants or Braves. The Giants need outfielders and offense and the Braves need to replace free agent Nick Markakis.
  4. Nelson Cruz, DH, free agent — There's a lot of speculation about where Cruz may end up. Two strong possibilities are Houston or Tampa Bay. The Astros always are looking for that veteran presence, which they got with Carlos Beltran in 2017 and Brian McCann last season. The Rays could use a power bat. Cruz hit 37 home runs last season with Seattle.
  5. Troy Tulowitzki, SS, free agent — Nobody knows if Tulowitzki can resume his career after two heel surgeries. As one AL executive said, "We'd have to see him work out. I haven't heard of any plans like that so far but for teams to feel comfortable that he can play any infield position, we'd have to see how he moves." With Didi Gregorius out, the Yankees will monitor the Tulowitzki situation. The A's, perhaps out of the Lowrie bidding, will also consider it. Tulowitzki recently was released by the Blue Jays after missing all of 2018. The Jays ate the remaining \$38 million of his contract.
- Craig Kimbrel has communicated with teams that he wants to be signed to a six-year deal.
6. Craig Kimbrel, RHP, free agent — It only takes one team to dish out a five- or six-year deal for Kimbrel at \$18 million per year, but teams are still deciding whether that type of commitment is prudent. The Cardinals, Phillies, and Braves have been mentioned most often. , but the market may take a while to develop for Kimbrel, who is the high-end reliever on the market.
  7. J.T. Realmuto, catcher, Marlins — It appears the Marlins have somewhat lowered the asking price on their star catcher. The Mets, Reds, Rays, Braves, Yankees, and Padres are trying to piece together a package that makes sense. The Mets will give up one of their young players (Michael Conforto, Brandon Nimmo or Adam Rosario), but no more, according to a major league source. The Yankees would have to give up third baseman Miguel Andujar, which they seem willing to do, but right now the Mets seem to be the team that could get this done.
  8. Wil Myers, OF, Padres — Myers may be one of the more attractive outfield trade bait guys out there. The Padres have made him available, but want a decent return. Again, the Giants and Braves may make the most sense. The Padres need a third baseman and if they can land one via trade, Myers would be the bait. Don't be surprised if free agent Mike Moustakas is on San Diego's radar.
  9. Jacoby Ellsbury, OF, Yankees — Yankees boss Brian Cashman said last week that Ellsbury had drawn trade interest from at least one team. It appears the Yankees would eat a solid amount of the remaining \$48 million on his deal.

## **Ken Rosenthal / Astros could add two hitters; the Kyler Murray mystery; all in the family for Manny?; more notes**

**By Ken Rosenthal Dec 15, 2018 26**

It's no secret the Astros want to add a hitter. But how about two hitters?

The team is at least considering the possibility, talking to free agents Nelson Cruz and Michael Brantley while remaining open to a trade of right fielder Josh Reddick, according to major-league sources.

Reddick, who turns 32 on Feb. 19, is owed \$13 million in each of the next two seasons, and the Astros developed little traction in their attempts to move him earlier this offseason, sources said (Reddick dropped from a career-high .847 OPS in 2017 to .718 in '18).

A free-agent splurge on Cruz and Brantley would be out of character for the Astros, and the competition on the open market, combined with the team's need for a starting pitcher, makes it more likely Houston will get one hitter, not both.

Still, the promise of Kyle Tucker — the team's No. 1 position prospect, according to MLB Pipeline.com — would not necessarily preclude the Astros from signing a left fielder such as Brantley to, say, a three-year deal. Tucker, 21, struggled last season in his first major-league audition, and free agent Marwin González and Tony Kemp were the Astros' left fielders in the postseason.

Brantley's willingness to play first base, something I reported on Twitter earlier this month, adds to his appeal. Astros manager A.J. Hinch likes versatility and the flexibility to give his position players rest, and the addition of Brantley would enable him to use first baseman Yuli Gurriel in other spots.

Cruz, 38, is an even cleaner fit than Brantley, a designated hitter who last season had 37 homers and an .850 OPS for the Mariners. The Astros likely envision Cruz as the kind of veteran stabilizer Carlos Beltrán was during their run to the 2017 World Series title. The Rays are among the other teams interested in Cruz, but the Astros offer perhaps the best chance for him to win his first World Series title.

Of course, the Astros also need to address their rotation, which is down three starters from last season — right-hander Charlie Morton, who signed with the Rays; left-hander Dallas Keuchel, who also is expected to depart in free agency; and right-hander Lance McCullers, who underwent Tommy John surgery in November.

A trade for a starter or modest free-agent signing remains possible, and the Astros possess numerous internal options beyond Justin Verlander, Gerrit Cole and Collin McHugh, who will rejoin the rotation in '19. Josh James, Brad Peacock and Framber Valdez are among the immediate possibilities, and prospects Forrest Whitley and Corbin Martin should contribute at some point as well.

### **The Kyler Murray mystery**

Perhaps the two-sport narrative around Oklahoma quarterback Kyler Murray will change if Alabama thrashes the Sooners in the college football playoff semifinal. But after winning the Heisman Trophy, Murray's football stock has never been higher, and it is not out of the question he will be selected in the first round of the NFL draft.

If Murray chose to play football, he would need to pay back any portion of the signing bonus he received from the Athletics, who selected him as an outfielder with the ninth overall pick in the 2018 baseball draft. Murray received \$1.5 million upon signing with the A's in June, and is due the remainder of his \$4.66 million bonus in March.

The NFL potentially would be more lucrative — the final pick in the first round next year projects to earn approximately \$5.5 million upfront and \$8.75 million guaranteed; players selected higher will receive more. Murray, as the reigning Heisman winner, surely would cash in on marketing and endorsement opportunities as well, likely increasing his potential income as an NFL pick to more than double his bonus from the A's.

Murray's agent, Scott Boras, said at the Winter Meetings that the player "has every intention" of being at spring training, but Murray probably could squeeze in an appearance at the NFL combine in Indianapolis before joining the A's in Mesa, Ariz. The combine takes place from Feb. 26 to March 4. Minor league spring training generally begins around March 1.

### **All in the family for Manny?**

Money will be the driving force — and perhaps the only force — in the free-agent decisions of Manny Machado and Bryce Harper. But the White Sox's acquisition on Saturday of Machado's friend and brother-in-law, first baseman Yonder Alonso, certainly will not hurt the team's chances in the Machado sweepstakes.

I wrote earlier this week that the White Sox's preference seems to be Harper, but their strong contingent of Latin players is a potential advantage in their pursuit of Machado, as is the presence of manager Rick Renteria, who is of Mexican heritage and bilingual. Machado, who is Dominican-American, was born and raised in Florida and speaks fluent English, but played for the Dominican team in the World Baseball Classic.

The Phillies, another of Machado's suitors, also are quite deep in Latin talent. And while their manager, Gabe Kapler, is not fluent in Spanish, he drew praise last season for his efforts to communicate with Latin players.

### **Where are the Twins?**

A rival executive theorized last offseason that Yankees general manager Brian Cashman would do everything possible to bolster his 2018 club after making the decision to replace a successful manager, Joe Girardi, with a novice, Aaron Boone.

Cashman probably would object to such a characterization, saying he would have tried just as hard if not change had been made. But he indeed was aggressive, trading for outfielder Giancarlo Stanton over the winter, then acquiring J.A. Happ, Lance Lynn, Luke Voit and Andrew McCutchen during the season.

The Twins' top baseball executives, Derek Falvey and Thad Levine, are in a similar position after naming a first-time manager, Rocco Baldelli, to replace Paul Molitor, who was less successful than Girardi but perhaps more popular with fans as a native of St. Paul.

Falvey and Levine inherited Molitor, so Baldelli is their first managerial hire. The Twins entered the offseason with enormous payroll flexibility, including zero financial commitments in 2020. Yet to this point, they have been fairly quiet, addressing the infield needs with the additions of

first baseman C.J. Cron, second baseman Jonathan Schoop and utility man Ronald Torreyes, but doing little to address their pitching except with their selection of right-hander Dusten Knight from the Giants in the Rule 5 draft.

The Twins' remaining needs include a veteran starting pitcher and at least one late-inning reliever. They will be a team to watch in the days and weeks ahead.

Around the horn

Information from major-league sources:

\*The Nationals made Ian Kinsler a one-year offer before the free-agent second baseman agreed to his two-year, \$8 million deal with the Padres, which is pending a physical.

Howie Kendrick and Wilmer Difo are the Nats' current options at second, and Carter Kieboom, a top shortstop prospect, might be the long-term answer at the position.

If the Nats' preference in free agency is for a one-year option, it likely will preclude them from signing any of the top free agents at second — DJ LeMahieu, Jed Lowrie, Josh Harrison, et al.

\*The Brewers are not only pursuing Daniel Murphy to play second base. They also are showing interest in Jed Lowrie, who was with the Astros in 2015 when Brewers GM David Stearns was in the Houston front office.

Lowrie, who also was a Twins target before the team landed Schoop, is coming off his two best seasons at ages 33 and 34. He averaged 155 games for the A's over that period, with a combined 37 homers and an .804 OPS. The A's made him an offer earlier this offseason, but he might move out of their price range.

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