Ramirez earns Bob Feller Man of Year Award
By Jordan Bastian / MLB.com | @MLBastian | 6:24 AM ET
CLEVELAND -- When considering who was the Indians' best player from this past season, there are many candidates and no correct answer. Ace Corey Kluber would be a fine choice, as would energetic shortstop Francisco Lindor, Jason Kipnis, Carlos Santana and Mike Napoli had career years. Andrew Miller dominated in the bullpen.

Then, there was Jose Ramirez.

"He kind of saved [us]," manager Terry Francona said during the World Series. Ramirez's breakout season has earned him special recognition by the Cleveland chapter of the Baseball Writers' Association of America, which named him the recipient of the 2016 Bob Feller Man of the Year Award. Francona was also honored with the Frank Gibbons-Steve Olin Good Guy Award for the second time (also in 2014) for his respect and cooperation with the media.

Kluber, Lindor, Kipnis and Napoli were also nominated for the Man of the Year Award, while pitching coach Mickey Callaway, closer Cody Allen and Lindor joined Francona as the nominees for the Good Guy Award. The winners were voted on by BBWAA members during the Cleveland chapter's annual luncheon.

It seems fitting that Ramirez took home the honor one season after left fielder Michael Brantley earned the same award. With Brantley sidelined for most of the 2016 season due to troubles with his right shoulder and biceps, the Tribe was in need of someone to step up in a big way. Ramirez did so by playing multiple positions, hitting out of every spot in the lineup and turning in a brilliant offensive campaign.
“Out of Spring Training,” Francona said, “I would be lying if, when we didn't have Brantley, if I [said I] wasn't worried about how we were going to score runs. And Ramirez kind of took Brantley's at-bats, and he took the at-bats and ran with them. Now, he's turned himself into one of the better players in the American League, and he's done it in multiple positions.”

Consider how closely Ramirez's production mirrored Brantley's, too. In 2015, Brantley turned in a .310/.379/.480 slash line with 15 home runs, 45 doubles, 84 RBIs, 68 runs, 15 steals and a 3.7 Wins Above Replacement (per Fangraphs). This past season, Ramirez had a .312/.363/.462 slash to go along with 11 homers, 46 doubles, 76 RBIs, 84 runs, 22 steals and a 4.8 WAR.

Ramirez led the Indians and ranked seventh in the AL in batting average. He also led the club and ranked third in the AL in strikeout rate (10 percent), and paced Tribe batters in doubles. The switch-hitting Ramirez ranked second on the club in steals, on-base percentage and OPS (.825). His 122 Weighted Runs Created Plus was second to only Santana (132) on the team and 23rd in the AL.

Brantley was limited to only 11 games, but Ramirez helped the Indians finish second in the AL in runs scored.

Ramirez also had a knack for coming through in critical situations.

Among AL batters, Ramirez trailed only Mike Trout (.696), Josh Donaldson (4.66), David Ortiz (4.65) and Adrian Beltre (4.16) with a 3.91 Win Probability Added.

Mookie Betts had a 3.12 ERA in 53 games, but his opponents' OPS rose from .440 in '15 to .750 in '16. In the second half, Ramirez was used mostly against guys with runners in scoring position, .346 with two outs, .366 with RISP and two outs and .400 with bases loaded.

Ramirez did all of that while handling multiple roles. Early in the season, he filled in as a left fielder, but he later transitioned to third on a full-time basis after the Indians parted ways with veteran Juan Uribe on Aug. 1. Ramirez played second base (six games), shortstop (four games), third (103) and left (48), and started at least one game in every lineup spot.

Jordan Bastian has covered the Indians for MLB.com since 2011, and previously covered the Blue Jays from 2006-10. Read his blog, Indians non-tender reliever Manship

By Jordan Bastian / MLB.com | @MLBastian | December 2nd, 2016

CLEVELAND -- The bullpen was a strength for the Indians down the stretch last season and a force throughout the postseason. With most of the group returning, that aspect of Cleveland's roster should be formidable once again next year, but the cost of the club's relief corps is rising. That combination of depth and price led to Friday's decision not to tender a contract to reliever Jeff Manship, who now joins this offseason's free-agent pool. The Indians did offer one-year pacts to their other arbitration-eligible relievers: closer Cody Allen, setup man Bryan Shaw, and right-handers Dan Otero and Zach McAllister.

Cleveland also tendered contracts to starters Trevor Bauer and Danny Salazar, as well as outfielers Lonnie Chisenhall and Brandon Guyer. Unless a deal takes place, the two sides will exchange proposed salary figures in January, and arbitration hearings, if necessary, will be held in February. Teams can avoid arbitration with a contract at any point leading up to a player's scheduled hearing.

According to projections by MLBTradeRumors.com, the Tribe's eight arbitration-eligible combined could earn an estimated $28.7 million for 2017. The bulk of that money will flow to Cleveland's relievers. Allen projects to earn over $7 million, Shaw could net more than $4 million, while McAllister and Otero each project to earn north of $1 million for next season.

When taking into account that relief ace Andrew Miller is scheduled to earn $9 million next year (and again in 2018), Cleveland's bullpen could be under contract for more than $25 million in '17. That projection includes Miller, Allen, Shaw, Otero and McAllister, plus two or three additional arms. The current crop of internal candidates includes Austin Adams, Shawn Armstrong, Joseph Colon, Tim Cooney, Kyle Crockett, Edwin Escobar and Perci Garner.

The expectation is that the Indians will continue to monitor the relief market for reinforcements, especially left-handers.

Manship, who will turn 32 in January, played a meaningful role for Cleveland in 2015 after being signed to a Minor League contract before the season. The righty posted a pristine 0.92 ERA in 32 appearances for the Indians, earning a spot in the '16 bullpen. This past season, Manship had a 3.12 ERA in 53 games, but his opponents' OPS rose from .440 in '15 to .750 in '16. In the second half, Manship was used mostly against right-handed batters.

Through arbitration, Manship was projected to earn $1.2 million, which is not much in the big picture, but freeing up that salary gives Cleveland a touch more wiggle room. Before any additions, the Tribe's 2017 payroll projects to be over $100 million, leaving little flexibility for the team to make external moves.

Over the course of the second half, Manship saw his role diminish as Indians manager Terry Francona's five relievers became Miller, Allen, Shaw, Otero and McAllister. After Miller was acquired via trade from the Yankees before the Aug. 1 non-waiver Trade Deadline, those five arms combined for a 1.76 ERA, 0.88 WHIP and .522 opponents' OPS over the final two months.

During that final two-month span, Cleveland's bullpen led the Majors in WHIP (1.17), baserunner per nine innings (10.6) and opponents' on-base percentage (.290), and it led the American League in opponents' average (.224) and FIP (3.30). The Indians' relief corps ranked second in the AL in that time period in opponents' OPS (.656) and strikeouts (226), and third in ERA (3.31) and strikeout-to-walk ratio (3.18).

Coming off arguably the best season of his career, Bauer projects to earn $3.7 million through arbitration. Salazar, who made the All-Star team in an injury-marred campaign, could earn around the same in his first year of arbitration eligibility. Both pitchers are in the plans for Cleveland's starting rotation, which also includes Corey Kluber, Carlos Carrasco and Josh Tomlin.

As the roster is currently constituted, Chisenhall and Guyer could be platoon partners in right field next season. Chisenhall, who mostly played against right-handed pitching, projects to earn $4.1 million through arbitration. Guyer -- acquired from the Rays at the non-waiver Trade Deadline for his ability to hit lefty pitching -- could make around $2 million in arbitration.

Jordan Bastian has covered the Indians for MLB.com since 2011, and previously covered the Blue Jays from 2006-10. Read his blog, Major League Bastian, follow him on Twitter @MLBastian and listen to his podcast. This story was not subject to the approval of Major League Baseball or its clubs.
Indians aim to supplement talented nucleus
Moves to add depth expected at Winter Meetings
By Jordan Bastian / MLB.com | @MLBastian | December 1, 2016
CLEVELAND -- There is precedent for the daunting task at hand for the Indians. In 2014, the Royals went the distance in the World Series and came up short against the Giants. One year later, Kansas City defeated the Mets to claim baseball's crown.

The Indians just experienced a classic World Series against the Cubs, but lost in Game 7 for a disappointing conclusion to an unforgettable and historic season in Cleveland. With the Winter Meetings set to begin Monday, the Indians are now evaluating how to upgrade a roster that will return mostly intact, with the goal of winning one more postseason game than last season.

“Our pitching and our core players are locked up, which I think bodes well for us,” Indians manager Terry Francona said during the World Series. “But, so much happens that you just don't know.”

That is why improving an already-talented roster is imperative for the Tribe.

MLB.com and MLB Network will have wall-to-wall coverage of the 2016 Winter Meetings from the Gaylord National Resort & Convention Center outside Washington, D.C. Fans can watch live streaming of all news conferences and manager availability on MLB.com, including the Rule 5 Draft on Dec. 8 at 9 a.m. ET.

Club needs
Right-handed power: The Indians found a lot of that last offseason with the one-year signing of veteran Mike Napoli, who belted 34 homers and led the team with 101 RBIs. Napoli, however, is back on the free-agent market and looking for a multi-year deal. Cleveland has interest in bringing him back, but the preference would be to do so on a short-term contract. If re-signing Napoli isn’t in the cards, Chris Carter or Matt Holliday could be fits on a short-term contract. The Indians showed interest in free-agent Carlos Beltran last season at the Trade Deadline, but he is 39 and essentially limited as a designated hitter.

Outfield help: Insurance is the key here. The Indians believe that left fielder Michael Brantley will be ready for Spring Training after an injury-marred 2016, but the team needs to have some contingency plans. Right now, Cleveland has center fielder Tyler Naquin and right fielder Lonnie Chisenhall to primarily face righty pitching, and corner outfielder Brandon Guyer as a weapon against lefties. Switch-hitting outfielder Abraham Almonte will also be in the mix for an Opening Day job. Last year, Rajai Davis (now a free agent) provided depth between left and center field, not to mention a great speed element. Davis remains of interest to the Tribe, too.

Left-handed relief: Cleveland reeled in a relief ace in lefty Andrew Miller last season, but the Tribe is thin on left-handed options behind him. The Indians have Kyle Crockett on the roster, along with lefty starters Ryan Merritt and Shawn Morimando. Cleveland already claimed lefties Tim Cooney and Edwin Escobar off waivers this winter to add depth. Look for the Indians to continue to search for left-handed relief options. Boone Logan represents an intriguing option among the lefty relievers on the free-agent market.

Rotation depth: The Indians have one of the top rotations with Corey Kluber, Carlos Carrasco, Danny Salazar, Trevor Bauer and Josh Tomlin. What Cleveland could use is some more depth behind those five. The Indians have internal options in Mike Clevinger and Cody Anderson, but some experienced arms would help a staff that was exposed amid a wave of injuries down the stretch and in the postseason.

Look for the Tribe to solve this either through trades, claims or Minor League contracts.

Who they can trade if necessary
Chisenhall: Eligible for arbitration this winter, Chisenhall projects to earn around $4 million next season. That is hardly an overly expensive contract, but the right fielder has become mostly a platoon outfielder. Plus, the Indians have a very similar player in Naquin, who can play center, but also projects well as a right fielder. If Cleveland wants to shed some cash and perhaps address another need, the team could see value in keeping McAllister, but another team might also see some worth in the right-hander as well. The same could go for right-hander Jeff Manship (also eligible for arbitration).

Miller: Would the Indians actually consider flipping Miller after shipping four prospects to acquire the leverage weapon from the Yankees before the Aug. 1 non-waiver Trade Deadline? Probably not. Cleveland certainly is not shopping him. Miller, who is under contract for $9 million in each of the next two years, is a big part of the team's plans for the 2017 campaign. That said, the talented lefty also is extremely valuable and the Indians would not be doing their job if they did not at least listen if teams came calling with offers.

RHP Bryan Shaw: Shaw is eligible for arbitration this winter and projects to earn around $4.5 million. The veteran reliever is one of the most durable late-inning arms in the game (he leads baseball with 299 appearances over the past four years), but is becoming pricey. It might serve Cleveland well to see how other teams value Shaw, whose velocity improved last season. That said, Shaw is one of Francona’s favorites and -- like most of the relievers -- the right-hander's showing improved after Miller's arrival allowed Francona to better utilize his relievers based on situations. So, there is value in keeping McAllister, but another team might also see some worth in the right-hander as well. The same could go.

Top Prospects
Per MLBpipeline.com, the Indians’ top prospects are outfielder Brad Zimmer, left-hander Brady Aiken, first baseman Bobby Bradley, catcher Francisco Mejia, right-hander Triston McKenzie, third baseman Nolan Jones, outfielder Will Benson, shortstop Erik Gonzalez, shortstop Yu-Cheng Chang and outfielder Yandy Diaz. From that group, Zimmer, Gonzalez and Diaz are the most likely to impact the Major League team during the '17 season. Mejia and Chang were included in the four-player package that would have gone to the Brewers had All-Star catcher Jonathan Lucroy approved a trade to the Indians prior to the non-waiver Trade Deadline last season. Mejia, who had a 50-game hitting streak in the Minors last year, was the centerpiece of those talks with Milwaukee.

Rule 5 Draft
The Indians have 39 players on their 40-man roster, so the team could take part in the Rule 5 Draft. Cleveland picks 27th in the annual event. Middle infielder Osvaldo Abreu (Nationals' No. 19 prospect) could be of interest, though the Rule 5 is often a good place to seek relief help.
Tito Francona, Terry's father, played 15 years in the big leagues. He played for the Indians from 1959-1964.

Francona is managing his third big league team. He made stops in Philadelphia and Boston before this, but he has Cleveland roots. He played year in four years from the BBWAA last month.

This is Francona's fourth year as manager of the Indians. He's led them to four straight winning seasons and two postseason appearances. But he is unlikely to be dealt. Carlos Santana will earn $12 million next season, but that was a team option that was picked up by the team. He will continue to serve as a first baseman and DH. Players like Chisenhall, Shaw or McAllister could be dangled, but none figure to be moved, strictly due to financial motivations.

Payroll summary
Cleveland projects to have a payroll north of $100 million, and that is before even making any external additions. There is nearly $60 million tied up in eight guaranteed contracts, plus another $25 million to $30 million likely to come via arbitration signings. Combined with the pre-arbitration players, and the $9 million still on the books for Chris Johnson (a part of the trade that allowed Cleveland to deal Michael Bourn and Nick Swisher to the Braves in August 2015), the Indians could be looking at their largest payroll in franchise history. With little monetary wiggle room, Cleveland may need to explore the trade market to free up salary space.

Jordan Bastian has covered the Indians for MLB.com since 2011, and previously covered the Blue Jays from 2006-10. Read his blog.

Francona to miss Winter Meetings after hip surgery
By Jordan Bastian / MLB.com | @MLBastian | December 1st, 2016

CLEVELAND -- The Indians lean heavily on manager Terry Francona when it comes to making roster decisions. During the Winter Meetings next week, team president Chris Antonetti and his front-office team will have to keep Francona looped in via phone calls and texts.

MLB.com confirmed on Thursday night that Francona will miss the Winter Meetings while recovering from right hip surgery, which he underwent shortly after the conclusion of the World Series. After Francona won the American League Manager of the Year Award in voting by the Baseball Writers' Association of America last month, the manager joked about the procedure in a conference call with reporters.

"I've had both knees done and now my right hip," Francona said. "So, if I can get my left one done, then I'll be fully bionic."

MLB.com and MLB Network will have wall-to-wall coverage of the 2016 Winter Meetings from the Gaylord National Resort & Convention Center outside Washington, D.C. Fans can watch live streaming of all news conferences and manager availability on MLB.com, including the Rule 5 Draft on Dec. 8 at 9 a.m. ET.

During the annual event, managers typically hold one scheduled media session and take part in a luncheon with reporters. This will be the first time Francona has missed the Winter Meetings during his four-year tenure with Cleveland, which he has led to an AL-leading 352 wins during his time at the helm.

Francona's AL Manager of the Year Award was his second with the Indians, following his 2013 win for guiding Cleveland to a Wild Card one year after the team lost 94 games. This past season, Francona helped lead the Tribe to its first AL Central title since 2007 and its first World Series berth since '97.

Jordan Bastian has covered

Cleveland Indians' Terry Francona gets 'Good Guy' award from baseball writers
By Paul Hoynes, cleveland.com

CLEVELAND, Ohio - Indians manager Terry Francona makes for good copy.

Whether he's riding his "hog" - a scooter - to and from Progressive Field for work or talking about his late-night dietary wrestling matches with ice cream, pizza, peanut butter or popsicles, he always makes things interesting for the reporters covering the Indians.

Not to mention, he knows how to manage a baseball team.

It is for those reasons that Cleveland's Chapter of the Baseball Writers Association of America elected Francona as the Frank Gibbons-Steve Olin Good Guy Award at their meeting last week. It is the second time in three years Francona has received the award.

The writers also selected third baseman Jose Ramirez, the man with the orange hair, as the Bob Feller Man of the Year award at their annual meeting last week.

Francona, 57, is at home in Tucson, Ariz., recovering from right hip replacement surgery. He underwent the operation immediately after the Indians lost Game 7 of the World Series to the Cubs. Other candidates for the Good Guy award were closer Cody Allen, shortstop Francisco Lindor, pitching coach Mickey Callaway and John Krepop, who ran the Indians pressbox for 44 years before retiring after last season.

Krepop received a special award from the writers.

This is Francona's fourth year as manager of the Indians. He's led them to four straight winning seasons and two postseason appearances. But this past season is going to be hard to beat.

The Indians won their first AL Central title since 2007 and their first AL pennant since 1997. Francona received his second AL Manager of the Year in four years from the BBWAA last month.

Francona is managing his third big league team. He made stops in Philadelphia and Boston before this, but he has Cleveland roots. He played for the Indians in 1988 and worked in their front office from 2001 through 2003.

Tito Francona, Terry's father, played 15 years in the big leagues. He played for the Indians from 1959-1964.

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Longtime Cleveland Indians aide honored by baseball writers with newly created 'Special Achievement' award

By Zack Meisel, cleveland.com

CLEVELAND, Ohio -- John Krepop's tireless assistance for 44 seasons fueled the idea for a new award from the Cleveland chapter of the Baseball Writers Association of America.

He is the first recipient of the John Krepop Special Achievement Award, created to honor career achievement, or dedication and service to the Indians' organization. Nominees will be discussed annually, though the award will not necessarily be given out each year.

Krepop, known to many as "Popper," retired and relocated to Florida a few days after Game 7 of the World Series. It marked the end to his tenure with the Indians, in which he did everything from researching statistics to securing player autographs to serving as press box supervisor. He assisted writers, broadcasters, members of the team's communications department and more.

"He's been the true essence of a behind-the-scenes guy, helping people get done what they needed," said Bob DiBiasio, the Indians' vice president of public affairs.

"You always knew that the press box, the game notes, the statistics and all of the broadcasters, radio and TV guys and all of the writers were going to be taken care of. That was something we did not have to concern ourselves with, because Popper was there to take care of it."

Krepop began his role with the Tribe in 1973, after he attended an afternoon game at Cleveland Stadium. He never imagined his gig would evolve and persist for nearly a half-century.

"I just hope I did a good job and made everybody else's life easier," Krepop said.

The Cleveland chapter of the BBWAA also selected Jose Ramirez for the "Man of the Year" honor and manager Terry Francona for the "Good Guy" award.

Cleveland Indians' breakout star Jose Ramirez wins 'Man of the Year' award from baseball writers

By Zack Meisel, cleveland.com

CLEVELAND, Ohio -- It wasn't just the blazing orange hair, the ever-soaring helmet and the signature strut. Jose Ramirez made a name for himself in 2016 with his bat and with his glove.

For that, Cleveland's chapter of the Baseball Writers Association of America named Ramirez the Bob Feller Man of the Year award winner.

Ramirez replaced Michael Brantley (last year's winner) in left field when the Indians ran out of options. When Juan Uribe -- Ramirez's pseudo-father -- was dismissed, Ramirez shifted to third base without a hitch. Through it all, he delivered timely hit after timely hit after timely hit, a constant pest to opposing pitchers.

"It was amazing to watch him step into left field and play a good left field and then midway through the year really transition to full-time third base and be an above-average defender there," said Tribe general manager Mike Chernoff. "Two positions he hasn't played a whole lot of. He's a natural second baseman. And yet, he stepped in and was very good defensively, basically anywhere we put him."

The Man of the Year award, handed out annually since 1946, is given to the team's top player. Before the season began, Ramirez would have been considered a long-shot candidate.

After a couple of offensively challenged seasons in the big leagues, Ramirez finally pieced together an effective approach at the plate in 2016. His name even found its way onto one writer's Most Valuable Player ballot, with a ninth-place tally.

Behind the helmet: Who is Jose Ramirez?

Ramirez, who turned 24 in September, batted .312 with an .825 OPS, 11 home runs, 76 RBI and 22 stolen bases. He struck out only 62 times in 618 plate appearances, making him the fifth-toughest player to punch out in baseball. Ramirez's 46 doubles were the most by a Tribe hitter since Grady Sizemore collected 53 in 2006.

Scott Atchison, a member of Cleveland's coaching staff, said Ramirez "makes our lineup go."

He launched a game-tying homer against Toronto on Aug. 19, a blast that tends to get lost in the shuffle because Tyler Naquin delivered a game-winning, inside-the-park homer moments later. Two days later, Ramirez slugged a go-ahead homer in the bottom of the eighth against the Blue Jays.

He contributed a walk-off single on Father's Day. He erased Miami's two-run lead with a two-out single in the ninth in an early-September affair. He registered another walk-off hit against the Tigers, which broke a scoreless deadlock in mid-September.

"That's the guy you want up at the plate in those situations," catcher Roberto Perez said toward the end of the regular season.

Chris Antonetti, the Indians' president of baseball operations, said last month that, barring any off-season reordering, Ramirez will serve as the team's third baseman again next season.

"What Jose was able to do given what we asked of him probably exceeded our expectations," Antonetti said. "To be able to go and play two positions that he didn't have a lot of experience playing and play them as well as he did and still contribute as such a high level offensively says a lot about him."

Michael Brantley was elected the Man of the Year in 2015. Corey Kluber earned the distinction in 2014, when he captured the American League Cy Young Award.

Manager Terry Francona was selected as the Steve Olin-Frank Gibbons Good Guy Award winner.

Kluber, Francisco Lindor, Mike Napoli and Jason Kipnis also received consideration for Man of the Year. Ramirez will receive a plaque from the BBWAA next season.
“Every team in baseball could use a guy like Jose Ramirez,” said Tribe reliever Cody Allen, “and I'm glad we've got him.”

Here’s team-by-team look at MLB’s 30 teams headed into the winter meetings

By Paul Hoynes, cleveland.com

CLEVELAND, Ohio - There are times when the winter meetings are a nonstop swirl of trades and free agent signings. In other years, it’s a five-day yawn, but there is always an element of intrigue, a hint of the unknown.

This year’s edition of the winter meetings opens Sunday at National Harbor, Md. Indians manager Terry Francona won’t be in attendance to entertain reporters with late-night tales of ordering copious amounts of ice cream from room service as he did at the World Series. Francona is home in Tucson, Arizona, recovering from right hip replacement surgery following the Tribe’s loss to the Cubs in the World Series.

Still, the meetings should get off to a newsworthy start Sunday at 6 p.m. when former Commissioner Bud Selig is expected to be elected to the Hall of Fame by the Today’s Game Era Committee. Former Indians Albert Belle and Orel Hershiser are among the players eligible for election.

If Belle is elected, it will be interesting to see if he can free his schedule for a trip to Cooperstown in late July. When the Indians elected him to their Hall of Fame last season, he said he couldn’t make it because of a family vacation.

Most of the week at the Gaylord National Resort and Convention Center will be filled with teams meeting with agents and other teams to discuss the acquisition of players. The media will be following them trying to find out what players are going where.

Free agent closers Aroldis Chapman, Kenley Jansen and Mark Melancon are the big-ticket items this winter. The bidding on Chapman could reach $100 million.

The meetings end with the Rule 5 draft on Thursday morning. The Indians will enter with 38 players on their 40-man roster, meaning they might participate in the draft. But since they have the 27th pick in the first round, they’ll probably pass.

Here’s a look at the state of MLB’s 30 teams as they enter the meetings:

AL EAST

Red Sox (93-69): Unless Big Papi decides to call off his retirement - and he spent all last season saying his feet hurt too much for that - the Red Sox need a power-hitting DH. Can you say Edwin Encarnacion?

Orioles (89-73): The Birds have to find a way to replace free agent Mark Trumbo’s MLB-leading 47 homers.

Blue Jays (94-67): They already signed Kendrys Morales to replace Edwin Encarnacion, but they could use an outfielder with Jose Bautista and Michael Saunders on the open market.

Yankees (84-79): After helping the Cubs and Indians reach the World Series by trading late inning relievers Aroldis Chapman and Andrew Miller, can the Yankees re-sign Chapman?

Rays (69-94): Manager Kevin Cash is looking for relievers after the Rays led the AL with 33 bullpen losses last season.

AL CENTRAL

Indians (94-67): What they really need is a healthy Michael Brantley. Outside of that, they need to re-sign Mike Napoli or a reasonable facsimile.

Tribe’s winter shopping list

Tigers (86-75): Detroit is all about getting younger and leaner this winter. It’s not sure if they’ve told Miguel Cabrera that.

Royals (81-81): The Royals, who have lost Kendrys Morales and Edinson Volquez through free agency, are looking to restore the dominant bullpen that took them to the World Series in 2014 and 2015.

White Sox (78-84): Chicago needs to make up its mind. Are they going to rebuild by trading veterans such as Chris Sale or are they going to try to win now?

Twins (59-103): After their rotation went 37-71 with an MLB-high 5.39 ERA, they’ll be looking for starting pitching - lots of it.

AL WEST

Rangers (95-67): They’re looking to add to a big arm to their starting rotation. Chris Sale, Jose Quintana and Chris Archer are on their short list.

Mariners (86-76): GM Jerry Dipoto sent right-hander Taijuan Walker and shortstop Ketel Marte to Arizona for infielder Jean Segura and outfielders Mitch Haniger and Zac Curtis. That’s probably the big news of the winter for Seattle.

Astros (84-78): They traded for catcher Brian McCann and signed free agent outfielder Josh Reddick and right-hander Charlie Morton. On Saturday, they signed free agent Carlos Beltran.

Angels (74-89): They need a second baseman, catcher and a dose of good health for their starting rotation.

A’s (69-93): They’ll be looking for a new ballpark after being phased out of revenue sharing for failing to get out of Oakland Coliseum.

NL EAST

Nationals (95-67): They acquired catcher Derek Norris from San Diego on Friday to replace free agent Wilson Ramos. They still need a closer.

Mets (87-75): They re-signed outfielder Yoenis Cespedes. All it took was $110 million for four years. Now they would like to add a reliever and get their rotation healthy.
Marlins (79-83): They just signed Edinson Volquez, but still need at least one more starting pitcher to help fill the void left by the untimely death of Jose Fernandez.

Phillies (71-91): After right-hander Jeremy Hellickson accepted the $17.2 million qualifying offer and Howie Kendrick was acquired in a trade, the Phillies are just about ready for spring training.

Braves (68-93): Atlanta is still looking for starting pitching after signing free agents Bartolo Colon, R.A. Dickey and trading for Jaime Garcia prior to moving into their new park. They've been linked to Chris Sale, Chris Archer and Sonny Gray in trade talks.

NL CENTRAL


Cardinals (86-76): St. Louis made lefty Brett Cecil a rich man, but they're still looking for an outfielder to replace free agents Matt Holliday and Brandon Moss. Dexter Fowler could be their guy.

Pirates (78-83): Will they or won't they trade center fielder Andrew McCutchen? It will be a good storyline to follow at the winter meetings and, possibly, beyond.

Brewers (73-89): This is a tough game. Chris Carter tied for the NL lead with 41 homers this year and the rebuilding Brewers kicked him to the curb as a non-tender.

Reds (68-94): It doesn't sound like Joey Votto is going anywhere, but Cincinnati could use some help in the bullpen. They could also try to trade second baseman Brandon Phillips. He might say yes this time.

NL WEST

Dodgers (91-71): Los Angeles has holes at third base (Justin Turner) and closer (Kenley Jansen). They're also said to be looking for a second baseman (Brian Dozier or Ian Kinsler?). They could also try and trade Yasiel Puig.

Giants (87-75): The Giants and rival Dodgers share a common need - a closer. San Francisco led the big leagues with 30 blown saves last year, so it really needs Aroldis Chapman, Kenley Jansen or Mark Melancon.

NL champion Cleveland Indians don't need much, but still looking to improve at winter meetings

By Paul Hoynes, cleveland.com

CLEVELAND, Ohio - The Indians are going to try and get better this offseason. It might not happen at the winter meetings, which begin Sunday in National Harbor, Md., at the Gaylord National Resort and Convention Center, but at some point before opening day, they're going to add to the ballclub.

Think about this. Even if they didn't add one player, even if the front office spent the rest of the winter in Tahiti, the Indians would still be considered one of the top teams in the American League in 2017, a favorite to win the AL Central and return to the World Series. When you take the best team in baseball to the 10th inning of Game 7 of the World Series despite a decimated starting rotation, that's the kind of reputation you get.

Don't get the wrong idea. Chris Antonetti, Mike Chernoff and the rest of the front office know there's work to be done. Here are five ways they could improve the Indians.

1. They need to re-sign Mike Napoli - or a right-handed power hitter just like him - to secure the middle of the lineup. Napoli's agent and the Indians will meet at the winter meetings to continue to the discussions that have been ongoing for a couple of months.

Napoli, 35, reportedly is seeking a three-year deal after setting career highs with 34 homers, 101 RBI and 194 strikeouts. Would the Indians go for that after he slumped in September, October and a couple of days in November?

If not, free agents Matt Holliday and Chris Carter are on the market. The Indians had interest in Carter last winter, but went with Napoli instead. Pedro Alvarez, a left-handed hitter, is available and the Indians talked about him last year as well.

2. They need help in the outfield, but Andrew McCutchen is not the guy. The Pirates are giving strong signals that they're going to trade their former NL MVP center fielder. He has one year left on his contract with a club option for 2018.

Pirates GM Neal Huntington and Antonetti grew up in the Indians' front office. They value players the same way, which makes a deal like this extremely hard to make. In other words, it's not happening.

Pirates' McCutchen not perfect fit for Tribe

3. The profile for the outfielder the Indians are looking for is a right-handed hitter with speed who can play all three positions. Do those qualities sound familiar?

Well, they fit Rajai Davis perfectly. Davis, like Napoli, is a free agent after playing well for the Indians in 2016.

Rajai Davis and his Game 7 homer
The outfield situation would also improve with the return to health of Michael Brantley. With Brantley in left field and a sound starting rotation, the 2017 edition of the Indians might be stronger than last year's - at least on paper. Brantley has been in Cleveland since the end of the World Series rehabbing his right shoulder after having the biceps tendon transplanted in August. In November of last year, he had surgery to repair a torn labrum in the same shoulder.

4. The Indians are looking for a left-handed reliever to go with Andrew Miller, but filling their position player needs come first. The four-year, $30.5 million deal St. Louis gave lefty Brett Cecil turned that market upside down. The Cubs just signed Brian Duensing to a one-year, $2 million deal, while the Mariners have signed former Indian Marc Rzepczynski to a two-year, $11 million contract.

Kyle Crockett and the recently signed Edwin Escobar and Tim Cooney are internal options. The Indians aren't going to spend a lot of money for a lefty reliever.

5. The Indians, because of their pennant-winning season, have the 27th pick in the first round of the June draft. Would they be willing to forfeit that to pursue a free agent who received a qualifying offer such as outfielders Jose Bautista or Dexter Fowler, third baseman Justin Turner or slugger Mark Trumbo?

It's unlikely that would happen because of the value the Indians place on a first-round pick. Should one of those players still be available in February or March, and their asking price would come close to offsetting the value the Indians place on their No.1 pick, maybe they'd have a deal. But that's pure speculation.

Finally: The Indians non-tendered right-hander Jeff Manship on Friday, but they might still try to sign him to a minor league deal and bring him to spring training. ... Congratulations to Dave Wallace for being named Baseball America's Minor League Manager of the Year. Wallace led the Class AA Akron RubberDucks to the Eastern League championship, overcoming a 12-game losing streak along the way. ... The Tribe's athletic training staff of Lonnie Soloff, James Quinlan, Jeff Desjardins, Michael Salazar and Jim Mehalik was named MLB's Training Staff of the Year by PBATS (Professional Baseball Athletic Trainers Society).

Cleveland Plain Dealer LOADED: 12.04.2016

Cleveland Indians have Terry Talkin' free agents, new labor agreement -- Terry Pluto

By Terry Pluto, The Plain Dealer

CLEVELAND, Ohio -- In the last three years, only eight teams which were not in the top 50 percent in payroll made the baseball playoffs.

As I wrote a few weeks ago, the Cleveland Indians were the only team in the bottom 50 percent in payroll to make the 2016 playoffs. Out of 30 big-league teams, only the Indians and Houston Astros had winning records while sitting in the bottom 15 in payroll.

I mention this because baseball just agreed to a new labor deal for the next five years. For teams such as the Tribe, the good news is the deal doesn't make it much harder for small-market teams.

But it also doesn't do much to help the obvious payroll imbalance.

1. In the NBA, the Cavaliers have the league's highest payroll at $130 million. At the bottom are the Brooklyn Nets and Denver Nuggets at $75 million.

2. In the NFL, the Detroit Red Wings have the highest payroll at $82 million. The lowest is the Carolina Hurricanes at $52 million.

3. In the NHL, all the teams are between $96 million and $150 million.

4. In baseball, the Los Angeles Dodgers had the highest payroll at $253 million. The Milwaukee Brewers and Miami Marlins were the lowest at about $62 million. The Indians payroll was about $62 million.

What's the point? In the other three sports -- all with some type of salary cap -- no team is spending twice as much as any other team. The widest spread is the NBA: The Cavs at $130 million, the lowest paid teams at $75 million.

But in baseball, the Dodgers are spending FOUR times as much as the bottom teams (Miami and Milwaukee). That's a huge difference, something the new labor agreement basically ignores.

Yes, baseball does have a luxury tax. In 2016, teams spending more than $189 million in payroll had to pay an 18 percent tax. The math gets complicated, and the penalties rise slightly. But it's still not going to dramatically change the wide gap between the top and bottom teams.

But that has been the case for ages, as the MLB Players Association is extremely strong. It has fought off attempts by teams to bring in a salary cap.

Unlike the other sports, in which owners believe if they hang tough they can force the union to give in, that's not the case in baseball. The last labor stoppage was 1994. The owners wiped out the World Series -- yet they still couldn't come to an agreement with the players for a salary cap.

Also, the larger market owners seem to have a stronger say in baseball policy than in other sports. I agree with USA Today's Bob Nightengale, who wrote: "The rich will stay rich, the poor will stay poor, the marquee free agents will still financially set every branch of their family tree up for life..."

My bottom line: The new five-year deal basically keeps the status quo.

1. What could help the Tribe is a limit on international spending to about $6 million annually per team for Latin players. That will end the huge contracts given to Cuban players. But players from the Far East can still get huge bucks.

2. The winner of the All-Star Game no longer hosts the World Series. It goes to the team with the best record.

3. New big-league players can't use chewing tobacco during games. But current players can continue.

4. Each team has to employ a personal chef.
5. It's complicated, but teams that repeatedly pay a luxury tax will do so at a high rate each year. But it probably won't stop many in huge markets from spending wildly.

6. Starting after the 2017 season, teams will no longer lose a first-round pick as compensation for signing a top free agent. Teams in the luxury tax have to give up a second-rounder and a fifth-rounder.

7. The disabled list is now 10 days, rather than 15 days.

8. There are some other little things, but nothing dramatic.

Not much was said when Brandon Guyer was acquired from Tampa Bay at the end of July, but the outfielder is an excellent fit with the Tribe. He is not eligible for free agency and crushes lefty pitching, making him an ideal platoon partner for Lonnie Chisenhall in right field.

Since moving to right in the middle of the 2015 season, Chisenhall has batted .294 (.786 OPS) in 154 games. He also has hit 11 HR and 77 RBI, while being above average defensively.

Chisenhall had been a third baseman, where he struggled defensively and batted only .242 in 330 big-league games.

In right field, Chisenhall faces primarily right-handed pitching. Guyer batted .336 (1.022 OPS) vs. lefties after joining the Tribe. For his career, the 30-year-old Guyer is a .289 hitter vs. lefties, .238 vs. righties.

Guyer is like adding a valuable bat for 2017, and manager Terry Francona knows how to mix-and-match in the outfield.

1. If Michael Brantley can come back ... and it's a big IF because it's been so hard for him to bounce back from shoulder surgery ... left field is set.

2. Chisenhall/Guyer can handle right field.

3. If the Indians re-sign Rajai Davis (a realistic possibility), they can once again platoon Davis and Tyler Naquin in center.

4. They have youngsters Yandy Diaz and Brad Zimmer as possibilities, although I doubt Zimmer is close to being ready to open 2017 in the majors. Not after he hit .242 with 1 HR and 9 RBI in 122 at-bats when promoted to Class AAA last season.

5. Jose Ramirez can play left, but the Indians like him at third base -- unless they can find a better option.

6. They have Abraham Almonte who can play all three outfield positions. Almonte failed a PED test last season and was suspended for 80 games. If he does it again, it's an entire season.

1. Chris Carter to the Indians? The free agent from Milwaukee hit 41 HR last year. The Brewers did not offer him a contract, so that's a red flag. But the 30-year-old Carter has big-time power -- while piling up massive numbers of strikeouts.

2. In the last three years, Carter has batted a combined .218 (.790 OPS), averaging 34 HR, 82 RBI and 179 strikeouts. It doesn't matter if it's righties (.222) or lefties (.216), Carter hits about the same.

3. Carter can be very frustrating to watch. His lack of plate discipline cuts down on his RBI totals. He ranked No. 15 out of 17 National League first basemen defensively by FanGraphs. Mike Napoli ranked No 15 in the American League, Carlos Santana was No. 4. I'm not sure Santana was that good, but he definitely improved over 2015.

4. The Indians are looking for options if they fail to re-sign Napoli, who is looking for a multi-year deal. So Carter is a possibility. Santana plays well enough at first base for the Indians to look for a guy who is mostly a DH.

5. Carlos Beltran falls into the DH category. For a while, Beltran was in the trade talks with the Tribe as part of the Andrew Miller deal. The Indians and New York Yankees couldn't work it out, so Beltran was eventually shipped to the Texas Rangers. He became a free agent and then signed a 1-year, $16 million deal with Houston.

6. It's hard to guess what will be the price for Carter or Napoli. Toronto surprised many baseball people by signing DH Kendrys Morales to a three-year, $33 million deal. He batted .263 (.795 OPS) with 30 HR and 93 RBI. He is 33, but really can't play the field for more than a few games.

7. The Morales deal is probably why there are reports the 35-year-old Napoli wants three years for a new contract.

Cleveland Plain Dealer LOADED: 12.04.2016

The World Baseball Classic: A great idea that works for everyone but Major League Baseball

Paul Hoynes,

CLEVELAND, Ohio - For a great idea to work, it has to work for everybody involved.

Take a peanut butter sandwich. Now sprinkle a handful of M&Ms in the middle of it. Peanut butter and chocolate - it works for everybody.

Now here's a great idea that doesn't work - the World Baseball Classic. Correction, it works fine for every country but the biggest baseball-playing nation in the world - the United States.

The premise is great; the timing is terrible. And if you asked every MLB owner, general manager and manager to reveal what they think about it in their heart of hearts they'd say the same thing.

It's easy to see why MLB is the driving force behind the WBC. They want to take the sport to the far corners of the earth. One day they want to be able to send a scout into the Himalayas to find a 15-year-old Sherpa who developed pinpoint control by hitting a Yeti in the eye with a snowball from 100 yards away.
There's nothing wrong with extending the talent pool. Why not have away games in Mexico, London, Korea and Japan? Some day the World Series might be a real World Series, but can't that all happen without the WBC disrupting spring training every four years, while putting MLB's handsomely paid players at risk for injuries?

The WBC returns in the spring of 2017. It runs from March 6 through March 22 with games being played in Korea, Japan, Mexico, Miami, San Diego and Los Angeles. Preliminary rosters are being formed right now. They will be released in January.

While countries such as Korea, Japan and the Dominican Republic revel in the WBC, it always seems to be a necessary nuisance for MLB. It ruins the rhythm of spring training, empties locker rooms in February and March when team building should be going on. But most importantly, there it exposes players to injury.

In 2013 Vinnie Pestano, an important reliever for the Indians, injured his elbow while pitching for the U.S. and has never been the same. Former Tribe closer Chris Perez was scheduled to pitch for the U.S the same year, but pulled out because of an elbow injury. In the spring of 2009, Grady Sizemore committed to playing in the WBC, but pulled a groin muscle and withdrew.

Players can get hurt at any time of the season. A strained hamstring in March, a drone attack in October. Stuff happens, but most MLB teams would rather it happen on their watch. Believe me you wouldn't want to be monitoring a GM's blood pressure when he sends one of his best players hallway around the world to play a ballgame in March, while he's trying to put his team together for the regular season.

This year the Indians could have Corey Kluber and Andrew Miller playing on Team USA. They could have Carlos Santana, Jose Ramirez and Danny Salazar playing for the Dominican Republic. Gold Glove shortstop Francisco Lindor, the emerging face of the franchise, is expected to play for Puerto Rico. Carlos Carrasco would almost certainly be invited to play for Venezuela. Yan Gomes, in 2013, helped Brazil qualify for the WBC, but did not play in it.

The Indians do have some control over players coming off injuries, which means they could ask Salazar, Carrasco, Gomes and Michael Brantley not to play. Carrasco, for one, said at the end of the World Series he would not pitch in the WBC. But teams are pretty much powerless to stop healthy players from playing for their countries if they so desire.

Common sense has to enter the equation somewhere. Kluber and Miller reached career highs in innings pitched this past season and postseason. But if they want to pitch for the U.S., all Chris Antonetti and Terry Francona can do is smile, wave the American flag and pray something doesn't go pop in the wrong elbow.

Cleveland Plain Dealer LOADED: 12.03.2016

**How big will Cleveland Indians' playoff shares be from their October run? Hey, Hoynsie!**

Paul Hoynes, on December 03, 2016 at 5:00 AM, updated December 03, 2016 at 5:01 AM

CLEVELAND, Ohio -- Do you have a question that you'd like to have answered in Hey, Hoynsie? Submit it here or Tweet him at @hoynsie.

Hey, Hoynsie: I was wondering if you knew how the Indians' playoff shares will be divided following their postseason run? Do you think Andrew Miller will get a half or full share? - Drew Romito, Twinsburg.

Hey, Drew: MLB has not released the postseason players' pool yet for 2016. Last year the World Series champion Royals received $25 million of the nearly $70 million from the postseason players' pool. A full share for the Royals was $370,069.03.

The Royals awarded 50 full shares, 8,37 partial shares and 50 cash awards. A full share for the runner-up Mets was $300,757.78 from a total of $16.8 million.

Based on what Miller did in the postseason, I would imagine he'd receive a full share, but that's speculation on my part. For some reason the players did not invite me to the meeting in which they divided their playoff shares.

Hey, Hoynsie: There has been a lot of talk lately about Bradley Zimmer's woes swinging the bat. I recall there were similar concerns about Francisco Lindor before he was promoted to the big leagues. Can you tell us anything about the similarities or differences in their swing issues? - David Resnick.

Hey, David: You're talking about two different players with different body types and different swings. Zimmer is a 6-4 left-handed hitting outfielder with speed and power. Lindor is a switch-hitting 5-11 shortstop, who before he arrived in the big leagues was known more for his glove than his bat.

I know Zimmer has a contact problem. He struck out 171 times in 468 at-bats last season at Class AA Akron and Class AAA Columbus. But he still had a .365 on-base percentage with 15 homers, 25 doubles and 77 walks. In the Arizona Fall League, he posted a .935 OPS with 26 strikeouts and 19 walks.

Zimmer stole 46 bases in 61 attempts (75 percent) in the minors and the AFL this year.

Lindor, 22, didn't strike out nearly as much as Zimmer in the minors. He didn't show that kind of power either until he got to the big leagues. Lindor hit 21 homers in 1,648 at-bats in the minors. He's hit 27 homers in 994 at-bats in the big leagues.

What helped Lindor offensively was an adjustment he made in lowering his hands once he came to Cleveland.

@hoynsie John Norris, Lakeland FL. With the hope of resigning Napoli fading, why not consider Chris Carter? Age and power stats are better.


Hey, John: They kicked the tires on Carter last year before signing Napoli. The Indians are still talking to Napoli and will meet with his agent at the winter meetings, which begin Sunday.

If the Tribe has a choice between the two, I think it would be Napoli. But if Napoli really wants a three-year deal, I don't see the Indians going for that.
Here's a little compare and contrast. Carter, 29, hit .222 with 41 homers, 94 RBI and 206 strikeouts last season. Napoli, 35, hit .239 with 34 homers, 101 RBI and 194 strikeouts.

Tribe's shopping list for the off-season

Hey, Hoynsie: In Game 7 of the World Series, I felt the rain delay after the ninth inning was a detriment to the Tribe. I must have missed the discussion following the game about sending Bryan Shaw back out after the delay. What did the Tribe's coaching staff say about this point? - Tim Burton, Highland Ranch, Colo.

Hey, Tim: In the postgame interview manager Terry Francona said he didn't have a second thought about sending Shaw back out because the delay lasted just 17 minutes. I know Dan Otero was available, but he allowed a grand slam to Addison Russell in Game 6. Shaw said he felt fine going back out to start the 10th inning.

The Cubs, as you know, used the rain delay to hold a team meeting. They then went out and scored two runs off Shaw in the 10th inning to win the game and Series.

@hoynsie who are some minor leaguers that have a chance to impact the big league club next year? Garret, Canton

-- Garret Price (@GMP_33) December 2, 2016


Hey, Hoynsie: Why are the Indians so quiet this off-season? It seems like they aren't pushing to fill blatant holes. - Ryan Hayes, U.S. Army.

Hey, Ryan: For one thing, they really don't have that many holes to fill. They're looking for a right-handed hitter (if they don't re-sign Mike Napoli) and versatile outfielder (if the don't re-sign Rajai Davis) and a left-handed reliever.

I think negotiations on the basic agreement might have slowed business in general around MLB.

Tribe filled some of its 2017 needs in 2016

Last year they didn't sign Davis until Dec. 17 and Napoli until Jan. 5, although the news on their agreements broke earlier. They added Juan Uribe in February and Marlon Byrd in March. There's still plenty of time before opening day.

@hoynsie How do you respond to Trevor Bauer's assertion that you, specifically, were out to derail his career this year?

-- Andy Dufresne (@theunzippedfly) December 2, 2016

Hey, Andy: I have no idea what you're talking about. Trevor Bauer has never had a problem telling me what's on his mind. I haven't heard him say that.


Hey, Jim: As you know, the Indians exercised Santana's $12 million option for 2017 in November. If they are going to try and extend his contract, I would look for them to do it late in spring training or early in the regular season.

Tribe will exercise Santana's option for 2017

The trouble is that when a player gets as close to free agency as Santana is, extensions are usually a lost cause. They want to see what's on the other side of the mountain.

@hoynsie I see a need for an OF upgrade (and a healthy Brantley), what say you? Phil in Hilliard, OH

-- Phil Nagy (@phil_nagy) December 2, 2016

Hey, Phil: I couldn't agree more. Michael Brantley is scheduled to resume baseball activities in December. But I think the Indians still need to protect themselves in the outfield in case he's still not ready to play.

Brantley scheduled to resume baseball activities in December

The good news is that Brantley has been in Cleveland since the end of the World Series rehabbing his right shoulder.

Hey, Hoynsie: Knowing that the Indians need a left-handed reliever, who do you see them going after? Is there a middle ground between a minor-league deal and the deals Brett Cecil got and what Aroldis Chapman will get? -- Kyler Ludlow, Dayton.

Hey, Kyler: Travis Wood would be a good fit for the Tribe, but Cecil's four-year $30.5 million contract with St. Louis probably moved him out of the Tribe's price range.

Brian Duensing is another lefty who always pitched well against the Tribe when he was with the Twins. Duensing, however, just signed with the Cubs. Marc Rzepczynski, who used to pitch for the Tribe, was available, but he reportedly is close to signing with Seattle.

@hoynsie Do you think with the Indians market being bigger than St Louis, the Dolans will spend accordingly??

Chris - Grand River@zoops007


Hey, Chris: I don't think that's a fair comparison. St. Louis is one of the best baseball cities in the country. Cleveland, based on attendance, is not.

The Cardinals have drawn over three million fans for 13 straight seasons and 18 of the last 19 seasons. The Indians haven't drawn three million fans since 2003, 15 years ago. In the last eight years, they've drawn fewer than two million fans a year.
Hey, Hoynsie: Are the Indians satisfied with Jose Ramirez' defense at third base? If so, what do they do with Gio Urshela, who looks major league ready? -- Howard Smith, Gainesville, Fla.

Hey, Howard: The Indians are thrilled that Urshela is playing and hitting well in Venezuela this winter. Defensively, they know he can play in the big leagues. A lack of offense and injuries have held him back.

How could the Indians not be happy with how Ramirez played and hit last season? Yes, his ability to play different positions gives him options, but right now he's their third baseman.

Hey @hoynsie Indians announced no more cream jerseys. It's holiday gift giving time. Any word on a replacement? Eric Furniss Marion, OH

-- Eric Furniss (@EricFurniss) December 2, 2016

Hey, Eric: Clubhouse manager Tony Amato said the Indians won't have an alternative jersey until 2018 after retiring the cream jerseys last season. They will, however, retain the red caps from the cream uniforms and wear them with their blue tops at home in 2017.

Amato said MLB requires a year's notice if a team is going to change uniforms. One more uniform note, during the World Series the Indians wore their blue tops in every game because the starting pitchers picked them.

Cleveland Plain Dealer LOADED: 12.03.2016

Cleveland Indians non-tender right-hander Jeff Manship; eight others offered contracts

Paul Hoynes, on December 02, 2016 at 5:46 PM, updated December 02, 2016 at 5:47 PM

CLEVELAND, Ohio -- The Indians had nine players eligible for arbitration and all but one of them was offered a contract for 2017 before Friday's deadline.

Right-hander Jeff Manship was the only player not tendered a contract. Manship, 31, went 2-1 with a 3.12 ERA in 53 games last season. In three appearances in the postseason, Manship threw 2 1/3 scoreless innings.

Manship will become a free agent Friday at midnight.

The eight players who were tendered contracts were Lonnie Chisenhall, Bryan Shaw, Cody Allen, Danny Salazar, Trevor Bauer, Brandon Guyer, Zach McAllister and Dan Otero. The anticipated raises for the eight players, according to mlbtraderumors, could increase the Indians' payroll by just under $30 million.

The Indians signed Manship as a free agent on Dec. 30, 2014 after he appeared in 20 games for the Phillies that season. He had an excellent spring training with the Tribe, but opened the year at Class AAA Columbus.

Manship joined the Indians on June 18 and made history. He went 1-0 with a 0.92 ERA in 32 appearances. In was the lowest ERA in team history and the lowest in the big leagues in 2015 among pitchers who appeared in at least 30 games.

He struck out 33 and walked 10. The opposition hit .155 against him.

Manship spent the entire 2016 season in the big leagues with the Tribe. He didn't allow a run over his first 10 games, but struggled after that. He went on the disabled list from July 27 through Aug. 10 with tendinitis in his right wrist.

After being nearly perfect in 2015, he allowed seven homers this year compared to one the year before. His hits allowed doubled from 20 to 40.

Manship made $760,000 this year and stood to make an estimated $1.2 million for 2017.

The Indians will go to the winter meetings on Sunday with 38 players on the 40-man roster.

Cleveland Plain Dealer LOADED: 12.03.2016

No chicken sacrifices needed: Cleveland Indians satisfied with catching situation, hopeful Yan Gomes, Roberto Perez will rebound

Zack Meisel, on December 02, 2016 at 3:10 PM, updated December 02, 2016 at 3:23 PM

CLEVELAND, Ohio -- The Indians consider their catching unit to be a position of strength.

“We have two really good, high-quality, capable major-league catchers,” said Chris Antonetti, Cleveland's president of baseball operations.

It's safe to say, though, that the Indians are counting on healthier, more productive seasons for Yan Gomes and Roberto Perez in 2017.

A quick recap as to how the 2016 campaign unfolded for the doomed duo:

The guy who couldn't buy a hit suffered a shoulder injury after that bizarre chicken sacrifice, an implausible sequence which forced the guy who had suffered a thumb injury -- the other guy's backup -- to come back sooner than intended, and as it turned out, that guy couldn't buy a hit, either. Then, the guy with the shoulder injury suffered a hand injury as he neared the completion of his rehab, but he surprisingly returned in time to back up the backup who finally started to produce at the plate as the postseason began.

Got all that?

In short, Gomes and Perez both struggled with the bat and the injury bug in 2016. Perez recovered enough to play a significant role during the postseason march, but will the No. 9 spot in Terry Francona's batting order be another black hole in 2017? Or will Gomes resemble his 2014 Silver Slugger persona? Will Perez's postseason experience provide him with a confidence boost for next year?

Wait, which guy will be the starter?

That's the first question to sort out. Gomes is the one set to earn $4.5 million next season, with that salary figure escalating each year through at least 2019. The Indians hold options on him for 2020 and 2021. (Eventually, the job could belong to Francisco Mejia, the hitting machine with a strong arm, though he turned 21 a month ago and has only 42 games at High-A to his credit.)
If money is no deciding factor, it might be a dead heat, with neither ice-cold bat standing out. Neither thrilled at the plate in 2016, but both have a history of doing so behind it. Gomes batted .167 with a .527 OPS in 74 games in 2016. Perez hit .183 with a .579 OPS in 61 contests.

This probably won't be a situation in which one catcher receives 90 percent of the playing time. Tribe hurlers have proven that they aren't picky, as both catchers appear to have a strong handle on managing the staff.

The Indians signed veteran catchers Erik Kratz and Guillermo Quiroz to minor-league contracts that include spring training invitations, a way of potentially acquiring insurance at the position in the event that Gomes or Perez suffer another injury.

It's also a reminder that the Indians will focus on the outfield, first base/designated hitter and the pitching staff. They seem satisfied with their catching situation.

"Yan had some adversity this year," Antonetti said, "with a couple of injuries he really couldn't control. But we still feel very confident with him and his ability to lead the pitching staff behind the plate.

"And then Roberto had some challenges of his own with his injury, us having to cut short that rehab, but he returned and came back and led a pitching staff all the way through Game 7 of the World Series, which says a lot about him as a catcher and his leadership.

"So, it's a position of strength for us moving forward."

Cleveland Plain Dealer LOADED: 12.03.2016

**Michael Martinez rejoins Cleveland Indians along with Erik Kratz on minor league deals**

*Paul Hoynes, cleveland.com*

CLEVELAND, Ohio -- Go ahead, admit it. You thought the Indians dumped Michael Martinez on Nov. 23 because he made the last out in Game 7 of the World Series.

But if you remember, it was written at the time that the Indians were interested in re-signing Martinez to a minor-league deal. Well, that's what they did Thursday and they added another catcher just for the heck of it.

The Indians signed Martinez and Erik Kratz with spring-training invitations. Martinez, a favorite of manager Terry Francona, grounded out to NL MVP Kris Bryant in the 10th inning on Nov. 2 as the Cubs beat the Indians, 8-7, in Game 7 of the World Series.

Martinez, 34, entered the game as a defensive replacement for Coco Crisp in the ninth inning.

In parts of two seasons for the Indians, the switch-hitting Martinez has proved to be a valuable player. He can play almost anywhere on the diamond, but more importantly Francona trusts Martinez to get the job done no matter where he plays.

Martinez hit .242 (23-for-95) with four doubles, one homer and four RBI for the Indians last season in 58 games. The Indians lost Martinez to Boston on waivers on July 8, but reclaimed him on Aug. 4. He was on all three of their postseason rosters this year.

**Andrew McCutchen isn't the perfect fit in a trade for the Cleveland Indians, but he's intriguing**

*Zack Meisel, cleveland.com*

CLEVELAND, Ohio -- There's a player available on the trade market who has four All-Star Game appearances and four top-five Most Valuable Player Award finishes over the last five years.

Oh, and he's under team control for up to two more years and he won't cost an acquiring club an arm and a leg.

So, is there any downside to obtaining Pirates outfielder Andrew McCutchen, especially for a team such as the Indians, a club in need of some substance at the position?

If one ignores McCutchen's 2016 campaign, then the answer is no. The numbers behind his rough season, however, are a bit more than a red flag. They're more like an unrelenting laser pointer directed right at the eyes of any potential trade partner.

Pittsburgh is selling low on McCutchen, the 2013 National League MVP. Any team talking to the Pirates -- and the Nationals seem to be the popular pick, among reports -- will scoff at any request for the utmost premium prospects.

After all, a team would be acquiring 2017 McCutchen, not 2012 or 2013 or 2014 or 2015 McCutchen. Over those four years, he posted a .313/.404/.523 slash line, with an average of 25 home runs, 90 RBI, 19 stolen bases and 35 doubles per season. He played an adequate center field and emerged as one of the sport's top performers for a franchise that was in desperate need of such a talent.

Then, 2016 happened. At first glance, nothing appears too wretched. McCutchen hit 24 homers. He tallied 81 RBI. He missed only nine games.

Let's dig deeper. He posted a .256 batting average, a .336 on-base percentage and a .430 slugging percentage, his lowest career marks in each category. He established a career-high strikeout rate (21.2 percent of his plate appearances) and a career-low walk rate (10.2 percent).

He stole only six bases, the lowest total of his career. With minus-28 defensive runs saved, he ranked as the worst center fielder in the game. After WAR totals of 5.5, 6.8, 8.4, 6.8 and 5.8 the previous five years, he plummeted to 0.7 in 2016. That's a barely-above-replacement-level player who is set to earn $14 million in 2017 and has a $14.75 million team option for 2018. (Marlon Byrd also produced 0.7 WAR in 2016 and his season ended on May 31.) Those salary figures would be a bargain for 2012-15 McCutchen. If he's stuck in reverse, it's a financial burden, and one that a penny-pinching team such as the Indians typically prefers to avoid.

**What kind of payroll will the Indians have in 2017?**

But let's not write off a guy who endured one (relatively) miserable season and turned 30 two months ago. Especially if the Indians -- or some other team -- could acquire him at a discounted price, in terms of a prospects haul.
The Indians should be in win-now mode anyway, and the free-agent market doesn't offer much bang for the buck (or bang at all, really. It's a pretty weak class.) McCutchen is probably best suited for a corner outfield spot. Michael Brantley, if healthy, will fill the one in left field. Lonnie Chisenhall and Brandon Guyer are slated to occupy right.

That's the crux of this fantasy scenario. If the Indians obtained McCutchen and stuck him in center, they would be sacrificing defense -- though Tyler Naquin's exploits in center didn't exactly blow away any observers or computers -- for the hope that he returns to his old form at the plate. That's a risk, one that would cost at least $14 million and a couple of prospects.

Will the Indians' payroll rank near the bottom of the league again in 2017? The club's arbitration situation -- in addition to raises for its core players who are signed to long-term deals -- figures to bump up the organization's total budget. But by how much?

Still, it isn't often that a five-time All-Star who just turned 30 is available for a presumably reasonable price.

Everything is circumstantial. If the Indians somehow acquired McCutchen, they could test the market on Chisenhall, or use their (for now) vacant designated hitter spot to rotate Brantley and McCutchen and Carlos Santana and anyone else.

McCutchen isn't the perfect fit. Maybe the Indians don't think he's a good fit at all. Maybe he isn't worth the financial risk.

But when a guy with such credentials becomes available and his services might not require the departure of the top cattle in the farm system, it's worth considering. The Indians' talent evaluators and analytics gurus would just have to determine that McCutchen's 2016 was an outlier, not the new norm.

Pennant Race Podcast: Previewing the Indians' off-season

David Wallace steps down as RubberDucks manager, will remain in Indians organization

Just days after being named minor-league manager of the year by Baseball America, David Wallace has decided to step down as manager of the RubberDucks.

His next job is yet to be determined, but Wallace said Friday he intends to remain with the Indians organization. And he plans to meet with team officials at the winter meetings next week in Washington, D.C., when there could be further developments.

But for now, it is a case of family first for Wallace, a Jacksonville, Fla., resident, who plans to spend more time with his wife and children.

Wallace, 37, told Indians President Chris Antonetti, General Manager Mike Chernoff and Assistant GM Carter Hawkins this week of his decision.

“The biggest change is I will not be managing next year,” said Wallace, who has done so for six years, the past three with the RubberDucks. “I need to be more present for my family. My No. 1 priority is to be the best dad and husband I can be, and right now as a manager, I don’t feel able to do that.”

Wallace and his wife, Lauren, have a 6-year-old daughter, Lakely, and 3-year-old son, Stratton.

“I haven’t been there for any of my kids’ birthdays and missed my son’s birth,” he said. “So I’m stepping away from managing but will still be with the organization. We’re working through what my role will be right now.

“This is an opportunity to get experience and expertise in different aspects of the game, including the front office and scouting departments.”

But his ultimate objective hasn’t changed, he said.

“My goal is to be a major-league manager one day,” Wallace, who led the Ducks to the Eastern League title this season, said. “My intention is not to walk away from managing.”

At the same time, he said he realizes this could temporarily stall the progress he has made.

“I’m fully aware of that,” Wallace said. “But I’m comfortable in my decision, for my family and all the sacrifices they made for me to do it as long as I’ve been doing it.”

And the front office, he said, understands how he feels.

“The Indians have been incredibly supportive through this process,” Wallace said. “That’s why I love this organization. They are a special organization.”

RubberDucks’ David Wallace named minor league manager of the year by Baseball America

RubberDucks manager David Wallace built an incredible team this season.

He fought through a 12-game losing streak and watched the majority of his squad promoted, but he built the Ducks up again and then won an Eastern League title.

That made-for-Hollywood storyline wasn’t lost on Baseball America when the organization named the 37-year-old Jacksonville, Fla., resident its minor league manager of the year.

The national award singles out the best manager at all levels of minor league baseball and it spans every organization.

“I’m very proud of the award,” Wallace said. “I honestly don’t view it as an individual award. In fact, watching and listening and reading [Indians manager Terry Francona] when he won the American League Manager of the Year, he said it best.

“It’s not an individual award. Anyone that is around it enough that sees the daily work that goes into a season, there are so many more hands and people involved than just the manager. They have a significant impact on the players’ development and the outcome of the game that night. I’m just one part of that. I view this as an organization and team award.”

It is an honor previously won by Francona, Buck Showalter and Hall of Famer Ryne Sandberg.

Joining those names wasn’t lost on Wallace.

“It’s pretty flattering,” Wallace said. “It puts a big smile on my face to be even mentioned with those guys. I look up to each one of those guys. I study those guys. Hopefully one day I’ll have the career and the impact those guys have in Major League Baseball.”

Wallace’s selection marks the third time the award has been won by a manager in the Indians organization. Mike Sarbaugh (Columbus) won it in 2010 and Joel Skinner (Buffalo) in 2000.

Wallace, who has gone 223-202 in three seasons with the Ducks, did an amazing job in leading the organization to its third EL title since 2009. The Ducks were 51-57 games out of a playoff spot on Aug. 9 with 26 games remaining.

The Ducks then closed the season by winning 21 of those games, beating the Bowie Baysox on the last day of the regular season to clinch the Western Division title with a 77-64 record.
"I think we were so focused on each day as its own day with the big picture perspective of doing whatever we could to get better," Wallace said. "In the midst of some of our struggles in that 12-game losing streak, I was really proud of how we kept the same focus. I was really proud of how it eventually showed up on the field. Probably in mid-to-late August, we started to see improvements and execution on the field. Seeing and feeling the energy in the clubhouse, we knew something special was going on."

That drive radiated throughout the postseason, when the Ducks beat the Altoona Curve in four games to reach the championship series and then swept the Trenton Thunder to claim the organization's fifth title. It was the first championship in Wallace's six-year run as manager.

"It means a lot to me," he said. "To look back on it, the first thing that stands out are the players — the guys we started with on Opening Day and the guys we celebrated with in the clubhouse after we won. Those relationships — not only my relationship and the staff's relationships with those guys — but watching their relationships just grow and develop and become a bond was more impactful than winning any game."

APNewsBreak: Union backed out of deal to add 26th player
RONALD BLUM (AP Baseball Writer)
The Associated Press-Dec 2, 2016, 7:43 PM
NEW YORK (AP) -- Baseball players and owners had a deal to expand active rosters from 25 to 26 players for most of the season, but the union backed away in the final stages of collective bargaining.

As part of the deal, the limit from Sept. 1 on would have been lowered from 40 to 28.

"We thought we were going to make an agreement, had a tentative agreement," baseball Commissioner Rob Manfred told The Associated Press on Friday, "but nothing's done until it's done."

Union head Tony Clark characterized the talks differently and said the parties may revisit the topic during the five-year contract they agreed to Wednesday.

"I don't know that there was an agreement to do it and that it came apart. There was a lot of dialogue over the course of this round where we were moving in a direction that we inevitably weren't able to agree to," he said. "It simply got to the point with all of the moving pieces that were part of the conversation during the course of the year that we lived to talk about it another day."

Rosters have long expanded for the season's final full month as minor league affiliates end their campaigns. The roster expansion gives managers the ability to make more frequent pitching changes in an attempt to gain favorable matchups. Some managers and general managers have complained it doesn't make sense to play most of the season under one set of rules and then switch as pennant races heat up. While some teams add many players and a few reach the 40-man limit, others make relatively few call-ups.

"There were very mixed opinions on the club side, as well," Manfred said. "Maybe we were going too far, too fast."

Many players make their big league debuts in September, and the union has long been concerned about the loss of service time if the limit were to be lowered from 40.

"To reduce the roster to 28 people would jeopardize the ability for people to get their feet wet in the big leagues," Oakland catcher Stephen Vogt said in a text. "September is a great time for teams to teach the young guys how to act and be in the big leagues and get their feet wet in a comfortable environment."

Given the increasing importance of bullpens, some believe a 26th player likely would be an additional relief pitcher.

"I know there have been a lot of concerns from the other side related to just how it would work and how it might affect the games or the length of games," Clark said. "Trying to appreciate that extra player and who it may be is hard to predict based on whatever the organization philosophy is of any one team."

Management and the union released details of the deal Friday, an agreement that will extend the sport's labor peace to 26 years since the 1994-95 strike - baseball's eighth work stoppage since 1972.

"We kept the game on the field," Manfred said. "We made an agreement within our current structure which I think shows that we have a durable structure. We moved some things our direction, and we moved some other things their direction."

The threshold for the luxury tax, known formally as the competitive balance tax, rises from $189 million this year to $195 million in 2017 to $210 million in the deal's final season. There are some rate increases and new surtaxes.

"The premise of the CBT altogether was a drag at the top to keep teams from running away from the group," Clark said. Manfred added: "There's two dynamics around the threshold: stopping people from running away but also having them low enough that people can aspire to spend a little more to be a little more competitive."

Among the new details that emerged:

- The penalty for a second stimulant violation goes up from 25 to 50 games and for a third rises from 80 to 100. The penalty for a first violation remains follow-up testing.
- Random urine tests will increase from 3,200 to 4,800 in season and from 350 to 1,550 in the offseason, ensuring at least one offseason test for all 40-man roster players. Random blood test rise from 260 to 500 in season and from 140 to 400 in the offseason.
- The number of teams disqualified from revenue sharing drops from 15 to 13. A person familiar with the details, speaking on condition of anonymity because no announcement was made, said Atlanta and Houston were the teams that became eligible.
- The new All-Star bonus pool for the winning team is $640,000, which calculates to $20,000 per player.
- After fan and player voting, the final roster selections in each league (seven in NL and five in AL) will be made by the commissioner's office rather than the All-Star managers.
- Major league players may not be traded during the final week of the regular season.
- While a team with a payroll $40 million or more above the luxury tax threshold would have its highest draft pick dropped 10 places, the top six selections are protected and those teams, if penalized, would have their second pick dropped 10 slots.
- The commissioner may schedule regular-season games at ballparks other than the regular sites, and players would receive additional compensation.
- Players would receive $15,000 to $100,000 each for special events such as games in Mexico, Asia, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic and London.
- Signing bonuses of $10,000 or less do not count against a team's international signing bonus pool.
- Teams will increase their annual pension and medical benefits contribution to about $200 million.

**Nick Cafardo / SUNDAY BASEBALL NOTES / Some scenarios that could develop at this year's Winter Meetings**

**By Nick Cafardo**

Just a few days ago, baseball's Winter Meetings were going to be a waste of time. Not anymore. With a new collective bargaining agreement in place, teams will proceed on the trade and free agent fronts in what should be an eventful few days in National Harbor, Md.

The new CBA isn't significantly different than the old agreement, though teams won't be surrendering a first-round pick to sign a free agent who declined a qualifying offer. Teams that exceed the new $195 million luxury tax threshold will surrender their second and fifth picks. Others will give up a third-rounder.

So we expect business as usual at the Winter Meetings, with perhaps a big- or mid-market team more willing to sign a major free agent without having to give up its top draft pick.

Here are some scenarios that could develop:

**The deals**

1. You could easily see the Red Sox and White Sox or Red Sox and Tigers hooking up on a megadeal. The Red Sox could easily pull off a Chris Sale-Jose Abreu trade if they're willing to give up Andrew Benintendi or Yoan Moncada, as well as Jackie Bradley Jr., Eduardo Rodriguez, and Blake Swihart. They could pull off a Miguel Cabrera-Justin Verlander deal with the Tigers if they were willing to include the above players or add Michael Kopech. Why do it if you're the Red Sox? They want to win now. Abreu is a proven 30-100 hitter. Sale is a tough-as-nails, 27-year-old lefty. Verlander gives you performance and intestinal fortitude. You keep Moncada or Benintendi to play left field. You already have a young core with Mookie Betts and Xander Bogaerts, and you have Rafael Devers about two years away, if that, at third base. The White Sox also match up with the Nationals, Dodgers, Rangers, and Astros for Sale.

2. The A's could be in for a package deal. They have pitchers Sonny Gray and Sean Doolittle, both coming off injuries but desirable to many teams, including the Red Sox, Rangers, Astros, Dodgers, Yankees, Blue Jays, Nationals, and Rockies.

3. The Pirates have desirable players in Andrew McCutchen and Josh Harrison they could package in order to obtain controllable pitching. It seems the Nationals are deep in talks for McCutchen.

4. The Rays have the potential to reinvent their roster if they traded Evan Longoria and Chris Archer. It's probably a long shot on Longoria, but his righthanded bat and superb defense at third base would be very attractive. There are endless trade possibilities for either player or in tandem. Start with the Dodgers, who have the prospects to land both. Don't count out the Cardinals, either.

5. The Diamondbacks have premier players in Zack Greinke and Paul Goldschmidt, but it's highly unlikely the popular Goldschmidt would be moved and Greinke is tough to deal because of his contract that has about $172.5 million remaining. The Diamondbacks have a $100 million payroll and could use Greinke to obtain cheaper, major league-ready players. If Arizona absorbed some of Greinke's money, would a team such as Atlanta (which is looking for an ace) step forward and give up some of its coveted youngsters, or even Julio Teheran?

6. The Rockies have the potential to deal some players, namely outfielder Carlos Gonzalez, who is entering the final year of his deal (at $20 million). Gonzalez, however, is an excellent player and good value. He's been branded a Coors Field hitter, but someone with his talent could hit well at any ballpark. The Orioles, Blue Jays, Rangers, Astros, Dodgers, and Cardinals might be able to work something out with the Rockies.

7. The Mets are trying to sell off Jay Bruce and/or Curtis Granderson, and with several teams seeking a lefthanded-hitting outfielder, that shouldn't be a problem. The Jays have long had interest in Bruce, and Toronto could use Granderson, a lefthanded leadoff bat with power.

8. The Yankees would likely listen on Brett Gardner and Jacoby Ellsbury, but the latter would require New York to assume a healthy portion of the contract. Teams have inquired on Gardner, but Brian Cashman has not received any offers that make sense to him. Angels GM Billy Eppler, a former Cashman assistant, has always been a Gardner fan.

9. The White Sox are willing to deal anyone, and two players who could be in demand are closer David Robertson and third baseman Todd Frazier. This deal would make sense for the Dodgers, who have the young players to send back and could even dangle Yasiel Puig. The Yankees would also appear to be interested in Robertson, their former closer. The Nationals and Giants are other possible destinations for Robertson, who could fill a need for the Red Sox. San Francisco might have interest in Frazier.

10. Tigers outfielder J.D. Martinez and righthy Anibal Sanchez could entice a team to give up some younger players. The Astros and Rangers fall into this category as they could use a big bat and another starting pitcher. The Giants have been discussing Martinez for some time.

11. The Reds could pair first baseman Joey Votto and shortstop Zack Cozart in a deal. Votto is sticky because of his enormous contract, which would require the Reds to pick up some major money. GM Dick Williams has downplayed a Votto deal, but the Ontario native makes sense for the Blue Jays if they lose Edwin Encarnacion, Jose Bautista, or Michael Saunders in free agency. Cozart would have value as an extra infielder.

12. The Tigers have Ian Kinsler, a Gold Glove second baseman who turns 35 in June. The Angels and Dodgers are in the market for a second baseman. The Tigers have made everyone available, so you could package Kinsler with a host of players. Detroit picked up its club option on closer Francisco Rodriguez, but he'd be available for the right price. Lefty reliever Justin Wilson is drawing attention from multiple teams.

13. The Astros have been busy, and we're hearing they would listen on righty Collin McHugh (13-10, 4.34) and DH/catcher Evan Gattis. Could this tandem appeal to the Yankees?

14. The Twins probably won't trade Brian Dozier, but they will at least listen on Dozier and righthy Ervin Santana. The Dodgers certainly match up.

15. The Royals could deal both closer Wade Davis and outfielder Jarrod Dyson within a week. They are looking for controllable starting pitching. Davis will draw plenty of teams, including the Giants, Red Sox, and Blue Jays.
Free agents

1. Dexter Fowler — Who’s more popular than Fowler in free agency right now? He’s a lefthanded leadoff man who solves a lot of needs for a lot of teams. With the Cubs signing center fielder Jon Jay, it doesn’t appear Chicago will re-sign Fowler, but you never know. The Cardinals have a great need for him. He’d be a nice fit in Baltimore or Toronto, or even San Francisco.

2. Aroldis Chapman — Not sure there will be a tug-of-war for him, but he is the top reliever on the market. The Yankees have shown signs they’d love to have him back, and Chapman felt comfortable in pinstripes. He could also return to the Cubs, but don’t expect Theo Epstein to give out crazy money. Other teams to watch are the Giants, Dodgers, Nationals, and those sneaky Rangers.

3. Mark Melancon — He seems like a great fit for the Giants. While Melancon doesn’t have great power stuff, he’s accomplished in getting that final out. The Yankees again come to mind. He was once considered the heir apparent to Mariano Rivera. Perhaps he still has a future closing in New York.

4. Kenley Jansen — The closer could return to the Dodgers, but he too will have nice options at big money. There was a debate at the GM meetings as to which closer might demand more money — Chapman or Jansen. Expect the Giants to be in on Jansen.

5. Edwin Encarnacion — He will come close to Yoenis Cespedes as the highest-paid hitter in free agency. The Astros have looked at him as the answer to their void in the middle of the order but may not be willing to go that far on the contract (we’re talking four or five years at $25 million per). Ditto the Rangers, Red Sox, and Blue Jays. The Jays have recently shown signs they don’t want to lose him.

6. Rich Hill — It’s nice to be in Hill these days because he’s the best starting pitcher in free agency. Hill would love to come back east and pitch for the Red Sox, Yankees, or Orioles, but the Dodgers want him back and there are rumors that they may have already sealed the deal at three years and $46 million-$48 million. As of Thursday, Baltimore GM Dan Duquette said he was not involved in Hill, but that could change in a hurry. The Red Sox make sense because Hill’s late-career success is due in part to his work with Brian Bannister, Boston’s pitching guru.

7. Jose Bautista — His market may develop a bit later after an injury-filled season raised doubts about his durability. It’s unlikely that, at age 36, he gets the four or five years he was seeking, but he could sign a shorter-term deal with a team that needs a basher. He makes sense for the Orioles, the Red Sox (as a DH/OF), Cardinals, Giants, and Nationals. The on-base component he provides is key, and while he didn’t have a good defensive year in 2016, better health could produce better outfield play.

8. Ben Revere — Non-tendered by the Nationals, Revere, who had a poor season (.214) and never fully came back from an early oblique strain, could be a pleasant surprise for some team. Revere hit .300 or better for three straight seasons (2013-15) and averaged 34 steals. Teams losing out on Fowler could take a chance with Revere.

9. Matt Holliday — The Red Sox have contacted agent Scott Boras about Holliday, who has a relationship with John Farrell and his family from his time at Oklahoma State. But he also fits a few other teams, including the Orioles, Yankees, Blue Jays, Cubs, Rays, and Rangers.

10. Ian Desmond — Coming off an All-Star season, Desmond can play any outfield position and some teams haven’t ruled him out as a second baseman, shortstop, or third baseman. The Rangers wouldn’t mind a reunion. He might be of interest to the Angels.

11. Justin Turner — The third baseman is likely to return to the Dodgers. Turner is an outstanding fit for so many teams, including Boston (despite having Pablo Sandoval and Travis Shaw). The Yankees are a good fit if they can move Chase Headley. The Giants have shown some interest.

12. Ivan Nova — He had a rebirth with the Pirates after being traded by the Yankees, and he’s now positioned for a nice payday. The Pirates would love to re-sign him, but that may not be in the cards. The Marlins, Royals, Braves, Phillies, and Angels are possible destinations.

13. Mike Napoli — Jon Heyman reported the Red Sox, Rangers, and Indians have expressed the most interest in Napoli, who hit 34 homers and drove in 101 runs for Cleveland. Napoli could be an intriguing fallback at DH. The Yankees also have some interest.

14. Mark Trumbo — The Orioles are trying to re-sign him after he excelled in Baltimore. It’s hard to imagine Trumbo with too many options outside of the AL, since his fielding is less than adequate, but his power plays anywhere.

15. Doug Fister — A back-end starter who could solidify a staff. A team such as Miami, looking for a few pieces for its rotation, may be a strong suitor even after signing Edinson Volquez.

16. Jason Hammel — He has been a good NL pitcher and probably should stay there. The Marlins might be one to watch for his services. About 10 teams have called agent Alan Nero on the 34-year-old right-hander, who won 15 games for the Cubs last season.

17. Chris Carter — Just your run-of-the-mill, 41-homer, 94-RBI first baseman/DH who was designated for assignment. For $5 million or so, what a cheap way to add massive power to your lineup. We expect Carter to get a few calls.

18. Michael Saunders — The former Blue Jays outfielder is a lefthanded bat who presents good value as a second-tier player.

19. Brad Ziegler — The submariner can hold multiple roles in the bullpen. Look for a possible return to Arizona. The Yankees, Cardinals, and Red Sox could be potential suitors.

20. Wilson Ramos — One of the top catchers last season, Ramos probably regrets turning down a three-year, $30 million offer from the Nationals during the season. Now he’ll be fortunate to get one or two years after tearing his ACL in September. An optimistic return date is early May. The White Sox and Rays may have interest. The Nationals’ acquisition of Derek Norris Friday could signal their readiness to move on from Ramos.

Extra innings

From the Bill Chuck files — “Do the Yankees have a bullpen solution already on their staff? Last season, Luis Severino had an ERA of 5.83. His ERA in 11 starts was 8.50 and his ERA in 11 relief appearances was 0.39.” Also, “From 2010-15, 14.2 percent of all Edwin Encarnacion’s plate appearances ended in a strikeout. Last season, it jumped to 19.7 percent.” . . . Happy birthday, Lee Smith (59).

Family resemblance

Sluggers Prince Fielder retired in 2016, ending a 12-year career that was remarkably similar to his father Cecil’s, another slugger who played for five teams, from 1985-98. They each had a 50-homer season and they both played for the Tigers mid-career. One difference: Cecil interrupted
his major league career to play one season in Japan in 1989 after being limited to a part-time role with the Blue Jays, his first team. A tale of the
tape, Fielder edition:


John Harper / MLB Winter Meetings Preview: Trade for Chris Sale or other star pitchers could be done for right price

JOHN HARPER NEW YORK DAILY NEWS

Rich Hill, a 36-year old lefthander with a history of injuries, including recurring blister problems, is the top starting pitcher on the free-agent
market. Which is another way of saying that teams in need of pitching need to get creative this off-season.

And that brings us to the Winter Meetings, which begin in Maryland on Monday. Long a showcase for free agent-signings, baseball’s off-season
evaganzia this time could be a setting for blockbuster trades to make the biggest splash.

Is a team willing to meet the White Sox pricey demands for Chris Sale?

Are the Tigers serious about dealing Justin Verlander as part of a plan to reduce payroll?

What would it take for the Diamondbacks to trade Zack Greinke and get out from under his huge contract?

The availability, or at least the potential availability of such No. 1 starters makes for great intrigue at these Winter Meetings. As always, there
are plenty of teams looking for high-end starting pitching, and some this winter that could very well feel they’re just an ace away from winning a
championship.

But in an era when prospects are valued more highly than ever, it seems, are any of them willing to raid their farm systems to make such a
deal?

The trade possibilities help make up for what is a weak free-agent class whose most dynamic player, Yoenis Cespedes, is off the market.

Nevertheless, the bidding for the top closers, Aroldis Chapman, Kenley Jansen, and Mark Melancon, could make for some great drama. As will
the pursuit of sluggers like Edwin Encarnacion, Mark Trumbo, and Jose Bautista.

So as the Winter Meetings begin, here are the 10 teams, including our locals, that should be most interesting to watch.

YANKEES

They always have everyone guessing, waiting for the big splash, even after two winters of relative inactivity. Hal Steinbrenner and Brian
Cashman are committed to their rebuild, which is why they won’t unload the farm system for Sale, but they’re also trying to contend while
waiting for their kids to blossom.

So they want to re-sign Chapman to be there when they’re ready to win again. Can’t see them doing a four-year deal with Encarnacion, but if
Bautista’s market sags, would they bring him to the Bronx on a short-team deal?

METES

It’s already mission accomplished for Sandy Alderson in locking up Cespedes, but they should still be plenty busy this week in trying to find the
best trade for Jay Bruce, either for a quality reliever or a top prospect. They’d rather not trade Curtis Granderson instead, but if the offers are
significantly better for him than Bruce, they just might.

If they don’t get a reliever in a trade, they’ll be working that second-tier reliever market for a solid set-up reliever, perhaps a Brad Ziegler or a
Joaquin Benoit.

NATIONALS

Desperate to get over the hump in the playoffs, GM Mike Rizzo is going to make big moves. The Nats are in the bidding for one of the top
closers and they’ve been in discussions with the Pirates for days about an Andrew McCutchen trade, but some baseball people are convinced
Rizzo wants to pull off a trade for Sale, which would give the Nationals quite a star-studded starting rotation, adding the White Sox lefty to the
likes of Max Scherzer and Stephen Strasburg.

The Nats have the young pitching in Lucas Giolito and Reynaldo Lopez to satisfy the White Sox, but it’s hard to imagine they’ll give up
shortstop/center fielder Trea Turner, and that could be a deal-breaker. If the Sox settle for highly-touted center field prospect Victor Robles in a
package instead, the Nats just might get Sale. That wouldn’t be good news for the Mets, to say the least.

CUBS

They could do nothing, which would include not re-signing Chapman, and still be favorites to win it all again next year, such is the strength of
their core. But Theo Epstein is always looking for ways to get better, and he has the type of surplus of position players to make a deal for one of
the top starting pitchers, which would be a hedge against Jake Arrieta leaving as a free agent next winter.

Even if Dexter Fowler leaves as a free agent, the Cubs have too many outfielders, with Kyle Schwarber back in left field next season. They just
signed Jon Jay to play center, which means Jason Heyward stays in right, so where does that leave Ben Zobrist after Javier Baez played his
way into starting at second base? As spectacular as Baez can look at times, he’s still prone to strikeouts, as the World Series proved; would the
Cubs deal him to the Rays as part of a package for Archer?

RED SOX

Primed to win a championship with a core of young position players that rivals that of the Cubs, the Sox may be looking for that blockbuster
trade for an ace that could put them over the top.

They have plenty of young talent, on the major-league roster and the farm system, but are they willing to give up an Andrew Benintendi as part
of a package for Sale? A package with Yoan Moncada as the headline probably wouldn’t get it done, so we’ll see.

WHITE SOX
If they're serious about breaking up their team and doing a rebuild, they could be the centerpiece of the Winter Meetings. Teams such as the Nationals, Astros, Rangers Red Sox, and perhaps the Dodgers, among others, have the talent in their farm systems to make such a deal, but it would depend on the asking price. At the trade deadline last summer the Sox were asking for four or even five of the top young players from interested teams, and nobody was willing to go that far.

If they’re in sell-mode, the Sox also would get plenty of interest on the likes of Carlos Quintana, Todd Frazier, and Jose Abreu. Even if they don’t go all-in on a rebuild, they’ll probably look to trade closer David Robertson. The ex-Yankee wasn’t great last season but with two more years and $25 million left on his four-year deal, he could be a cheaper alternative or a consolation prize of sorts for teams that don’t get Chapman, Jansen, or Melancon.

TIGERS

GM Al Avila has made it clear he needs to reduce payroll, but to what extent? Verlander’s bounce-back to Cy Young Award-caliber form makes him marketable, even with $84 million owed over the next three years — plus a $22 million vesting option. The Tigers will get offers on him, but for that type of money they probably won’t get what they would consider equal value.

Same goes for Miguel Cabrera. The Tigers may not want to go into a full rebuild anyway, so it seems more likely they could make trades for J.D. Martinez and perhaps Ian Kinsler, get a little younger and cheaper, and still try to contend. But they should be very active.

ASTROS

They’ve already made significant moves, trading for Brian McCann and signing free-agents Josh Reddick and Carlos Beltran, but they aren’t stopping there, as their GM Jeff Luhnow has made clear.

They pursued Yoenis Cespedes, yet their biggest need is a top starting pitcher to go with Dallas Keuchel, who figures to bounce back in 2017. Would they trade Alex Bregman, their highly-touted young third baseman, in a deal for Sale or Archer? That’s probably what it would take, as part of a package deal, and the ‘Stros are saying they won’t do it, but their front office feels they’re ready to win it all now, only they’ll need to an ace to have a real shot.

DODGERS

Another team that might be one top starter away from winning a championship. Clayton Kershaw may be the best pitcher in baseball, but he needs someone riding shotgun with him in the playoffs, after the Dodgers let Zack Greinke walk a year ago.

Maybe it’s Julio Urias, but can L.A. and its win-now payroll afford to wait on the young lefty? Or would the Dodgers include him in a package for Sale or Archer and go all-in for the next couple of seasons. Even without including Urias they have enough prospects to make a deal for pitching. And they need to re-sign Justin Turner as well — or would they with the White Sox for Frazier instead?

RANGERS

In the last two postseasons their pitching hasn’t been good enough, even with Cole Hamels and Yu Darvish at the top of the rotation. They dealt top prospects to get Jonathan Lucroy at the trade deadline, but their system is deep enough to make a play for Sale if they’re willing to deal power-hitting Joey Gallo as part of a package.

They also could be in play for an impact hitter, whether it’s signing Dexter Fowler, or trading for a first baseman like Jose Abreu.