

# BASEBALL UNDER GLASS

## ***Schwarber, Garcia in the spotlight as Cubs, Sox shop at winter meetings***

*By George Castle, CBM Historian  
Posted Wednesday, December 6, 2017*

The Cubs and White Sox themes at the winter meetings in Orlando center around whether to pull a trigger on deals of youngish players with power potential.

The trade du jour for Cubs fans and pundits centers around trading Kyle Schwarber to the Tampa Bay Rays for, presumably, young-veteran starter Alex Cobb. Meanwhile, the rebuilding Sox still have Avisail Garcia to ship out seemingly for another quality prospect or two.

Free-agent signings are on the docket, too, for both Chicago teams.

In their quest to bolster a pitching staff that slipped amid a 92-win playoff season, the Cubs should look at an available starter and a couple of relievers in free agency. Re-signing Wade Davis, their own at-liberty closer of 2017, appears to be alive.

While a specific need is not a necessity for a Sox team still stocking up on their talent pool, a fifth starter to round out a rotation that still includes veteran James Shields and three youngsters would seem the No. 1 free-agent goal. Having dispatched almost all worthy veteran relievers in the rebuilding program, GM Rick Hahn will need to find able bodies as replacements. He is still charged with fielding a 25-man big-league roster while the prospects percolate in Charlotte, Birmingham and other Southern outposts further down.

Back to Schwarber. As if his 2016 World Series feats and 30-homer output in 2017 never took place, the masses appear to desire his exile to the American League to serve as a designated hitter. One season of fighting to get his average above the Mendoza line and



**Kyle Schwarber (center), bantering with Ryne Sandberg and David Ross, should not be rushed out of town simply because he's perceived as an American League DH.**

somewhat sketchy left-field play have afflicted too many with a case of “John Holland Syndrome” – impatience.

To be sure, Theo Epstein and Jed Hoyer logically should have Schwarber on the table as they search for rotation help. But not at a giveaway price, and not in any hurry. Schwarber is a smart player who is still in a developmental phase. He lost a full season – which would have been his first full big-league campaign – due to a debilitating knee injury in 2016. His World Series heroics were totally unexpected, pure gravy on his comeback quest. He played catch-up ball in 2017, and often failed as manager Joe Maddon did him no favors with the Schwarber-as-leadoff man experiment.

The Cubs could not produce a left-handed power hitter out of their system since Billy Williams in 1961 no matter how hard they tried. Pat Bourque, Karl Pagel, Derrick May (he did hit for average), Brooks Kieschnick, Robin Jennings, Corey Patterson and Felix Pie are down in team annals as falling short. Speaking of Williams, after he made 13 errors in the outfield in his rookie of the year season, Williams concentrated on his fielding the following spring training. He knew he could hit, so why not spend more time shoring up his weaknesses? Williams became a capable-enough outfielder to log seasons-worth of time in the sun field in right, and even started the 1965 season in center. Who’s to say Schwarber could not embark on a similar course of self-improvement? His drawback is running speed, but learning positioning and good jumps can close those gaps.

I may be in the minority. Unless Epstein’s posse can land a high double digit win-quality starter for Schwarber, give him more time to round into a semi-complete player. If the Cubs send Schwarber away, he’d have gotten less time than Lou Brock to round into star-level form as a Cub. And you know how Brock turned out.

Better that the Cubs brass look at dealing Ian Happ, whose switch-hitting ability and unexpected power as a rookie could attract suitors.

### **Baez should be a keeper**

And they ought to disabuse themselves of any temptation to trade Javy Baez. All-world defensive players with flair and hustle – even with some holes in his swing and a bit of hot dog in his personality – don’t come around too often.

Eight miles south, Hahn may be justified in shopping right fielder Garcia. He took a great leap forward from his middling baseball persona in 2017. The big Venezuelan batted .330 and finally showed flashes of run production with 18 homers and 80 RBIs. But will he continue to boost the power numbers? The Sox seem well-stocked in the outfield coming up with Eloy Jimenez and Luis Robert.

Hahn is running out of veteran trading chips. He should not trade Jose Abreu, on the basis of his middle-of-the-order production and team leadership potential, unless he is overwhelmed. The Sox thought Garcia had a very high ceiling after he broke in as a De-



**Avisail Garcia is one of the few veteran trading chips Sox GM Rick Hahn has left.**

troit Tiger as a kind of protégé of Miguel Cabrera. Some other team out there might have the same viewpoint now that Garcia showed something last season.

Matt Davidson should be kept off the trading bloc unless he's craved elsewhere. After seeing his career go sideways for several seasons since the Sox acquired him from Arizona, Davidson displayed enough power in 2017 to suggest he could find a home at third. Strongmen at the hot corner are not common. Like Schwarber, the Sox should mandate Davidson work out at third until he's got defense on the brain. The payoff could be well worth it. The Sox can scarcely find a comparable third-base commodity on the market, or try to develop the same.

No Dick Allen is going to arrive with either the Cubs or Sox via a winter-meetings deal. Bottom line, the moves should be calibrated. No itchy fingers on the trigger, please.