

# NEXT MAN UP

I think I pitched pretty well,” but the disappointment of being sent down soon gave way to the new reality.

Cortes Jr. — who made his big-league debut in 2018, pitching in four games for the Orioles — went down to the minors with the mindset to keep doing what he had been doing his whole minor league career and hope to get another chance in *The Show*. That chance has come and gone several times this year for Cortes Jr., who is among more than 20 Yankees who have been riding the Scranton Shuttle. But each time they return to New York, the smiles and the greetings from teammates are just as warm — as if they’d never left.

And the business of winning rolls on.

“It’s crazy to think that I wasn’t on the roster at the start of the year, and now I’m helping a first-place team win ballgames,” Cortes Jr. says. “(A team) with one of the best records in baseball.”

**A**round the Yankees, Tauchman is known for his gung-ho speeches upon receiving the club’s championship wrestling belt — awarded to the player of the game after a Yankees win — and his depth of knowledge regarding the *Game of Thrones* series.

He read the books.

That alone would have endeared Tauchman to CC Sabathia, which says something about the inclusive nature of the club’s top triangle of leadership. Sabathia, Brett Gardner and Aaron Judge have gone out of their way to make guys like Tauchman feel that they are a part of the club from day one. Plus, “When guys come up here, they know they’re going to play,” Tauchman says. “And just culturally, when you’re here, you’re going to be counted on, and you have the full support of the team.

“It’s just time to attack with a lot of positivity and enthusiasm.”

It’s no surprise to hear Tauchman — who was previously locked in the Colorado Rockies’ minor league system for six years before a March 23 trade brought him to the Yankees for left-handed reliever Phillip Diehl — laughing it up with Sabathia as

the primary guest on a recent episode of the pitcher’s “R2C2” podcast with Ryan Ruocco.

And it’s no shock to hear Gardner waxing poetic about those “Next Man Up” contributions after another win.

“We’ve found a way to just prevail, if you will, and weather the storm,” Gardner says. “We’ve got a resilient group of guys, and it doesn’t matter who’s playing where or who’s hitting where in the lineup.”

Well before camp broke, the Yankees already knew they wouldn’t have shortstop Didi Gregorius until sometime in midseason, as he rehabbed from Tommy John surgery. By March, the Yankees also knew that Severino and Betances — both dealing with shoulder issues — weren’t going to be April options. As of late August, neither pitcher had yet to throw a big-league inning this year. But it was Hicks’ lingering back issue that compelled Cashman and company to trade Diehl — one of the most talked-about young pitchers during a successful camp — to Colorado for Tauchman.

Already 28 years old, the lefty-hitting Tauchman had just 59 big-league at-bats over two seasons with the Rockies. But he’d been a .303 hitter in seven minor league campaigns, with an .827 OPS and a reputation as an above-average defender who could play all three outfield positions.

His success at the big-league level with the Yankees seems like a page torn from the Luke Voit story of 2018. Last July, the Yankees sent pitchers Chasen Shreve and Giovanni Gallegos to St. Louis for someone who was largely unknown and an afterthought around the 2018 trade deadline.

“Luke was organizationally a guy that we identified, that we felt like was capable of [big-league success], and he really just took advantage of an opportunity that probably hadn’t existed before,” Boone says. “And all we’ve seen from him is a guy with tremendous power to all fields and a guy that controls the zone.”

Now, here’s Tauchman, thriving in the same way for a club that, in mid-August, was 40 games over .500 and had built a double-digit AL East lead — a team that had seen 28 players make 35 trips to the IL.

“I just love playing for this team and with these guys, and I love showing up to the ballpark and competing every day, trying to help the team win,” Tauchman says as the Yankees hurtle toward the stretch run, which he termed the “all gas, no brakes” portion of the year.

In this lineup of All-Stars and replacements to the stars, Tauchman finds himself “just playing with confidence, feeling loose,” and knowing that “the guy behind you has your back; the guy behind you is going to pick you up.

“And that’s just kind of how we’re playing together as a team.”

Seeing players such as Tauchman step up “doesn’t really surprise me,” says Judge. “In spring training, we’d go on the road and have guys in Double-A and Triple-A (playing) with a couple of our major league guys, and we’d put up eight, nine, 10 runs. So, once everybody got hurt and all these guys who would’ve been in Triple-A got a chance to play, it didn’t surprise me.

“It’s been a fun group to play with,” one that Judge feels has brought the club closer together — the “Next Man Up” theme providing more fuel for the fire.

“Each guy’s just got to step up and keep doing their job, and that’s the coolest thing about this team,” Judge says. “No one is trying to take the load on them themselves. Everyone’s trying to pass the baton and share the responsibility. If I do my job, the other guy behind me is going to do his job.”

**A**fter blasting a home run that Statcast measured at 461 feet at Yankee Stadium, Gio Urshela finally had to concede that he was becoming a home run threat.

“I think you could say it now,” Urshela said in his understated way.

And it was another moment to consider: *Where did this kind of contribution come from?*

Kahnle had already been a valuable, late-inning big-league reliever before a drop in velocity caused by biceps and shoulder tendinitis led to a lost 2018 season. Maybin had already had a solid career and