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Davidson's RBI knock in 11th bails out bullpen

Four relievers needed during game-tying two-run eighth; Santiago pitches three scoreless innings

By Casey Harrison / MLB.com / September 20, 2018

CLEVELAND -- For the second straight game, the White Sox bullpen wasn't able to preserve a late-inning lead.

Luckily, the only damage it allowed was a two-run Indians rally in the eighth to send the game into extras. Matt Davidson then ripped an RBI single to score Yolmer Sanchez in the 11th to pull out a 5-4 win against the postseason-bound Tribe on Thursday night at Progressive Field.

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"The guys battled," White Sox manager Rick Renteria said. "We used practically everyone off the bench that was available."

Renteria turned to five relievers to silence the Tribe's bats -- four of which were used to stop the bleeding in the two-run eighth, which tied the game at 4. Starter James Shields gave way to Aaron Bummer in the seventh after allowing two runs over six solid innings.

"It was actually a fun game," said Indians manager Terry Francona, whose team clinched its third straight division title last Saturday. "They pushed us pretty good. Playing in games where if somebody makes a mistake you lose, that's good for us."

Bummer retired the first three batters he faced, but he gave up a leadoff triple to Francisco Lindor, who would come home on a wild pitch in the eighth. He also surrendered a single to Michael Brantley, who scored the tying run later in the inning.

Both Rob Scahill and Caleb Frare entered in the eighth in an attempt to shut the door, however, each faced one batter and walked him to load the bases. Juan Minaya was called on and walked in the tying run on Melky Cabrera's 10-pitch, two-out plate appearance.

But Minaya was able to prevent further damage by inducing an inning-ending popout from Jason Kipnis, who hit the walk-off grand slam in the Sox 4-1 loss Wednesday.

In all, the Tribe sent eight men to the plate in the eighth.

"We went through a plethora of pitchers in one inning to kind of keep us there," Renteria said. "Everyone kind of did what they had to do to minimize the damage and not give it up."

Hector Santiago (6-3) entered in the ninth and closed the game out with three shutout innings. He faced 13 batters and allowed two hits, two walks and a hit batter.

"We needed this one today to go home," Santiago said. "I'm happy to say that these guys do show you fight and they don't quit. I know that things don't always turn out the way we want them to turn out as a club, but they've kept battling. That's a pretty good club over there."

Though his outing was far from perfect, Santiago was able to stave off the Indians long enough for Davidson to come through in the 11th. Sanchez started the inning with a double down the alley in left-center off Adam Cimber (3-8), advanced to third on a groundout and came around courtesy of Davidson's clutch two-out knock.

"We stepped up to the occasion, kind of come in and battle," Santiago said. "We don't want to come in, just because they're in the playoffs, and let them run over us."

MOMENTS THAT MATTERED

Moncada's big day: Chicago's first four runs came off starter Josh Tomlin, who went four innings. Yoan Moncada led the offense by going 3-for-5 with a run, a walk and two RBIs. He scored from second on Avisail Garcia's RBI single in the first. He also lined a two-run double to the left-field corner in the next inning.

Over his last nine games, Moncada is batting .351 (13-for-37) with four doubles and four RBIs. He finished the series 6-for-14.

"He had some really good at-bats today from both sides of the plate," Renteria said. "He's been putting together some good at-bats. It's one of those things where experience and time is continuing to give him more information, and hopefully he continues to grow from it."

Close call in the 10th: With two on and two outs in the 10th, Santiago induced a ground ball off the bat of Kipnis toward the hole between Moncada and Davidson. The hit may have found its way through, possibly scoring a run, but it hit baserunner Brandon Barnes, who was en route to second on the play. Santiago acknowledged that luck was on his team's side.

"I'm just thanking the baseball gods right there," Santiago quipped. "It would have been a tough play to get over there with Kipnis running down the line. You're just thankful it hit him, and get ready for the next inning."

SOUND SMART

Thursday marked the White Sox only win in Cleveland this season and ended a nine-game skid, which dated back to last season. That was the second-longest losing streak at Cleveland in franchise history, two shy of the 11 straight defeats from May 25, 1931-May 30, 1932.

YOU GOTTA SEE THIS

Center fielder Adam Engel showed off impressive speed in the fifth inning with a long running play to take extra bases from All-Star Jose Ramirez, who ripped a pitch from Shields into the left-center field gap. Engel was able to cover 102 feet in 5.2 seconds to make a four-star catch, according to Statcast™. The play was given just a 39-percent catch probability.

UP NEXT

Right-hander Reynaldo Lopez (6-9, 4.05 ERA) will take the mound Friday for the first of three against the Cubs at Guaranteed Rate Field to begin the club's final homestand of the season. Lopez is 2-0 with a 2.85 ERA over his last nine starts. The Cubs will counter with former Sox southpaw Jose Quintana (13-10, 3.95 ERA). First pitch is scheduled for 3:10 p.m. CT.

Eloy shares wisdom with DR academy prospects

By Jesse Sanchez / MLB.com / September 20, 2018

BOCA CHICA, Dominican Republic -- Eloy Jimenez has been here before -- lots of times, actually -- and he knows what it feels like to walk around this place.

Jimenez remembers the delicious and hearty food, the weight room just off the main sidewalk and, of course, the batting cages.

"So many memories," Jimenez said in Spanish.

The White Sox top prospect -- and ranked No. 3 in the game by MLB Pipeline -- Jimenez says he basically grew up at the Cubs' academy in the D.R. before and after they signed him back in 2013, and it will always be a special place. So when he was asked to come back to his old stomping grounds to visit with the prospects at MLB's national showcase for players from the island on Thursday, Jimenez leaped at the chance to speak to the teens.

• Debut Trainer Partnership showcase draws raves

"I'm here for the kids, because I have been where they are," Jimenez, 21, said. "I know my words can encourage them and change their lives. I had so much good advice and guidance when I was their age. It's only right for me to come back here and share what I know with them, because so many people helped me along the way."

Jimenez arrived at the complex at noon on the final day of the showcase, the first event under the new Trainer Partnership Program between Major League Baseball and local trainers. He met with the 45 prospects and posed for photos. Jimenez also shook hands with trainers, MLB officials and Cubs personnel on hand scouting the event.

Jimenez, who participated in MLB showcases like the one this week before he signed with the Cubs for \$2.8 million, looks back fondly on his days as an amateur. He was acquired as part of a five-player deal that sent Jose Quintana to the Cubs in July 2017.

"I never really felt pressure, even then, because I just saw it as a competition," Jimenez said. "I just wanted to go out there and do my best and let what happened happen. I still think the same way."

Jimenez hit a combined .337 with 22 home runs, 28 doubles, 75 RBIs and a .961 OPS at Double-A Birmingham and Triple-A Charlotte this season. In 211 at-bats with the Knights, he hit .355 with a .996 OPS, 12 home runs and 33 RBIs.

The White Sox felt it was in the club's best interest not to call up Jimenez on Sept. 1, when rosters expanded.

"It's not something I was comfortable with, because I felt I was ready and could help the team, but that's not something I could control," Jimenez said. "I'll be here all winter, and I'm going to keep working hard, getting my body ready and be ready for Spring Training."

Jimenez spent most of his time chatting up the young prospects at the showcase. He also sent a message to any White Sox fans who wonder why he is at the rival Cubs' academy.

"The White Sox fans have been so good to me," Jimenez said. "I love them, and I want them to know I'm working hard. Look at my shirt -- it's black. I'm wearing our color."

These 20 pitchers boosted their stock this year

By Jonathan Mayo / MLB.com / September 20, 2018

Sep. 20th, 2018

Last week, we took a look at 20 hitting prospects who boosted their stock in 2018. Now it's time to turn attention to the mound.

Most of the 20 pitchers listed below are on our current Top 100 Prospects list, though some are on their respective organization's Top 30 only. All of them used very strong 2018 seasons to make large jumps up rankings and more firmly onto the prospect radar.

Chris Paddack, RHP, Padres No. 5/MLB No. 48

Paddack missed all of 2017 season due to Tommy John surgery, so it was tough to know what to expect. A 12.0 K/9 and ridiculous 0.8 BB/9 rate (120 K's, 8 walks) went far beyond any projections and allowed him to skyrocket to the middle of the Top 100 and from No. 23 to No. 5 on the Padres' Top 30.

Jesus Luzardo, LHP, A's No. 1/MLB No. 12

To say Tommy John surgery is in his rearview mirror is an understatement. He's now the second-best lefty prospect in the game and jumped up from No. 60 on the preseason Top 100 thanks to a season that saw him pitch across three levels and start the Futures Game.

Dane Dunning, RHP, White Sox No. 6/MLB No. 62

An elbow sprain that shut him down in late June puts a damper on his season, but the good news is he didn't need surgery. Before the injury, he pitched his way to Double-A and continued to miss bats (10.4 K/9) and not walk guys (2.7 BB/9) to move up 30 spots in the Top 100.

Jonathan Loaisiga, RHP, Yankees No. 3/MLB No. 73

The right-hander moved from No. 14 on the Yankees Top 30 up to No. 3 and jumped firmly onto the Top 100 in a year that saw him start in the Class A Advanced Florida State League and finish in New York, posting a 67/8 K/BB ratio along the way in the Minors.

Touki Toussaint, RHP, Braves No. 7/MLB No. 74

The questions about his ability to start long-term have disappeared after a huge 2018 season that saw him finish tied for eighth in strikeouts in the Minors while considerably cutting his walk rate and making a strong contribution to the playoff-bound big league club.

Brusdar Graterol, RHP, Twins No. 4/MLB No. 77

Graterol's Tommy John surgery in 2016 is well behind him and he backed up his stirring 2017 U.S. debut with a year that saw him pitch across two levels of Class A ball before he turned 20. Along the way, he struck out 9.4/9 and walked just 2.5/9 to go from unranked up to No. 77 on the Top 100.

Dustin May, RHP, Dodgers No. 4/MLB No. 78

May continued his ascent up the Dodgers' ladder, and prospect lists in his second full season of pro ball, going from No. 11 to 4 on the team's Top 30 and jumping to No. 78 from being unranked, while pitching across two levels and reaching Double-A at age 20.

Justus Sheffield , LHP, Yankees No. 1/MLB No. 27

The top Yankees' prospect began the year No. 48 on the Top 100 and has shot up 21 spots thanks to pitching extremely well across two upper levels (2.48 ERA, .195 BAA, 9.5 K/9) and pitching in the Futures Game. He capped things off by receiving his first callup in September.

Griffin Canning, RHP, Angels No. 3/MLB No. 81

Canning wasn't on the Top 100 to start the season and was at No. 8 on the Angels list, but now he's at No. 81 and No. 3 in a vastly improved system after he pitched his way to Triple-A in his first full season of pro ball.

Dylan Cease , RHP, White Sox No. 5/MLB No. 44

Cease moved up 17 spots from his preseason ranking on the Top 100 and it's quite possible he's still under-ranked, especially after he was as dominant as any pitcher in the Minors late in the season (0.51 ERA, .107 BAA, 14.8 K/9 in August).

Adonis Medina, RHP, Phillies No. 3/MLB No. 69

The right-hander also made a 17-spot jump in the Top 100, shaking off a rough July with a very strong August (2.57 ERA) to help him finish with nifty 9.9 K/9 and 2.9 BB/9 ratios for the season in the Florida State League.

Peter Lambert, RHP, Rockies No. 2/MLB No. 84

After thriving in hitting environments over his first few seasons, Lambert dominated the Double-A Eastern League to earn a promotion to Triple-A at age 21 and jump firmly onto the Top 100. While he scuffled there, he finished with 11 scoreless innings over his final two starts.

Mike Soroka , RHP, Braves No. 1/MLB No. 15

Before a shoulder strain effectively ended his season in June, Soroka had taken his stuff and pitchability and was on his way to cementing himself as a 21-year-old big-league starter. His lack of walks and high ground-ball rate made him very efficient and earned him a jump into the top 20 overall.

Logan Allen , LHP, Padres No. 8/MLB No. 85

He might be the third-best lefty prospect in the Padres' system, but he definitely put himself more on the national prospect radar (unranked to No. 85 overall) thanks to a year that saw him post incredible numbers (2.54 ERA, .205 BAA, 9.1 K/9) in Double- and Triple-A at age 21.

Josh James, RHP, Astros No. 6

James wasn't ranked on Houston's Top 30 at the start of the season, but now he's in the top 10 and impacting the big league staff thanks to a breakout campaign that saw him pitch across Double- and Triple-A while finishing with a .191 BAA and ending tied for fourth in the Minors with 171 K's.

Luis Oviedo, RHP, Indians No. 10

Oviedo started the year in the short-season New York-Penn League as an unranked prospect, but pitched his way to full-season ball for the first time before being shut down as a precaution. Along the way, the 19-year old struck out 10.6/9 and posted a 2.05 ERA to go along with a .190 BAA.

Garrett Whitlock, RHP, Yankees No. 11

As an 18th rounder from the 2017 Draft, it's not surprising Whitlock was unranked at the start of the season, but when he finished third in the Minors with his 1.86 ERA and had a combined .214 BAA and 9.1 K/9 while touching Double-A, it's no wonder he's now No. 11 on New York's list.

Luis Patino, RHP, Padres No. 12

Unranked to start the year, this 18-year-old went to full-season ball in May and dominated there (2.16 ERA, .220 BAA, 10.6 K/9) to put a big up arrow next to his name, showing even more dominance in the second half (1.74 ERA, .202 BAA, 11.1 K/9 in 11 starts).

Emilio Vargas, RHP, D-backs No. 14

A move to the California League can be a kiss of death for pitching prospects, but for Vargas it helped put him on the map as he finished second in the system in both ERA (2.88) and strikeouts (170) while pitching his way to Double-A and going from unranked to the top 15.

Dean Kremer, RHP, Orioles No. 16

Unranked this preseason with the Dodgers, Kremer was having a breakout year in the California League and had earned a promotion to Double-A when he was sent to the O's in the Manny Machado deal, then dominated post-trade and finished the year leading the Minors in strikeouts (178).

Youth is served: Each club's best rookie in 2018

By MLB.com / September 20, 2018

Each year, a new group of rookies sets out to make a mark in the Major Leagues, and in 2018, many of these young players have made history with their performances. They're fueling clubs during postseason races, as well as giving fans a glimpse of what's to come in the years ahead.

With the aid of all 30 MLB.com beat writers, here's a look at each team's best rookie this season:

AMERICAN LEAGUE EAST

Blue Jays: Ryan Borucki

Borucki has opened his Major League career with quality starts in 10 of his first 15 outings. Even though Borucki did not make his debut until the end of June, he has the third-most starts of at least six innings and two runs or fewer among Major League rookies. Only San Francisco's Dereck Rodriguez has registered more of those starts this season. Borucki appears to be a future cornerstone of the Blue Jays' rotation and his rookie campaign has been an overwhelming success with a 3.86 ERA.

Orioles: Cedric Mullins

It's been a tough year for Baltimore, but Mullins has given O's fans a glimmer of hope in the past two months. Since becoming the first Oriole to record three hits in his debut, the center fielder -- who moved Adam Jones over to right -- has showcased his range and speed and has become a table-setter for a lineup that sorely needs more dynamic players.

Rays: Joey Wendle

Tampa Bay acquired Wendle from Oakland during the Winter Meetings -- the same day the Yankees finalized their acquisition of Giancarlo Stanton. Many found humor in how the Rays "answered" their division foe's acquisition. Wendle has hardly been a joke, though. He's played second base, third base, shortstop, right field and left field. While Wendle's glove has been dazzling as billed, particularly at second, his bat has been equally so. He always seems to be in the middle of rallies. Wendle has above-average speed and runs out every ball, and he's shown decent power. He has been a big reason for Tampa Bay's marked improvement this season.

Red Sox: Brian Johnson

Out of options, Johnson had no option but to become a dependable contributor for the Red Sox this season, and that's exactly what he has done. Though he has unspectacular numbers (4-4, 4.24 ERA), Johnson has been one of the most important members of the pitching staff for manager Alex Cora because of his ability to move seamlessly between the bullpen and starting rotation, and often doing both roles within days of each other. In 12 starts, Johnson is 4-2 with a 4.06 ERA. He could have a few more wins, but he was taken out just shy of five innings numerous times.

Yankees: Miguel Andujar

Nothing was handed to Andujar, who made the most of an early-season opportunity when Brandon Drury landed on the disabled list to grab hold of the third-base job. Andujar's calling card is his bat, and he quickly cemented a reputation as an extra-base hit machine, tallying the third-most extra-base hits by a rookie in Yankees history behind Joe DiMaggio (88) and Aaron Judge (79). The AL Rookie of the Month in June and August, Andujar has worked to polish his defense. With Gleyber Torres also enjoying a strong season, the Yanks have two legitimate choices to follow Judge as the AL Rookie of the Year Award winner.

AL CENTRAL

Indians: Shane Bieber

Indians manager Terry Francona jokes that Chris Antonetti, the team's president of baseball operations, did not bring Bieber to MLB camp in the spring because the manager would not have let the pitcher return to the Minors. Bieber, 23, cruised through Double-A and Triple-A, posting a 1.47 ERA with 77 strikeouts vs. seven walks in 79 2/3 innings. When the back of Cleveland's rotation ran into some issues, Bieber rose to the big leagues. He debuted in late May and returned for good in June. The rookie has enjoyed a promising campaign and figures to be a part of the Tribe's postseason pitching staff.

Royals: Brad Keller

Keller, a right-hander, was an absolute steal in the Rule 5 Draft. He started the season in the bullpen and eventually graduated to the rotation, where he has been arguably the Royals' best starter and certainly a top-of-the-rotation guy moving forward. Opposing hitters throughout the season have called facing Keller an "uncomfortable at-bat." His four-seam fastball, which hovers around 93-95 mph, moves like a cutter, and he has worked to develop an effective slider and changeup. During a recent six-game stretch, Keller went 4-1 with a 1.85 ERA, permitting just a .645 OPS. While Keller, 23, likely won't win the AL Rookie of the Year Award -- especially with Shohei Ohtani, Torres and Andujar in the running -- he at least deserves some consideration. Keller is a lock for the rotation in 2019.

Tigers: Niko Goodrum

The Tigers took a chance on the former Twins second-round pick, extending a Spring Training invite in the hopes that his versatility and athleticism would help him stick while learning on the job in the big leagues. Much to their surprise, Goodrum has become essentially an everyday player and a cog in Detroit's lineup, with a .741 OPS that ranks second on the team to Nicholas Castellanos. He has made a start at every defensive position except center field, catcher and pitcher.

Twins: Jake Cave

The Twins took a chance on Cave in March, acquiring him from the Yankees for Minor League right-hander Luis Gil, and Cave has responded with a strong rookie season. The 25-year-old wasn't expected to play much this season, but with center fielder Byron Buxton out most of the year because of injuries and offensive inconsistency, the left-handed-hitting Cave has filled in nicely. He's capable of playing all three outfield positions and has shown some power offensively, hitting .257/.300/.458 with 11 homers and 13 doubles through his first 82 career games.

White Sox: Daniel Palka

The White Sox picked up the left-handed slugger off waivers from the Twins on Nov. 3, 2017. While he didn't break camp with the team, Palka not only leads the White Sox in home runs, but also set a single-season franchise record for most homers from a left-handed-hitting rookie. Palka has a knack for the big hit, having knocked out six home runs in the ninth inning. Left-handed reliever Jace Fry made a solid late-inning rookie impression, but Palka provided the biggest power boost.

AL WEST

Angels: Shohei Ohtani

A rocky Spring Training created some questions about how Ohtani's talent would translate to the Majors, but he quickly erased those doubts once the regular season began. For two months, he dazzled as a two-way phenom for the Angels, emerging as a dominant right-handed pitcher with a triple-digit fastball and devastating splitter and an impact left-handed bat with impressive raw power. An elbow injury derailed his

magical season and led to a Tommy John surgery recommendation earlier this month, but it hasn't prevented Ohtani from continuing to hit. He is the first player to log 10 pitching appearances and hit 20 home runs in a season since Babe Ruth in 1919, making him a front-runner for the AL Rookie of the Year Award.

Astros: Max Stassi

Stassi made his Major League debut during the Astros' 111-loss season of 2013, and he has bounced between the big leagues and Triple-A each season since while maintaining his rookie status. He's spent most of this year as Houston's backup catcher to Brian McCann, and he is hitting .233 with eight homers and 27 RBIs through 85 games. Stassi was on pace to catch more games than McCann, who missed a chunk of time with knee surgery, and Martin Maldonado, who was acquired in a July trade and cost Stassi significant playing time down the stretch.

Athletics: Lou Trivino

Trivino has been an absolute godsend for what's become a deep and dangerous Oakland bullpen, arriving in late April and quickly taking over setup duties behind All-Star closer Blake Treinen with a high-90s fastball and a mid-90s cutter -- a devastating duo. The flamethrowing right-hander singlehandedly bridged the gap for much of the first half before the midseason arrivals of Jeurys Familia, Shawn Kelley and Fernando Rodney, working multiple innings more times than not. Center fielder Ramon Laureano, who has been superb on both sides of the ball since his August promotion, also deserves consideration.

Mariners: Daniel Vogelbach

The 25-year-old first baseman made the Opening Day roster after a huge spring, then was sent down when he struggled at the plate in April. But after putting up good numbers again in Triple-A, Vogelbach has flashed his power potential with a couple of big home runs this week as a September callup, including a game-winning pinch-hit grand slam to beat the Astros on Monday.

Rangers: Ronald Guzman

This is a tossup between Guzman and Isiah Kiner-Falefa, who did a terrific job in a utility role that included time at catcher. But Guzman has emerged as the Rangers' first baseman of the future by showing power, run production and superb defensive ability. There is still more improvement and development needed, but Guzman is among the AL rookie leaders in home runs and RBIs. His emergence also allowed Joey Gallo to take over in left field, which had been a troubled spot for Texas.

NATIONAL LEAGUE EAST

Braves: Ronald Acuna Jr.

Acuna has lived up to his top prospect status, as he spent the season's second half producing numbers baseball has seldom seen from a player who has not yet turned 21 years old. He introduced himself to the Majors in April and then suffered a late-May knee injury that sidelined him for a month. But when Acuna was moved to the top of Atlanta's lineup immediately after the All-Star break, the 20-year-old outfielder suddenly became one of the game's top catalysts and power threats. He became a strong NL Rookie of the Year Award candidate and likely earned some down-ballot NL MVP Award consideration.

Marlins: Brian Anderson

Not only has Anderson been the Marlins' top rookie in 2018, he has established himself as one of the young faces of the franchise. He's also built a case to be a top-five finisher in the NL Rookie of the Year Award balloting. On the big league roster from wire to wire, Anderson has played third base and right field. He will lead all NL rookies in games played and hits.

Mets: Jeff McNeil

McNeil was never a top prospect, and when he arrived in the big leagues, he first drew attention for his unusual knobless bat. But since he took over at second base following the Asdrubal Cabrera trade, he's been a revelation at the plate, commanding attention for his outstanding contact ability and all-around hitting prowess. McNeil hasn't slowed down, either -- he leads all rookies in hitting since his July 24 debut, including 17 multihit games in 54 contests, and is second among all players in triples in that span, with five.

Nationals: Juan Soto

Soto wasn't even the Nats' most heralded prospect coming into the year -- that was Victor Robles. But he's hit at an almost unprecedented level for his age, putting himself on lists alongside names like Griffey and Harper. Soto's combination of plate discipline and power marks him as a future star. He's not only a top NL Rookie of the Year Award candidate; he might even get some down-ballot consideration in the crowded NL MVP Award field.

Phillies: Seranthony Dominguez

One of the reasons the Phillies held first place in the NL East as late as Aug. 12 is Dominguez, who joined Philadelphia's bullpen in May. He posted a 1.85 ERA in 34 appearances through Aug. 3, striking out 49 and walking 13 in 39 innings, becoming manager Gabe Kapler's most trusted weapon with the game on the line. Dominguez struggled down the stretch as the former starter adjusted to a new role, but there is no question NL East batters are not looking forward to facing him in the future.

NL CENTRAL

Brewers: Freddy Peralta

Taylor Williams pitched in more games and Corbin Burnes is playing the most significant role among Brewers rookies down the stretch, but in terms of aggregate value this season, Peralta gets the nod. By making 14 starts, including a history-making 13-strikeout Major League debut on Mother's Day, Peralta helped hold together a starting rotation that was a quiet strength for much of the year despite Jimmy Nelson's year-long absence and significant disabled list time for Zach Davies, Wade Miley and others. Among Major League starters who pitched at least 70 innings, only Chris Sale had a lower opponents' average than Peralta.

Cardinals: Jack Flaherty

With respect to Harrison Bader (3.5 fWAR), Jordan Hicks (105 mph fastball) and Yairo Munoz (.275 average), it's Flaherty who has emerged as the star of St. Louis' loaded rookie crop -- and the Cardinals' new ace. Premature? Not if you consider how the on-the-playoff-bubble Cards manipulated their rotation so Flaherty will be on turn to start their most important game of the year, whether that's the NL Wild Card Game or a must-win during the season's final series. The 22-year-old has earned the responsibility: He ranks among the NL rookie starter leaders in strikeouts (first), starts (second), innings (second), ERA (fourth), wins (first), fWAR (second) and WHIP (third).

Cubs: David Bote

An 18th-round Draft pick in 2012, Bote was pressed into duty when Kris Bryant was injured and has delivered in the clutch. On July 26 against the D-backs, he smacked a game-tying two-run homer with one out in the ninth. On Aug. 12 against the Nationals, Bote delivered a pinch-hit walk-off grand slam in the ninth. That blast helped teach people how to pronounce his last name (it's bow-tee). He hit another walk-off homer on Aug. 24 against the Reds and is the first Cub since Bryant in 2015 with two walk-off homers in one season. Bote has helped support the Cubs' motto to be versatile, starting at second, third, shortstop and in the outfield.

Pirates: Richard Rodriguez

Far from a household name, the 28-year-old rookie has become a vital part of Pittsburgh's bullpen in his first extended Major League opportunity. Signed as a Minor League free agent, Rodriguez entered the week with a 2.57 ERA, 1.08 WHIP and 79 strikeouts in 63 innings over 56 appearances. Rodriguez doesn't possess overwhelming stuff, but he's getting the job done with a 92.9-mph four-seam fastball he throws about 75 percent of the time plus a swing-and-miss slider.

Reds: Jesse Winker

Winker gets the nod despite having his season cut in half by injury. After a slow start, he found his stroke and some power. Overall, Winker batted .299/.405/.431 in 89 games but was slashing .362/.465/.554 in June and July before his year was halted by right shoulder surgery in his non-throwing arm to repair an

injury that nagged him even in the Minors. Expected to be fully recovered by Spring Training, the 25-year-old with great plate discipline could be an even bigger offensive threat when fully healthy.

NL WEST

D-backs: Yoshihisa Hirano

While Hirano is technically a rookie as far as Major League Baseball is concerned, he certainly was not inexperienced coming into this season after spending 11 seasons pitching in Japan. The D-backs signed him to a two-year contract during the offseason, and he has more than met their expectations. Used primarily in a setup role through the first five months of the season, Hirano's effectiveness -- along with his unflappable makeup -- eventually got him moved into the de facto closer's role in September.

Dodgers: Walker Buehler

In any year not involving Acuna or Soto, the Dodgers' 24-year-old sensation would likely have been a favorite to win NL Rookie of the Year Award. Since his April recall from the Minor Leagues, Buehler was a steady presence through Clayton Kershaw's extended absence and has since cemented himself beside Los Angeles' ace at the top of the rotation, allowing two or fewer runs in 17 of his 21 starts. With the Dodgers embroiled in a tight divisional race, he has a 1.62 ERA since the start of August, and with his season mark at 2.74, he could become Los Angeles' first rookie starter to post an ERA under 3.00 with at least 20 starts since Hideo Nomo in 1995.

Giants: Dereck Rodriguez

The son of Hall of Fame catcher Ivan Rodriguez is steadily establishing his own identity as a ballplayer as well as his candidacy for a respectable finish in the NL Rookie of the Year Award balloting. The 26-year-old, who converted to pitching from playing the outfield, demonstrated his consistency by pitching at least six innings and allowing two or fewer runs in nine consecutive starts. Despite their losing record overall, the Giants are 9-8 when Rodriguez starts. What makes Rodriguez's story even more remarkable is that he did not pitch above Double-A in Minnesota's farm system last year. San Francisco signed him as a Minor League free agent last November.

Padres: Franmil Reyes

Reyes was left unprotected in the Rule 5 Draft last December after leading all Padres Minor Leaguers in home runs in 2017. Thankfully for San Diego, he went unselected. Reyes' power is otherworldly, and he's made huge strides with his approach at the plate. The hulking 6-foot-5, 275-pounder is still a liability defensively. But he's grown into a legit middle-of-the-order game-changer.

Rockies: Ryan McMahon

Drafted as a third baseman but blocked at the hot corner by one Nolan Arenado, the 23-year-old McMahon made the Opening Day roster with eyes on the starting first-base job, but he was beat out by veteran Ian Desmond. After struggles at the plate and two extended Minor League stints, McMahon's .330 on-base percentage since his July 29 recall is fourth among Rockies. He has also shown a penchant for clutch homers -- four of his five 2018 long balls have come late in close games with Colorado trailing, including a memorable three-run walk-off shot against the Dodgers on Aug. 11.

With Michael Kopech out for the year, should the White Sox try to bring James Shields back for 2019?

By Vinnie Duber / NBC Sports Chicago / September 20, 2018

Michael Kopech's recovery from Tommy John surgery put an unanticipated item on this offseason's to-do list for Rick Hahn's front office: The White Sox now need to fill a 2019 rotation spot that was supposed to belong to Kopech.

There are numerous ways to fill that hole in the rotation, though are any more attractive, perhaps, than simply bringing James Shields back for another season on the South Side?

Shields' third year in a White Sox uniform has undoubtedly been his best. After he posted a 5.60 ERA and allowed a combined 67 home runs during the 2016 and 2017 seasons, the 13-year major league veteran has done impressive work this season. After six innings of two-run ball Thursday night in Cleveland, Shields has a 4.48 ERA in 2018.

Of course, that's not a number that will have fans picketing Guaranteed Rate Field if the White Sox opt to move on from Shields this winter. But don't let that one figure overshadow how reliable Shields has been during the campaign. Thursday night marked his 19th quality start of the season, and he ranks in the top 10 in baseball in innings pitched.

Detractors have some statistical ammunition, too, however. Shields is one of three White Sox starting pitchers ranking in the top 10 in the game in walks (74 after three on Thursday), and his 33 home runs allowed are the second most in baseball (back-to-back jacks by the Indians accounted for pair of runs he gave up Thursday).

But Shields, it should be noted, has plenty of value independent of the kind of numbers he's posted during his White Sox tenure. He is a veteran mentor to the team's young pitchers. That includes Lucas Giolito, whose locker has been next to Shields' all season — or rather it was until Kopech became Shields' new locker buddy when the organization's No. 1 pitching prospect got his promotion to the big leagues. That placement, by the way, was Shields' request. While Kopech will be in recovery mode during the 2019 season, bringing Shields back would allow him to continue to help Giolito and act as a resource for Kopech.

This team is young and will continue to be young next season. Having a few reliable veterans around to guide the youngsters is a valuable thing.

Plenty, though, might not be sold on the idea, a reasonable reaction as the team moves toward contention mode and might need to free up spots in a rotation that could soon star some of the young arms developing in the minor leagues. But what are the alternatives for plugging Kopech's empty spot in the 2019 rotation? And if Shields doesn't come back, that makes two holes that need filling.

There isn't a wealth of major league ready options within the organization. Dylan Covey has a 5.33 ERA after his 19 starts this season. At the Triple-A level, Spencer Adams and Jordan Guerrero would figure to be the next-best options. Adams had a 3.19 ERA in 15 starts at Charlotte, and Guerrero had a 3.46 ERA in 12 starts. Though it's possible the White Sox could want them to receive some more conditioning in Triple-A. Jordan Stephens' 4.71 ERA in 21 starts and Carson Fulmer, who was moved to the bullpen after getting sent down to Charlotte earlier this season, are less appealing options.

Of course, the White Sox could go outside the organization, and that would seem to be the most likely course of action. But whether that's via free agency or a trade, wouldn't the still-rebuilding White Sox rather do that once than twice? And while there's nothing to say that the White Sox can't spend big this offseason with a loaded free-agent class, is the time right to do so? Does spending big this winter line up with the timeline of this rebuilding effort? In simpler terms: Would signing a pair of free-agent starting pitchers be the kind of win-now moves that Hahn has tried to avoid during this rebuild?

The most attractive free-agent options include the likes of Clayton Kershaw, Dallas Keuchel, Patrick Corbin and Charlie Morton. But those big names could be looking for instant contention or a gigantic contract that could put the White Sox out of the running. Going lower down the wish list, you'll see names like Chris Tillman, Wade Miley, Hyun-Jin Ryu, Anibal Sanchez, Jeremy Hellickson, J.A. Happ, Garrett Richards, Nathan Eovaldi, Tyson Ross and Gio Gonzalez.

It's quite possible that even with Shields brought back, the White Sox will need to sign one of those guys. Here's the question: Are two of those guys — and the contracts they'll command — better than one of them and Shields?

Another thing to think about: With Kopech on the mend until spring 2020, how close could the White Sox get to contention by the time he returns? And if the team has reached the contention stage, could they

afford any growing pains that Kopech could have during his first full season in the majors? Remember that Kopech's first start in 2020 will be just his fifth big league start. That could affect the approach the White Sox take this offseason, perhaps hoping to acquire a pitcher who could be around for a while — not just as a bridge to Kopech but as a safety net for him, as well.

So does a Shields return make sense? Given that the White Sox might still be playing the waiting game next season, having a reliable arm to save the bullpen and a veteran presence to help the still-developing young pitchers could be an attractive option this offseason.

'The Hawk Harrelson Show,' a long-running drama, draws to a close

The Hawk Harrelson Show” concludes its Chicago run after 33 seasons with three White Sox-Cubs telecasts this weekend.

There will be no cliffhanger ending. There almost certainly will be tears. When it comes to emotion, Harrelson is more apt to choke up than choke back.

It's hard to imagine Harrelson won't be welcomed back to the Sox booth in a guest role from time to time, if he's up for it. But why undercut the drama by contemplating that?

The last two seasons with reduced workloads have built toward this curtain call Friday and Saturday on WGN-9 and NBC Sports Chicago for the grand finale Sunday.

Fans who embrace him as theirs — blind spots, idiosyncrasies and all — will savor it.

The detractors who call him a homer, an anachronism, a blowhard and worse are free to avail themselves of the Cubs feed on NBC Sports Chicago on Friday and Saturday and ABC-7 on Sunday.

To each his own. The conflict, love and disaffection all make for a good show.

Someone recently asked why Harry Caray, who could loudly root, root, root for the home team with the best of them, wasn't as polarizing in Chicago as Harrelson has been.

There are many answers. One is that Caray, like most fans, was also capable of criticizing the home team in addition to (and sometimes especially) its management.

Harrelson was Sox management for a time. More to the point, he is perhaps Sox Chairman Jerry Reinsdorf's biggest fan whose last name isn't Reinsdorf. It may be Harrelson's sincere belief that Reinsdorf can do no wrong, but Reinsdorf is human.

When the Sox honored Hawk with an on-field ceremony this month, he went out of his way to bring up baseball's 1994-95 work stoppage, which cost a promising Sox team a serious title shot.

Harrelson placed the blame solely on players union boss Donald Fehr. But it's not as though Reinsdorf was a passive figure in the events leading to the impasse and in pressing fellow owners to take a hard-line stance during the standoff.

It's not as though Harrelson is incapable of criticizing a team owner the way he will tee off on, say, an umpire or columnist. His inability to hold his tongue precipitated his departure for Chicago after a 1975-81 run announcing Red Sox games in Boston.

Harrelson was speaking to college students at a sports seminar in early 1981. Someone asked about the dismantling of the Red Sox that winter.

They had traded Rick Burleson, and a clerical screwup cost the team its hold on Fred Lynn and Carlton Fisk, leading it to trade Lynn to the Angels on unfavorable terms and lose Fisk to free agency (and ultimately the White Sox).

Haywood Sullivan, the Red Sox general manager and co-owner, was deservedly in Harrelson's crosshairs along with the rest of the ownership group.

"The club is in disarray, confused and chaotic," Harrelson told the students, according to reports at the time. "If they don't have the money to pay Lynn and Burleson, they can't afford to own the ballclub.

"Fisk is the symbol of Red Sox baseball, and the way management is treating him is beyond me. ... They're operating out of weakness and desperation. ... The heart of the team is gone."

Harrelson, who casts himself as the hard guy with a soft emotional center, complained the Red Sox were "almost the laughingstock of the American League. I don't see them as a contender anymore, and I can't stand to see what's happening to them."

Sullivan, who had managed Harrelson with the Kansas City A's and played a role in bringing him to the Red Sox as a player in 1967, the year they won the AL pennant, was stoic publicly.

"I've heard the tape and all I have to say is that he's a private fan entitled to his own opinion," he said.

Privately, Sullivan raged and called for Harrelson's head. WSBK stood by Hawk, but clearly Harrelson sensed he didn't have a long future as a Red Sox announcer.

So he was more than open to a change of Sox when Reinsdorf and Eddie Einhorn expressed interest after the abbreviated '81 season. And seldom has been heard a discouraging word about them.

Harrelson might carp today about then-GM Ron Schueler not drafting A.J. Pierzynski in 1994, but he's reluctant to offer an on-air critique of a current GM.

Over the years, despite leaving them behind, Harrelson has maintained a soft spot for the Red Sox — or the Carmines, as he calls them to keep alive an antiquated nickname.

It's a callback to days of yore when the Red Sox sometimes were referred to as the Carmine Hose, a reference to the shade of red in their uniforms. Who will pick up the Carmine mantle in his absence?

The Red Sox this year have been transitioning off the computerized system developed when Theo Epstein was general manager to a newer system for analytics called Beacon.

And according to the Boston Globe, what did Epstein, now presiding over the Cubs, dub the now-outdated Red Sox system? Carmine, naturally.

Harrelson is credited with coining nicknames of his own, Hall of Famer Frank Thomas' "The Big Hurt" chief among them.

It was Dick Howser who nicknamed him Hawk, and Harrelson says Howser's inspiration in 1959 was a cartoon character named Henrietta Hawk.

The character he seems to be referring to, however, is the Henery Hawk of Merrie Melodies and Looney Tunes fame, introduced in 1942's "The Squawkin' Hawk."

A tough-talking yet naive, overly aggressive chickenhawk who can't be intimidated despite his small stature, Henery was often paired with Foghorn Leghorn.

Typical line from the cartoon Hawk: "Are you comin' quietly, or do I have to muss ya up!?"

Which sounds a bit like something Harrelson would say.

Harrelson, in his 1969 memoir, "Hawk," recalled once suggesting he could break his Washington Senators out of a slump in similar fashion.

"Maybe I should start a fight," he recalled offering Gil Hodges, the Senators manager. "A good free-for-all might get us all pulling together."

Hodges, whom Harrelson branded "unfair, unreasonable, unfeeling, incapable of handling men, stubborn, holier-than-thou and ice cold," frostily rejected the offer.

"This shows me something about what kind of person you are," Hodges told him.

To the final episode, Hawk Harrelson has had a flair for drama, when to avoid it and when to play it for all it's worth.

Column: Cubs battle White Sox on the South Side as Ken 'Hawk' Harrelson calls it a career

By Phil Rosenthal / Chicago Tribune / September 20, 2018

The Cubs find themselves in the catbird seat this weekend as they travel to the South Side for a three-game series against the White Sox.

They're virtually assured of a postseason spot, and with a 2½-game lead over the Brewers in the National League Central, the magic number is down to eight to clinch their third straight division title.

But anything can happen in the City Series, as we've seen since the inaugural games in 1997, and there's nothing left for the Sox but to try to spoil the Cubs' season.

Rick Renteria will be managing like it's Game 7 of the World Series, and Sox Park will be abuzz for this rare late-season Cubs-Sox affair, the latest since the actual World Series in October of 1906.

Adding to the drama is the Hawk Factor.

These will be the final calls by Sox broadcaster Ken "Hawk" Harrelson, ending an era of unabashed homerism that once was common among local announcers.

So sit back, relax and strap it down for what should be a typically wild City Series.

In honor of Harrelson's farewell, here's a Hawk-centric glance at the weekend's storylines:

Mercy!

The Cubs fired Renteria in 2014 with two years left on a three-year contract, replacing him with Joe Maddon, who has a World Series ring and is on the verge of taking them to their fourth straight postseason. Renteria was hired as the Sox's bench coach in 2016 and replaced Robin Ventura last year to start the rebuild. The Sox seemingly will avoid a 100-loss season but have lost 10 of their last 13. There is nothing the Sox would like more than for Renteria to get a series win over his former team, and expect the Sox to show no mercy if they get a lead. While Maddon and Renteria are cordial, the City Series hasn't been as fun since Ozzie Guillen and Lou Piniella departed as managers. In 2008, Guillen regaled the media with his hilarious Lou impersonation, mostly backing up while talking, swearing and complaining about the Cubs writers. When he did the impression for Piniella, the Cubs manager was asked what he thought. "If you hang around with Ozzie long enough, you don't think," Piniella replied.

Grab some bench

White Sox second baseman Yoan Moncada was made the so-called face of the organization after arriving in the Chris Sale deal, only to be eclipsed by a couple of new faces, Michael Kopech and Eloy Jimenez, the former Cubs prospect. Back in spring training we daydreamed of watching Kopech and Jimenez against

the Cubs in an important series in late September. But when we awoke, Kopech had reconstructive elbow surgery after only four starts, and Jimenez never got the call-up, leaving the focus on Moncada, who is hitting .228 going into Thursday night's game in Cleveland and leading the majors with 205 strikeouts. Moncada should be able to avoid the all-time record of 223 strikeouts, set by Mark Reynolds in 2009. But if he's within two or three going into the final game of the season, it'll be interesting to see if Renteria lets him grab some bench to avoid tying or breaking the dubious mark. Sox hitters also lead the majors with 1,473 strikeouts (as of Thursday) and should be able to avoid the record of 1,571 strikeouts, set last season by the Brewers.

Yaz was...

"The greatest ballplayer who ever lived, in fact or fiction." That, of course, was Harrelson's description of Carl Yastrzemski, his former Red Sox teammate, whose name has been dropped on White Sox broadcasts a few hundred times over the decades. Yaz won the batting title in 1968 with a .301 average, the lowest in history. Cubs veteran Ben Zobrist is battling for the NL lead with a .312 average, third behind Christian Yelich (.319) and Scooter Gennett (.317). Zobrist is hitting .352 since the All-Star break but needs a strong finish to have a shot at the batting crown.

You gotta be bleeping me!

Harrelson's classic T-shirt-ready motto was aimed at umpire Mark Wegner, whom he claimed "knows nothing about the game of baseball" after Wegner ejected Sox starter Jose Quintana in 2012 for allegedly throwing at a Rays hitter. Former Commissioner Bud Selig and Sox Chairman Jerry Reinsdorf both reprimanded Harrelson afterward. Quintana, who seldom got run support with the Sox, will face his old team Friday in the series opener at his old stomping grounds, squaring off against emerging Sox starter Reynaldo Lopez. Harrelson's favorite foil over the years was umpire Joe West, who is scheduled to work the City Series. Harrelson once called West a "joke" on the air and "an absolute disgrace to the umpiring profession." But Harrelson later made amends with West, and in his latest book, "Hawk," called him "one of the greatest umpires I've ever seen." Cubs and Sox fans don't agree on many things, but most will agree to disagree with Harrelson on this.

You can put it on the board ... Yes!

The Sox have shuffled their rotation to have ace left-hander Carlos Rodon pitch in Sunday's finale, which also will be Harrelson's final game. There's no doubt the organization would like Hawk to go out with a win, and Rodon is their best chance. Sox hitters would also like to give Harrelson a chance to go out with his signature home run call. Who will be the last one to "put it on the board" for Hawk? Daniel Palka is our pick to click, with seven home runs in September entering Thursday. Of course it would only be appropriate that the final game will be decided on a "Kansas City special." Then the ballgame, and Harrelson's illustrious career, will be "O-vah."

Series preview: Cubs at White Sox

By Mark Gonzalez / Chicago Tribune / September 20, 2018

All games on WSCR-AM 670 and WGN-AM 720.

Friday: 3:10 p.m. NBCSCH (Cubs), WGN-9 (Sox).

LH Jose Quintana (13-10, 3.95) vs. RH Reynaldo Lopez (6-9, 4.05).

Saturday: 6:10 p.m., NBCSCH (Cubs), WGN-9 (Sox).

LH Jon Lester (16-6, 3.43) vs. RH Lucas Giolito (10-11, 5.77).

Sunday: 1:10 p.m., ABC-7 (Cubs), NBCSCH (Sox).

RH Kyle Hendricks (12-11, 3.58) vs. LH Carlos Rodon (6-6, 3.30).

'Falling low' might be best thing for White Sox' Moncada, Renteria says

By Daryl Van Schouwen / Sun-Times / September 20, 2018

CLEVELAND – Yoan Moncada almost got through a game without striking out Thursday. After reaching base four times in his first five plate appearances in the White Sox' 5-4 win in 11 innings against the Indians Thursday, he whiffed for the 206th time with 10 games to play with two runners in scoring position and two outs in the 10th inning against submariner Adam Cimber.

That put the talented 23-year-old switch-hitting Sox second baseman within 17 strikeouts of record holder Mark Reynolds (223) of the Rockies in 2009 and 16 short of Adam Dunn's franchise mark set in 2012. It's a dubious distinction Moncada could do without but Sox manager Rick Renteria won't be going out of his way to prevent it by limiting Moncada's at-bats down the stretch.

If it stings a little, so be it.

"Sometimes allowing somebody to fall as low as they can possibly fall might be the biggest thing they get to move them forward," Renteria said Thursday. "Sometimes it's, 'We don't want to hurt his feelings.' No, by all means hurt his feelings. Let him appreciate the frustration of what that's about so he can appreciate how important it is to have a certain approach, or mindset, or sense of urgency."

In an era when increasing strikeouts are shrugged off as no big deal, Renteria has no use for the whiff. Give him a productive out, he says.

You might not know it watching the Sox, who lead the majors with 1,485 this season.

"All it tells me is we have more work to do," Renteria said.

A centerpiece of the Sox rebuild, Moncada had a productive night with a walk and three hits including a two-run double off the wall in the second against righty Josh Tomlin. The Sox won on Matt Davidson's RBI single in the 11th that scored Yolmer Sanchez (double). Hector Santiago (6-3) pitched three scoreless innings of relief as the Sox won for the first time in nine games at Progressive Field.

James Shields allowed homers on consecutive pitches to Francisco Lindor and Michael Brantley in the third but nothing else over six innings, and Omar Narvaez hit his ninth homer but the Sox bullpen gave up the lead in the eighth.

The Sox won for the first time after losing eight games at Progressive Field this season.

In his first full season, Moncada is one of eight players (12 times) to surpass 200 strikeouts, a list with some good current names on it like Aaron Judge and Giancarlo Stanton. Kris Bryant fanned 199 times as a rookie.

On the plus side, Moncada is not a chaser of bad pitches. He has a patient eye.

"The stats are the stats. I'm not sitting here going 'I'm leading the league in strikeouts,' " he said last week. "I'm just trying to focus on getting better."

Renteria said Moncada might one day laugh off the huge K total. And he doesn't care at all about the number, only Moncada's approach.

"Is he adjusting to moments and situations," Renteria said. "At times I see at, at times I don't. It's the inconsistency in which he's approaching those two strike at-bats that I'm more concerned.

"He knows he has to do a better job of putting balls in play, in situations where he might create a run, have a productive out.

"He had some really good at-bats from both sides of the plate tonight."

Renteria touts Moncada's 17 homers, 28 doubles, six triples, 11 stolen bases and 60 RBI. He has an improving .231/.309/.397 hitting line reaching base in 25 of his last 27 games, batting .294 in that stretch.

"Some people think this is a lost season for him but it is not," Renteria said. "He is going to grow and come out of this."

And deal with the strikeout record if it occurs.

"Remember, there are different ways of motivating people," Renteria said. "There's a pat on the butt and there's a kick on the butt. Maybe this will be a kick on the butt. But I'm not going to give up on that kid. No way. He has way too much talent. And one season is not making or breaking him."

Keeping cool in big moments making difference for White Sox' Lopez

By Daryl Van Schouwen / Sun-Times / September 20, 2018

CLEVELAND — White Sox right-hander Reynaldo Lopez says he has a handle on his engine that would run too hot in big moments, which is a good thing with the Cubs coming to Guaranteed Rate Field for three games starting Friday.

Lopez, 24, faces the North Siders for the first time Friday, and close to a full house is expected.

"I know there's going to be a big crowd; the ballpark might be sold out," he said. "And that makes it fun because you can feel the energy."

Lopez (6-9, 4.05 ERA) is 2-0 with an ERA of 0.67 and 28 strikeouts in 27 innings in his last four starts. In his last 10 outings, he's 2-1 with a 3.88 ERA. He said the biggest thing in his recent good run is dealing with surges of energy running through his veins and not "putting added pressure" on himself and reaching back for extra in two-strike counts.

"Even when I was pitching well, there were times when I would get overexcited when I'd get two strikes on a hitter," he said. "I would be super-hyped, and I'd try to finish off a batter, and it would backfire on me. Now it's just, keep it simple, execute every pitch and be in control of the whole game when I'm on the mound. Maintain the same level of intensity. That has been the big key."

The Sox won one of three games against the Cubs at Wrigley Field, and manager Rick Renteria tweaked his rotation to have Carlos Rodon, their ERA leader among starters, pitch Sunday.

The intensity figures to be running higher than usual with a big crowd of fans from both sides of town.

"What we need to do is play good baseball," said Renteria, who managed the Cubs in 2014. "If we play good baseball, we have a chance. And if we don't, we won't."

The Sox are trying to avoid 100 losses, and the Cubs are in first place in the National League Central, trying to hold off the Brewers with 10 games to go.

The Sox know they can be a spoiler.

"I see them like any other team," Lopez said. "As a pitcher, you have to. For me, it's just another game to perform my best."

Abreu doubtful

An infection on his right thigh likely will keep Jose Abreu out of the lineup against the Cubs. Abreu spent a night in a Cleveland hospital, watched a game at the team hotel and was at the ballpark for the series finale, although walking with a slight limp. Abreu is taking antibiotics for the infection, which stemmed from a hair follicle.

† Outfielder Nicky Delmonico was still dealing with a stiff neck, Renteria said, and Welington Castillo is nursing a sore left elbow. Both are day-to-day.

Tickets

Scattered seats were available for the Saturday and Sunday games against the Cubs, with sellouts expected on those days. As of Thursday afternoon, a few thousand seats remained for Friday.

Sports media: Hawk Harrelson's unique broadcasting will be missed

By Jeff Agrest / Sun-Times / September 20, 2018

It's almost perfect.

The only way Ken “Hawk” Harrelson’s last broadcast could be any better is if Brian Gorman and Mark Wegner were part of the umpiring crew and Phil Garner was managing the Cubs.

But we’ll take what we can get, which in this case is the final Crosstown Showdown game of the season, giving all of Chicago the chance to hear the legendary White Sox announcer together one last time.

NBC Sports Chicago will air the game, with pregame coverage beginning at 12:30 p.m. It would be interesting to know how many Cubs fans will click over from Ch. 7, even for a bit, to hear Hawk.

NBCSCH will make it worth their time. First off, reacquainting with analyst Steve Stone is always a treat (I like Jim Deshaies, but I’ll take Stoney every day of the week), and the network will have special guests stopping by throughout the game.

But the guest of honor — and master of ceremonies — is Hawk.

Though he’s a polarizing figure, even among Sox fans, he always has brought an entertainment value to his broadcasts that not a lot of announcers can. So many team broadcasts around baseball sound the same. Hawk’s call is distinctive.

People often overlook that Hawk is a very good broadcaster. They hear an opinion they find outlandish or focus on his Hawk-isms, and they tune out his broadcasting skills. He turns his call of the game into a discussion, aided by his experiences as a player. Not that a play-by-play man needs to have played the game, but it helps make Hawk’s broadcasts unique.

No one ranks players like Hawk does. Or at least few come up with the categories to rank players like he does. There are probably about as many as there are Hawk-isms. Who’s the best at hitting a pitch off his shoe tops or flipping a grounder to start a double play? Hawk could tell you. And how could you not believe him?

He takes fans on an emotional roller coaster, from boundless joy to silence (even not making a call says something). And, yes, such broadcasting can be homerish, but so what? Hawk isn’t talking to a national audience, he’s talking to Sox fans. Broadcasts with emotion are better than those without.

He’s old-school, which is good and bad. He dismisses analytics — in protest, he made up a nonsensical, nonanalytic metric that supposedly trumped them all called “TWTW,” the will to win — but his rants about retribution for hit batters are entertaining. So are his rants about umpires such as Gorman and Wegner (and Hawk was right about both; Google it).

Garner never was one of Hawk’s favorites (“Garner’s an a–hole,” he once told me). Hawk and former partner Tom Paciorek (a k a “Wimpy”) helped incite the Sox-Brewers rivalry of the 1990s, accusing the then-Brewers manager of directing his pitchers to throw at Sox hitters. There were brawls and bad feelings on both sides. How many announcers could do that?

The best part of Hawk is the Hawk-isms. They’re a part of Sox vernacular. Heck, they’ve crept into my speech. They burst out of my mouth at my son’s Little League games: Stretch! Stay fair! Where was it? They’re original, and they’re fun. And they will be spoken long after Hawk leaves the booth. How many announcers could do that, too?

Whatever you think of Hawk, there are a lot fewer broadcasters like him left. Don’t get me wrong, there are a lot of good ones. But there aren’t a lot of unique ones. Hawk is a lot of things, but the thing he is most is unique. And in a game that tends to suppress personality, that’s what I’ll miss most about him.

4D Replay comes to NBCSCH

NBCSCH will use 4D Replay technology for the first time next week for the Sox’ game Tuesday at Guaranteed Rate Field and the Cubs’ game Thursday at Wrigley Field. If you watched ESPN’s coverage of the Home Run Derby in July, you know it’s very cool.

It involves 100 4K cameras installed on the second level of Guaranteed Rate Field from first base to third base. They'll take pictures that are woven together, allowing a play to be viewed from one side of the diamond to the other. The cameras also can zoom in without distorting the picture.

• In other NBCSCH news, anchor/reporter Siera Santos announced on Twitter that Friday is her last day at the network.

Bears-Cardinals TV announcers

After playing before a national audience in their first two games, the Bears will be shown in only 14 percent of the country on Fox (3:25 p.m. kickoff). Calling the game are play-by-play voice Dick Stockton, analyst Mark Schlereth and sideline reporter Jennifer Hale.

The game is opposite Cowboys-Seahawks, the network's game of the week, which the rest of the country will see.

Scouting report White Sox vs. Cubs at Guaranteed Rate Field

By Scot Gregor / Daily Herald / September 20, 2018

TV:

NBC Sports Chicago, WGN Friday and Saturday; NBC Sports Chicago, ABC 7 Sunday

Radio:

WGN 720-AM, WSCR 670-AM

Pitching matchups:

The Sox's Reynaldo Lopez (6-9) vs. Jose Quintana (13-10) Friday at 3:10 p.m.; Lucas Giolito (10-11) vs. Jon Lester (16-6) Saturday at 6:10 p.m.; Carlos Rodon (6-6) vs. Kyle Hendricks (12-11) Sunday at 1:10 p.m.

About the White Sox:

This is their final homestand of the season. The Sox have lost five straight at Guaranteed Rate Field. The White Sox lost 2 of 3 to the Cubs at Wrigley Field in mid-May. They were outscored 19-6 in the two losses. Giolito beat the Cubs in the final game of the series, giving up 3 runs on 2 hits and 7 walks in 5 $\frac{2}{3}$ innings. Lopez has been the Sox's best starter down the stretch. Over his last 4 outings, the 24-year-old righty is 2-0 with a 0.67 ERA and 28 strikeouts in 27 innings. Jose Abreu missed the three-game series at Cleveland after being briefly hospitalized with a right thigh infection. Abreu was also sidelined from Aug. 22-Sept. 9 after having testicular torsion surgery. The White Sox hope to have their all-star first baseman back in the lineup this weekend.

About the Cubs:

The Cubs finally got a day off Thursday, after going 30 straight days (29) games without a day away from the park. They hold a 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ -game lead over the Brewers in the NL Central. The Cubs slipped to fifth in runs scored and to 11th in homers in the NL entering Thursday. They were first in batting average and on-base percentage while their ERA (3.65) was second in the league. MVP candidate Javier Baez has a line of .294/.329/.569 with 33 homers and 107 RBI. Ben Zobrist is in the hunt for the batting title, and his line is .312/.384/.452. Kyle Schwarber may see time at DH this weekend if his back has healed. He did not make the trip to Arizona. The Cubs are in Chicago for the rest of the regular season.

Next:

White Sox vs. Cleveland Indians at Guaranteed Rate Field, Monday-Wednesday; Cubs vs. Pittsburgh Pirates at Wrigley Field, Monday-Thursday

White Sox can soothe some of season's sting with strong showing against Cubs

By Scot Gregor / Daily Herald / September 20, 2018

Between all of the losses, injuries to key players (Michael Kopech, Jose Abreu, Avisail Garcia, Jake Burger, Dane Dunning, Luis Robert) throughout the organization, the near death of relief pitcher Danny Farquhar and the business over baseball decision on Eloy Jimenez, the White Sox have got to be relieved the 2018 regular season is nearing an end.

Not quite.

Between all of the losses, injuries to key players (Michael Kopech, Jose Abreu, Avisail Garcia, Jake Burger, Dane Dunning, Luis Robert) throughout the organization, the near death of relief pitcher Danny Farquhar and the business over baseball decision on Eloy Jimenez, the White Sox have got to be relieved the 2018 regular season is nearing an end.

Not quite.

Dollars and sense: The Lee Jenkins news is cool, but a Chicago sportswriter almost saved the Clippers 25 years ago

By Jon Greenberg / The Athletic / September 20, 2018

“Dollars and sense” is a regular column about sports media and sports business.

Former Sports Illustrated feature writer Lee Jenkins made waves this week with the announcement that he was leaving journalism to join the front office of the Los Angeles Clippers as the executive director of research and identity.

You might have read about it on Twitter. I, for one, would love to read the internal profile he writes about future Clipper Jimmy Butler.

Jenkins’ new gig seems to be a new-age way of looking at scouting. In an interview with the Washington Post’s Ben Strauss, Clippers president Lawrence Frank said, “The reality is someone who’s been in basketball versus a journalist will attack a problem from different perspectives. If you want different thoughts and want to avoid an echo chamber and avoid group-think, you have to have people come from different perspectives.”

This idea isn’t that crazy. Plenty of journalists have gone to front office jobs since pro sports began. As Strauss wrote, recent high-profile pen-to-pros include Jenkins’ fellow SI scribe Luke Winn (Toronto), John Hollinger (ESPN to Memphis) and Chris Snow (Boston Globe to Minnesota Wild/Calgary Flames).

The difference is, those guys are analytic wonks. Jenkins is a feature writer who specializes in getting to know athletes on a deeper level. Interviewing and researching are skills the Clippers are trying to utilize in their scouting. That’s not that unconventional either, by modern standards anyway. The Cubs’ scouting process uses a lot of techniques the Clippers seem interested in to find the right kind of athletes.

But while Jenkins got all of the love this week, he isn’t the first NBA insider the Clippers have tried to hire for their basketball operations department.

That would be Chicago’s own Sam Smith, the Monday morning general manager and maestro of the trade column, who was once almost the assistant general manager to Elgin Baylor.

It almost happened in 1994 thanks to Smith’s unlikely friendship with infamous Clippers owner Donald Sterling.

Before I delve into the story, let’s make a few things clear. Smith said he never heard anything racist come out of Sterling’s mouth during their occasional dinners or courtside conversations. By the sad end of Sterling’s misbegotten ownership run, Smith said the two hadn’t spoken in years.

Smith is a world-class storyteller in media rooms, but he's not a very good self-promoter (Buy his book!). Somehow, I convinced him to re-share the details of this story, which he told me one night years ago at the United Center. It's certainly topical given Jenkins' news.

Back in the day, Smith was a beat guy trying to get sources and Sterling was an owner who loved attention. It was a perfect match. What writer wouldn't have wanted to spend time around a character like Sterling?

"I was covering the beat and I kind of got to know the owners, because I always felt they knew what was going on," Smith told me in a phone conversation. "I had a business background and I could talk to these guys. I majored in business and worked in business before I got in journalism. So I got to know Sterling. He loved media attention. In L.A., he was kind of considered a buffoon, but he was from Chicago and when Chicago would go to L.A., he'd be sitting courtside and I'd go talk to him."

These conversations resulted in post-game dinner invitations. Since it wasn't like Smith was going to hit the clubs in his sweater vests and saddle shoes, he would go to diners and delis (yes, diners and delis) with Sterling and his wife and hang out at their house.

"I think he owned Cary Grant's old house in Beverly Hills," Smith said. "He was very proud of it."

They mostly ate together, though occasionally there were bigger group outings. Smith remembers a dinner with Pia Zadora, her then-husband Israeli businessman Meshulam Riklis, and Frank Sinatra's agent.

"My only brush with B-list Hollywood fame," Smith said.

So why would Sterling want to hire Smith?

Well, if you read Smith in his Chicago Tribune days, you remember that he was ESPN's Trade Machine before it existed. His Monday morning column was reason enough to buy the paper. So Smith would pepper Sterling with trade ideas during these dinners and conversations.

"You know me, I've got a million trades I'm working on," he said. "I'm pumping him like, 'You've got this guy, you've got that guy.' Most owners don't really know the league. They know their team. They don't know basketball. They're business guys."

Smith gave Sterling an education on the league and he said Sterling would tell him, "I want to win. I don't know how to do it."

"So I'd give him my crazy scenarios," Smith said.

Fast-forward to the 1994 All-Star Game in Minneapolis, when Smith was the newspaper's NBA writer. This was after "The Jordan Rules" came out.

"(Sterling) called me before the game and said 'I want to talk to you that weekend,'" Smith said.

Smith met with him and the owner said he wanted Smith to join the front office to work with Baylor, his beleaguered general manager.

"He said, 'I like your ideas and I want to be more aggressive,'" Smith said.

At that time, Smith said he remembers being uneasy at the paper. This was around the time the Tribune bosses brought in a new sports editor and changes were afoot.

Smith, who's not exactly a career climber, was intrigued and met with Sterling in Minneapolis. After talking over some things, Sterling told Smith to meet with Baylor to see how they could work together. Smith assured the NBA legend he wasn't out for his job, but rather he wanted to work with him and see if some of his wacky trade ideas could succeed in real life.

“Elgin,” Smith said with a chuckle, “was not happy about it.”

You might remember that was the All-Star Game in which Scottie Pippen won the MVP. Despite his ascent that year, Pippen wasn't happy with the Bulls organization (shocker) and Smith remembers him putting on a Phoenix jersey (Kevin Johnson was on the West team) after the game and joking he could play for the Suns.

Smith imagined trading for Pippen in his new job with the Clippers. “Hey Scottie, you want to play in L.A.? I think I can help.” Now that would've been a story.

But alas, Smith turned down the offer and the big pay bump (albeit with little job security). He wound up winning the Curt Gowdy Award in 2012, which is the journalist's way into the Hall of Fame.

“My dream was being a journalist, not working for a team,” he said. “In journalism, I could still make all my trades. With a team, you can't.”

Of course, Smith kind of does work for an NBA team now. He's been with the Bulls, as an independent contractor for their website, since he broke with the Tribune in 2008. He certainly understands why Jenkins made this move, given the tenuousness of the industry.

“I feel good when any journalist lands somewhere they find security,” he said. “Good for him.”

Jenkins might find success with Steve Ballmer's Clippers, but will he be able to say he ate dinner with Pia Zadora? Advantage Smith.

So I wrote another media column this week about the March and July changes at The Score. It's definitely overdone by me at this point, but I've wanted to interview Jason Goff since everything happened. We've traded direct messages about meeting up, but couldn't get it together until this Monday.

I transcribed the entire hour-and-change interview and wrote up a very long column. The reaction, both on Twitter and through our metrics, has been incredible. No one can say Goff doesn't move the meter.

Here a few quotes that didn't make it in the story:

On finding out about the moves before he met with his bosses

“I knew what the deal was at that time,” he said. “I knew they were going to let me go three days before they let me go. I found out from somebody else in the business about the changes they were going with. I actually found out during a Cubs game and I had to go back on the air. It was the day of the Jarvis Landry trade. I had to go back on air for the final hour just be the pro. That's why they don't want to tell radio people they're going off the air because it'll be a funeral for a week or two week or whatever the contract is.”

Interestingly enough, that happened to Brian Hanley, after it was announced they were replacing him on July 3. I believe the delay was caused by them working out a contract with David Haugh, but it was still surprising. Hanley actually did two days of shows before Bulls writer Joe Cowley mentioned the news on the air. He finished up the month, amazingly enough, and had a tearful goodbye, the kind you almost never get on sports radio.

On Jemele Hill getting her money

“Jemele Hill is the fucking (Darrelle) Revis of our industry,” he said. “She got every bit of her money. Every dime. All these people talking shit about Jemele, ‘Aw, you don't have a gig.’ Have you seen Jemele's Instagram the last two months? Jemele has been in every exotic location she wants to be in. She got her dough.”

This was in relation to two topics we discussed: Goff getting his contract voided because he wasn't on air for 30 days and that critics were harping on Hill, who recently parted with ESPN, for being too "political." In truth, that tag had to do with a few anti-Trump and NFL tweets — far fewer than the average loud, liberal beat writer for a newspaper or website — not the content of her actual job.

On the idea of separating sports talk radio from everyday life issues

"That's the thing, man," he said. "The biggest problem I have with the entire situation, whether it's me or somebody else, it's so insulting to the listener. You have so many people, men and women, out here who don't have similar experiences who just appreciate conversation that isn't familiar every once in awhile. That's what this whole thing was about, connection, to me. So in the end, if you got the same voice, and I'm not even talking about race or anything like that, if it's the same voice over and over again, your listeners are going to go somewhere else."

On possibly staying at The Score after the move

"In a different capacity, I could've still been with The Score," he said. "I got the paperwork at home to prove it. But no, you told me that who I am is not the route you want to go anymore. Which is cool. That's fine. I can dig it. I didn't think this was the end for me, even though in the moment it felt like the end. I had to get through it, you know?"

On Chicago sports radio not serving its black fan base

"I've asked about doing South Side remotes north of 115th St.," he said. "I've asked about servicing that audience. It's kind of like the NFL stuff. 'The NFL numbers are down!' You really think that's all white people, huh? If you look at any business magazine, the most loyal consumer in any marketplace, even when the product is shitty, unfortunately, are people of color because once we get invested in something, we have that buy-in. We want it to succeed."

(I started that conversation because I've noticed a very loyal black and Latino audience for sports talk radio in Chicago.)

On Score stories, past and present, that will remain untold

"This is only half the shit that happened."

Quotes like these are why I love writing about sports radio.

NBC Sports Chicago White Sox reporter and host Siera Santos is leaving the station. I don't know her as well as I should, because I'm not on the South Side as much as I used to be, but I've always found her to be very good on camera while also engaging and funny in person. She's also a real asset to the station because she's bilingual and covers a team full of native Spanish speakers. Hopefully, wherever she goes next will be a step up.

It's Cubs-White Sox weekend, and while we won't get Eloy Jiménez hitting dingers against his old organization, it's surreal this is Hawk Harrelson's last series. Hopefully he'll do yet another press availability before his final game Sunday and retell the same yarns he's been spinning for years. If the Sox sweep the Cubs, which is very unlikely, I'd like to imagine he just flies out of the booth like the final scene of "Birdman," as Steve Stone looks on in wonder.

Don't let Cubs-Sox distract you from the Fall Classic(s): Instructional and Arizona Fall leagues

By James Fegan / The Athletic / September 20, 2018

This series really could have had a lot of juice.

Just a month ago, the White Sox were playing their best ball of the season, in the middle of a stretch that saw them win five straight series, capped off by taking two of three in Yankee Stadium and splitting a four-game set with Boston. Better yet, there was optimism back then that Eloy Jiménez was coming soon.

Now the White Sox are likely without José Abreu, who has been beset by unusual maladies below the belt, and definitely without Michael Kopech until 2020. Even Welington Castillo, Nicky Delmonico and Leury García's absences are likely to be felt in terms of their ability to spoil the Cubs' division-clinching plans, and send their fans into the offseason with a taut battle against one of their most hated rivals. Also notably absent will be full, pain-free function of Avisail García's right knee, and of course, Jiménez.

As sportswriters, we're constantly coming down with outbreaks of "The Team Should Do This Thing Tailored to My Personal Interest Level" disease, but at this point a crosstown showdown with a packed house and playoff implications at hand feels theoretical as the White Sox end their season on schedule for the 10th-straight year, and with little to rock the apple cart as they do. Rick Hahn has repeatedly said the White Sox will only prioritize the best long-term plan for the team, which obviously doesn't include jazzing up a late-September matchup with the Cubs for the paying customers who are holding up through the lean years.

That said, I don't actually think it's a good idea to call up Dylan Cease to pop out of the bullpen as a surprise this weekend, WWE-style. They do need to add him to the 40-man this offseason, though.

Even though the White Sox could officially duck 100 losses and win the Crosstown Cup with a sweep this weekend, it won't quite move the needle like, for example, Arizona Fall League. So here's a rundown of the big prospect names who will be present at instructional league and the AFL and what questions they can answer in October.

Dane Dunning: He's not actually on the instructional league roster, but rehabbing his elbow sprain from late June at the White Sox complex in Glendale. Hahn mentioned innings in the Arizona Fall League as a possibility, but the question is whether he can get himself set for a normal offseason. That plan seemed to work out fine for Dylan Cease last fall, and testing Dunning's elbow in games would be much more for assessing health than scrutinizing any of his innings for performance.

Luis Robert: Where's the power? Scouts have mostly encouraged holding off until next year before raising the alarm about the 21-year-old center fielder's slow acclimation, but despite his professional experience in Cuba, he struggled mightily in High-A Winston-Salem (.244/.317/.309 in 32 games). He obviously had plenty of good excuses for being rusty with his most standout tool during the month of action he got after recovering from his second thumb sprain, but if it's going to take a lot of sustained action to start looking like himself, that only raises the anxiety about his early tendency to accumulate nagging injuries. The Arizona Fall League is an insane offensive environment, so what better place to run into some balls and ease some concerns about his tools playing in games going into the winter?

Zack Burdi: Is the stuff back yet? There's no panic if it isn't yet at this stage in his rehab, but early reports had his velocity still working its way up to old heights, and his seven outings in the AZL read a lot more like a pitcher shaking off a year of rust than Zack Burdi at the height of his powers working against complex league hitters. Also, has his poker face gotten any better?

Nick Madrigal: Mostly it will be interesting to see him get some time at shortstop, since he saw all of one game there in his debut season. Luis Curbelo and Laz Rivera are both legit prospects, but not quite the guys who are going to push Madrigal to second if the Sox were really eager to see him at short. Another question would be how he's adjusted to how professional pitchers have tried to exploit his aggressive approach. Also, does he believe in days off? What a marathon season for the 21-year-old.

Luis Basabe: The White Sox have an enormous outfield crunch, so absolutely anything the still just 22-year-old Basabe could do in the AFL to prove himself ready for Triple-A would make the math a lot easier for the organization in April. He held his own in Double-A at a young age (.251/.340/.394, 111 wRC+ with a 28.1 percent strikeout rate) and probably ended the season on a more encouraging note than Alex Call and Joel Booker.

Luis González: Guys who spent most of the season looking like they belonged in Double-A usually aren't common in instructional league, so the big question will be what he's working on. González's instructional league experience last year was heavily based in working with Aaron Rowand on his defense in center field. How the Sox figure out opportunities for Call, Booker, Basabe, González, Robert, Blake Rutherford and Micker Adolfo is beyond me, but at least this Luis has put himself at the top of the list with his numbers.

Steele Walker: Thanks to an oblique pull, his professional debut came after a long layoff and his numbers bore that out, especially upon his arrival to Low-A Kannapolis (.186/.246/.310 in 31 games). The second-round pick didn't seem too concerned about the slow start, but it would be nice to see him get rolling to set the expectations for him for 2019.

Lightning round

College starters whose innings were restricted down the stretch: Lincoln Henzman (last year's fourth-round pick, but a former closer without a long track record of starting), Konnor Pilkington (third-round pick this year and anchor of a Mississippi State rotation that made a deep run) and Jonathan Stiever (fifth-round pick who was kept to short outings but missed bats), Codi Heuer (sixth-round pick), Jason Bilous (13th-rounder).

Toolsy high school picks from this year: Bryce Bush (As a 33rd-rounder, it's shocking he signed, let alone dominated complex league and held his own in Great Falls), Lency Delgado (a fourth-round pick who is suddenly the less well-known high school third baseman in the system), Cabera Weaver (seventh-rounder who is very fast).

International-signing, middle-infield prospects who are starting to make some noise: Amado Nuñez (the former top-30 July 2 signing was a dominant offensive force in Great Falls' championship run and is still only 20), Lenyn Sosa (Born in the year 2000 and doesn't strike out, which is neat).

Others to watch: Laz Rivera (older than the competition he faced this year, so AFL action is a good way to make up for lost time), Zach Thompson (his breakthrough as a reliever will certainly get tested against AFL bats), Luis Curbelo (struggled mightily in his first taste of full season ball but only 21), Wil Kincanon (local kid who throws hard), Yeyson Yrizarri (still very toolsy even though his playing time dried up in Winston-Salem), Corey Zangari (if his wrist is healed, he could show off his power stroke), Hunter Schryver (lefty reliever acquired for IFA bonus pool room and succeeded in his short time in Winston-Salem).

Rosenthal: Tension exists as MLB, teams and players look for solutions to offensive and embarrassing social media posts

By Ken Rosenthal / The Athletic / September 20, 2018

Shortly after the revelation of offensive tweets by White Sox right-hander Michael Kopech last month, Cubs left-hander Jon Lester took to Twitter to urge players to "please spend the five minutes it takes to scrub your account of anything you wouldn't want plastered next to your face on the front page of a newspaper."

Unbeknownst to Lester, Kopech actually had cleaned up his account, to no avail. On Aug. 21, following his major-league debut, Kopech's racist and homophobic tweets from 2013, when he was a 17-year-old high-school senior in Mount Pleasant, Texas, surfaced anyway.

"He had deleted those tweets ... but somebody had screen-shotted them," says Scott Reifert, the White Sox's vice president of communications. "When, where, how those were made public was dictated by somebody else."

"Michael then had to stand up and own it and be responsible for it and apologize. And he did that. But that stuff is out there, and as we've told guys for years, it's never really gone, it doesn't always disappear."

The lesson is clear: The dredging up of insensitive tweets from major-leaguers is not likely to end with the examples of Kopech and three others who faced similar embarrassment over a 12-day period in late July – Brewers All-Star reliever Josh Hader, Nationals shortstop Trea Turner and Braves left-hander Sean Newcomb.

Kopech's experience — a haunting release of screenshots revealing intolerance through old tweets — easily might expand to other young players who grew up in the age of social media. As players, agents, clubs and Major League Baseball deal with their new reality, they are taking steps to address past oversights and mistakes while understanding that prejudice is not exclusive to baseball, nor a problem that can be totally erased.

Even as club and league officials express the hope that the unsettling events of the summer will serve as “teachable moments,” a certain tension exists within the sport, from those bracing for the next exposure of ill-advised social-media posts to players who are unsure how they would react to a teammate who had expressed bigotry.

“Granted, those were all tweets from some years ago,” says Rays outfielder Tommy Pham, who is black. “But 10 or so years ago, I wasn't tweeting racist epithets. I would definitely look at (such teammates) differently, especially being a black man and having to come through this world as a black man. It's something they won't ever know anything about.”

Baseball is full of players from different nationalities, backgrounds and cultures – 29 percent of the players on opening-day 25-man rosters and inactive lists, representing a record 21 countries and territories, were born outside the U.S. The league in recent years has worked aggressively to promote diversity and tolerance, twice promoting and expanding the responsibilities of Billy Bean, the only living openly gay former or current player, since naming him its ambassador of inclusion in 2014. The outbreak of old, offensive tweets reinforced to the league the importance of its programs and helped shape the approach of a new initiative for prospects in the upcoming Arizona Fall League.

“The harm is done. It's out there. At this point, the players can only apologize and try to make amends,” says Dan Halem, MLB's deputy commissioner for baseball administration.

“Going forward, on this issue in particular – sensitivity and acceptance of others – we've been very focused on educating our players led by the efforts of Billy Bean and others. The awareness certainly is heightened. It's our job to do everything possible to both prevent unfortunate incidents from happening and to create a clubhouse culture in which all players feel welcome and comfortable.”

The potential of Twitter to disrupt such efforts caught many in baseball by surprise. A New York Times story in November 2013 detailed how colleges tracked the social-media mentions of applicants and noted that “in the business realm, employers now vet the online reputations of job candidates as a matter of course.” A number of teams by then were checking certain social-media platforms when investigating the backgrounds of prospective draft picks and trade candidates. But when it came to Twitter, said one executive who spoke on the condition of anonymity, “We were just too stupid to understand it already had overtaken everything. We were 10 years behind.”

Hader was the Orioles' 19th-round pick in 2012. Turner was the 13th overall pick by the Padres in 2014, while Newcomb went to the Angels at No. 15 and Kopech to the Red Sox at No. 33 in that same draft. Executives who worked for those teams at the time said they were not aware of the players' tweets before the draft.

So much changed, so quickly: In the wake of this summer's events, some agents and clubs are advising players to delete their previous Twitter accounts and start new ones after signing their first professional contracts. Clubs, augmenting the training players receive from MLB, are expanding their quests to educate players on the effects of social media and values of their respective organizations.

Perhaps baseball can change certain players' attitudes. Undoing the damage created by harmful words, even those uttered by teenagers before they were professionals, is another matter.

Kopech, Hader, Turner and Newcomb, all of whom are white, were between the ages of 17 and 19 when they authored their offensive tweets. All apologized for their actions, and their teammates who spoke publicly mostly expressed forgiveness, with Brewers center fielder Lorenzo Cain, who is black, responding to Hader's tweets by saying, "We all said some crazy stuff when we're young."

Some players on other clubs agree, saying they form judgments about teammates over the course of the eight months they are together, not from tweets that might have been little more than indiscreet teenage banter. Others, though, take a more pointed view, saying ugly tweets from a teammate's past might affect relationships between players.

Pirates right-hander Chris Archer, who was adopted by his white maternal grandparents when he was 2 but considers himself African-American, falls into the latter category, saying he viewed Hader's comments as the harshest of the group.

Archer emphasizes he does not know Hader and does not want to come off as critical, but adds, "It's something society is more sensitive to nowadays. It's something that being an African-American in the game of baseball, the percentages are so low" — 7.8 percent on opening-day rosters and inactive lists, according to USA Today — "I'm sensitive to it as well."

"If I was teammates with Hader, it would have to be more than words, saying he was sorry. He would have to show me with actions — a lot of actions — that is not who he is anymore," Archer says. "It's hard to say that's not who he was because only someone who has those thoughts ingrained in them would say that. Is that who he is now? I don't know. If I was his teammate, there wouldn't be any drama. There would be no problem. But I would distance myself. It would be hard to trust him, without a doubt."

Pham expresses similar sentiments, saying he would respect and work with a teammate such as Hader but would limit his contact with him off the field. "I probably wouldn't be texting him or saying, 'What's up?' to him," Pham says. "That's how my relationship would change."

Archer says people can evolve — "I know that first-hand" — and acknowledges saying politically incorrect things when he was younger. The difference, he says, was that he did not speak with "actual hatred in my heart."

Hader, though, offered a similar explanation for his old tweets, saying the posts — which included misogynistic and threatening remarks as well as racist and homophobic ones — did not reflect his current beliefs and stemmed from being, "young, immature and stupid."

"Right. That's the thing. I don't know the guy," Archer says. "But something about what he was saying was, in my opinion, coming from a place that was not innocent."

Would Archer have held a different view had he been Hader's teammate? Perhaps, considering Cain's response to reporters immediately after news of Hader's tweets broke at the All-Star Game, and the comments of another Brewers player, first baseman Jesus Aguilar, on Twitter the next day.

Some rival African-American players, meanwhile, are more forgiving of Hader and the others without dismissing the concerns raised by their tweets.

"For us to hold something against a young guy like that is hard," Indians outfielder Rajai Davis says. "Kids are going to do childish things — they're kids. And they're going to say childish things as well. We as a society look at those things and we want to blow those kinds of things up. But those are real issues. And that's the reason it's being blown up. These are real issues in America."

And yet, Davis adds, “I am under the impression that a guy can always change. Guys change all the time. I like to talk with a guy before I make any judgments. I don’t like to listen to what he said or she said. I have a different perspective than a lot of people. I like to be open-minded and think the best of people first.”

The Los Angeles Dodgers’ Dave Roberts, the game’s only black manager, says he would have taken the same approach as Davis during his major-league playing career, which spanned from 1999 to 2008. As a manager, Roberts said he first would speak to the player before drawing any conclusions.

“I would just kind of see where his heart was at and hope — not even encourage, hope — that he would want to make a heartfelt apology and be responsible for his actions,” Roberts says.

Each of the players involved did just that, but apologizing was the least they could do. What baseball wants is for players to understand the difference between appropriate and inappropriate behavior — if not before they turn professional, then at least once they are working in the sport.

The NBA has it relatively easy. Each August, the league and its players’ union hold a Rookie Transition Program, inviting current and former players along with outside experts to stage presentations, panel discussions and interactive workshops for rookies on topics ranging from social media to nutrition and hydration.

Baseball has too many players in too many places to pull off such a event.

“We draft 1,200 players every year; obviously, not all of them sign,” says Paul Mifsud, MLB’s vice president and deputy general counsel of labor relations and player programs. “Then we sign over 800 foreign amateurs every year, most of whom are assigned to academies in the Dominican Republic. We have a potential shift of about 2,000 players every year coming in and out.”

And those are just on the edges.

The total number of players on 40-man rosters is 1,200, nearly three times as many as the 450 in the NBA. Add another 7,000 to 8,000 players of varying potential in the minors and, Mifsud says, “Finding a one-size-fits-all from a league perspective, to get in front of the players, is extremely challenging.”

Baseball, though, is trying, enhancing old programs and starting new ones. Two initiatives the sport began last year — “Ahead in the Count,” in English and “ARRIBA” in Spanish — give newly signed players the tools necessary to make informed decisions off the field in order to support their development on it, Mifsud says. ARRIBA is a Spanish acronym using words that translate to English as, “Acquiring resources to face unpredictable baseball challenges in Latin America.”

MLB officials based in New York and the Dominican Republic conduct “ARRIBA” in four-hour presentations at each of the major-league academies in the D.R., usually between April and July. (The league this year also added a first-year player and parent orientation for new signees at the MLB office in the Dominican.)

Many of the same officials direct “Ahead in the Count” at hotel conference rooms in Florida and Arizona during the fall instructional leagues, leading sessions in both English and Spanish for newly drafted and signed domestic players. Most clubs participate; the league prefers not to wait until spring training to begin educating players, but adjusts for a handful of clubs that do not participate in instructional league.

Inclusion is one topic. Social media is another. Each presentation in both countries, technology permitting, starts with a video from Bean that includes past missteps by players on social media. A series of racially insensitive tweets in September 2016 by former Mariners catcher Steve Clevinger is included, as is a disparaging tweet in October 2016 from Astros minor-league second baseman Brooks Marlow, who said “no lady” should comment on a baseball game, “(e)specially (ESPN’s Jessica) Mendoza.”

This year’s agenda also addresses the racially insensitive gesture Astros first baseman Yuli Gurriel, a native of Cuba, made toward former Dodgers pitcher Yu Darvish, a native of Japan, during last year’s World

Series. The idea, Mifsud says, is to demonstrate to Latin players that certain actions that might be acceptable in their own countries are not acceptable in the U.S.

Baseball's attempt to explain proper player conduct only begins with the initiation sessions in the D.R. and U.S. Similar subjects are also covered at the annual Rookie Career Development Program, in security presentations given to all major- and minor-league clubs and the new program "Prospects and Expectations" that will take place during the Arizona Fall League.

Teams generally send their top prospects to the AFL; about 60 percent of all the players in the league reach the majors, baseball officials say. The agenda of "Prospects and Expectations" will go beyond how to use Twitter, centering more on personal branding, Mifsud says. But the recent embarrassments players experienced on Twitter, starting with the release of Hader's old tweets at the All-Star Game, only strengthened baseball's resolve.

"It was something we were thinking about doing in June and July," Mifsud says. "When insensitive or offensive social-media posts by players from years ago started to become public after the All-Star Game, it cemented the approach we wanted to take. The curriculum is in the works right now and definitely is being informed by what has been happening."

Royals general manager Dayton Moore summarizes his team's message to players succinctly:

"Words written or spoken should be meant to inspire, to encourage, to tell the truth, to help people uncover blind spots."

The message might not be perfect — people might hold their own versions of truth and view blind spots differently. But the idea, Moore says, is for players to set positive examples on social media and in their other public interactions.

Among his peers, Moore is particularly passionate about developing players on and off the field, baseball officials say. The Royals, though, are not unique in their increasingly holistic approach. Most clubs reinforce MLB's messaging by offering social-media training among other life lessons, and not just once a year.

The White Sox, for example, provide guidance for players in spring training, following the draft, in instructional league and even at SoxFest, the team's winter convention. The Orioles, in the wake of this summer's incidents, are augmenting their current programs, according to Dan Duquette, the team's executive vice president of baseball operations.

"We're working on a curriculum we could present next year . . . working on educating players on the effects of social media, the norms and values of the organization, what we feel is important," Duquette says.

To Moore, those values start at the top.

"We don't expect to undo years and years — and, in fact, generation upon generation — of, shall we say, uninformed or poor behavior that makes the kid the product of their environment. We can't," Moore says. "But your leaders are the ones shaping your culture. Your leaders have to step up and say, 'This is what we expect. This is what words are meant to be.'"

"I will be the first to say I have said things, written things to people I care about, people I respect that I wish I didn't say or wish I wouldn't have written. When I do that, when I make that mistake as a man, I'm accountable. I ask for forgiveness. I apologize and ask them to accept my apology. I try to get better. And I move on."

Still, as Moore points out, a player's support system — his team, his league, even his agent — can do only so much.

The biggest learning curve for professional baseball players, Reifert says, occurs when they leave their relatively small social-media communities from junior high or high school — five, 10, even 50 friends — and start drawing much larger followings as employees of major-league organizations.

At that point, quoting an offensive song lyric or using other harmful language takes on a different context. Such comments, even though they are wrong, might be understood within a teenager's circle of friends. In a larger public forum, they do not escape notice — or rebuke.

"The audience is bigger," Reifert says. "It's the media. It's fans. It's fans from other teams. It's your agent. It's potential sponsors.

"That's the big thing we try to get guys to understand. If you're a rookie ball or A ball kid and I'm standing in the front of a room trying to explain that, I get where it doesn't necessarily resonate. But as you get closer and closer to the big leagues, it becomes more and more of a reality. That's where this summer has taught a really hard lesson to a lot of people."

Lester, after advising players on Twitter to scrub their accounts of offensive remarks, added, "Better yet, don't say stupid things in the first place."

In a perfect world for baseball, current major leaguers and aspiring players of all ages would not even think them.
