



### **WHITE SOX HEADLINES OF OCTOBER 18, 2018**

"Key 2018-19 free agents for all 30 MLB teams" ... Thomas Harrigan, Do-Hyough Park and Chad Thornburg, MLB.com

"Could Manny Machado's NLCS shenanigans impact White Sox potential free-agent pursuit?" ... Vinnie Duber, NBC Sports Chicago

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### **Key 2018-19 free agents for all 30 MLB teams**

By Thomas Harrigan, Do-Hyough Park and Chad Thornburg / MLB.com / October 17, 2018

An impressive collection of talent will hit the open market when free agency gets underway this offseason, and players are eligible to sign with a new team five days after the conclusion of the World Series. Here is a division-by-division breakdown of the key free agents for all 30 Major League clubs.

#### **NATIONAL LEAGUE EAST**

##### **Atlanta Braves**

Key free agents: RHP Brad Brach, 1B Lucas Duda, 3B Ryan Flaherty, OF Nick Markakis, C Rene Rivera, RHP Anibal Sanchez, C Kurt Suzuki, LHP Jonny Venters

Markakis was a valuable member of a youthful Braves club in 2018, providing veteran leadership and making the All-Star team for the first time in his career. Atlanta has a stellar farm system that is loaded with pitching prospects, which is one of the reasons why Sanchez is unlikely to be back after his impressive rebound campaign. But without an obvious replacement for Markakis in right field, the door remains open for the soon-to-be 35-year-old to return. Suzuki has formed a productive catching tandem with Tyler Flowers over the past two seasons, but the 35-year-old may be too expensive to bring back for a part-time role.

##### **Miami Marlins**

Key free agents: None

The Marlins' roster is replete with players who are at the early stages of their big league careers, putting them years away from free agency. After trading multiple big-name players last offseason, Miami will likely now look to deal veterans Starlin Castro and Martin Prado, as they are owed nearly \$27 million combined in 2019.

##### **New York Mets**

Key free agents: LHP Jerry Blevins, OF Austin Jackson, C Devin Mesoraco, RHP AJ Ramos, INF Jose Reyes

There's a chance the Mets won't bring back any of these players after they combined for -1.7 Wins Above Replacement in 2018, per FanGraphs. With Travis d'Arnaud, T.J. Rivera and Juan Lagares returning from injuries, the Mets have obvious replacements for Mesoraco, Reyes and Jackson next year. Blevins is more likely to be back than Ramos, whose recovery from right shoulder surgery is expected to extend into next June and possibly longer.

#### Philadelphia Phillies

Key free agents: 3B/OF Jose Bautista, INF Asdrubal Cabrera, LHP Aaron Loup, C Wilson Ramos

All four players on Philadelphia's list were acquired late in the 2018 campaign as the Phillies made a playoff push that ultimately fell short. Instead of bringing back Ramos, who is sure to fetch a sizable multi-year deal, the Phils may give 25-year-old Jorge Alfaro another chance to show he can handle starting duties behind the plate. Cabrera could be a fallback option if the Phillies are unable to land Manny Machado in free agency.

#### Washington Nationals

Key free agents: OF Bryce Harper, RHP Jeremy Hellickson, RHP Kelvin Herrera, RHP Greg Holland, 1B Mark Reynolds, C Matt Wieters

Harper will be one of the top free agents available this offseason, and the Nats will likely make a major push to keep him in Washington. The club might also be interested in bringing back Holland and Hellickson, but the two righties are sure to draw interest from other clubs after boosting their value with the Nats. Washington is expected to try to upgrade at the catcher spot, which could leave Wieters looking for a new home.

#### NL CENTRAL

##### Chicago Cubs

Key free agents: RHP Jesse Chavez, LHP Jorge De La Rosa, LHP Jaime Garcia (club option), LHP Cole Hamels (club option), OF Jason Heyward (can opt out of his contract), RHP Brandon Kintzler (club and player options), 2B Daniel Murphy, RHP Pedro Strop (club option), LHP Justin Wilson

The Cubs have many decisions to make this offseason, most notably regarding the \$20 million club option for Hamels, who was acquired from the Rangers at the non-waiver Trade Deadline and recorded a terrific 2.36 ERA over 12 starts. They also have a bevy of bullpen arms that are set to depart or have club options. The Cubs could try to retain Chavez and Strop, and Murphy could also be back (particularly given Addison Russell's suspension), as president of baseball operations Theo Epstein spoke highly of the second baseman's contributions after his acquisition from the Nationals.

##### Cincinnati Reds

Key free agents: RHP Matt Harvey

Cincinnati elected to keep Harvey at the non-waiver Trade Deadline instead of flipping him to a contender, and now face a decision about the right-hander, given that he has expressed openness to returning and the Reds will be seeking starting pitching depth this offseason. Outside of Harvey, the Reds don't have any key departures or options to worry about this winter, though Scooter Gennett and Billy Hamilton are due for free agency following the 2019 season.

##### Milwaukee Brewers

Key free agents: LHP Gio Gonzalez, OF Curtis Granderson, RHP Jeremy Jeffress (club option), LHP Dan Jennings, C Erik Kratz, RHP Jordan Lyles (club option), LHP Wade Miley, 3B Mike Moustakas (mutual option), IF Eric Sogard, RHP Joakim Soria (club option)

The Brewers have most of their pitching depth locked up beyond this season, with Gonzalez, an in-season acquisition, and Miley, who was initially signed to a Minor League contract before the season, the only two starters set for free agency this offseason. Soria, a key piece of the Brewers' bullpen in their playoff run, has a \$10 million team option for 2019, while closing option Jeffress has a much cheaper \$3.175 million team option. The 38-year-old Kratz and 37-year-old Granderson are also bound for free agency. Given their security all over the roster, the Brewers are set to contend again in 2019 even if they don't make a big offseason splash.

## Pittsburgh Pirates

Key free agents: IF/OF Josh Harrison (club option), IF Jung Ho Kang (club option), SS Jordy Mercer

After making a splash by trading for Chris Archer in 2018, the Pirates appear to be mostly set with their pitching staff but will be looking for a bat in the offseason, likely at shortstop, especially if they don't end up bringing Kang back after his late-season cameo. Even if they don't make a Manny Machado-sized splash at shortstop, the market is deep this offseason, with Jose Iglesias, Freddy Galvis and Adeiny Hechavarria among the names that will be in play. It seems unlikely that the Pirates will pick up Harrison's \$10.5 million option.

## St. Louis Cardinals

Key free agents: 1B Matt Adams, RHP Bud Norris, C Francisco Pena, RHP Tyson Ross

Adam Wainwright already avoided free agency by agreeing to a one-year deal to return for his 15th season with the Cardinals. Improving the bullpen to build around Jordan Hicks will be a priority for the Cardinals, especially with the departure of Norris, who provided stability at closer for much of the season. Though Adams likely won't be on the Cardinals' radar again, St. Louis is thought to be looking for an impact left-handed hitter, with needs at outfield and third base.

## NL WEST

### Arizona Diamondbacks

Key free agents: RHP Clay Buchholz, LHP Patrick Corbin, RHP Randall Delgado, 2B Daniel Descalso, LHP Jake Diekman, 3B Eduardo Escobar, 1B Paul Goldschmidt (club option), OF Jon Jay, C Jeff Mathis, OF A.J. Pollock, C Chris Stewart, OF Yasmany Tomas (player option)

The D-backs could lose two key contributors this winter, with Corbin and Pollock likely to exceed Arizona's price range, but Buchholz, Descalso and Mathis are strong candidates to return. Neither Goldschmidt nor Tomas is expected to hit the open market. The D-backs are sure to pick up Goldschmidt's \$14.5 million club option for 2019, and Tomas will undoubtedly exercise his player options for '19-20, valued at \$15.5 million next year and \$17 million in '20, after spending all of '18 in the Minors.

### Colorado Rockies

Key free agents: C Drew Butera, OF Carlos Gonzalez, OF Matt Holliday, 2B DJ LeMahieu, RHP Seunghwan Oh (club option), RHP Adam Ottavino, OF Gerardo Parra

The Rockies will have to decide whether they want to compete for LeMahieu this winter or if they're ready to turn the reins at second base over to one of their middle-infield prospects, Garrett Hampson and Brendan Rodgers. They also face decisions in the outfield, where Gonzalez, Parra and Holliday are impending free agents, and in the bullpen with Ottavino and Oh, who has a \$2.5 million option for 2019 with a \$250,000 buyout.

### Los Angeles Dodgers

Key free agents: RHP John Axford, 2B Brian Dozier, C Yasmani Grandal, RHP Daniel Hudson, LHP Clayton Kershaw (opt out), SS Manny Machado, RHP Ryan Madson, LHP Hyun-Jin Ryu

Machado is among the headliners in this year's star-studded free agent class, and longtime Dodgers ace Clayton Kershaw could add his name to the mix if he opts out of his contract. The Dodgers will try to retain Machado, whom they acquired from the Orioles at the non-waiver Trade Deadline, but they'll have stiff competition as he's likely to cash in for a big payday. The oft-injured Ryu posted a 1.97 ERA through 15 regular season starts in 2018 and pitched well in the playoffs to improve his stock heading into free agency.

### San Diego Padres

Key free agents: C A.J. Ellis, SS Freddy Galvis

The Padres' 2018 roster will remain mostly intact with only Galvis and Ellis entering free agency, and both are candidates to return. Ellis is less likely to be re-signed, however, with young catchers Austin Hedges and Francisco Mejia in the mix. San Diego may also let Galvis walk if he wants a multi-year deal, with Fernando Tatis Jr. (San Diego's No. 1 prospect, per MLB Pipeline) nearing big league readiness and Luis Urias (San Diego's No. 4 prospect) likely to take over as the club's starting second baseman in 2019.

#### San Francisco Giants

Key free agents: OF Gregor Blanco, RHP Madison Bumgarner (club option), LHP Derek Holland, C Nick Hundley, RHP Mark Melancon (can opt out of his contract), OF Hunter Pence, 3B Pablo Sandoval

The Giants are expected to pick up Bumgarner's \$12 million option, and Melancon is almost certainly staying put for the final two years of his four-year, \$62 million deal, but the club will likely part ways with veterans Pence and Blanco. The Giants may try bring back Holland, who enjoyed a bounceback campaign and anchored an injury-riddled Giants rotation in 2018, and Hundley, who capably backed up Buster Posey.

#### AMERICAN LEAGUE EAST

##### Baltimore Orioles

Key free agents: OF Adam Jones

The O's list has just one man on it, as they traded nearly every player on an expiring contract, including Manny Machado, Zach Britton and Brad Brach, during their 2018 roster purge. Baltimore would have dealt Jones as well, but he was unwilling to waive his 10-and-5 rights. Jones may be interested in returning, but he would likely need to accept a significantly reduced role as the Orioles look to the future.

##### Boston Red Sox

Key free agents: RHP Nathan Eovaldi, RHP Joe Kelly, RHP Craig Kimbrel, 2B Ian Kinsler, IF Eduardo Nunez (player option), 1B/OF Steve Pearce, 2B Brandon Phillips, LHP Drew Pomeranz, LHP David Price (can opt out of his contract), LHP Chris Sale (club option)

Even if the Red Sox pick up Chris Sale's \$15 million club option for 2019, which they likely will, and David Price doesn't opt out of the four years and \$127 million remaining on his contract, they still have a number of important players hitting free agency. Kimbrel is the biggest name among them, though it's unclear if Boston will be willing to hand out a big contract for a player who regressed some from '17 to '18 and was shaky in the playoffs. The Red Sox will probably look to re-sign Eovaldi, who excelled after joining the club in a July trade (3.33 ERA, 2.88 FIP).

##### New York Yankees

Key free agents: LHP Zach Britton, OF Brett Gardner (club option), LHP J.A. Happ, SS Adeiny Hechavarria, RHP Lance Lynn, OF Andrew McCutchen, RHP David Robertson, LHP CC Sabathia, 2B/OF Neil Walker

The Yankees have a busy offseason ahead of them, especially on the pitching side of the ledger. Even if prospect Justus Sheffield is ready to claim a rotation spot behind Luis Severino and Masahiro Tanaka, that still leaves two open starting jobs. Meanwhile, the Yankees' vaunted bullpen could lose two key pieces in Robertson and Britton. Gardner was New York's longest-tenured player in 2018, but the club may pass on his \$12.5 million club option (\$2 million buyout) after the veteran outfielder posted a .690 OPS this past season.

##### Tampa Bay Rays

Key free agents: OF Carlos Gomez, RHP Sergio Romo

Romo was an integral member of the Rays' pitching staff for much of the 2018 season, racking up 25 saves and making five appearances as an "opener." However, he recorded a 10.00 ERA in September and will be 36 years old on Opening Day in '19. The cost-conscious Rays may opt to move on and give an opportunity to a younger alternative. As for Gomez, the veteran outfielder is unlikely to be back after posting a .634 OPS over 118 games in 2018.

#### Toronto Blue Jays

Key free agents: RHP Tyler Clippard, RHP Marco Estrada, 1B Justin Smoak (club option), INF Yangervis Solarte (club option)

Much like Baltimore, Toronto dealt many impending free agents during the 2018 season, including Josh Donaldson, J.A. Happ, Steve Pearce, Curtis Granderson and John Axford. With Rowdy Tellez looking ready for an expanded role at first base, the Jays could pick up Smoak's reasonable \$8 million club option and then trade the veteran this offseason. Estrada is likely gone after recording a 5.27 ERA with a 4.97 FIP in 61 starts over the past two years, as the Blue Jays can likely get similar production from a younger and cheaper pitcher.

#### AL CENTRAL

##### Chicago White Sox

Key free agents: RHP Jeanmar Gomez, RHP Miguel Gonzalez, RHP Nate Jones (club option), LHP Hector Santiago, RHP James Shields (club option)

The White Sox are close to emerging from their rebuild, and the club could look for more pitching help this offseason, since Michael Kopech is now sidelined for 2019 after undergoing Tommy John surgery. They have a \$4.65 million option for Jones that they could exercise, but it seems unlikely that they'd exercise Shields' \$16 million club option.

##### Cleveland Indians

Key free agents: RHP Cody Allen, OF Michael Brantley, OF Melky Cabrera, RHP Carlos Carrasco (club option), OF Lonnie Chisenhall, OF Rajai Davis, 3B Josh Donaldson, OF Brandon Guyer (club option), LHP Andrew Miller, LHP Oliver Perez, IF Adam Rosales, RHP Josh Tomlin

Miller headlines a productive crop of prospective free agents departing Cleveland this season, with outfield and the bullpen being the two areas that stand to be hit hardest by the departures. Allen, Brantley and Miller are eligible for the \$17.9 million qualifying offer. The Indians do have some security in the bullpen with midseason acquisitions Brad Hand and Adam Cimber both controllable for several more seasons, but bolstering the relief corps will be an offseason priority for the Tribe, who got subpar seasons from both Allen and Miller in 2018. Outfield is also an area of need, especially if Brantley departs, with no clear-cut starter at any of the three spots entering the offseason.

##### Detroit Tigers

Key free agents: SS Jose Iglesias, LHP Francisco Liriano, C Jarrod Saltalamacchia

Iglesias, Liriano and the retiring Victor Martinez are the key departures for the rebuilding Tigers, who also dealt impending free agent Mike Fiers to the A's in August. The Tigers will likely be in the market for a shortstop, as they don't have an immediate heir lined up in the event of Iglesias' departure, and will likely look to add to the rotation.

##### Kansas City Royals

Key free agents: SS Alcides Escobar, RHP Jason Hammel (mutual option), RHP Wily Peralta (club option)

After trading Jon Jay, Lucas Duda, Kelvin Herrera and Mike Moustakas this season, the Royals figure to let Escobar walk, as Adalberto Mondesi is now their starting shortstop. The Royals will almost certainly pay a \$2 million buyout to get Hammel off the books instead of exercising his \$12 million mutual option for 2019, but they could bring back Peralta, their closer, on a cheaper \$3 million team option, especially since they'll likely be looking for bullpen help this offseason.

##### Minnesota Twins

Key free agents: RHP Matt Belisle, 2B Logan Forsythe, C Chris Gimenez, 1B/DH Joe Mauer, 1B/DH Logan Morrison (club option), RHP Ervin Santana (club option)

The most pressing offseason question for the Twins will be at first base with the possible departure of Mauer to either free agency or retirement and Morrison's disappointing performance in 2018, after which the Twins are not expected to pick up his \$8 million option for 2019. The departures of Forsythe, Brian Dozier (traded to Dodgers) and Eduardo Escobar (traded to D-backs) also leave openings in the middle infield for the Twins. The Twins need lots of help in the bullpen and could always use more starting depth, with Santana's option unlikely to be picked up.

#### AL WEST

##### Los Angeles Angels

Key free agents: RHP Jim Johnson, RHP Garrett Richards, RHP Junichi Tazawa, OF Chris Young, OF Eric Young Jr., RHP Blake Wood

The Angels will retain much of their core. Johnson will likely draw interest on the open market for clubs in need of dependable bullpen arms. Richards pitched well in 16 starts this season, but will be out of action until 2020 after undergoing Tommy John surgery. Young also suffered a season-ending injury (labral tears in both hips) but is expected to be ready for Spring Training.

##### Houston Astros

Key free agents: DH Evan Gattis, UTIL Marwin Gonzalez, LHP Dallas Keuchel, C Martin Maldonado, RHP Charlie Morton, LHP Tony Sipp

Keuchel figures to be one of the most sought-after starting pitchers on the market this winter. The 2015 AL Cy Young Award winner has spent his entire career with the Astros, but could anchor another team's staff in 2019. Morton also figures to draw considerable interest coming off his first All-Star season at age 34. Maldonado will be part of a deep class of veteran backstops.

##### Oakland A's

Key free agents: LHP Brett Anderson, RHP Trevor Cahill, RHP Jeurys Familia, RHP Edwin Jackson, OF Matt Joyce, 2B Jed Lowrie, C Jonathan Lucroy

The A's looming free agents are headlined by a pair of veterans in Lucroy and Lowrie. Lucroy is more likely to return with Franklin Barreto ready to take over as Oakland's everyday second baseman. Joyce is likely the odd man out in a crowded A's outfield. It's unclear if the A's will try to retain any of their veteran starting pitchers.

##### Seattle Mariners

Key free agents: 2B Gordon Beckham, DH Nelson Cruz, LHP Zach Duke, RHP Hisashi Iwakuma, OF Cameron Maybin, RHP David Phelps, UTIL Andrew Romine, OF Denard Span (mutual option), RHP Adam Warren

Cruz represents the biggest free agent choice for the Mariners this winter. Both sides have expressed interest in a reunion, but Seattle must decide whether it wants to commit to a multi-year deal with the 38-year-old slugger or utilize that money elsewhere, with needs on the pitching staff and in center field. Span has a \$12 million mutual option with a \$4 million buyout. Iwakuma left the Mariners in September to pursue pitching opportunities in Japan.

##### Texas Rangers

Key free agents: SS Elvis Andrus (can opt out of his contract), 3B Adrian Beltre, C Robinson Chirinos (club option), RHP Bartolo Colon, RHP Doug Fister (club option), RHP Yovani Gallardo, LHP Matt Moore (club option), LHP Martin Perez (club option)

The Rangers are awaiting Beltre's decision on his baseball future, and if the third baseman opts to continue playing, they could re-sign him. Andrus could opt out of his contract, leaving four years and \$58 million on the table, but is more likely to stay put. The Rangers will likely pick up Chirinos' option, and decline their

options on Moore and Fister. Perez's option is for \$7.5 million and it remains to be seen what Texas will do with the left-hander coming off a down year. Colon and Gallardo aren't expected to return.

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## Could Manny Machado's NLCS shenanigans impact White Sox potential free-agent pursuit?

By Vinnie Duber / NBC Sports Chicago / October 17, 2018

"It's a dirty play by a dirty player."

That was Christian Yelich, the all-but-sure-to-be NL MVP, describing Manny Machado, who's about to become one of the best-paid players in baseball history, after Game 4 of the NLCS, a game in which Machado once again grabbed headlines for all the wrong reasons.

Joe Trezza

✓

@JoeTrezza

Christian Yelich speaks for the Brewers clubhouse regarding the Manny Machado incident. He wasn't happy. #Brewers #NLCS

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Machado's Los Angeles Dodgers and Yelich's Milwaukee Brewers have played four games in this NLCS, and after three of them, the focus has been on Machado. Not because of his bat or his glove but because of lack of hustle and certain methods on the base paths that weren't exactly on the up and up.

After Game 2, he was criticized for not hustling on a ground ball to shortstop. In something straight out of a public-relations person's nightmare, he defended himself by saying that hustling really isn't his cup of tea. During Game 3, he twice attempted to break up double plays by interfering at second base and was, upon review, busted for it the second time. In extra innings in Game 4, he appeared to intentionally drag his leg across Jesus Aguilar's at first base. That play cleared the benches, got Machado called "dirty" in the Brewers' clubhouse and earned him the reputation of postseason villain.

And so Machado's impending free agency gets to be discussed in a brand new light. There's now more baggage attached to the 26-year-old superstar with a fantastic bat and a stellar glove.

The question is: Will the White Sox, one of many teams that could be mulling a contract offer worth hundreds of millions of dollars, care?

As much as it's talked about building a perennial contender of the future by developing the on-field skills of their fleet of highly touted prospects, the White Sox brain trust has discussed developing a culture, a way of doing things, to go along with all that talent and all that skill. Unsurprisingly that conversation has focused on the oft-used phrase of "doing things the right way."

Does what Machado has been doing count as "doing things the right way"? It seems easy to assess that it doesn't. It's far more difficult to determine whether it will end up making a difference or not.

Not hustling is one of Rick Renteria's biggest bugaboos. He sat down multiple players on multiple occasions throughout the 2018 season — starting with Avisail Garcia in a spring training game and including a veteran like Wellington Castillo as well as a young star like Tim Anderson — for not running to first base on pop ups and line outs and ground outs. Would Renteria's tune suddenly change if Machado and his preference for not hustling arrived on the South Side in what would surely be the biggest free-agent deal in club history?

Renteria got fired up over the issue at the end of July, when he benched Anderson for not hustling on what the shortstop believed was a line out.

"We tell these guys, don't assume anything. ... It's as simple as that, and he understands it. He knows it. We've talked about it. He comes out of the box, he doesn't stand there. But we just reiterated to make sure that you allow the umpires to make the calls and you allow the other clubs to go ahead and ask for reviews. We run."

But asked about not running out his ground ball in Game 2, Machado shared pretty much the opposite philosophy.

"Obviously I'm not going to change, I'm not the type of player that's going to be 'Johnny Hustle,' and run down the line and slide to first base and ... you know, whatever can happen," Machado told The Athletic's Ken Rosenthal. "That's just not my personality, that's not my cup of tea, that's not who I am."

What about Machado's interferences at second base? It was that exact play that sent Anderson into an on-field tiff with umpire Joe West during the second Crosstown series of the season just last month. Javy Baez slid into second base, and Anderson thought Baez did something he shouldn't have, raising his arm to interfere with a double-play turn, that sequence of events ending with Anderson screaming at West on the field. Would Anderson be cool with playing alongside — and potentially vacating his position at shortstop for — an infamous interferer?

And what about being a "dirty player," a villain? The White Sox always seemed fine — heck, they loved it — having one of baseball's greatest irritants in A.J. Pierzynski on the roster. Perhaps no player wore the "villain" title as a badge of honor more than the catcher on the 2005 World Series team. But remember that Pierzynski took the punch, he didn't throw it. Being baseball's version of a "villain" and being a guy who makes dangerous plays that could hurt somebody are two different things.

The point being: Do Machado's actions in this postseason series make him anathema to the "Ricky's boys don't quit" mantra? If the White Sox were to turn a blind eye to the events of this NLCS, would it qualify as a betrayal of their quest to establish a high-effort, high-character culture?

Or do they value that culture so much that they stay away from Machado this offseason?

Here's Rick Hahn from September of last year.

"It's the culture that Ricky and his coaching staff have been able to create in that clubhouse. I cannot tell you how many various fans have stopped me, or emailed me or mentioned to me that they've never been this excited over a 60-win team. Or they've never been excited about a team that isn't going to the playoffs. And I think so much of that is based on how Ricky and the coaches have them playing day in and day out. You see them fighting for 27 outs, you see them prepared every night. Sure, we're going to get out-manned at portions during this process, but the fight and competitiveness and the style of play is the kind of thing that is going to endure year in and year out. And that is extremely important for us to establish at the big league level for all of us."

Machado's talent would make any team he's a part of more competitive. But for the White Sox, who talk an awful lot about hustling and refusing to quit, perhaps all these postseason shenanigans make it so Machado just isn't their cup of tea.

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### **If 2018 was all about 'learning experiences' for young White Sox, what did Lucas Giolito learn?**

By Vinnie Duber / NBC Sports Chicago / October 17, 2018

We heard a lot about "learning experiences" during the White Sox 100-loss 2018 season.

It was Rick Renteria's way of describing the to-be-anticipated growing pains for highly touted players spending their first full seasons in the major leagues. Fan expectations were high for the likes of Lucas



Giolito, Reynaldo Lopez and Yoan Moncada, and by very few measures did those players — some of the first of the organization's bevy of prospects to reach the South Side — live up to those expectations.

But that doesn't mean that those players' seasons were devoid of value. Renteria, the White Sox and the players all expect these "learning experiences" to have long-term benefits. In other words, it's the struggles now that will help these players succeed and create the planned perennial contender on the South Side.

So if those "learning experiences" were so valuable, what did these guys learn?

Giolito finished his first full season in the bigs with a 6.13 ERA, leading baseball in earned runs allowed and leading the American League in walks. What did he take from what looked from the outside like a disappointing season?

"I think I learned the most from my worst starts this year, the ones where I didn't make it out of the first, didn't make it out of the second," Giolito said before the end of the White Sox season last month. "Just going out there not having the right mindset from the get go and allowing the game to speed up on me really quickly, there's maybe two, three, four games where that happened. And obviously I came out of those games upset and frustrated, but now looking back on them from this perspective at the end of the season, I really learned the most from those.

"Entering every single start, I get roughly 32 of them a year, make sure that I'm prepared, I'm ready to pitch, my routine is set and I'm following it to a 'T.' And over the second half of the season, I started to put up better numbers, put up more competitive starts just through that process of earlier in the year grinding and grinding and not doing well. I learned a lot about myself in that process as a pitcher and as a competitor."

Certain numbers don't exactly show a drastic improvement from one half of the season to the other: Giolito's ERA prior to the All-Star break (6.18) and after it (6.04) were pretty much the same. He had a much improved August (3.86 ERA in six starts) and a rough September (9.27 ERA in five starts).

But again, the 2018 season wasn't about what the numbers look like now. It was about what those numbers will look like a year or two or three from now, when the White Sox make their transition from rebuilding to contending.

"You go out there and you don't get the job done, you're knocked out of the game early, looking back on it, it's like, 'Now I know what doesn't work.' And I'm able to make those adjustments and the changes to the routine and the changes to mindset and things to be able to go out there," Giolito said. "I'm not going to have my best stuff every day. Some days I might not feel right and might be battling myself a little bit. But it's being able to make that quick adjustment, not letting the game speed up. That's the biggest thing.

"At this level, you go out there and you're not feeling right in the first inning, it might be three runs, four runs on the board before you even know it. And I think getting that experience, getting to pitch every fifth day for an entire season and having a ton of downs and starting to figure it out more toward the end, it's gaining that experience and learning what works and learning what doesn't."

Throughout the season, Renteria complimented Giolito for the pitcher's ability to move on from rough beginnings to starts and turn in a five- or six-outing despite the early trouble. Giolito did a good deal of that throughout the season, with longevity during starts rarely being an issue, even if the run totals were high. Only six of his 32 starts in 2018 were shorter than five innings, and the percentage of his starts that lasted six and seven innings increased from the first half of the season to the second.

And then there are the walks, and there was a significant decrease in the amount of guys Giolito was putting on base between the first and second halves of the season. He walked 60 batters in 103.1 innings in the first half for a BB/9 of 5.2, compared to 30 batters in 70 innings in the second half for a BB/9 of 3.9.

So there were positives for Giolito to take from his 2018 campaign.

"The second half of the season, bouncing back from what I was doing. Cutting down on the walks, starting to pitch better, pitch more consistently. Even games when I wasn't sharp, I was getting hit around, not doing so well, I did a better job of at least giving the team a chance, getting a little bit deeper into the game," he said. "So I'd say those are some of the highlights, learning from the mistakes and learning from the failures and within the season being able to make the right adjustments to be more successful."

On Opening Day, Giolito talked about how different a pitcher he was more than a year after joining the White Sox organization. One full season in the big leagues, and Giolito is again a different pitcher. It's that continuing evolution that the White Sox hope will make him a mainstay in their rotation of the future.

"More experience, more mature. I'm no longer really fazed by the big situation. If I get into trouble in the first inning, I'm not worrying about it or thinking about it or how I screwed up the last at-bat, last pitch, I walked a guy, gave up a double, whatever it might be. Now, what's in the past is in the past, even when I'm out there," he said. "If I mess up a couple pitches, I know the adjustment to make and I'm going to do my best to make that adjustment without it taking a couple innings or even never making the adjustment the entire start, which is what was happening through April, May, June.

"Just getting that experience and learning to make those adjustments on the fly. I'd say that's what I'm really taking away from this year."

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