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Source: White Sox offer Machado 7-year deal

By Scott Merkin / MLB.com | January 14, 2019

CHICAGO -- The White Sox seven-year offer to free-agent infielder Manny Machado has not changed, a source confirmed to MLB.com on Monday.

On Sunday, reports swirled that the Sox had upped their offer to Machado to eight years. There also were reports that the Phillies -- after meeting with Bryce Harper and his wife in Las Vegas on Saturday -- had become favorites to land the outfielder.

If the Phillies were to land Harper, would that mean the White Sox had a clear shot at Machado? Is there really a mystery team interested in either of those stars, as has been reported? Might the Sox be being leveraged for a better deal elsewhere?

After USA Today's Bob Nightengale reported on Sunday that the Phillies were the favorite for Harper, ESPN's Jeff Passan reported that the White Sox had moved to an eight-year offer to Machado. Hector Gomez of Z101 Digital in the Dominican Republic placed that offer at \$250 million.

Nightengale tweeted later on Sunday that the White Sox had not moved off their seven-year-offer, and that was confirmed on Monday by a source. So what does this all mean for the White Sox?

There's little question the team has serious interest in both Machado and Harper. Although the White Sox begin their third season of their ongoing rebuild, they targeted this offseason as a time to be aggressive and opportunistic with a pair of premium 26-year-old talents available and the payroll flexibility to match that desire.

If as reports indicate the Yankees are no longer trying to reach a deal with Machado, then the White Sox certainly aren't about to bid against themselves with no certainty that a "mystery team" actually exists, or any certainty that either player would, in the end, choose the Sox.

That assessment represents no affront to the White Sox, but it is a team coming off 195 losses over the last two rebuilding years. Even in a less-than-stellar American League Central, Chicago is likely a year away from contending.

Many people outside of the White Sox organization considered this team a long shot to sign either Machado or Harper as the offseason began. But the club has sold these players on its plethora of burgeoning young talent, not to mention serving as the face of the franchise in a major media market.

General manager Rick Hahn already has upgraded the White Sox bullpen through the addition of Alex Colome and Kelvin Herrera. He stabilized the rotation with the trade for Ivan Nova, added a solid catcher in James McCann and balanced the lineup with the trade for left-handed-hitting first baseman Yonder Alonso, who happens to be Machado's brother-in-law, and outfielder Jon Jay, a close friend of Machado.

One point made clear by Hahn is the White Sox can afford to wait on decisions from Machado and Harper. There doesn't seem to be a Plan B at this stage of the rebuild. They view these two as unique opportunities.

"You don't tend to get guys at this point in their career in free agency having already accomplished what they've accomplished, and on the trajectory that they appear to be on," Hahn said during a recent conference call. "So that part is unique, and that's understandably impacted the pace and how this thing's unfolded. Outside of that segment of the market, I think it's been fairly standard."

Madrigal set to get back in full baseball mode

White Sox No. 5 prospect ahead of curve after first pro season

By Scott Merkin / MLB.com | January 14, 2019

CHICAGO -- The 2018 baseball season marked a long but productive one for Nick Madrigal.

Despite fracturing a bone in his left wrist, Madrigal hit .367 with 42 runs scored, 34 RBIs, 16 combined extra-base hits, 15 stolen bases and a mere seven strikeouts over 180 at-bats in helping Oregon State to the College World Series championship. As the fourth pick overall by the White Sox in the 2018 MLB Draft, Madrigal hit .303 with 25 runs scored, 16 RBIs and five strikeouts in 155 at-bats split between three Minor League stops.

Madrigal, ranked the club's No. 5 prospect and named to the 2019 All-Defense Team by MLB Pipeline, finally got a break beginning in early October following instructional league action in Arizona, spending time with his family and taking a trip to Hawaii with his girlfriend. But with Spring Training approximately one month away, the talented middle infielder is ready for action after letting his body heal a little bit.

"Toward the end, my body was pretty beat up like everyone else," Madrigal told MLB.com before joining his friends and teammates on a White Sox Minor League trip to the Dominican Republic departing on Monday. "You go through a long season and you are going to have little kinks and stuff.

"Once I got the time off and got back in the weight room, it was nice to get back in there. I enjoy preparing for the season and taking ground balls, hitting, weight room. I love doing that stuff. Once I got the break I needed, I was ready to get back into it. I don't need any more time off."

Class A Advanced Winston-Salem became Madrigal's highest level of competition in 2018, with 98 at-bats and 26 games played. Yet there has been some mentions of Madrigal rising to the White Sox infield as quickly as later this season.

Of course, the possible free-agent signing of infielder Manny Machado immediately would change that configuration in the short term and long term. And while the White Sox appreciate the advanced status of Madrigal as a three-year college starter, there's no reason to rush him to the Majors.

"He's got a really good sense of how to play the game," said White Sox director of player development Chris Getz, who also is part of the Dominican trip. "He's got a really strong feel of his skill set. Therefore, he certainly is ahead of others. With that being said, we are just getting him started.

"Last year, he was just getting a taste of professional baseball after having a long successful college season. He's just experiencing his first offseason as well and now going into his first Spring Training. There's certainly no reason to get ahead of ourselves, or he needs to get ahead of himself. It's pure preparation mode and I'm sure he's champing at the bit to get that first full pro season under his belt."

There's very little worry on Madrigal's part as to what level he will begin at in 2019 or whether he's at second or shortstop, taking ground balls at both spots as he prepares while working with his dad. He's more focused on getting back with his friends and playing White Sox baseball.

"They are the core group of players and know we are the ones who are going to change it with the people they are bringing in," Madrigal said. "Everyone knows [the White Sox] have a plan, and we are not afraid to talk about it.

"We know that something hopefully soon is coming and it's all exciting. Not one person in the organization is questioning it or what's going to happen here. It's exciting to see what happens."

Source: White Sox offer to Manny Machado 'was for less than 8 years'

By Chuck Garfien / NBC Sports Chicago | January 14, 2019

Despite reports that the White Sox have made an eight-year offer to Manny Machado, their offer to the free agent infielder "was for less than 8 years and less money than has been reported," a source has told NBC Sports Chicago.

The financial details of that offer are not completely known, but I'm told the White Sox have not changed their stance on either money or terms since making their initial offer, thought to be around \$200 million.

Although it has often been projected that Machado could sign a contract north of 10 years and \$300 million, a 7-year, \$200 million offer, for example, would be comparable to the 7-year, \$210 million contract Max Scherzer signed with the Washington Nationals in 2015. At \$30 million, Scherzer's is the third highest average annual salary in MLB history. The offer to Machado would also come close to the 6-year, \$206.5 million contract Zack Greinke signed with the Arizona Diamondbacks in 2016. Greinke's \$34.4 million average annual salary is tops in MLB history.

Sunday, ESPN's Jeff Passan reported that the White Sox upped their offer to eight years and suggested that they might be willing to stretch it to possibly 10 years.

With just over four weeks left until pitchers and catchers report for spring training, and Machado still unsigned, both sides might soon be reaching a breaking point in negotiations.

The White Sox and Phillies are two of the known suitors for Machado. Last week, his camp pushed out the addition of a "mystery team" that was in pursuit of Machado. This is sometimes a sign that the player is close to making a final decision.

As for the White Sox interest in Bryce Harper, despite meeting with the free agent outfielder in November, the White Sox have not made an offer to Harper, according to a source. It appears that their attention has been more focused on signing Machado.

Sox Drawer Q&A: Combating the outbreak of Harper/Machado Fatigue

By Chuck Garfien / NBC Sports Chicago | January 14, 2019

Welcome to the exhausting slog known as the Bryce Harper/Manny Machado sweepstakes.

In November and December, it was exciting and new, but here in mid-January, that wishful hysteria has transformed itself into a rare condition that has left many of us emotionally drained and physically depleted, waiting for either free agent to pick a team.

I call this ailment Harper/Machado Fatigue.

Signs and symptoms may include:

- Lack of sleep.
- Easily distracted at home and work.
- Constantly checking Twitter for the latest news (at least 50 times a day).
- Frequently writing out lineup projections with Machado and/or Harper batting around Eloy Jimenez.
- Thinking every male you see walking down the street with dark hair is Manny Machado.

If you are experiencing any of these symptoms, it is Harper/Machado Fatigue. No need to consult a physician. Simply continue reading this column for possible temporary relief. The only known cure is for either Harper or Machado to finally sign on the dotted line. I'm recommending with the White Sox.

In the meantime, I will do my best to ease your suffering by answering your questions in the Sox Drawer.

Q: How soon do you think Machado will sign, and do you think it will be with the Sox? — @Henschel_Joe18

CG: On Jan. 8, Bruce Levine reported that Machado was expected to make a decision "within a week."

That was precisely one week ago. Still no decision. Trying to predict anything during this ongoing saga has been almost pointless, even if you think you have correct information. Just ask @DanClarkSports.

However, with pitchers and catchers reporting in just over four weeks, and with over 200 free agents still unsigned, at some point (hopefully very soon) the teams, players and agents connected with Machado and Harper will need to have this resolved. Fortunately, there have been signs over the last few days that the Machado dam is showing some cracks and that it might actually burst. Every day more news trickles out. To me, that's a sign that there's momentum going on behind the scenes, even if that's one side putting a line in the sand.

I think the White Sox have a 50-percent chance at signing Machado, up from 30 percent now that the Yankees appear out of the running. The White Sox and Phillies have been quite aggressive in their pursuits, plus you cannot ignore the "mystery team" that is reportedly in the running. Is it real or just a ploy to drive up Machado's price? Since we've seen both scenarios play out in the past, I'd play it safe and consider the mystery team to be for real and hope the White Sox win out in the end.

Q: Do you get the feeling that Machado could be using the Sox as leverage, or is he genuinely interested in signing here? — @JordanDynasty

CG: Without knowing what's really going on inside the head of Machado and his agent Dan Lozano, it's difficult to guess his motive. I believe that Machado has a genuine interest in signing with the White Sox. It helps that while you're reading this, there's a chance that he's working out in Miami with his good buddies Yonder Alonso and Jon Jay. In the end, it's going to come down to money. Will the White Sox offer enough to sign him? Stay tuned.

Q: Did the sox really offer 8 Years, 250 Million? — @cross_tillman

CG: That's what ESPN's Jeff Passan reported on Sunday. However, USA Today's Bob Nightengale followed that up on Monday, saying that the White Sox have not changed their seven-year offer made to Machado from almost two weeks ago. Reading between the lines, this could be Machado's camp or another team trying to drive up the price, and the White Sox saying, nope, we're not going to bid against ourselves. Lots of gamesmanship going on behind the scenes. That's just how it works sometimes.

Q: When is Machado's press conference? — @GarkischLeo

CG: How about I schedule one for Thursday. Do you think Machado would show up?

Q: Do you find this chaos frustrating or entertaining? — @BillyVig

CG: At first it was entertaining and exciting. Now it's frustrating and exciting. Most of us didn't think it would take this long for them to sign. But taking a step back, it actually makes some sense. This free-agent saga isn't just about Machado and Harper, it's also about future free agents who will be hitting the market in the next few years: Mookie Betts, Mike Trout, Francisco Lindor, Kris Bryant, etc. The contracts that Harper and Machado will sign this winter will help set the bar for those All Stars (and their agents) in the future. Conclusion: There's a whole lot at stake. Harper and Machado likely won't sign until they believe they've received the very highest offer they're going to get. To the fans and media, the wait has been frustrating. But if your team (in this case, the White Sox) is in the running to sign one of them, it's still exciting, but honestly, it's wearing on me more and more with every passing day.

Q: At this point, if Machado decides not to sign with the Sox, would you just put me out of my misery bc I can't take anymore #proudfyachuck — @tfsikora1

CG: Harper/Machado Fatigue.

Q: If we sign Harper and Machado, do we just go all out and trade for Trout as well? — @Glangon

CG: Harper/Machado Delirium. Consult a physician. It's above my medical expertise.

Q: I purchased my 10 game plan so we are \$500 closer. Lol. — @ram_vince

CG: I think this might bring Manny to Chicago. Manny Ramirez.

Q: What changed on the pursuit of Harper? Just last month it seemed the Sox interest was at an all time high but there seems to have been no traction since then and no official offer according to reports. What happened? — @MattACanon

CG: Good question. I don't know what happened, if anything. As long as Harper is still a free agent, I consider the White Sox to be in the hunt.

Reports about their interest have dried up lately. Wish I had more information and context. Very curious to see how this eventually plays out as well.

Q: So where exactly does Tim Anderson play if Machado is signed? — @RyanA_M

CG: I've been getting a lot of questions about this. If the White Sox sign Machado, it will create a big shell game in the infield, and I don't know how it will eventually be resolved. First, will Machado play shortstop or third base? This not only could affect Anderson, but also Yoan Moncada, who Rick Hahn has said might eventually move over to third base in the future to potentially make room for Nick Madrigal at second base. There could be a lot of moving parts with this. Let's first see if the White Sox sign Machado and take it from there.

Q: How good can Dane Dunning be? — @oglando23

CG: I spoke to Don Cooper last week about Dunning (and about 20 other pitchers) on the White Sox Talk Podcast. Coop said, "We like him. He had a heck of a year last year. He proved everything that he needed to prove and accomplished everything he needed to accomplish before being shut down (with an elbow sprain)." Cooper added that Dunning assured him that his arm feels "great." He went 6-3 last season with a 2.71 ERA at Class A Winsto-Salem and Double-A Birmingham. When I asked Coop if he thinks Dunning has a chance to make it to the majors sometime in 2019, he said, "absolutely."

Q: If the Rays sign Matt Davidson and use him as a DH and Reliever do you think you'll get credit as this was your idea? — @chungdiesel

CG: Davidson becoming a DH and reliever was not my idea. It's Matt Davidson's idea. I'm guessing you heard me say on the podcast (Episode 178, 11:00 mark) that I believe that Davidson will find a team that will use him in both roles. My colleague Vinnie Duber looked at me like I was crazy. Maybe me and the Tampa Bay Rays are both crazy. The Athletic's Ken Rosenthal reported that the Rays are looking at Davidson as a potential two-way player. I'd love to see it.

Q: What's your bowling average @ChuckGarfien? — @PieManRay

CG: No idea. I think my all-time high is 195. The Dude abides.

Q: It can't snow on Opening Day at Guaranteed Rate again, can it? — @XYBoy74

CG: It can't. It won't. Feel better?

And finally:

Q: Will you be at SoxFest? — @kj7246

CG: Yep! It all starts next Friday. NBC Sports Chicago will carry the opening ceremonies. Hope to see you there!

Report: One baseball exec believes Manny Machado is 'heavily leaning' toward White Sox
By Vinnie Duber / NBC Sports Chicago | January 14, 2019

Are the White Sox zeroing in on a happy ending to the Manny Machado free-agency saga?

According to a report from NBC LA's Michael Duarte, there's a belief the 26-year-old free-agent superstar is "heavily leaning" toward signing with the White Sox, though it sounds like it's not exactly close to being a done deal.

A rival MLB executive believes Manny Machado is heavily leaning towards accepting the offer from the Chicago White Sox. Deal could be announced this week or could still fall through. #MachadoMonday #WhiteSox

Now, thanks to all of the careful wording in that tweet, this might come across as a sort of non-update, and perhaps that's what it is. It's what one member of a front office believes will happen.

That being said, it was reported last week that Machado's decision could come within a week, and it's been about a week, meaning there's potential for a Machado decision very soon.

As for the White Sox offer, the details have been of much debate over the past day. Sunday night, ESPN's Jeff Passan reported the White Sox had offered Machado an eight-year deal — and that they could even go bigger. That seemed to be an upping of their previously reported offer of seven years for about \$200 million. But a flood of reports came in after the sun came up Monday saying that the White Sox were sticking to their "original" offer.

The only team bidding against the White Sox in this sweepstakes appears to be the Philadelphia Phillies, whose owner said they would be "a little bit stupid" with their spending this offseason. But the Phillies have their hands in numerous pies this winter, also in pursuit of the other mega free agent on the market, Bryce Harper. They met with Harper over the weekend in Las Vegas, and it's unknown how that meeting will affect their pursuit of Machado. Passan and SNY's Andy Martino reported on the existence of a third, mystery team, though who knows if there really is one or which team it might be.

And so we wait. Still.

If Machado does wind up accepting the White Sox offer, however — and if that offer ends up being seven years for about \$200 million — it will be a shocking difference from the expectations at the beginning of the offseason, when Machado was expected to get one of the richest deals in baseball history, one potentially lasting a decade and worth \$300 million or more. And it would be shocking then, as it is now, that only two or three teams ended up in the running for such a young, talented player like Machado.

Baseball's annual rounds of free agency seem to keep getting more and more bizarre. And with the constant barrage of updates (or non-updates) and no decision coming from the two biggest names on the market for so long, this offseason might count as the weirdest yet.

Stay tuned.

Who is the Manny Machado mystery team? Ranking every team in baseball

By Vinnie Duber / NBC Sports Chicago | January 14, 2019

Who is the mystery team?!?

There supposedly is one in the Manny Machado sweepstakes, going up against the White Sox and the Philadelphia Phillies. ESPN's Jeff Passan hinted at the presence of such a team in his report Sunday night — the one that said the White Sox have made an eight-year offer to the 26-year-old free-agent superstar, which has since been rebutted by a few other reports — and SNY's Andy Martino backed that up in his own report chronicling the New York Yankees' supposed out-ness Monday.

So in the event this mystery team doesn't come forward, we're left to guess which of baseball's other 28 teams it might be (28 because the White Sox and Phillies are not mysteries). Let's get to it. Because what else are we going to do while waiting for Machado to just announce where he's signing already?

Here are all 28 candidates, ranked from least likely to be the mystery team to most likely to be the mystery team.

28. Baltimore Orioles

Hahahaha, yeah Machado's going back to Baltimore. OK. The Orioles, who were atrocious last season with 115 losses, dealt Machado away right after the All-Star break. They are in severe rebuilding mode over there and are busy paying Chris Davis ... (looks up salary) ... \$92 million for the next four seasons to bat .168. The Orioles are most definitely not the mystery team.

27. Tampa Bay Rays

Machado is very much out of the Rays' price range, even if they'd love a left-side infielder as they're currently starting Willy Adames and Matt Duffy at shortstop and third base. The only "mystery" involving the Rays is how this team almost made the playoffs last season.

26. Kansas City Royals

The Royals? They're back in rebuilding mode after watching the Hosmer-Moustakas-Cain glory days turn to nothing as if Thanos' snap was limited to the intersection of I-70 and I-435. It's darn near impossible to see the famously small-market Royals commit hundreds of millions of dollars to one player as they appear to be entering another era of hoping to hit on high draft picks.

25. Detroit Tigers

The Tigers managed to win a couple more games than the White Sox last season, but their immediate future is mighty grim, with nothing but playing alongside an aging Miguel Cabrera to sell to any prospective free agent. The pitching staff could one day be quite good, with five Detroit pitching prospects ranked on MLB Pipeline's list of the top 100 in the game. But come on, Machado's not going to the Tigers.

24. Pittsburgh Pirates

The Pirates are not the mystery team because they have no money because they are the Pirates. I understand that sounds mean, but when was the last time the Pirates made a big free-agent splash? Three of the four biggest free-agent deals in team history belong to pitchers who also played for the White Sox, and they aren't exactly All Stars: Francisco Liriano, Ivan Nova and Daniel Hudson. Teams whose fourth-ever biggest free-agent signing is Daniel Hudson don't sign Manny Machado.

23. Cincinnati Reds

One thing the Reds have is position players. They have Eduardo Suarez and Jose Peraza on the left side of the infield, where Machado plays, and don't even have room for Nick Senzel, one of the highest-rated prospects in baseball. They would love some pitching, but Machado is not a pitcher. The Reds might not be done spending this offseason — they've been tied on multiple occasions to Dallas Keuchel, still unsigned — but it's unlikely they'd make a run at attempting to sell Machado on a last-place team and the "glamour" of Cincinnati.

22. Seattle Mariners

Nope. No shot. They've traded away everyone this offseason in a Marlins-esque fire sale. Hopefully they've gotten better returns. But they've gone into something akin to rebuilding mode and now that they're finally out from under that monster Robinson Cano contract they're probably not going to take on another one.

21. Houston Astros

Carlos Correa and Alex Bregman. Yeah, no mystery team here.

20. Oakland Athletics

The A's don't really have a rep for landing top-of-the-market free agents, preferring typically to add with midseason trades. They're also focused on trying to keep their first-round draft pick from quitting baseball altogether, so they have other things on their plate right now. Boomer Sooner!

19. Arizona Diamondbacks

The Snakes are in sell-off mode. They traded Paul Goldschmidt to the Cardinals, they lost Patrick Corbin and A.J. Pollock to free agency, their two best remaining pitchers, Zack Greinke and Robbie Ray, could be on the move, too. It's tear-down time in the desert and tear-down time is not a time for Machado.

18. Cleveland Indians

The only players the Tribe apparently aren't talking about trading are the ones on the left side of their infield, Francisco Lindor and Jose Ramirez. Cleveland's small-market woes when it comes to paying their very good starting pitchers might be worth it if it means they can keep paying their very good left-side infielders. Ramirez is under contract for quite a while, Lindor not so much. Machado? He's not one of those two guys.

17. Minnesota Twins

If Manny thought his visits to Chicago, New York and Philadelphia were kind of chilly after spending the second half of last season in Los Angeles, what in the world would be appealing about Minneapolis? The Twins got a real reality check a year after making the playoffs and don't really have a championship roster to sell. Miguel Sano and Byron Buxton, two of the bigger young stars in baseball just a couple years ago, are projected to be at or near the bottom of their batting order.

16. Boston Red Sox

The Red Sox are seemingly trying to figure out a way to sign Craig Kimbrel without giving him too much money. They need some relief help regardless, and Machado can't really pitch. The defending champs have Xander Bogaerts at shortstop and Rafael Devers at third and J.D. Martinez at DH and no room for Machado.

15. Colorado Rockies

Trevor Story is the Rockies' shortstop, and he's quite good. Nolan Arenado is the Rockies' third baseman, and he's quite good, as well. The Rockies do have some money thanks to the fact that they're finally done paying Mike Hampton. But they might want to focus on trying to keep Arenado in Denver (because he's only a .263 hitter outside of Colorado).

14. Miami Marlins

Machado is a Miami guy, and getting the opportunity to play for a team technically headquartered in the British Virgin Islands could provide some interesting financial draws. But the Fish are an offseason removed from trading away Giancarlo Stanton, Christian Yelich and Marcell Ozuna. Not really in "buy" mode, are they? Though if Machado picks the Marlins, he'd figure to have a near guarantee that he'd be on a different team within a few years. That's just the way things go in South Florida.

13. Washington Nationals

Trea Turner is under team control for four more seasons. And even though Anthony Rendon is heading toward free agency next winter and could free up a spot at third base, the Nats reportedly want Bryce Harper, not Machado. They are not the mystery team. But I kind of wish they were. They could smuggle Machado into and out of Nats Park as one of the racing presidents. No one would know!

12. Los Angeles Dodgers

Machado was a rental for the Dodgers because they needed a fill-in after Corey Seager went on the shelf. With Seager back in action, no fill-in needed. Seager and Justin Turner live on the left side of that Dodger infield. The Dodgers are fine without Machado and not very mystery team-y at all.

11. Texas Rangers

The Rangers could really use a third baseman, and perhaps some big dollars could convince Machado to move from his reportedly preferred position of shortstop. They've rarely been shy in the spending department, the original Alex Rodriguez megadealers, but what is there to sell Machado on with this team? An extended stay at the bottom of the AL West doesn't seem terribly appealing.

10. San Francisco Giants

Speaking of teams rarely shy when it comes to spending, here are the Giants. While a new head of baseball ops in San Fran would probably like to put his stamp on the future of the franchise, doing so with Machado seems like it would strip the Giants of their flexibility moving forward. There are Madison Bumgarner trade rumors swirling, and that return package would be a nice starting point for a rebuild. Unless Machado can't get enough of the clam chowder in the bread bowl. I mean, man, I wouldn't blame him.

9. Milwaukee Brewers

The Brew Crew spent big last winter and already landed a big-name free agent this winter in Yasmani Grandal. Machado would be a heck of an addition to the Grandal-Cain-Yelich thing they've got going on up in Beer City, but the Brewers need pitching. And they're rumored to be looking for it in the form of Bumgarner. Point being, the Brewers might be moving on to the trade market rather than looking for big-time free agents.

8. Atlanta Braves

As much as the Braves would probably like to put further distance between themselves and the Phillies in the ultra-competitive NL East, the guess is they're not ready to give up on former No. 1 pick Dansby Swanson quite yet as he'll be only be 25 on Opening Day. The Braves have made their big splash already this winter with Josh Donaldson, and while it would be pretty cool to see Machado and Donaldson on the same side of the infield, the Braves are pretty well loaded as is.

7. Los Angeles Angels

The Angels love spending big dollars on guys, and they did so with Albert Pujols, another client of Machado's agent, Dan Lozano. The day is coming where they'll have to shell out probably the biggest contract in baseball history if they want to keep Mike Trout in Anaheim, meaning they'd be well served to save that money. But saving money has never been the Halos' jam — just ask Josh Hamilton, Gary Matthews Jr. or C.J. Wilson — and so maybe they want to convince Trout to stick around by adding another big name to the roster and building some semblance of a contender. Or maybe they want to get an insurance policy in case Trout bolts for Philly, where he'll have to spend far less money to catch Eagles games and see interesting weather. Machado knows all about L.A. after reaching the World Series with the Dodgers last season. Does the team that gave the world the Rally Monkey have another trick up its sleeves?

6. Chicago Cubs

Need a shortstop? Check. Have a history of spending big dollars? Check. Just last year made a huge free-agent signing late in the offseason? Check. Have a Machado "relative" in Albert Almora? Check. Uh oh, are the Cubs gonna steal Manny Machado away from the South Side? Probably not. They have such financial constraints they can't sign middle relievers right now, according to the reports. There's plenty of speculation that could change if certain players' free agency once more drags into February. But Theo Epstein has done pretty much nothing this winter because of the economics on the other side of town.

5. Toronto Blue Jays

Enter the Jays, the team Our Chuck Garfien believes is the mystery team. Could it be? Sure. They've got almost no non-Tulowitzki money on the books after the 2019 season and play in an uber-competitive division, one where Machado played for the bulk of the last seven years. Cutting Troy Tulowitzki loose — at the seemingly insane cost of nearly \$40 million — gives them a need at shortstop. And think about the

potentially amazing pairing of Machado and Vladimir Guerrero Jr. on the left side of that infield for the better part of the next decade. What's working against the team from the Great White North? Well, remember the Orioles? Yeah, they're a little better than them and also have to play the Yankees and Red Sox 38 times a season. Tough to win in that division, as Marcus Stroman noted (even if he was wrong about Machado going to the Yankees).

Machado is going to the Yankees. Yankees go out and get everyone. Red Sox are lethal. Rays are dangerous. Can never sleep on the Orioles. I'm going to the gym. Gonna be in my zone all year. Excited to compete in the best division in baseball! #ALEast

Barely .400 last season? Yes. Soon to be really, really good? Also yes. The Padres' farm system is extremely well stocked — led by the name that makes White Sox fans shudder, Fernando Tatis Jr. — with 10 top-100 prospects. Like South Side baseball fans, the Friars' faithful can plot out future rosters solely made up of homegrown names. But why not add an outside addition to that group? The aforementioned Eric Hosmer is already playing there, and will be for the next seven years, but he's one of the only players tying up any significant money on that team (Wil Myers is another). The Padres probably are even further away than the White Sox from being able to justify this kind of move at this point in a rebuilding effort, but they're about to be pretty good and Machado could make the future even brighter in San Diego. Plus, who would say no to living and working in San Diego? One problem: Tatis is a shortstop. Perhaps a big contract offer could convince Machado to slide back to third base.

3. St. Louis Cardinals

The Redbirds are really rolling the dice on 2019, as Goldschmidt and Ozuna are both slated to be free agents next winter. Do they add some long-term stability to that with Machado? They've got a lot of money tied up in the likes of Yadier Molina and Dexter Fowler and Andrew Miller in 2020, but the only player they have under a really long-term contract is a shortstop, Paul DeJong. No doubt, Machado could help the Cardinals win the NL Central in 2019. But they'd probably need him to play third base. But then where does Matt Carpenter play? Can DeJong play second? The Cards are probably motivated enough to be the mystery team, but they face a Yankee-esque infield crunch.

2. New York Mets

Step right up and meet the Mets, Manny. The Mets and new general manager Brodie Van Wagenen have been active this winter, adding two new infielders (Cano and Jed Lowrie), a new catcher (Wilson Ramos) and two big-name pieces at the back end of the bullpen (Edwin Diaz and Jeurys Familia). Bringing in Machado would not only give the Mets a cherry on top of their one-winter reshaping sundae, but it would take him away from the division-rival Phillies, who the Mets are jousting with to get into the NL East race alongside the Braves and Nationals. One of the Mets' top prospects is a shortstop, so they could be content to wait on him. But they could use a shortstop right now. It's not the Yankees. But is in New York. Watch out for those Mets. If they're the mystery team, someone try to find out if Jerry Seinfeld was part of the pitch team. "What's the deal with free agency? It's not free! It's the opposite of free! It should be called expensive agency!"

1. New York Yankees

Yes, the Yanks are supposedly out on Machado, but are they though? What an obvious answer to the mystery it would be if it's just the Yankees, who have been in on Machado all along. Their infield seems to be jam packed with players good enough to keep them from adding Machado, and the most recent addition to that group, free-agent D.J. LeMahieu, seemed to close the door on Machado to The Bronx. But the Yanks have always been big spenders and could move things around to find the best combo. They've got a great roster to pitch, and even though Martino reported Monday that Machado won't be taking a discount to play for the team he's always wanted to play for, perhaps the Yankees make the mysterious decision to up their offer. What a twist that would be. Though not as fun as those M. Night Shyamalan ones.

It sounds like there could be a White Sox reunion brewing with the Rays

By Vinnie Duber / NBC Sports Chicago | January 14, 2019

Get non-tendered by the White Sox, end up playing for the Tampa Bay Rays. Is that this winter's hottest trend?

According to The Athletic's Ken Rosenthal, the Rays are moving toward a deal with Avisail Garcia, who was non-tendered by the White Sox earlier this offseason. This just a couple days after Rosenthal reported the Rays are looking at Matt Davidson, who the White Sox non-tendered earlier this offseason.

#Rays closing in on free-agent outfielder Avisail Garcia, sources tell The Athletic.

The ever-creative #Rays are looking at free agent Matt Davidson as a potential two-way addition, sources say. Brendan McKay, the team's No. 2 prospect per @MLBPipeline and fourth overall pick in 2017 draft, reached High A last season as a first baseman and left-handed pitcher.

Garcia was in the White Sox outfield for six seasons and had one All-Star season in 2017, when he was one of the better hitters, statistically, in the American League with a .330 batting average and a .380 on-base percentage. His numbers cratered, though, last season as he spent the entire year dealing with a knee injury. Garcia played in only 93 games and slashed .236/.281/.438, though he did hit a career-best 19 home runs.

Though they knew it was tough to evaluate Garcia based on last year's injuries, they opted to move on from him, choosing to better spend the money he was probably going to make in his final year of arbitration eligibility elsewhere.

Davidson, meanwhile, was coming off back-to-back 20-homer seasons (26 in 2017), but was generating more headlines based on his desire to pitch as well as hit. The White Sox couldn't keep two designated hitters on their roster, Davidson and Daniel Palka, and opted for Palka, who hit 27 homers as a rookie last season.

Will Davidson get an opportunity to pitch regularly if he ends up with the Rays? Maybe. The Rays, who almost made the playoffs last season, showed a willingness to break baseball's norms by using "openers" on a regular basis, relievers starting the game and only pitching a few innings, sometimes just one inning. They could perhaps find value in Davidson as a two-way player — if he can show he can consistently pitch effectively. He only made three one-inning appearances last season with the White Sox, exclusively as an option to save the bullpen in games with lopsided scores. But Davidson expressed a desire to pitch in higher-leverage situations.

Day after report of eight-year offer to Manny Machado, others say White Sox are sticking to seven years

By Vinnie Duber / NBC Sports Chicago | January 14, 2019

The late-night frenzy over a reported eight-year offer from the White Sox to Manny Machado is getting some pushback now that the sun has come up.

ESPN's Jeff Passan reported Sunday night that the White Sox, whose contract offer to Manny Machado had previously been reported to be seven years for about \$200 million, upped their offer to eight years, with Hector Gomez following shortly thereafter with a report that the new offer was worth \$250 million. That would come as a huge change of plans, as the White Sox had been reported as unwilling to go past seven years in their offers to Machado and fellow mega free agent Bryce Harper (though supposedly they still haven't even offered a contract to the latter).

Well, it might have been too big a change to be true, with USA Today's Bob Nightengale (both Sunday night and Monday morning) reporting the White Sox are sticking with that "original" seven-year offer and The Score's Bruce Levine adding the same thing, also saying that "the offer is for closer to \$200 million than \$250 million" with an average annual value of between \$25 million and \$30 million.

The Chicago #Whitesox, who made their 7-year offer to Manny Machado nearly two weeks ago, have not revised their offer as of this morning. So far, still have not budged in their stance.

Despite reports of 8 year offer @JeffPassan ,the White Sox have not bid against themselves on long term Machado deal. Seven years has been the max offered . AAV likely between \$25 and \$30 mil.

As Levine mentioned, such a jump in offers would be the White Sox bidding against themselves. There are so few suitors still in the mix, potentially only the White Sox and the Philadelphia Phillies, that it would be ridiculous to offer a gargantuan number if you didn't have to. It is obviously difficult to guess at what "more than you would have to" would be when the details of a Phillies offer have not been reported and remain a mystery. The Phillies owner said they might "be a little bit stupid" with their spending this winter, but how much does that mean?

Certain fans might be wondering why the White Sox wouldn't just offer a ton of money and assure they would land Machado. Why not overpay? That is a decision that could have a negative effect on the White Sox payroll for years to come and prevent them from making necessary moves once the contention window is open. Just look across town to the Cubs as a contending team struggling to make any roster adjustments because of the large contracts handed out in recent offseasons.

And it's also a complaint likely made considering the expectations at the beginning of the offseason, when Machado was expected to receive a contract worth \$300 million. But we've come a long way since then, and recent reports that Machado's agent is still seeking a contract that would be baseball's largest ever — worth more than Giancarlo Stanton's \$325 million deal — struck as almost laughable, particularly because this whole sweepstakes seems to be down to just two teams.

There's no telling quite yet how this weekend's meeting with Harper in Las Vegas has affected the Phillies' pursuit of Machado. Perhaps they want to convince both to go to Philly in some sort of LeBron-Wade-Bosh type situation, though even in that scenario the Phillies' championship chances would seem much less favorable than the Miami Heat's did. Or perhaps it's all a big chess game to try to convince one or the other to sign and sign quickly. The Phillies have been reported to prefer Machado and to be the "clear-cut favorite" to land Harper.

Where does all that leave the White Sox? Well, it would seemingly leave them with a seven-year, approximately \$200 million offer on the table for Machado.

Whether or not that ends up as enough to get him or not, we'll find out one day. Hopefully one day soon.

White Sox Team of the Future: Third base

By Vinnie Duber / NBC Sports Chicago | January 14, 2019

What will the next championship-contending White Sox team look like?

That's what we're setting out to determine (or at least make a guess at) this month. Ten members of our White Sox content team here at NBC Sports Chicago put our heads together to try to project what each position on the diamond would look like in one, two, three years. Basically, we posed the question: What will the White Sox starting lineup be the next time they're capable of playing in the World Series?

That question can have a bunch of different answers, too. We didn't limit ourselves to players currently a part of the organization. Think the White Sox are gonna make a big free-agent addition? Vote for that player. Think the White Sox are gonna pull off a huge trade? Vote for that player. We wanted to see some creativity.

Interestingly, for a team with no right-this-second obvious long-term solution at the hot corner, only three different players got votes to be the White Sox third baseman of the future. The winner? Yoan Moncada.

The current starting second baseman, Moncada's potential move to third has been a talking point all offseason, one that makes sense considering the defensive skills last year's first-round pick, Nick Madrigal, has displayed as a middle infielder. It's not to knock Moncada's potential — though only two players in baseball made more errors than Moncada did last season (he made 21) — just that if you have the option of installing a Gold Glove type defender at second base, finding room for him makes a lot of sense.

Of course, there's a lot up in the air with the White Sox current infield alignment, with the team pursuing Manny Machado in free agency (more on him in a bit). That could throw everything out of whack if he insists on playing shortstop, forcing a position switch for Tim Anderson and perhaps forcing Moncada to stay at second. For what it's worth, Madrigal isn't the reason general manager Rick Hahn gave for the potential move of Moncada, at least not the only reason. And it's still just a potential move. While the White Sox would be wise to get Moncada as comfortable as possible at third as soon as possible if he is their best long-term option there, the decision to move him hasn't been made yet.

"We have not (made a determination on that yet)," Hahn said back in November during the GM Meetings. "We've talked to the player, we've talked to scouts, had a lot of good conversations about it. Fundamentally we like versatility and flexibility in all our players. So in that specific example, Moncada's ability to play third and second, that makes him more valuable to us. Should we eventually make a switch full time, that would be a decision we'd make closer to spring training and announce closer to spring training after the offseason plays out with how we're going to line up.

"Individually, you want to put the player in the best position to succeed for the long term. Flexibility, versatility of a roster factors into that, as well, to try to give (manager Rick Renteria) the best weapons at his disposal at any given game. And then you have to factor in the alternatives that you have and what's going to put us in the best long-term position to win.

"If we wind up with having too many premium middle-infield prospects or big league performers, that's a good problem to have."

Of course that's a good problem to have, but eventually the White Sox will need a premium third base prospect, too. It looked like Jake Burger was going to be that after the White Sox made him their first-round pick in 2017. But he twice tore his Achilles last year, amplifying already existing questions about his ability to play third base in the majors as well as he might be able to swing the bat. Part of what's made the pursuit of Machado so seemingly high-stakes for White Sox fans is the ease with which he could solve the third base question. He wants to play shortstop, but \$200 million is a pretty convincing argument to move back to third base.

And so Moncada emerges as a very realistic option. While a lot of fans have soured on his long-term prospects after a nearly record-setting 217-strikeout season in 2018, it's important to remember that Moncada is still just 23 years old and has one full season in the major leagues under his belt. There might not have been much to be excited about looking at his stat line from last season, but there's no doubt he had flashes of brilliance and gave samples of what made him the No. 1 prospect in baseball not too long ago.

Moncada is still as much a part of the long-term plans on the South Side as any player, and there will be a place on the field for him to develop into what the White Sox and so many evaluators believe he can be. That spot might just be third base starting in 2019.

Other vote-getters

Manny Machado. A real easy way to wrap the conversation up about who the third baseman of the future is would be for Machado to sign with the White Sox for the better part of the next decade and agree to

play third base. He's won a pair of Gold Gloves at the hot corner and spent the majority of his first seven seasons in the majors there before moving to the debatably more glamorous position of shortstop ahead of last season. Perhaps that was with an eye on upping the amount of money he could make this offseason. Perhaps he just wanted to return to the position he was drafted to play. Regardless, he's seemed pretty adamant about wanting to play shortstop, and so if he comes to the South Side, the more realistic outcome could be Anderson getting moved rather than Machado just agreeing to play third, even if hundreds of millions of dollars make a strong case. Would Machado be the ideal guy to be the third baseman of the future? Yes. But if you're doing all you can just to get him to join your team, isn't allowing him to play his preferred position pretty high on the list of concessions?

Nolan Arenado. There will be no bigger name on next winter's free-agent market than Arenado, and he's long been discussed as a possibility for the White Sox to pursue should they miss out on Machado. He'll turn 29 shortly after Opening Day 2020, making him older but no less a perfect fit than Machado when it comes to the White Sox long-term plans. He might end up costing more, considering he boasts a potentially stronger resume with six Gold Gloves, four All-Star appearances and four Silver Sluggers to his name. Arenado also figures to be more in line from a timing standpoint with the progression of the rebuild, a free agent that could be a true "finishing piece" rather than a finishing piece that has to wait a year for the contention window to open, though when inking these long-term deals, that's perhaps not as big a worry as it once might have seemed. What scares some about Arenado is the Coors Field factor, and his numbers at home in Denver are drastically different than his numbers away from the Mile High City over the course of his career: a .320/.374/.609 slash line with 108 homers and 376 RBIs at Coors and a .263/.318/.469 slash line with 78 homers and 240 RBIs away from it. But those concerns aside, Arenado is obviously one of the game's best players, and should the White Sox still be looking for a big name and a third baseman next offseason, he'd have to be near the top of the wish list.

Former White Sox outfielder Avisail Garcia signs one-year deal with Rays

By Paul Sullivan / Chicago Tribune | January 14, 2019

Former White Sox outfielder Avisail Garcia will get a chance to redeem himself in Tampa Bay after agreeing to a one-year, \$3.5 million deal with incentives, The Athletic reported.

Garcia can make another \$2.5 million in incentives in 2019, according to the report.

After being selected to the American League All-Star team in 2017 following a ragged start to his major league career, Garcia regressed in 2018, hitting .236 with 49 RBI in 93 games while battling knee and leg injuries. He hit a career-high 19 home runs, but an inability to stay healthy marred his season, and his overall stay on the South Side.

Manager Rick Renteria pulled Garcia from a game against the Royals in August for a lack of effort after he dogged it down the line on a first-inning fly ball. Though Garcia was apologetic afterward, the veteran outfielder was non-tendered by the Sox after the season when the team couldn't work out a trade.

Garcia underwent arthroscopic surgery on his right knee after the season but is expected to be ready to play this spring.

Despite his size (6-foot-4, 220 pounds) and muscular physique, Garcia never lived up to expectations after arriving from the Tigers in a three-way deal in 2013 that sent Jake Peavy to the Red Sox. General manager Rick Hahn at the time called the then 22-year-old outfielder a "five-tool player" with "potential impact talent for many years to come."

But the hype was just that, with the exception of 2017. Garcia hit .271 with 74 home runs and 26 stolen bases in six seasons with the Sox, and was a liability in right field for the most part. During his one promising season in '17, Garcia said at the All-Star Game he was open to signing a long-term deal.

"I'm always open," he said. "Of course I want to be here with the White Sox for a long time."

That deal never materialized, and Garcia's stock plummeted in 2018.

Garcia likely will get more opportunities as a DH in Tampa Bay, where Tommy Pham, Kevin Kiermaier and Austin Meadows, a former first-round draft pick of the Pirates in 2013, figure to be the regular starters in the Rays outfield.

The Sox recently signed free agent outfielder Jon Jay, who can play all three outfield positions, and expect top prospect Eloy Jimenez to earn a starting spot by the end of April. Free agent outfielder Bryce Harper is also on the Sox's radar, though they seemingly are focused on shortstop Manny Machado, who recently received a seven-year offer to become the face of the franchise. A source denied a report the Sox had increased their offer to eight years.

Is White Sox's pursuit of Manny Machado driven by a Netflix strategy?

By Phil Rosenthal / Chicago Tribune | January 14, 2019

The White Sox's pursuit of Manny Machado is guided in part by what might be called a Netflix strategy.

(No, this is not a reference to Netflix's "Bird Box" and that stupid and dangerous meme in which people go around with their eyes covered.)

Today virtually everyone knows Netflix. But before that, Netflix went on a binge of signing pricey deals with big-name stars and content producers to win over consumers who might not have even known what a streaming service was.

The resulting programs were uneven, and Netflix continues to face criticism from those who believe it can ill afford to throw around as much money as it has.

From the beginning, however, what Netflix couldn't afford was to be ignored.

That's the 2019 White Sox for you.

There has been much talk that the Sox play for Machado may pay off.

In truth it already has.

Whether Machado signs with them or not, people are talking about the Sox, which they have not been inclined to do, at least not in a positive way.

Coming off six straight sub-.500 seasons, the Sox are competing for not only victories this year, but also headspace.

They don't necessarily need to be pennant contenders yet, but they can't afford to be irrelevant.

Think about all the hoopla that accompanied phenom Michael Kopech's brief time in the majors last season before he got hurt. The Sox need more of that. Desperately.

This is the last of 15 seasons in which the Sox, Bulls and Blackhawks are partnered with the Cubs in NBC Sports Chicago, their cable TV venture. The Cubs plan to sell their own outlet to consumers, advertisers and distributors in 2020.

While the Sox are accustomed to fighting for attention, it has been especially difficult as the Cubs have played their best baseball in decades.

This winter, the Sox have caught a break. The Cubs have been relatively quiet, licking the wounds of an early exit from the postseason that no longer satisfies their fans or front office.

The Cubs' interest in Nationals free agent Bryce Harper (another Sox target) has been muted publicly, overshadowed by talk of fiscal realities, the decision not to extend manager Joe Maddon's contract and such.

There weren't even all that many turned heads when the Cubs secured lightning rod Addison Russell on team-friendly terms that incentivize Russell to rehabilitate himself after running afoul of MLB's domestic-abuse policies.

Jerry Reinsdorf's teams are not known for throwing money around willy-nilly. Sometimes when they have, it has not gone well. (Adam Dunn? Yes. Yes, he was.)

Side note 1: To all those dismayed by the Bulls giving a raise to gym teacher Jim Boylen despite a dearth of discernible success on his watch, the generosity is at least a sign the Reinsdorf vault is open for withdrawals.

Side note 2: Despite the Bulls brain trust's latest endorsement of Boylen, how long before the marketing team at Goose Island stages a contest in which fans can attempt to coach the Bulls to victory?

The Sox pursuit of Machado and Harper has been reminiscent of when, a few weeks after the group led by Reinsdorf and Eddie Einhorn acquired the team in 1981, they signed Red Sox catcher Carlton Fisk as a free agent and bought the contract of Phillies slugger Greg Luzinski.

The Sox at the time were a season away from launching SportsVision, just as they now are a season from the Cubs-less iteration of NBC Sports Chicago they'll share with Reinsdorf's Bulls and Rocky Wirtz's Hawks.

SportsVision, a pre-cable subscription channel, was supposed to serve as a TV turnstile for the club (but ran into resistance from couch-bound fans unaccustomed to paying for telecasts). It was going to need star power.

Whether signing Machado would be as impactful for the franchise as signing Fisk was remains to be seen, but the former Orioles and Dodgers infielder certainly would make a splash and announce the Sox are a force to be reckoned with.

Unless you're going around with your eyes covered — and your ears plugged — you know he already has.

MLB deleted odd tweet about White Sox' reported Manny Machado offer

By Satchel Price / Chicago Sun-Times | January 14, 2019

Everyone wants to know where Manny Machado (and fellow top free agent Bryce Harper) will sign before the start of the 2019 MLB season. That apparently includes whoever runs the league's official Twitter account, which curiously posted Monday afternoon about the White Sox' reported offer to Machado.

The tweet, which was later deleted, included an image of Machado alongside previously reported terms on the Sox' offer – eight years, \$250 million – and the caption: “The White Sox want Manny on the South Side. Will he say yes?”

A screenshot can be seen below:

The White Sox are one of several teams reported to be in heavy pursuit of Machado, a four-time All-Star and two-time Gold Glove winner, but there's been conflicting information on how much they've offered the infielder. On Sunday, ESPN reported that the Sox had bumped their offer up to eight years, while a report out of the Dominican Republic pegged the value at \$250 million.

Those are the figures that MLB used in its now-deleted tweet.

However, a source told the Sun-Times that the White Sox have stuck to their original offer of seven years. USA Today also reported that the club had not increased the term length on its proposal.

Per source, the #WhiteSox offer to free agent Manny Machado has not changed and is in fact for 7 years.

Many fans pointed out after MLB's tweet how unusual it was to see unofficial information reported by the media being passed along from an official league account.

At this point, it's unclear whether Machado has serious interest in signing with the White Sox, regardless of the details of what they've offered so far. One report said that his camp plans to sign with the highest bidder, which could put the South Siders in a difficult position if they're holding firm in negotiations.

The White Sox have done their part beyond hammering out contract details to appeal to Machado. Earlier this offseason, the team acquired first baseman Yonder Alonso, Machado's brother-in-law, and outfielder Jon Jay, Machado's longtime friend. Like everyone else, we're waiting to see whether the money makes sense for both sides, too.

How White Sox scouts determined Eloy Jiménez would be their next big star

By James Fegan / The Athletic | January 15, 2019

"First impressions: big, strong body. Carlos Lee-type body. Automatically he stood out. That's the first thing you see. Then you get a chance to see him take batting practice and the ball jumps off his bat."

White Sox scout Daraka Shaheed had no trouble spotting or becoming quickly impressed by a 19-year-old Eloy Jiménez as he conducted his assigned coverage of the Cubs organization three years ago. He might have had more trouble envisioning is what would come of it.

Shaheed's 16 years in the White Sox organization have mostly been spent with the franchise firmly in win-now mode, searching for big league-ready talent, or scouring for hidden contributors that could be added without subtracting much or anything from the playoff effort.

The idea of using major-league resources to pluck the crown jewel of another team's farm system was still pretty foreign to the Sox three years ago, and to do so with the Cubs was even more unthinkable.

"I thought I'd be watching him in the big leagues with the Cubs, not with the White Sox," Shaheed said by phone. "There are certain teams that you see that you deal with and other teams that you don't and the Cubs, occasionally they do stuff but you wouldn't expect to see José Quintana going out to that team."

Especially not since Shaheed was one of the scouts who recommended signing Quintana when the Yankees allowed him to become a minor league free agent after 2011. Securing a mid-rotation horse for essentially no acquisition cost was a massive key for turning the 2012 White Sox into a near-division winner out of nowhere, but Shaheed is even more tickled by the idea that Quintana turned into Jiménez and Dylan Cease. Besides, he wouldn't want too much credit for the find in the first place.

"Nobody knows," Shaheed said. "I thought he had a chance to be a nice, solid reliever."

Part of downplaying credit is that Shaheed would say he didn't find Quintana; that's not how pro scouting works. Rather, he was told to get a look at him by senior director of baseball operations Dan Fabian, who wanted to have his interest in the left-hander affirmed in-person by a veteran evaluator. Similarly, Shaheed certainly did not find Jiménez — the top-rated international amateur signing in baseball as a 16-year-old per MLB Pipeline — but was tasked with going beyond what everyone knew (big, strong, power-hitting

prospect) and discerning whether he was the type of player who could be the centerpiece of a return for one of the White Sox's best trade assets, or mature into a foundational piece of the rebuild.

"He hit the ball to right-center field like he was a left-handed hitter and when he pulled the ball, it was just ridiculous," Shaheed said. "He has the physical, but he has the mental feel for the barrel and the ability to make contact. That's a rare thing."

Enough looks at Jiménez allowed Shaheed to see his patience improve over time and assess whether he was driven enough to keep in top shape despite concerns over how physically mature he was at a young age. Shaheed's also saw Jiménez when he struggled, so he could see how he responded. The Sox of course did not just rely on Shaheed, and kept Jiménez on their list of targets for scouts assigned to other teams, including Keith Staab and John Tumminia.

"I watched batting practice," said Tumminia, recently retired from the Sox after 32 years. "I did see him get up four times and he didn't make any throws in the outfield but I did see him in warmups. He didn't steal any bases and I have to believe he's not a stolen base threat. But the words that I used on my report were 'He looks like something out of the movie Troy.'"

When Tumminia shifted off Achilles as a comp for Jiménez, he offered up Dave Winfield in terms of physical tools and build, stopping short of promising the same Hall of Fame career. This time last year I struggled to find a White Sox staffer who would identify a flaw in Jiménez's game, but Tumminia is up to the task. Like many he noted Jiménez's defense is behind the bat, but he also sat off near the on-deck circle to watch his eyes as he tracked pitching, and noticed some vulnerability for his eyes to draw him out in front on off-speed pitches and slow breaking balls.

Since scouts are usually noted for their enthusiasm about players they like, it was surprising to hear both Tumminia and Shaheed express unprompted approval for the White Sox holding Jiménez back from his big-league debut last year. But with all those concerns identified, Tumminia still came out of the process viewing Jiménez as a "pure hitter," and grading him out as a potential All-Star-level contributor.

"Pure hitter for me is a guy who has bat speed, he has angle to and through the ball, he's got backspin, which is natural backspin, something you can't be taught," Tumminia said. "He's got launch power. You put this combination together and you have the ability there to hit .310-.320 with 30 home runs by the time it's all said and done."

If there's an addendum to focusing on Jiménez's ascension to the majors, it would be allowing some room for the similar path taken by Cease, who could also debut in Chicago by the end of the year after a breakthrough 2018 accelerated his timeline.

Like Jiménez, Cease hardly came from nowhere, as the ceiling of his raw stuff and velocity always exceeded even his sixth-round draft pick status. But while other evaluators saw Cease's lagging command and tagged him a reliever, Shaheed thought the right-hander's slow ease back into a starter workload after Tommy John surgery was slowing his progress in repeating his delivery, which would eventually come. This stance also came from watching Cease all the way from his early days in instructional league, since Fabian had tagged him as a player to monitor immediately after he became a pro.

"He showed arm strength and the ability to spin the breaking ball," Shaheed said. "He didn't have the command yet, it was shaky. Got a chance to see him in season, that was one of the guys Dan had targeted and said if you get a chance to see him, let me know. I knew then there must be a good chance that something was in the works."

Rather than raw and unrefined, Shaheed found Cease almost too advanced. Even in his earliest pro innings, from talking to Cease in the stands on his off days, Shaheed found him to be thinking about pitch sequencing to a degree he usually only saw in the low minors from big leaguers making rehab starts.

Jiménez hit .337/.384/.577 across two levels last year, and Cease struck out 160 with a 2.40 ERA over 124 innings while making a mid-season level jump of his own. Both now have achieved the level of absurd statistical dominance over minor league competition that most future stars achieve, making it easy to forecast their success and relevance in the White Sox's coming years. But before the Sox had that to fall back on, they had faith in their scouts.

Garcia leaves White Sox for Tampa Bay

By Staff / Associated Press | January 14, 2019

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. -- Avisail Garcia and the Tampa Bay Rays have agreed to terms on a one-year contract that would pay the former Chicago White Sox outfielder \$3.5 million next season.

With incentives, the deal could be worth more if the 27-year-old -- one season removed from being an AL All-Star -- rebounds from a disappointing 2018.

Garcia, who's coming off arthroscopic surgery on his right knee, hit a career-high 19 home runs last season but slumped to .236 with 49 RBIs in 93 games after batting a career-best .330 with 18 homers and 80 RBIs in 136 games in 2017, when he was an All-Star.

Garcia is a .271 career hitter with 76 home runs and 302 RBIs over seven seasons with the White Sox and Detroit Tigers