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Former White Sox broadcaster McConnell dies

By Scott Merkin / MLB.com/ April 8, 2018

CHICAGO -- Joe McConnell, the talented and versatile broadcaster who called White Sox games from 1980-84, died on Sunday morning in Indianapolis, Ind. He was 79. The club announced his passing prior to Sunday's game against the Tigers.

McConnell was the radio voice of the 1983 American League West champion White Sox. He teamed with Harry Caray, Jimmy Piersall and Rich King on WBBM-AM coverage from 1980-81, and from 1982-84, McConnell worked with Early Wynn and Lorn Brown on WMAQ-AM.

McConnell's iconic career included 23 seasons in the National Football League as the voice of the Denver Broncos (1969), Minnesota Vikings (1971-76 and 1985-87), Chicago Bears (1977-84), Indianapolis Colts (1992-94) and Tennessee Oilers (1997-98), seven seasons in the National Basketball Association as the voice of the Phoenix Suns (1970-72) and Indiana Pacers (1972-77), and seven seasons in Major League Baseball as the voice of the Twins (1978-79) and White Sox.

From 1991-95, McConnell also served as the lead voice for the NBA Radio Network. He broadcast three Super Bowls, the NBA and American Basketball Association championships, the NBA All-Star Game and the American League Championship Series. Additionally, McConnell broadcast Northwestern football

(1988) and Indiana State (1978-79), DePaul (1984-88), Illinois (1987-88), Notre Dame (1987-88) and Northwestern (1989-94) men's basketball. McConnell was with the Sycamores during their run with Larry Bird to the NCAA title game.

Most recently, McConnell served for 15 seasons as play-by-play announcer for Purdue football, from 1995-2009. He has been honored with the AP/UPI Play-by-Play Sportscaster of the Year Award five times and was the Indiana Sportscaster of the Year in 2000, and the Illinois Sportscaster of the Year in 1981.

In 2006, he received a nomination for the National Football Foundation's Chris Schenkel Award, presented to a college football broadcaster. Upon his retirement, at halftime of his final broadcast of the game between Purdue and Indiana University on November 21, 2009, he was awarded the Sagamore of the Wabash, the highest award that the Indiana governor can bestow, presented by Governor Mitch Daniels.

Pipeline Preview: Kopech ready for season debut

By Mike Rosenbaum /MLB.com / April 8, 2018

Here's a look at top prospects to watch in today's Minor League action:

Hitter to watch: Gleyber Torres (Yankees' No. 1), Scranton/Wilkes-Barre vs. Lehigh Valley (6:35 p.m. ET on MiLB.TV)

Torres, MLB Pipeline's No. 6 overall prospect, played the hero for Triple-A Scranton/Wilkes-Barre on Sunday, hitting a go-ahead two-run single in the top of the ninth inning that proved the difference in the RailRiders' 5-4 win against Syracuse. The hit was one of four collected by the 21-year-old infielder, who finished the game 4-for-5 one day after connecting on his first 2018 home run.

Pitcher to watch: Michael Kopech (White Sox No. 2), Charlotte at Norfolk (6:35 p.m. ET on MiLB.TV)

The No. 10 overall prospect will be making his season debut when he takes the mound for Triple-A Charlotte. The 21-year-old right-hander pitched well early in Spring Training but struggled in his final two outings, allowing a combined 12 runs (nine earned) on seven hits and six walks in 2 2/3 innings to finish camp with an 11.57 ERA.

Duel of the day: Hunter Harvey (Orioles' No. 4) vs. Tyler Alexander (Tigers' No. 19), Bowie vs. Erie (6:35 p.m. ET on MiLB.TV)

After a slew of injuries limited him to just 31 1/3 innings over the past three seasons, Harvey, the top-ranked pitching prospect in Baltimore's system, is set to finally make his Double-A debut. The 2013 first-rounder returned fully healthy last July to dominate across three levels and continued to impress this spring in big league camp, allowing one earned run in each of his three starts while fanning seven in as many innings.

Alexander, meanwhile, is beginning his second straight season in the Eastern League after posting a 5.07 ERA across a career-high 138 1/3 innings for Erie in 2017. The 23-year-old lefty appeared to be on the fast track to the Majors after reaching Double-A in his first full season, a little more than a year after the Tigers had selected him in the second round. He was hit hard in '17, yielding 178 hits and 20 home runs, but continued to show an advanced control profile with 120 strikeouts and 23 walks.

Monday's Top 100 prospect probables

No. 21 Hunter Greene (Reds' No. 2), Dayton vs. Lake County (7 p.m. ET on MiLB.TV)

No. 25 Brendan McKay (Rays' No. 3), Bowling Green at South Bend (7:05 p.m. ET on MiLB.TV)

No. 51 Ian Anderson (Braves' No. 5), Florida at Fort Myers (7 p.m. ET)

More top prospect probables:

Max Povse (Mariners' No. 7), Tacoma vs. Sacramento (Triple-A)
Heath Fillmyer (Royals' No. 23), Omaha vs. Colorado Springs (Triple-A)
Drew Anderson (Phillies' No. 24), Lehigh Valley at Scranton/Wilkes-Barre (Triple-A)
Cionel Perez (Astros' No. 6), Corpus Christi at Arkansas (Double-A)
Yadier Alvarez (Dodgers' No. 8), Tulsa at Midland (Double-A)
Marcos Molina (Mets' No. 8), Binghamton vs. Akron (Double-A)
Garrett Williams (Giants' No. 9), Richmond at Hartford (Double-A)
Franklyn Kilome (Phillies' No. 9), Reading vs. Portland (Double-A)
Vladimir Gutierrez (Reds' No. 10), Pensacola at Mobile (Double-A)
Taylor Hearn (Pirates' No. 11), Altoona vs. Harrisburg (Double-A)
Cody Ponce (Brewers' No. 14), Biloxi at Montgomery (Double-A)
Brett Martin (Rangers' No. 15) vs. Connor Jones (Cardinals' No. 23), Frisco vs. Springfield (Double-A)
Kohl Stewart (Twins' No. 18), Chattanooga vs. Birmingham (Double-A)
Ricardo Sanchez (Braves' No. 27), Mississippi vs. Tennessee (Double-A)
Jon Harris (Blue Jays' No. 30), New Hampshire at Trenton (Double-A)
Alex Lange (Cubs' No. 5), Myrtle Beach vs. Winston-Salem (Class A Advanced)
Imani Abdullah (Dodgers' No. 19), Rancho Cucamonga at Stockton (Class A Advanced)
Pedro Avila (Padres' No. 26), Lake Elsinore at Visalia (Class A Advanced)
Joe Gatto (Angels' No. 29), Inland Empire v.s Modesto (Class A Advanced)
Brandon Bailey (Astros' No. 30), Buies Creek at Lynchburg (Class A Advanced)
Alex Scherff (Red Sox's No. 8), Greenville at Lexington (Class A)
Blayne Enlow (Twins' No. 9), Cedar Rapids at Peoria (Class A)
Will Gaddis (Rockies' No. 16), Asheville at Kannapolis (Class A)
Braeden Ogle (Pirates' No. 29), West Virginia vs. Lakewood (Class A)

Nicky Delmonico's brother had a catch with him from the stands and said it felt like 'heaven'

By Scott Merkin and Matt Monagan /MLB.com/ April 7, 2018

Ever wondered what you need to do in order to have a catch with your favorite MLBer? Well, as this Nicky Delmonico superfan proved before Sunday's Tigers-White Sox game, you simply need to wear the same jersey:

Well, that AND be related to him. MLB.com's Scott Merkin reports that the fan was Nicky's brother, Joey. Via Joey's Instagram:

"Playing catch with your little bro in the top of the 3rd against the Detroit Tigers, priceless. A moment I'll never forget. This field, this game, it's a part of our past, and our family. Is this heaven, no, it's Chicago, but today it sure felt like it. Love you bro. Thanks for the memories and can't wait to come back to Chicago! "

Pretty sweet. Still, it's worth testing out the "wear a player's jersey, play catch with said player" theory. You can yell out, "Hey! I'm kind of almost you, but not as good at baseball. Let's play catch!" Mike Trout's even done it if you wear the Angels' team colors..

Rondon impresses in White Sox relief debut

By Scott Merkin /MLB.com / April 7, 2018

CHICAGO -- Bruce Rondon was asked prior to Sunday's 1-0 loss to the Tigers how it would feel to face his old friend and former teammate Miguel Cabrera.

Rondon, whose contract was purchased by the White Sox from Triple-A Charlotte prior to the contest, said he wouldn't really know until that encounter occurred. After striking out Cabrera to close out the eighth, one of four straight strikeouts recorded by the hard-throwing right-hander, Rondon was able to put the matchup into context.

"It was a really nice experience for me because I knew I was facing one of the best hitters in the world, for me the best," Rondon said through translator Billy Russo. "To be able to face him and to strike him out was a really, really good experience."

Cabrera, a notorious and humorous talker in good times and bad, didn't say anything to Rondon. But he did give him a knowing wink after Rondon topped out at 100.1 mph with his fastball against him, according to Statcast™. Rondon averaged 98.4 mph on 10 fastballs, while also getting three swinging strikes on nine sliders.

That Cabrera reaction was a little different prior to the game when Rondon went into the visitors' clubhouse upon arrival. It was an easy mistake to make considering Rondon pitched for the Tigers in 2013 and from 2015-17. But after agreeing to a Minor League deal with the White Sox as a non-roster invite to Spring Training, Rondon is now part of the home team and he was reminded of that fact by Cabrera.

"He said, 'Hey loco, what are you doing here?'" the smiling Rondon said.

The 27-year-old went 8-7 with a 5.00 ERA and 133 strikeouts over 111 2/3 innings in 123 relief appearances with the Tigers. He made a career-high 37 relief appearances with the club in 2016, going 5-2 with a 2.97 ERA and 45 strikeouts in 36 1/3 innings.

Travel visa issues and lower back problems limited Rondon to five games and 5 1/3 innings in Cactus League action this spring, although he pitched well with seven strikeouts and one walk. Rondon thought more work or tuning up with Charlotte might be on the agenda before joining the White Sox, but he was added to the bullpen following one scoreless inning at Durham on Thursday.

Juan Minaya was optioned to Charlotte following Saturday's 6-1 loss to the Tigers. It was a loss during which Minaya faced four batters in the ninth and walked all four, leading manager Rick Renteria to say during the postgame that the team's closer at the end of '17 wasn't pitching with the same level of confidence and needed to find it again in the Minors.

Nate Jones and Joakim Soria have served as late-inning options, and Renteria doesn't see Rondon forcing his way into that role at this point. Sunday's dominant effort over 1 1/3 innings could gradually change that fact.

"His slider was really good today," catcher Wellington Castillo said. "Fastball was really good, so he just came in the game and attacked the hitters."

"We knew he had a big arm, and certainly today he showed you what he's capable of doing," Renteria said. "It was an impressive day for everybody in terms of what they saw him do, and hopefully it's something that he'll be able to continue to do as he remains with us."

Regardless of the role, Rondon is eager to take advantage of the new situation.

"Honestly, I needed a fresh start, a change," said Rondon, whose addition filled the White Sox 40-man roster. "Just a start from scratch in another organization with no strings attached. I showed today all the good things I can accomplish."

Lopez gives good account in White Sox loss

By Max Gelman/MLB.com / April 8, 2018

CHICAGO -- White Sox starter Reynaldo Lopez offered a glimpse of the future during Sunday's 1-0 loss to the Tigers.

The young right-hander, acquired from the Nationals in the Adam Eaton trade in 2016, tossed seven innings and gave up just one unearned run on two hits, while walking and striking out five. A central part of the White Sox rebuild, Lopez's strong start came on the heels of an equally impressive outing last week in Toronto.

Lopez now has seven quality starts in his last eight games dating to last September, and he is starting to establish himself as a force on the mound.

"He did a nice job and advanced last season with us," manager Rick Renteria said. "[He] has made some adjustments since the beginning of the season and is trying to make sure he commands the zone. I thought that today he went out and felt very good about where he was at."

Lopez's slider, a pitch he developed extensively in Spring Training, was particularly effective against Tigers hitters. He induced five swinging strikes on the slider, four of which came in two-strike counts.

"I've been happy with the way that pitch is working out for me because that's kind of a new pitch for me," Lopez said through translator Billy Russo. "I've been able to use it in an effective way."

Though Sunday's chilly weather made it difficult to get going offensively -- neither team recorded a hit after the third inning -- Lopez was nonetheless able to navigate out of a few jams, especially in the fourth. After retiring the first two batters, Lopez issued consecutive walks, but he struck out Jordan Hicks swinging to end the threat.

White Sox catcher Wellington Castillo said he saw Lopez gaining confidence through his early success. That confidence will be key to Lopez's development going forward.

"He's always had the stuff, but now it's like he's starting to grow and know himself," Castillo said. "That's a guy who is really quiet, but he knows what he's capable of doing."

MOMENTS THAT MATTERED

Passed over: Following Leonys Martin's leadoff single and stolen base, Castillo was charged with a passed ball, allowing Martin to advance to third. Two pitches later, Martin scored on Miguel Cabrera's sacrifice fly to left field, which was the difference in the game.

The best offense: Both teams had ample opportunity to tack on some runs, but were thwarted by solid defense. In the first, when the White Sox loaded the bases with one out, Tigers shortstop Jose Iglesias made a running backhand grab on a sinking Nicky Delmonico line drive. Then in the sixth, Delmonico responded in kind with a sliding catch to rob Mikie Mahtook of a hit.

QUOTABLE

"I've been working hard since Spring Training trying to get better, and I think that right now, I've been able to deliver. These first two outings have been good and those are just the first two good outings that are coming. I'm expecting more in the future." -- Lopez, on his first two starts of the season

STELLAR DEBUT

Reliever Bruce Rondon, whose contract was purchased by the White Sox from Triple-A Charlotte prior to the contest, logged 1 1/3 innings in relief and fanned former teammate Cabrera to close out the eighth, one of four straight strikeouts recorded by the hard-throwing right-hander.

"It was a really nice experience for me because I knew I was facing one of the best hitters in the world, for me the best," Rondon said through translator Billy Russo. "To be able to face him and to strike him out was a really, really good experience."

"His slider was really good today," Castillo said. "Fastball was really good, so he just came in the game and attacked the hitters."

WHAT'S NEXT

Right-hander Miguel Gonzalez will be aiming to bounce back from a tough first start as the White Sox open a three-game series with the Rays at 1:10 p.m. CT on Monday at Guaranteed Rate Field. Gonzalez gave up six runs (five earned) in five innings in his season debut at Toronto..

Daily White Sox prospects update: Jordan Stephens gives up just two hits in 2018 debut

By Vinnie Duber/ NBC Sports Chicago / April 8, 2018

Here's your daily update on what the White Sox highly touted prospects are doing in the minor leagues.

Double-A Birmingham

The Barons were the only White Sox affiliate in action Saturday due to rain washing away three other games. Jordan Stephens had a strong first start of the 2018 season, going six innings and allowing just one run on two hits and two walks while striking out seven. Stephens, a fifth-round draft pick in 2015, made 16 starts at Birmingham last season and finished with a 3.14 ERA. He's currently ranked as the White Sox No. 21 prospect. The guy ranked right behind him, Seby Zavala, had Birmingham's lone hit in a 2-0 loss to Chattanooga.

Now that Bruce Rondon has found the correct clubhouse, White Sox giving him shot to be an upgrade in so-far shaky bullpen

By Vinnie Duber/ NBC Sports Chicago / April 8, 2018

The White Sox are hoping Bruce Rondon's first mistake upon arriving at Guaranteed Rate Field will be his last now that he's a member of the South Side bullpen.

You see, Rondon, a former Detroit Tiger, started his White Sox tenure by heading into the wrong clubhouse. It's hard to blame him, really, considering he's only ever pitched here as a visitor. But he got a quick correction from former teammate Miguel Cabrera, who called him crazy and asked what the heck he was doing with the team from the Motor City.

"I never had in mind I would have to pitch against them," Rondon said after arriving in the correct clubhouse Sunday morning. "This morning, wrongly I went to their clubhouse. I saw Miguel, everybody. He said, 'Hey loco, what are you doing here?'"

Rondon was brought up from Triple-A Charlotte ahead of Sunday's game to fill the spot in the bullpen vacated when Juan Minaya got sent down after walking four straight hitters in Saturday's White Sox loss.

Rondon pitched in 123 big league games with the Tigers from 2013 to 2017 and at one point was considered a promising future closer given his big arm. He's got seven career saves, but he likely won't be asked to pick up any more for the White Sox, who just need scoreless innings from a relief corps that has a 7.71 ERA through seven games, tied for the highest in the majors.

This is one of the many veteran sign-and-flip hopefuls Rick Hahn's front office added over the winter and started the season pitching in Charlotte. Xavier Cedeno, Jeanmar Gomez and Robbie Ross Jr. are all with the Knights. Whether any or multiple of those guys turn big league chances into a potential midseason trade for the rebuilding White Sox remains to be seen, but it's a good opportunity for those guys to work with Don Cooper and potentially rediscover some old magic.

"We saw it, after he was able to get there with us, obviously a power arm," manager Rick Renteria said. "The outings he did have with us were very efficient, got through them very quickly. Did throw one inning in Charlotte without any incident, did a nice job. He's been in the big leagues in the past. I think that the

hope is that we can harness that power, have him command the strike zone more consistently and maybe we get something that's long lasting and effective.

"We're very flexible with everything we've been doing. But to go and say to you that he's got a chance to win a back-end position, that's not something that I have on my mind. I want to get him working with us as White Sox, get him used to what we're about, and then allow his skill set to present what he's capable of doing. We'll use him accordingly."

Rondon allowed just one run in 5.1 innings during Cactus League play, impressive considering the late start he got after visa issues kept him from arriving at camp with the rest of the team. He also dealt with lower-back issues during the spring.

"I felt very good during spring training," Rondon said. "I got good results and even though I arrived to camp late because of the troubles with the visa, I was always in contact with them and I was working in Venezuela with the program Coop and the coaches gave me. They knew what I was doing in Venezuela, and when they saw me in spring training, they were happy with the way I was doing my job and throwing the ball.

"These first days in the minors was a continuation of that work. I think right now I feel good. I was able to execute all my plan during spring training and I feel really good.

"I think this is the right spot for me, and I'm very thankful for the White Sox for this opportunity. They are going to give me the chance to show what I'm able to do."

Uh oh, after another strong outing with no run support, is Reynaldo Lopez the new Jose Quintana?

By Vinnie Duber/ NBC Sports Chicago / April 8, 2018

Jose Quintana was one of the best pitchers in the American League during his tenure on the South Side, though not many people knew it thanks to Quintana's almost laughable bad luck when it came to run support.

Quintana is now on the North Side of town, but someone appears to already be filling his role as the hard-luck loser in the White Sox starting rotation.

Reynaldo Lopez turned in his second straight strong outing of the 2018 season in Sunday's 1-0 loss to the Detroit Tigers. Though the starting staff hasn't even completed two full turns through the rotation yet, Lopez has been the most impressive in the early going.

Sunday, Lopez lasted seven innings and allowed just one unearned run on only two hits on a tough day to hit on the freezing-cold South Side. He struck out five and had his issues, too, walking five. But his ERA plummeted after he was so good in his season debut last week in Toronto, now sitting at 0.69 on the season.

"I think this was one was a good one, too," Lopez said through a translator after the game. "Even with the walks, I didn't let them bother me and I didn't let them make me lose my focus in the game. I was mad with the walks, but I was able to keep my focus and perform.

"I've been working hard since spring training trying to get better, and I think that right now I've been able to deliver. These first two outings have been good, and those are just the first two of the good outings that are coming. I'm expecting more in the future. I think it's just a matter for me to keep my focus and execute my plan. I was able to do it, and I just hope to keep doing it."

Suggesting Lopez is the new Quintana from the run-support standpoint is hyperbolic, of course, considering it's been just two games. But he went through a few outings of similar results last season, too, when he made his first appearances with the White Sox. He didn't get his first win until his fifth outing, even though three of his first four were quality starts. In fact, only three of his 10 starts in a White Sox uniform haven't been of the "quality" variety, and he's got a 3-4 record.

The White Sox offense was frozen Sunday, mustering only three hits against the Tigers, though freezing temperatures might be as much to blame as the performance of the lineup. Even with the limited production, there were more of the same positive flashes the lineup has shown at the season's outset: Avisail Garcia had two hits and is batting .343, Tim Anderson got the White Sox other hit and stole his major league best fifth base, and Matt Davidson upped his walk total to six after walking just 19 times total in 2017.

But the continued success of Lopez is an equally good sign for the rebuilding White Sox. The rotation of the future is a crowded one with Lopez vying for a spot alongside Lucas Giolito, Carlos Rodon, Michael Kopech, Alec Hansen, Dylan Cease and Dane Dunning. Lopez lowered his ERA with the White Sox to 3.86 with his performance Sunday, making him as promising as any of these young arms.

This season will continue to be a developmental one for Lopez, and those five walks Sunday shows there's always room for improvement. But in two starts, he's been impressive.

And if being the new Quintana is bad, Lopez might not want to be good. After all, Quintana posted a 3.51 ERA and went to an All-Star Game while pitching for the White Sox. Even without the run support, if Lopez is the new Quintana, that'll surely make the White Sox very happy.

Needing strike-throwers, White Sox brought up Bruce Rondon, who promptly struck out all four hitters he faced

By Vinnie Duber/ NBC Sports Chicago / April 8, 2018

The White Sox needed its bullpen pitchers to throw strikes.

Enter Bruce Rondon.

Brought up from Triple-A Charlotte ahead of Sunday's series finale with the Detroit Tigers, Rondon was a bright spot in a 1-0 loss. He faced four batters. He struck out batters.

That was a drastic turn of events for a relief corps that began play Sunday with the highest bullpen ERA in the majors. Rondon was only up in the first place because Juan Minaya was sent down after he walked all four hitters he faced in Saturday's loss.

"I wasn't expecting to be here as soon as I was," Rondon said through a translator after the game. "I'm very thankful to the White Sox for the opportunity they have given me just to show again what I'm able to do at this level. I want to take advantage of every single day and take full advantage of this opportunity because I know I'm able to do a good job here."

Rondon was one of several veteran relievers Rick Hahn's front office inked to minor league deals this winter, and while none of those guys made the Opening Day roster, they figure to get their shots as the season goes on to become the kind of sign-and-flip guys that could land the rebuilding White Sox prospects, a la the bullpen selloff of 2017.

This kind of performance from the still-just-27-year-old Rondon should generate some interest around the league. Of course it's only one game, but after watching the bullpen get off to such a shaky start, the White Sox will take it.

And so will Rondon, who went from being a big-time prospect for these same Tigers to facing them Sunday. The first batter he struck out? Longtime teammate Miguel Cabrera, who gave Rondon some good-natured ribbing when the pitcher accidentally walked into the visitors clubhouse upon his Sunday-morning arrival.

"It was a really nice experience for me because I knew I was facing one of the best hitters in the world, for me the best," Rondon said. "To be able to face him and to strike him out was a really, really good experience.

"Honestly I needed a fresh start, a change. Just a start from scratch in another organization with no strings attached. I think with this opportunity with the White Sox I'm able to do it. I showed it today in the first time, all the good things I can accomplish.

"Definitely at some point with all the ups and downs (during my time with the Tigers) I lost confidence in myself, but you know what, that's one of the things right now I'm really glad because I feel comfortable with this organization since I joined this team in spring training. I know that the manager, the coaches and all my teammates have confidence in me and I feel very very good here. I feel like this is my home now."

White Sox call up reliever Bruce Rondon

By Paul Sullivan/ Chicago Tribune / April 8, 2018

The White Sox purchased the contract of Triple-A reliever Bruce Rondon Sunday to take the place of Juan Minaya.

Rondon, 27, had one scoreless inning at Charlotte. He was 8-7 with a 5.00 ERA in various stints with the Tigers from 2013-'17, and signed as a minor-league free agent in January.

Minaya was optioned to Charlotte after walking four batters in Saturday's loss and struggling from the outset of the season.

With the addition of Rondon, the Sox's 40-man roster now stands at 40."

Memorable first day for new White Sox reliever Bruce Rondon

By Paul Sullivan/ Chicago Tribune / April 8, 2018

On Sunday morning, new White Sox reliever Bruce Rondon accidentally went to the wrong clubhouse, where former teammate Miguel Cabrera pointed out he was no longer a Tiger.

"Hey, 'Loco,' what are you doing here?" Cabrera said, using his preferred nickname for Rondon.

Rondon sheepishly left and found his way to the home clubhouse. But ultimately he had the last laugh on Cabrera, striking out the Tigers slugger Sunday in his Sox debut.

The Sox called up the 27-year-old reliever from Triple-A Charlotte to replace Juan Minaya, who was sent down Saturday after walking four straight hitters. Rondon wound up striking out four straight hitters in his first outing.

A power arm who has lacked consistency, Rondon hit 100 mph on his second pitch to Cabrera and averaged between 97 and 100 on his fastball. The Sox aren't expecting to use him as a late-inning option, but they may have no choice if he pitches like that.

Rondon had a 5.00 career ERA with the Tigers in 123 appearances from 2013 to 2017, but he was non-tendered last November after posting a 10.91 ERA in 21 outings.

Manager Rick Renteria said the Sox were “very impressed with him last year in Detroit,” apparently ignoring his unsightly numbers. Rondon signed a minor-league deal with the Sox in January but made only five spring appearances after arriving late to camp because of a visa problem and then having a lower back injury.

“The outings he did have with us were very efficient, got through them very quickly,” Renteria said. “Did throw one inning in Charlotte without any incident. Did a nice job. He’s been in the big leagues in the past. I think that the hope is that we can harness that power, have him command the strike zone more consistently and maybe we get something that’s long-lasting and effective.”

Or at least long-lasting enough to get through the first half and deal him for prospects in July.

Rondon was the first of what could be many call-ups from Charlotte during the season. The Sox began the day with a 6.39 ERA, the worst in the majors, and a 7.71 bullpen ERA, also last in the majors.

Since none of the relievers is part of the rebuilding core, the Sox can’t really ask for patience as they can with starters like Reynaldo Lopez, Lucas Giolito and Carson Fulmer.

Rondon said the nickname “Loco” was given to him by Cabrera. As most know, it means “crazy” in Spanish.

So is Rondon crazy?

“No,” he said with a laugh.

Former voice of Sox silenced: Former Bears and White Sox broadcaster Joe McConnell died Sunday at 79 after a long illness. McConnell teamed with Harry Caray, Jimmy Piersall and Rich King on Sox radio broadcasts in 1980-81 and with Early Wynn in 1982-84, which included the “Winning Ugly” Sox team that won the AL West in 1983.

Reynaldo Lopez a bright spot as White Sox get swept by Tigers

By Paul Sullivan/ Chicago Tribune / April 8, 2018

If you’re looking for small victories in the early stages of Year 2 of the White Sox rebuild, Reynaldo Lopez is your man.

Lopez turned in the best outing by a White Sox starter this season Sunday, allowing one unearned first-inning run and only two hits in a seven-inning stint against the Tigers.

But if you’re looking for real victories, you’ve come to the wrong place.

The Sox wasted Lopez’s fine performance, managing only three hits in a 1-0 loss that handed Detroit a series sweep.

“I thought it was a decently played ballgame on both sides,” manager Rick Renteria said.

In the battle of AL Central rebuilds, the Tigers seem to be a bit further ahead than the Sox, though it’s hard to imagine a team in rebuild mode with Miguel Cabrera in the middle of the lineup.

The Sox have lost five of six after their promising start in Kansas City, and the offense that pounded out a major-league-leading 14 home runs in the first five games has been homerless since returning home.

They’ll face Rays ace Chris Archer at home on Monday, weather permitting, so it doesn’t get any easier.

Of course the cold weather may have something to do with the Sox's lethargic offensive showing the last two days. They scored one run Saturday on a 32-degree afternoon and were shut out by Mike Fiers and the Tigers bullpen Sunday on another frigid day.

Tigers 1, White Sox 0

Photos from the White Sox-Tigers game at Guaranteed Rate Field on Sunday, April 8, 2018.

"We've been putting together some good at-bats," shortstop Tim Anderson said. "We haven't been getting great results, but we've definitely been scratching and putting the barrel on the ball."

The saving grace of the afternoon was Lopez, who struck out five and walked five but managed to bear down with men on base. He gave up a single leading off the game to Leonys Martin, then watched Martin steal second, advance on a passed ball by Welington Castillo and score on a sacrifice fly by Cabrera.

Fiers escaped a base-loaded jam in the first inning and cruised the rest of the afternoon, throwing six shutout innings and allowing only three hits and a walk. Two scoring chances, in the seventh and ninth, were thwarted by double-play grounders by Castillo and Jose Abreu, respectively.

"Not the way we would've wanted to end the ballgame," Renteria said. "But today one run was what it took (to win)."

The Sox didn't have many threats and were 0-for-3 with runners in scoring position, leaving them at .202 (14-for-69) in that category for the year. Meanwhile, Lopez didn't allow a hit after the second inning and lowered his earned-run average to 0.69.

The hard thrower who came in the Adam Eaton deal couldn't choose which of his outings was more impressive.

"I think this one was a good one too," he said. "Even with the walks, I didn't let them bother me and I didn't let them make me lose my focus in the game. I was mad with the walks, but I was able to keep my focus."

White Sox fans may be buying into the rebuild, but Sunday's diehard-only crowd, which was announced at 11,131, suggests not everyone is on board yet. A game-time temperature of 36 degrees made it uncomfortable for fans from the outset, and many season ticket holders probably opted to eat their tickets after freezing through the first two games of the series.

Another factor may also have contributed to the absence of fans. The popular weekend ticket plan was changed in 2018, and now it includes only two Sunday dates — April 22 vs. the Astros and Aug. 19 vs. the Royals.

But the Sox knew it wasn't going to be easy to draw fans early in the season, especially without a hot start.

And it figures to be another sparsely attended game Monday afternoon, when snow and possibly rain are forecast and the Cubs are opening at Wrigley Field at the same time.

White Sox recall former Tigers reliever Bruce Rondon before game Sunday

By Cat Garcia/ Chicago Sun Times / April 8, 2018

After playing for the Detroit Tigers for his entire major-league career, right-handed reliever Bruce Rondon was recalled from Class AAA by the White Sox before a game Sunday against his former team — leading to some confusion.

"This morning, wrongly I went to their clubhouse," Rondon said through a translator shortly after his arrival to Guaranteed Rate Field. "I saw Miguel, he said, 'Hey, loco, what are you doing here?'"

"I never had in mind I would have to pitch against them."

Rondon was signed by the White Sox in January after spending four seasons with the Tigers. He has a 5.00 career ERA, accompanied by a strikeout rate of over 12 K/9 and consistently hit 97 mph on his fastball during 2017 with the Tigers.

White Sox relief pitcher Bruce Rondon pauses on the mound during the fifth inning of a spring training baseball game against the Seattle Mariners on March 23, 2018, in Glendale, Ariz. (AP Photo/Ross D. Franklin)

Rondon was recalled to fill the roster spot of Juan Minaya, who was optioned to Class AAA Charlotte after walking four batters in Saturday's 6-1 loss to the Tigers.

"I felt very good during spring training," Rondon said. "I got good results and even though I arrived to camp late because of the troubles with the visa, I was always in contact with them and I was working in Venezuela with the program [pitching coach Don] Cooper and the coaches gave me. They knew what I was doing in Venezuela and when they saw me in spring training."

"He's been in the big leagues in the past," manager Rick Renteria said. "The hope is that we can harness that power, have him command the strike zone more consistently and maybe we get something that's long-lasting and effective."

White Sox miss their one shot, Tigers score on theirs to sweep series

By Cat Garcia/ Chicago Sun Times / April 8, 2018

Allowing Tigers center fielder Leonys Martin to reach third base became a vital error for the White Sox on Sunday.

Martin led off the game with a single and stole second. After Jeimer Candelario struck out, Martin advanced to third on Wellington Castillo's passed ball and scored on Miguel Cabrera's sacrifice fly. Nicholas Castellanos flew out to end the inning.

White Sox DH Matt Davidson's new hitting approach paying dividends
White Sox recall former Tigers reliever Bruce Rondon before game Sunday

That was all the Tigers would need in their 1-0 victory, which earned them a three-game sweep at Guaranteed Rate Field.

The Sox had Tigers starter Mike Fiers on the ropes in the first, loading the bases with one out on a single, hit batter and walk. But Nicky Delmonico lined out and Castillo grounded out. Fiers allowed only two more baserunners, both on hits, in the next five innings.

Reynaldo Lopez allowed only two hits — both to Martin — in seven innings, though he also walked five. Sox manager Rick Renteria still praised the righty, who struck out five and was particularly satisfied with his slider, which he threw 16 times.

"I've been happy with the way that pitch is working out because that's kind of a new pitch for me," Lopez said. "I think I've been able to use it in an effective way. I wasn't throwing that pitch for a long time. I'm very happy with that pitch right now."

Said Renteria: "He has made some adjustments since the beginning of the season, trying to make sure he commands the zone. I thought that today he went out and felt very good about where he was at when he started the game, and it showed."

Former Tigers reliever Bruce Rondon was impressive in his Sox debut, fanning all four batters he faced. Rondon, who was called up from Class AAA Charlotte before the game, faced Cabrera first and touched 100 mph on his second pitch. He struck him out with an offspeed pitch.

"I knew I was facing one of the best hitters in the world," Rondon said. "To be able to face him and to strike him out was a really, really good experience."

Rondon was an unexpected arrival after he was reassigned to Charlotte out of spring training. But the Sox needed help in the bullpen after Juan Minaya allowed three runs and five walks in one inning over three appearances.

"I wasn't expecting to be here as soon as I was," Rondon said. "I'm very thankful to the White Sox for the opportunity they have given me just to show again what I'm able to do at this level. I want to take advantage of every single day and take full advantage of this opportunity because I know I'm able to do a good job here."

Avisail Garcia continued to carry over his strong play from last season. He had two of the Sox' three hits, singling to right field in the first inning and to left in the third. Garcia also reached on a fielding error by first baseman Candelario in the ninth. He's leading the team with a .343 batting average.

White Sox DH Matt Davidson's new hitting approach paying dividends

By Cat Garcia/ Chicago Sun Times / April 8, 2018

White Sox third baseman Matt Davidson walked 19 times in 443 plate appearances last season for a minuscule 4.3 percent walk rate, the eighth-lowest in the American League.

Davidson also had a 37 percent strikeout rate, making folks wonder if he'd end up more of a liability than an asset for the Sox.

White Sox miss their one shot, Tigers score on theirs to sweep series

White Sox recall former Tigers reliever Bruce Rondon before game Sunday

"I'm just trying to swing at good pitches, not swing at balls and walk more," Davidson said. "If I decide to swing, [I] just swing at better pitches. I think overall the season is going to go well, so really that's my main goal."

Davidson now is swinging at just 35 percent of pitches he sees, down from 48 percent in 2017. He also is swinging at fewer balls by a considerable margin. This season, he has swung at just 18 percent of pitches outside the strike zone (albeit in only eight games), down 15 percentage points from last season.

Few batters fared well in the Sox' 1-0 loss to the Tigers on Sunday, including Davidson. He walked in his first plate appearance but struck out in his other three.

However, one year after putting up paltry numbers, Davidson leads the Sox with six walks.

"I didn't walk at all last year, really," he said. "I just wanted to improve that."

Davidson always has been known as a power hitter. It was just a matter of getting him to be patient enough to find his pitches to hit. That has helped him hit four home runs in just 35 plate appearances.

Davidson's ISO (isolated power), a statistic that measures a batter's home-run power, always has been exceptional. He had a .232 ISO last season, placing him 23rd among AL batters with 400 or more plate

appearances. This season, Davidson is at .520. Although that number is due to regress to the mean, it's still an impressive start for a player who struggled to bat even .220 last season.

With Yolmer Sanchez taking over the starting third-base job, Davidson has been the designated hitter in every game but one. The role suits him well, but it isn't stress-free.

"Being DH, you kind of gotta distract yourself a little more because you have a lot more time to think," Davidson said. "I'm not trying to [overthink]. I think sometimes last year when I was not doing so well, I would try to take a lot of swings and work on my swing a lot during the game, and it kind of just got me away from just going out there and competing.

"You know you got a lot more time [as DH], I'm hitting four or five times a night and sometimes there's like an hour between at-bats. When you're playing defense, you go play defense and try to help the team out."

No matter what role Davidson assumes, it's safe to say he's building his success on a solid approach.

"I just made it a big focus to make my decision-making a little more efficient and just really focus on the decision-making itself," Davidson said.

Juan Minaya's quick exit opens door for Bruce Rondón, bullpen turnover

By James Fegan/ The Athletic / April 8, 2018

Juan Minaya's exit from the White Sox clubhouse Saturday, save for a quick word of encouragement and hug from veteran Joakim Soria, was quick and quiet. Since his day included warming up in freezing temperatures, walking all four batters he faced in the ninth inning of a 6-1 loss, and then being promptly optioned to Triple-A Charlotte after all of three appearances this season, it's understandable Minaya wasn't in the mood for public reflection.

"I can tell you he just doesn't look as confident right now, obviously," Rick Renteria said. "I know he's trying to do his job but he hasn't looked as confident. You've got to attack the strike zone. In that part of the game we can still minimize a little bit of the damage."

Through seven games, the White Sox bullpen had the worst ERA in the league (7.71) and the eighth-worst walk rate (11.5 percent), so there won't be much fretting from the fan base that Minaya wound up bearing the brunt of the need to change something in the relief corps. But while beat writers usually find themselves explaining that teams can't pull the plug on players after one bad outing or two, that appears to really be the timeline Minaya was moved on.

"We already saw what he did with us last season, how he improved significantly," Renteria said. "In the spring we just wanted to get him ready to break with us and then give him an opportunity to show us the same stuff he did last year. It just didn't work out. There was no argument with him right now."

No manager likes having to use two relievers to handle the ninth inning when they're already down four runs, but with an eight-man bullpen, Minaya's quick hook is less about taxing his teammates, and more about not looking right from the start of the season. Renteria leaned hard on last year's performance as his guide for setting the Opening Day roster, but with a stockpile of veteran options in Triple-A and a very fluid situation past Soria and Nate Jones at the end of games, the Sox quickly moved on to the next option for someone who could emerge to lighten to high-leverage load down the line.

Into the clubhouse strolls former Tigers “closer of the future” Bruce Rondón to take that opportunity, after he accidentally strolled into the Tigers' visiting clubhouse first.

“I never had in mind I would have to pitch against [the Tigers],” Rondón said through team interpreter Billy Russo. “This morning, wrongly I went to their clubhouse. I saw Miguel [Cabrera], everybody. He said, ‘Hey loco, what are you doing here?’”

Rondon, still just 27, throws very hard and his ball moves very sharply. Even just last year he averaged well over 96 mph with his fastball, and struck out 29 percent of opposing hitters while simultaneously racking up a 10.91 ERA in 15 2/3 major league innings. As much as that kind of potential screams of someone who is one fix away, a Tigers club that very much saw that kind of potential in him released him after 10 years in their organization, after failing to eliminate the control problems that have undermined his readily apparent raw talent.

A Tommy John recipient in 2014, and bothered by lower back issues to go along with the visa problems in Venezuela that delayed his arrival this spring training, Rondón still managed to pitch well in Arizona. Rondón allowed one solo shot in 5 1/3 innings of Cactus League work with seven strikeouts and one walk, and pitched a scoreless frame in his only outing at Triple-A Charlotte.

“I got good results and even though I arrived to camp late because of the troubles with the visa,” Rondón said through Russo. “I was always in contact with them and I was working in Venezuela with the program [Don Cooper] and the coaches gave me. They knew what I was doing in Venezuela and when they saw me in spring training, they were happy with the way I was doing my job and throwing the ball. These first days in the minors was a continuation of that work. I think right now I feel good.”

Despite not having much settled in their late-inning picture beyond heavy reliance on Jones and Soria, some early solid work from Danny Farquhar and a well-defined lefty specialist in Luis Avilán, Renteria isn't going to place early expectations on Rondón to race into the Sox's late-inning plans.

“Obviously Rondón having a power arm,” Renteria said. “Depending on our usage and availability, it will determine — we're very flexible with everything we've been doing. But to go and say to you that he's got a chance to win a back-end position, that's not something that I have on my mind. I want to get him working with us as White Sox, get him used to what we're about, and then allow his skill set to present what he's capable of doing. We'll use him accordingly.”

On his own, tagging Rondón in particular to be the The Next Anthony Swarzak, or simply the third high-leverage right-handed reliever in a bullpen that could use one, is still a longshot. From early returns, Farquhar is more the guy to watch in that respect. But the Sox still have Jeanmar Gómez and Thyago Vieira in Triple-A, and prospects Ian Hamilton and Ryan Burr in Double-A. If Minaya's early hook is any indication, the wait for them to get opportunities might require less patience than anticipated.

By the Numbers: Reynaldo López matches career high, Bruce Rondón shines in debut, White Sox waste it all

By James Fegan/ The Athletic / April 8, 2018

It's not surprising that a rebuilding team would get swept at home by potential last-place finishers while scoring one run over a 21-inning span. But with the way the White Sox (3-5) came into the year bashing the ball out of the park like it was the year 2000, buoyed by production from their young lineup, losing 1-0 to an equally rebuilding Tigers team because they couldn't unlock the secrets to Mike Fiers' low-90s, carrying fastball was a pretty deflating ending to a frigid Sunday afternoon and weekend.

"I think our approaches were fine, again I think that Fiers was as he does, breaking ball, elevates out of the zone," manager Rick Renteria said. "He's not overpowering, he's sneaky, the ball gets on top of you. And he did what he needed to do to at that point which was the most crucial point for us in the first inning, to minimize the damage and he did. In terms of how we continue to go about playing the game, you know we know the elements play a part. One of you guys asked me earlier do we change it because the wind is blowing in a lot. It's kind of hard to change the swing path of the hitter, you try to make sure that they have good at-bats, but I think both clubs hit a lot of balls in the air that were caught."

After Fiers' control problems loaded the bases with one out in the first, the Sox never seriously threatened again, and seven innings from Reynaldo López, stained only by an unearned run and five walks, were wasted. Except for the part where it's a rebuild and good pitching performances are encouraging for their own sake.

1: The number of hits the Tigers needed in the first inning to push across the game's only run. A bloop single to short left from Leonys Martin to start the game was one of only two Tigers hits all day and was followed by a stolen base, a passed ball that rolled away from Welington Castillo and a sacrifice fly from Miguel Cabrera.

4-for-24: White Sox hitting with runners in scoring position over the course of a three-game sweep at home at the hands of a team that will pick first in the draft in June. Considering they had only three hits, and seven baserunners total, situational hitting really didn't seem like the specific bugaboo on Sunday, but when zero runs are scored against Fiers and the Tigers bullpen, any missed opportunities tend to stick out.

"He made some pretty good pitches," said Tim Anderson, who had one of the Sox's three hits and stole a base. "Nothing stood out but he placed the ball real well and was nipping the corners and kind of kept us off balance.

"With the wind, no balls were flying out, so definitely just trying to keep the ball out of the air and go for the gaps, but he pitched us real well today."

7: Innings for López, matching his career high, and coming in the first start of his career in which he was not charged with an earned run — a personal triumph even if control problems made the middle innings rocky. Despite the cold, López's fastball easily sat in the mid-90s and ran as high as 98 mph, and showed plenty of swing-and-miss capability. Through two starts this year, it's been clear why López is part of the Sox's long-term plans for the rotation each time.

5: The number of walks issued by López, tying a single-game career high. His previous five-walk game came as a member of the Washington Nationals in the second game of his major league career. All five of these free passes came between the fourth and sixth inning, as his fastball control seemed to completely abandon him as the game wore on.

"Even with the walks, I didn't let them bother me and I didn't let them make me lose my focus in the game," López said through team interpreter Billy Russo. "I was mad with the walks but I was able to keep my focus and perform."

Five is also the number of swinging strikes López got with his slider, which served as his primary off-speed pitch despite being in gestation as recently as last summer. Being able to maintain his mechanics for more than three innings is going to be more important for López's career as a whole, but as for the day's developments, clear evidence that his shiny new toy will be useful for the foreseeable future is a bigger deal.

"I've been happy with the way that pitch is working out for me because that's kind of a new pitch for me and I think I've been able to use it in an effective way," López said. "I wasn't throwing that pitch for a long time. It was good."

4: Batters faced and batters struck out by Bruce Rondón in his White Sox debut, including Miguel Cabrera. Despite the cold, Rondón touched 100 mph easily and had his best, most devastating slider at his command. Obviously, he's had some games in his career before in which he's been overwhelming, and consistency is what he needs to prove in this new opportunity, but it's a compelling start, and he earned a wink from Cabrera after their showdown.

"Honestly I needed a fresh start, a change," Rondón said through Russo. "With all the ups and downs I lost confidence in myself. But you know what, that's one of the things right now I'm really glad because I feel comfortable with this organization since I joined this team in spring training. I know that the manager, the coaches and all my teammates have confidence in me and I feel very, very good here. I feel like this is my home now."

.379: BABIP in the early going for Avisail García this season after he sprayed another two singles and reached on an error in the ninth. Probably the more significant early indicator is that he has just six strikeouts in 37 trips to the plate, but there's no sign of his batted ball results crashing to Earth so far. That his two singles accounted for two-thirds of his team's hitting on the day might have overshadowed his efforts.

11,131: Attendance for 36-degree weather on an April Sunday at Guaranteed Rate Field. It was cold. It was really quite cold, and Sox-Tigers is not the marquee divisional showdown it was a few years ago, or might be in another few years.