



### **WHITE SOX HEADLINES OF JUNE 13, 2018**

"Shields snags win as White Sox topple Tribe"... Scott Merkin, MLB.com

"Moncada, Yolmer open with back-to-back HRs" ... Scott Merkin, MLB.com

"Abreu in tight race to start All-Star Game at 1<sup>st</sup>" ... Scott Merkin, MLB.com

"Tuesday's top prospect performers" ... William Boor, MLB.com

"In My Words: Nick Hostetler"... Nick Hostetler, MLB.com

"There'd be no better White Sox representative at All-Star Game than Jose Abreu, who 'would like to stay here forever'"... Vinnie Duber, NBC Sports Chicago

"Yoan Moncada has a lot of strikeouts, and the White Sox think baseball's umpires might be partially to blame"... Vinnie Duber, NBC Sports Chicago

"Jose Abreu leading American League first basemen in All-Star voting"... Vinnie Duber, NBC Sports Chicago

"White Sox starter James Shields wins for the 1st time since opening day" ... Teddy Greenstein, Chicago Tribune

"James Shields gets early support, carries White Sox to victory"... Daryl Van Schouwen, Sun-Times

"Too soon to judge Moncada as switch hitter, White Sox hitting coach says" ... Daryl Van Schouwen, Sun-Times

"White Sox visit La Rabida Children's Hospital for Sox Serve Week" ... Annie Costibile, Sun-Times

"The White Sox have a plan, and it can't come soon enough"... Rick Telander, Sun-Times

"White Sox' Abreu leads AL first basemen in All-Star voting" ... Daryl Van Schouwen, Sun-Times

"White Sox' top prospects remain in holding, developing pattern" ... Daryl Van Schouwen, Sun-Times

"Early fireworks spark Chicago White Sox to elusive win over Indians" ... Scot Gregor, Daily Herald

"Abreu is Chicago White Sox's undisputed shining star" ... Scot Gregor, Daily Herald

"What the near and distant future holds for Carson Fulmer" ... James Fegan, The Athletic

"Stark: How MLB expansion could lead to realignment, a new playoff format, a universal DH and more" ... Jayson Stark, The Athletic

"Five observations: Power surge sets up James Shields for easy victory" ... James Fegan, The Athletic

"White Sox confident Yoán Moncada's breakout is coming: 'He will ultimately be everything everybody hopes he will be'" ... James Fegan, The Athletic

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### **Shields snags win as White Sox topple Tribe**

Victory was veteran right-hander's first since Opening Day in KC

By Scott Merkin / MLB.com / June 12, 2018

CHICAGO -- When James Shields last won a ballgame, the White Sox had just finished knocking out six home runs over nine innings at Kauffman Stadium and the South Siders were unbeaten.

That victory came on Opening Day, March 29. Fourteen appearances and 13 starts later, along with a 22-42 record for the White Sox since that impressive open, and Shields picked up his second victory of the season with a 5-1 White Sox win over the Indians on Tuesday at Guaranteed Rate Field. Shields hit Francisco Lindor with the first pitch of the game, but didn't allow much after, exiting after yielding one run on four hits over seven innings with two strikeouts.

"I feel like I've been pitching really well for the most part this season," said Shields, who improved to 2-7 on the season. "But wins haven't come my way. We've won some games while I've been in there, so that's been good, but at the end of the day, you want to get the win for the team."

"Different angles, there's some deception along with the stuff, been doing it for a long time," said Indians manager Terry Francona of Shields' success. "He goes out there and competes, fights, stays off the barrels and never lets us get in any kind of rhythm at all."

By retiring Jason Kipnis for the first out of the seventh, Shields reached 2,500 innings pitched for his illustrious career. He also has worked 59 1/3 postseason innings and 568 1/3 in the Minors. Shields has pitched at least six innings in 10 straight starts this season.

"Again, his longevity. He has reinvented himself," White Sox manager Rick Renteria said. "He continues to impress everybody."

"Little different arm slot now, he has become very comfortable with it. Changes speeds really well out of that slot, couple of different velocities on breaking pitches. Still is able to work 91-92 [mph], just continues to attack the strike zone and has a really good idea of how he wants to go after hitters. He continues to show everybody he can pitch."

Yoan Moncada and Yolmer Sanchez started the White Sox offense off strong against Cleveland's Adam Plutko with back-to-back home runs on back-to-back pitches in the first inning. Matt Davidson doubled twice to drive in two, and Omar Narvaez added a run-scoring double.

It was Shields after a loss on June 2 to Milwaukee who forcefully stated he wasn't worried about the rebuild and was tired of the losing. It was the same Shields celebrating with his teammates postgame Tuesday in what looked like the after-effects of some sort of fog machine and strobe lighting in the home clubhouse.

"We are trying to celebrate each win," Shields said. "We are going to go game by game and try to win the series and enjoy the moment instead of looking too far ahead or dwell on what we've done. We are going to enjoy the moment."

#### SOUND SMART

The White Sox earned their first win at home against the Indians since July 30, 2017. The team is 10-17 against the American League Central overall and 2-7 at home this season.

#### HE SAID IT

"To be honest, my cleat got stuck first pitch. It jarred me a little bit and I yanked the ball. I was hoping it went behind him, but instead, it hit him in the foot. It was a weird situation. I'm glad I got out in the first inning unscathed." -- Shields, on hitting Lindor with the first pitch

#### UP NEXT

Dylan Covey is scheduled to make his sixth start of 2018 on Wednesday night with a 7:10 p.m. CT first pitch against the Indians at Guaranteed Rate Field. Covey has gone 1-0 without allowing an earned run over 11 innings in his last two starts, including a victory against former White Sox pitcher Chris Sale. Covey matches up with right-hander Trevor Bauer on Wednesday.

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#### **Moncada, Yolmer open with back-to-back HRs**

By Scott Merkin / MLB.com / June 12, 2018

CHICAGO -- The White Sox didn't take long to score against Cleveland starter Adam Plutko on Tuesday night at Guaranteed Rate Field with Yoan Moncada and Yolmer Sanchez hitting back-to-back home runs to start the game. The early run support set the tone, as the White Sox went on to a 5-1 win.

Moncada connected on a 2-1 fastball for his ninth home run of the season and fourth career leadoff blast, all of which have come this season. Sanchez followed with another home run on the next pitch, his fourth, marking the fourth time the White Sox have gone back to back this season, and first since June 3 against the Brewers when Daniel Palka and Adam Engel did the damage.

"I went into that at-bat with an aggressive mentality, to be more aggressive in that at-bat," said Moncada, through interpreter Billy Russo, of his leadoff drive. "As I said before, everything is part of the process.

"I've been working hard, and I'm going step by step. I have plenty of confidence in my approach. I'm pretty sure and pretty confident that things are going to turn out and going to be in my favor now."

It was the first time the White Sox hit back-to-back home runs to open the first since Alen Hanson and Sanchez against Tampa Bay on Sept. 2, 2017. It was the fourth time in franchise history with Ray Durham and Jose Valentin connecting on July 4, 2000, vs. the Royals and Boze Berger and Mike Kreevich doing the same on Sept. 2, 1937, against Boston.

According to Statcast™, Moncada's 429-foot drive to center had an exit velocity of 102.7 mph. Sanchez's 427-foot homer had an exit velocity of 105.9 mph.

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### **Abreu in tight race to start All-Star Game at 1st**

Veteran slugger would be first White Sox All-Star starter since 1997

By Scott Merkin / MLB.com / June 12, 2018

CHICAGO -- Jose Abreu stayed true to form on Tuesday -- wanting to focus more on the game that night against the Indians than on his lead in the early results of the American League All-Star first basemen voting.

But achieving the starting honor would be something special for Abreu, not to mention the White Sox organization.

"It will be excellent because we play this game for the fans," said Abreu through interpreter Billy Russo. "To have the honor to represent them, and they know what I'm doing, that is really big. If that happens I would be really happy."

"Having the opportunity to work with him every day is something really special," said White Sox second baseman Yoan Moncada of Abreu, through Russo. "He likes to work, and you are always learning from him -- the things that he does, how he handles himself and his routine. That's something that you really appreciate, and I always thank him for allowing me to be close to him."

Abreu, an All-Star in his AL Rookie of the Year Award-winning season of 2014, has 267,812 votes to carry a slim lead over Boston's Mitch Moreland (241,889). Detroit's Miguel Cabrera (173,174), Los Angeles' Albert Pujols (155,219) and Houston's Yuli Gurriel (154,363) round out the top five at first base. No other White Sox player received enough support for the top five (or top 15 in the outfield).

Fans may cast votes for starters at MLB.com and all 30 club sites -- on computers, tablets and smartphones -- exclusively online using the 2018 Camping World MLB All-Star Ballot until Thursday, July 5, at 10:59 p.m. CT. On smartphones and tablets, fans can also access the ballot via the MLB At Bat and MLB Ballpark mobile apps. Each fan can vote up to five times in any 24-hour period, for a maximum of 35 ballots cast.

Following the announcement of this year's All-Star starters, reserves and pitchers, fans should return to MLB.com and cast their 2018 Camping World MLB All-Star Final Vote for the final player on each league's roster. Then on Tuesday, July 17, while watching the 2018 All-Star Game presented by Mastercard live on FOX, fans may visit MLB.com to submit their choices for the Ted Williams Most Valuable Player Award presented by Chevrolet with the 2018 MLB All-Star Game MVP Vote.

The 89th Midsummer Classic, at Nationals Park in Washington, D.C., will be televised nationally by FOX Sports; in Canada by Rogers Sportsnet and RDS; and worldwide by partners in more than 180 countries. FOX Deportes will provide Spanish-language coverage in the United States, while ESPN Radio and ESPN Radio Deportes will provide exclusive national radio coverage of the All-Star Game. MLB Network, MLB.com and SiriusXM also will provide comprehensive All-Star Week coverage.

For more information about MLB All-Star Week and to purchase tickets, please visit [AllStarGame.com](http://AllStarGame.com) and follow @MLB and @AllStarGame on social media.

According to the team, Abreu is the first White Sox player to lead at any point in the balloting process since Frank Thomas won the fan election at first base in 1996. Abreu would be the sixth White Sox player to be fan-elected as a starter to the All-Star Game, joining Thomas (1994-96), Carlton Fisk (1981-82), Richie Zisk (1977), Dick Allen (1972-74) and Luis Aparicio (1970).

The 31-year-old ranks first among AL first basemen in RBIs, doubles, slugging percentage and OPS. Entering Tuesday, Abreu had a .290 average with an .862 OPS, 10 home runs and 38 RBIs. His 25 doubles put him second in the AL behind Eduardo Escobar.

"[Making All-Star teams] are the experiences you never forget," Abreu said. "At that time [in 2014], it was recognition for all my work and for the journey to come to the U.S. and the Majors.

"One of the best moments was when I met Derek Jeter. He was in his retirement year, and it was a very special moment for me. Just being there, being around great players and having the opportunity to share the field and locker room with them was very special."

Third to first

- Outfielder Avisail Garcia began an injury rehab assignment with Triple-A Charlotte Tuesday, hitting second and serving as designated hitter. He singled in his first at-bat, after being out of game action since April 23 with a right hamstring strain.
- Moncada has heard talk from manager Rick Renteria and general manager Rick Hahn about a generous strike zone being employed against him by umpires. But the switch-hitter, who is 24-for-119 in his last 30 games, knows it's incumbent on him to make adjustments.

"I'm getting too many calls that for me are not strikes," Moncada said. "They are calling those pitches strikes and I will have to make some adjustments in order to take advantage of the situation. It's just more to keep doing the things that I'm doing. Just be more aware of the strike zone."

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### **Tuesday's top prospect performers**

By William Boor / [MLB.com](http://MLB.com) / June 12, 2018

Here's MLB Pipeline's roundup of the top prospect performances in the Minor Leagues on Tuesday.

Tigers' prospects Jake Rogers and Kyle Funkhouser put together dominant performances at the plate and on the mound as Double-A Erie cruised to a 12-0 win over Hartford.

Rogers, the Tigers' No. 5 prospect, entered the game hitting just .169, but those struggles looked like a distant memory as he clubbed a career-high three homers. The catcher, who has seven homers this season, went deep in the second, fifth and ninth innings on his way to a 3-for-4, four-RBI night.

While Rogers provided plenty of run support, Funkhouser (No. 6) needed just one run as he threw six scoreless innings to pick up his second win of the season. Funkhouser, who threw 56 of his 89 pitches for strikes, didn't issue a walk for the first time this season and struck out seven while giving up just three hits.

Other top prospect performances from Tuesday's action:

- No. 9 overall prospect Bo Bichette (Blue Jays' No. 2) put Double-A New Hampshire on the board with a two-run homer -- his fifth -- in the fourth inning. Bichette, who later added a sacrifice fly, is 4-for-8 with five RBIs over his past two games and hitting .285 overall through 61 games.
- No. 77 overall prospect Adonis Medina (Phillies' No. 2) was stuck with a no-decision despite spinning six scoreless frames for Class A Advanced Clearwater. After a rough start to the season, Medina, who struck out five and surrendered five hits, hasn't given up an earned run in two of his past three starts.
- No. 98 overall prospect Shane Bieber (Indians' No. 3) lowered his ERA to 1.38 with another solid outing for Triple-A Columbus. The right-hander struck out five and walked one as he threw 66 of his 99 pitches for strikes over 7 1/3 innings. Bieber yielded five hits and gave up two runs, although just one was earned.
- Angels' No. 7 prospect Griffin Canning continues to impress for Double-A Mobile. The right-hander put together another scoreless start -- his sixth over his past eight games -- as he struck out six over 5 2/3 innings. Canning, who has a 1.97 ERA through 10 starts with Mobile, walked one, hit one and gave up two hits.
- Astros' No. 15 prospect Framber Valdez notched a season-high 10 strikeouts in a rare relief appearance for Double-A Corpus Christi. Pitching out of the bullpen for the fourth time this season (compared to nine starts), Valdez gave up one run on three hits over five innings.
- Braves' No. 22 prospect Tucker Davidson had everything working in what was arguably his best start of the season for Class A Advanced Florida. Davidson fired 60 of his 95 pitches for strikes over seven innings in what was his second scoreless start of the season.
- Cardinals' No. 19 prospect Connor Jones was nearly unhittable in his first scoreless start with Double-A Springfield this season. Jones, who walked one and threw 59 of his 96 pitches for strikes, struck out six as he yielded just one hit over seven strong innings.
- Phillies' No. 12 prospect Enyel De Los Santos lowered his ERA to 1.47 with another quality start for Triple-A Lehigh Valley. De Los Santos threw a season-high 115 pitches and struck out seven - bringing his season total to 76 through 73 1/3 innings -- as he cruised through seven scoreless innings. The 22-year-old right-hander has gone at least six innings in eight straight starts and have given up one earned run or less in six of those outings.
- Pirates' No. 17 prospect Will Craig matched his career-high with five RBIs as part of a 3-for-5 night for Double-A Altoona. Craig went hitless in his first two at-bats, but finished the game on a tear as he collected an RBI single in the fifth, hit a three-run homer in the sixth and finished with an RBI double in the eighth.
- White Sox No. 26 prospect Lincoln Henzman put together his best start of the season in a win for Class A Kannapolis. The 22-year-old, a fourth-round pick from the 2017 Draft, put together the first complete game of his career as he fired seven scoreless innings. Henzman surrendered just one hit and struck out six while throwing just 67 pitches (52 strikes).

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**In My Words: Nick Hostetler**

By Nick Hostetler / MLB.com / June 12, 2018

You're never going to hear a scouting director walk out of a room and say, "Boy, we had a terrible Draft." But in my three years as the White Sox director of amateur scouting, [2018] is the most excited I've been after a Draft. There are some interesting guys in this class. This one is a bit more risky, and there's some more ceiling to it. It's going to be fun to watch it develop.

The MLB Draft is what we as scouts live for, but the three days are both exhilarating and excruciating. Leading up to the first day was miserable. Your mind is just racing a thousand miles a minute. All the phone calls, discussions, looking at the possible scenarios. It is just insane.

Forget about getting any sleep during the Draft. After the first night, I went back to the hotel and I'm wide awake at 2 in the morning. I said, "What am I going to do?" I actually went down to work out until 3:30. Then I took an hour nap -- if you want to call it that -- showered and went to the ballpark.

It also was gut-wrenching waiting for our pick at No. 4 in the first round. Nick Madrigal was the guy we knew we wanted. I wasn't positive he would get to us. There was actually a rumor told to me by someone pretty high up in baseball that there was a possibility Nick could go as high as No. 1. Then the talk was that the Phillies, picking third, were wavering between Alec Bohm and Nick. We had to create backup scenarios and make sure everyone was on the same page. I did a lot of pacing about an hour out. I was texting the scouting directors in front of me, behind me.

It kept flipping. I'd talk to one guy who said the Phillies wanted Madrigal. I'd talk to another who said they wanted Bohm. It got to a point where I had a pit in my stomach.

We weren't really positive Nick would get to us until Philly made their pick with Bohm. The feeling that you have, I liken it to winning a game. Finally that last out is made. This is exactly what we wanted. There's that excitement, that joy of this work. All of the nights on the road, the airplane flights, the bad food we eat, the constant cell phone conversations, the stressing over weather and schedules. Getting a player like Nick made it all worth it.

It was one of those deals where I didn't know how I would react if Nick got to us. Would there be a fist-pump? A dance, a yell? I put my hands on my knees and kind of bent over and took a big deep breath. There was a sense of relief.

Over the course of Nick's college career, I probably saw him play 20-25 times. Each time, he answered another question. He did something you wanted to see. He truly is a pleasure to watch play.

We talked Nick at Oregon State on May 9. I went with Mike Shirley, our national supervisor, and Garrett Guest, our Midwest supervisor. After that meeting, we were driving to the Portland airport. We all looked at each other and went, "Wow. That is an impressive young man." He has an unbelievable knowledge of the game and is a 100 percent team-first guy. It was a fun conversation. The three of us left there kind of in amazement over how special this guy really was.

Of course, the Draft is about more than one player. The third day, when we draft from the 11th to 40th rounds, is truly about the area scouts. That's their time to shine. I would be remiss to not mention the job the area scouts and cross-checkers do. I truly believe I have the best staff in baseball. They make my job so much easier. They know every piece of information about the player possible. They tell me at that point who it is they want us to draft.

We were in the 37th round, and I was listening to a debate between our area scouts about guys they wanted to sign after the Draft for \$1,000. These guys still kept getting after it. History tells us you can get some great players in the later rounds. Last year, we took Laz Rivera, a shortstop, in the 28th round. He's tearing it up at Class A Kannapolis. Ian Hamilton, a pitcher, was an 11th-round pick, and he's having success at Double-A Birmingham. That's a testament to what our scouts do.

This year, we added some high-ceiling high school kids. We're really excited about it. Selecting high school players is not something we've done of late. We're going to sign four of them. They are high-risk, high-ceiling guys. You want to balance it out. The last thing you want to do is walk out of the Draft and say, "I didn't take any chances." We want to go for the gusto with some of these guys.

Now the 2018 Draft is in the books. I'm leaving Tuesday to go to Cape Cod to start our 2019 Draft coverage. I actually made my flight reservations while in the Draft room. I'd love to sit here and tell you I can turn my mind off for a day and really enjoy it, but that's not the way it works. As a scout, you've got to move forward. You've got to make sure you're prepared.

We're back at it. We're ready to hit the road.

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**There'd be no better White Sox representative at All-Star Game than Jose Abreu, who 'would like to stay here forever'**

By Vinnie Duber / NBC Sports Chicago / June 12, 2018

The White Sox are all about the future, all about youth, at this point in their rebuilding effort.

But there's no better template for what the organization is trying to build than the 31-year-old who could be the team's lone representative at the All-Star Game next month.

Jose Abreu was revealed as the leading vote-getter among American League first basemen Tuesday, a surprising feat considering his place on a team 20 games under .500 and on a team that doesn't play in New York or Boston.

Abreu's statistics certainly make him deserving, as he's once again been the model of consistency with a .290/.350/.512 slash line that stands high above his competition at the position. But to understand how shocking it is that he's leading the vote, know this: He's the first White Sox player to lead his position at any point during balloting since 1996.

"It will be excellent because we play this game for the fans," Abreu said through a translator Tuesday when asked what it would mean to be voted an American League starter. "To have the honor to represent them and they know what I'm doing, that is really big. If that happens, I would be really happy."

"We're pretty excited about that," manager Rick Renteria said. "All of us, the coaching staff, are very excited. I'm sure the players are, as well. He's worked really hard and has had some very good seasons. He'll continue to have another nice season this year. It would be nice to see him there, get the chance to for the whole world to see who Jose Abreu is."

Abreu has been extremely consistent ever since arriving from Cuba before the 2014 season, last year becoming the third player ever to hit at least 25 homers and drive in at least 100 runs in each of his first four major league seasons. But he's been to just one All-Star Game, during his Rookie of the Year campaign in 2014.

"Those are the experiences you never forget," he said about his All-Star trip in 2014. "You work for it, and at that time it was recognition for all my work, and for the journey to come to the U.S. and the majors.

"One of the best moments was when I met Derek Jeter, he was in his retirement year and it was a very special moment for me. Just being there, being around great players and having the opportunity to share the field and locker room with them was very special."

The production speaks for itself, and it's been enough to make Abreu worthy of an All-Star appearance at pretty much any point throughout his career. But to the White Sox, he's so much more than a slash line and a collection of home runs and RBIs. He's a model for what they want all their young players to be, an example of work ethic and how to go about one's business. He earns rave reviews from every corner of the White Sox clubhouse, and it's not difficult to see why the team would be especially excited to see Abreu earn this All-Star nod.

It's also not at all surprising to see why they would want Abreu to stick around throughout this rebuilding process and be a key contributor on the next contending team. Of course, that would necessitate the

White Sox inking Abreu to a contract extension, as he's only under team control through the 2019 season. But that decision doesn't seem like a difficult one.

"We've made no secret about our affection for Jose, and it's not just based upon the contribution between the white lines, it's based on what he does in that clubhouse," general manager Rick Hahn said Monday. "I don't think there's a finer representative for what it means to be a White Sock or what we hope for our players to be on and off the field and what Jose Abreu provides us.

"Again, we don't have to make any decisions on how he fits for the long term for a little while now. He's under control through the end of next season. If at that point, before that point, if we haven't come to terms on an extension we certainly will have time then to revisit that."

For any other team in any other rebuild with any other veteran player, a season like Abreu's and a potential trip to the All-Star Game might make him an obvious midseason trade candidate. But read Hahn's words again. Does it sound like Abreu is a guy the White Sox want to deal away? No, it doesn't. And it sounds like Abreu doesn't want that, either.

"Right now I am with this organization. I am glad and really grateful for everything this organization has done for me. I would like to stay here forever," Abreu said, "but right now I am just taking advantage of every moment, every game that I spend with this team. Hopefully I can stay here my whole career."

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### **Yoan Moncada has a lot of strikeouts, and the White Sox think baseball's umpires might be partially to blame**

By Vinnie Duber / NBC Sports Chicago / June 12, 2018

Yoan Moncada has done a lot of things this season — see Tuesday night's leadoff home run — that signal his status of an expected centerpiece of the White Sox lineup of the future.

But he's also striking out a lot.

It's part of the growing pains during this developmental season on the South Side. But after two more strikeouts in Tuesday's game, Moncada is on pace to strike out 243 times this year, which would be the most in a single season in major league history — by 20.

What's the deal?

Well, Moncada's offensive game hasn't been where anyone has wanted it to be since his return from the disabled list on May 15. Even with Tuesday night's long ball, he's slashing just .202/.246/.368 in his last 28 games, and 41 of his 90 strikeouts have come during that stretch.

But Moncada's manager doesn't think all of those strikeouts are the 23-year-old's fault. Rick Renteria is putting some of the blame on baseball's umpires.

"He's got as good an eye as anybody in the game of baseball," Renteria said after Monday's game, in which Moncada added three more strikeouts (two were looking) to his total. "And sometimes he gets some pitches called on him that should not be called — flat out, straight up.

"It's a tough job that (umpires) have to do every single day, calling balls and strikes. But this poor kid, honestly, I think he gets the short end of the stick a lot of times, undeservedly. But that's just the way it is. You've got to continue to understand what the zone is for particular guys behind the plate, do the best that you can without getting outside of your hitting zones and, depending on the situation, knowing how to handle those types of strike zones.

"He goes up there with a very good eye. We just want him to start getting his timing back so he can start making more contact and take advantage of the bat speed that he has."

And Renteria's not alone. General manager Rick Hahn made some similar comments before Monday's game.

"It's funny because one of my good buddies in Major League Baseball deals with the umpires, so I don't want to go too far down this path, but Moncada had some tough ABs over the course of this (recent) road trip in terms of balls and strikes," Hahn said. "The challenge for him, the developmental element for him just this week is making sure he remains true to his approach as opposed to overreacting to some perhaps bad Strike 3 calls over the course of the last week."

Certainly a lot of Moncada's strikeouts have come looking: He's got 29 strikeouts looking compared to 61 strikeouts swinging. Going off what Renteria said, Moncada has earned a bit of a reputation among White Sox fans and observers for his selectivity at the plate, and while a selective batter waits for the perfect pitch, some backwards Ks might be a byproduct of that approach.

But this could also, in part, be a young player learning the intricacies of the game at the big league level. And that youth might be playing a factor, too. As Moncada gets more experience, it could serve him well in this department. Think about a veteran player or a superstar in basketball getting more calls than a rookie.

"I think as you gain more experience, as people see him and understand that this guy's got a pretty good eye," Renteria said. "Historically, you've got a lot of hitters or pitchers over time — I remember pitchers getting one, two, three, four baseballs off (the plate). (Tom) Glavine, (Greg) Maddux, they get all. You'll get hitters who take a pitch, they call it a ball, and you go, 'ooh.' All those guys earning, over time, their respect and the understanding of what is a ball and a strike from both sides, on the hill and at the plate.

"A ball's a ball and a strike's a strike. But the reality is you're going to get some, you're not going to get some."

Moncada isn't too worried about placing blame on umpires, saying he just needs to keep working at improving on a daily basis. Moncada's had success and a lot of it at points this season. Before he hit the DL in early May, he owned a .359 on-base percentage and a slugging percentage over .500. It makes you believe he's certainly capable of turning things around.

"The only thing that I can add is that I have to keep working," Moncada said through a translator Tuesday. "Keep working and sooner or later the results are going to be there.

"Right now I think I will have to make some adjustments because I'm getting too many calls that, for me, are not strikes. They are calling those pitches strikes, and I will have to make some adjustments in order to take advantage of the situation or put the ball in play."

Moncada's development is one of the biggest stories on this major league roster this season. There's no doubt he's in a down stretch and that the strikeouts are piling up. But it's the positive signs, like Tuesday's home run, that remind you why this guy is such a big part of this rebuilding process.

"Everything is part of the process," he said. "I've been working hard, and I'm going step by step. I have plenty of confidence in my approach. I'm pretty sure and pretty confident that things are going to turn out and going to be in my favor now."

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### **Jose Abreu leading American League first basemen in All-Star voting**

By Vinnie Duber / NBC Sports Chicago / June 12, 2018

Jose Abreu heading to Washington for this summer's All-Star Game wouldn't have been much of a surprise considering he's in the midst of one of his typically excellent offensive seasons.

But Abreu being voted in as the starter? That would qualify as a surprise, and if the first round of balloting updates are any indication, it could most definitely happen. Abreu is leading American League first baseman in voting, per Tuesday's balloting update from Major League Baseball.

Abreu is obviously deserving of receiving the most votes at his position, as he has far and away the most impressive offensive statistics among AL first basemen. Abreu has a .290/.350/.512 slash line with 10 home runs, 25 doubles and 38 RBIs. He leads AL first basemen in slugging percentage, OPS, doubles, RBIs and hits and ranks near the top in many other categories.

The production comes as no shock to the White Sox or their fans, who have watched Abreu be one of the most consistent hitters in the game ever since arriving from Cuba ahead of the 2014 season. Last year, he became the third player ever to start his big league career with four seasons with at least 25 home runs and 100 RBIs, the other two being all-time greats Albert Pujols and Joe DiMaggio.

In his White Sox career, Abreu owns a .300/.358/.524 slash line with 134 homers and 448 RBIs in 676 games.

What is a tad unexpected is that fans across the country would bypass typical voting favorites from teams like the Boston Red Sox and New York Yankees — or the world-champion Houston Astros — in favor of the deserving Abreu. That's a welcome sight.

Whether eventually elected or just picked as a reserve, this would be Abreu's second career All-Star appearance. He hasn't been since his rookie season in 2014.

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### **White Sox starter James Shields wins for the 1st time since opening day**

By Teddy Greenstein / Chicago Tribune / June 12, 2018

White Sox manager Rick Renteria rarely causes a stir. Ozzie Guillen was more controversial in his sleep.

Earlier this season after being asked whether he prefers an MLB with or without replay reviews, Renteria replied: "No comment."

So it was surprising to hear Renteria go off on the umpiring after Monday night's game. Renteria was ticked after watching second baseman Yoan Moncada go 0-for-4 with one swinging strikeout and two more punchouts.

"He has as good an eye as anyone in baseball," Renteria said. "Sometimes he gets some pitches called on him that should not be called — flat out, straight up. It's a tough job that those (umpires) have to do, but this poor kid, honestly, I think he gets the short end of the stick a lot of times. Undeservedly."

Well OK, then.

Moncada downplayed the issue before Tuesday night's game and then made some noise with his bat.

After taking two outside pitches for balls and fouling one away off the Indians' Adam Plutko, Moncada hammered a fastball to center. The 429-foot blast cleared the wall for his ninth home run — and fourth to lead off a game.

Yolmer Sanchez then went yard, and Matt Davidson drove home Daniel Palka for a three-run inning that launched the Sox to a 5-1 victory.

James Shields won for the first time since opening day, ending an 0-7 stretch with six no decisions. Shields, 36, pitched brilliantly over seven innings, allowing just one run on four hits and no walks.

"He has reinvented himself," Renteria said. "He has a little different arm slot now and has become very comfortable with it. He changes speeds really well out of that it, (using a) couple of different velocities on

breaking pitches. Still is able to work 91-92 (mph) and attack the strike zone ... he continues to show everybody he can pitch.”

Said Shields: “The boys came out swinging and got me a couple of runs there. It definitely gave me the confidence to attack the zone against a really good lineup.”

He needed that: The home run must have felt magical for Moncada, who has made little impact since returning May 15 from a left hamstring injury.

Before the injury, he was batting .263 with a .359 on-base average and .509 slugging percentage. His 24-for-119 stretch dropped those to .232/.305/.411.

“I think everybody knows that my offense right now is not as good as it can be,” Moncada said via interpreter Billy Russo. “It’s a work in progress and I’m just trying to do my best.”

As for the umpiring, Moncada said: “I think I will have to make some adjustments because I’m getting too many calls that, for me, are not strikes.”

As in swing more?

“Just be more aware of the strike zone,” he said.

Renteria could take no issue Tuesday with the ball/strike calls by umpire Tom Woodring<sup>v</sup>. All were called properly, according to the WGN-9 Pitchcast, including when Woodring rung up Moncada in the sixth on a 3-2 pitch on the inside corner.

Renteria was actually echoing the sentiments of his boss, general manager Rick Hahn.

“One of my good buddies in Major League Baseball deals with the umpires, so I don’t want to go too far down this path,” he said Monday. “But Moncada had some tough ABs over the course of this road trip in terms of balls and strikes. The challenge for him, the developmental element, is to make sure he remains true to his approach.”

First things first: Jose Abreu leads AL first basemen in fan voting for the All-Star Game, having received 267,812 votes to outpace the Red Sox’s Mitch Moreland (241,889) and the Tigers’ Miguel Cabrera (173,174).

Abreu is the first Sox player since Frank Thomas in 1996 to lead at any point in the balloting process. Only five Sox players — Thomas, Carlton Fisk, Richie Zisk, Dick Allen and Luis Aparicio — have been voted in.

Abreu said if he gets the nod, “it will be excellent because we play this game for the fans.”

Abreu, who made the All-Star team as a rookie in 2014, has 25 doubles, second in the AL to the Twins’ Eduardo Escobar. He entered Tuesday first among AL first basemen with 38 RBIs and a .512 slugging percentage.

“We’re pulling for him,” Renteria said. “We’d love for him to be there.”

Respecting 90: Charlie Tilson has tremendous speed, and he knows how to use it. Tilson beat out what looked like an obvious double-play ball in the fourth. He then motored into third — no hesitation — on a flared single to right by Adam Engel.

The effort went for naught, though, after third baseman Jose Ramirez went into the seats to snatch a Moncada pop-up. The Sox needed a Steve Bartman to deflect the ball.

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## **Column: Is Lucas Giolito lucky or unlucky White Sox are leaving him up during their rebuild?**

By Teddy Greenstein / Chicago Tribune / June 12, 2018

As the composed and cordial Lucas Giolito stood before his locker Monday night, trying to explain another tough night at the yard, the thought occurred: Giolito is lucky the White Sox are in rebuilding mode. Otherwise he would be in the minors.

On second thought, maybe that's backward.

Giolito (4-7) has walked an American League-high 43 batters in 66 innings. His 7.09 ERA was third-highest among starters through Monday behind the Rangers' Matt Moore (7.88) and the Orioles' Alex Cobb (7.23). Only Cobb (2-8), the Orioles' Andrew Cashner (2-8) and the Astros' Dallas Keuchel (3-8) had lost more games.

This cannot be fun for him. He's a wonderfully talented youngster — he turns 24 next month — who simply cannot deliver pitches where he wants them to go consistently. His velocity is fine (92.8 to 95.2 mph fastball, via [baseballsavant.mlb.com](http://baseballsavant.mlb.com)), but his mechanics are betraying him. This mainly has been the case since March 31, Game 2 of the season, when he walked four Royals and threw 49 strikes in 89 pitches.

Giolito twice has walked seven batters and struggled again Monday in the Sox's 4-0 loss to the Indians. His 34-pitch fourth inning was painful to watch as he threw 18 balls, and two of his 16 strikes were hit in a three-run inning.

As he walked off the mound, Giolito pressed his glove against his mouth as if he wanted to chew off a piece and spit it out.

"I thought my stuff was really good, probably up there with the best it has been this year," Giolito said. "But I had a lot of misfires and went deep into counts in the fourth inning, and it kind of bit me. I walked two in a row and then (gave up a) base hit. I just have to do a better job of just competing and throwing the ball over the plate."

The Sox shipped out Carson Fulmer after his eight starts and one relief appearance produced an 8.07 ERA and 6.7 walks per nine innings.

Fulmer, realistically, is viewed as a potential reliever in the Sox rebuild. Giolito, the Sox hope, will be a front-line starter.

"We very much still view Carson as playing a role in our future," general manager Rick Hahn said. "We're trying to accumulate as much potential front-of-the-rotation talent, and ultimately there's probably not going to be room at the end (of the rotation) for everyone who is capable. It's possible Carson winds up being a dominant reliever, but for now we're going to continue to give him opportunities to pitch in the rotation in (Triple-A) Charlotte. We'll see how it goes."

Giolito seems likely to stay in the big leagues, at least for now. I asked manager Rick Renteria if there has been discussion of sending him down.

His answer indicated the topic came up at some point: "We haven't had any more discussion about that, not at all."

So is Giolito lucky that the rebuilding Sox can ride a starter with a 7.09 ERA? Or unlucky?

No one wants to get sent down, but feeling uncomfortable on the mound against the world's best hitters is no one's definition of a good time.

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## **James Shields gets early support, carries White Sox to victory**

By Daryl Van Schouwen / Sun-Times / June 12, 2018

Yoan Moncada and Yolmer Sanchez hit back-to-back home runs to get the Sox offense going, and right-hander James Shields pitched seven strong innings to win for the first time since Opening Day in the White Sox' 5-1 victory over the Indians Tuesday at Guaranteed Rate Field.

The Sox (23-42) hadn't homered in their previous six games, but Moncada and Sanchez quickly halted that trend when they connected against right-hander Adam Plutko in the first. Matt Davidson drilled the first of his two RBI doubles off the fence in the first inning, and catcher Omar Narvaez also doubled in a run to give Shields a 5-0 lead in the fifth inning.

Shields (2-7, 4.63 ERA) allowed one run in one of his best outings of the season. He gave up four hits, walked none, struck out two and surpassed the 2,500 innings mark for his career. He went six innings or more for the 10th start in a row.

"Still is able to work 91-92 [mph]," manager Rick Renteria said. "Just continues to attack the strike zone and he had a really good idea of how he wants to go after hitters. He continues to show everybody he can pitch."

"He doesn't have the same stuff that he once had, so he's learned how to be a pitcher, to live on the corners, to get guys to hit off his pitches and he's done a good job with it," Indians second baseman Jason Kipnis said. "He did a great job tonight and as a team we need to make an adjustment faster to that, we gotta not be chasing those types of pitches. We didn't make the adjustment fast enough."

Left-hander Jace Fry pitched a scoreless eighth inning and Nate Jones, Xavier Cedeno and Joakim Soria (ninth save) worked through some trouble in the ninth as the Sox bullpen extended its scoreless streak to 21 2/3 innings.

The back-to-back homers by Moncada (his ninth) and Sanchez (fourth) marked the fourth time the Sox turned the trick this season. Moncada led off with a homer for the fourth time.

The Sox have won five of their last eight games and seven of 12. They defeated the Indians for the first time in five games in 2018.

"I feel like I've been pitching really well for the most part this season," Shields said. "But wins haven't come my way. We've won some games while I've been in there so that's been good, but at the end of the day, you want to get the win for the team."

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### **Too soon to judge Moncada as switch hitter, White Sox hitting coach says**

By Daryl Van Schouwen / Sun-Times / June 12, 2018

If switch hitter Yoan Moncada's struggles from the right side of the plate continue, the notion that he should scrap switch hitting and stick to batting left-handed could gain traction.

For now, though, give that thought a rest, hitting coach Todd Steverson said. For Steverson, it's much too soon even to discuss it and "make a judgment on the right side."

"When you're 23, and this is your second full season [playing baseball in the U.S.], you don't want to give up on something that's a potential asset before you've exhausted every option and say this might not be a thing to do," Steverson said. "Right now, give him time."

Batting left-handed against Indians right-hander Adam Plutko in the first inning of the White Sox' 5-1 win over the Indians Tuesday, Moncada led off with a homer to center field. He finished 1-for-4 with two strikeouts, all from the left side.

All nine of Moncada's homers this season are from the left side. In his young career, Moncada entered Tuesday with a .247/.340/.452 hitting line with 14 homers in 357 plate appearances batting left-handed.

Batting right he was at .192/.264/.292 with two homers in 144 plate appearances, including a .153 average this season.

"I have plenty of confidence in my approach," Moncada said through an interpreter after the game. "I'm pretty sure and pretty confident that things are going to turn out and going to be in my favor now."

A long time coming

The Sox clubhouse was filled with fog after right-hander James Shields (2-7, 4.63 ERA), who allowed one run over seven innings to win for the first time since opening day, halted a streak of 12 starts without a victory even though he has pitched six innings or more in 10 consecutive starts.

"We're trying to enjoy the moment," Shields said. "We're trying to celebrate each win."

At 36, Shields "doesn't have the same stuff that he once had," Indians second baseman Jason Kipnis said, "so he's learned how to live on the corners, to get guys to hit off his pitches. We didn't make the adjustment fast enough, and he went out there and [stuck it to us]."

Bullish on Sox' top pick

In middle infielder Nick Madrigal, who will be playing in the College World Series for Oregon State, the Sox got someone general manager Rick Hahn calls "arguably the best all-around college player in the country" with the fourth overall pick in the draft last week.

"Tremendous feel for the barrel. Does the little things well," Hahn said. "Saw it in super regional, hitting behind the runner, pulling off the hit and run, plus speed, defensive ability with very strong chance to be a premium defender up the middle and an important cog at the top of the lineup."

Madrigal technically isn't a prospect yet because he hasn't signed, but that didn't stop FanGraphs from compiling a new list of recent draftees and ranking Madrigal No. 33.

Relief!

With two scoreless innings, the Sox bullpen extended its scoreless innings streak to 21 $\frac{2}{3}$  consecutive scoreless innings dating back to the ninth inning last Tuesday at Minnesota. The pen owns a 1.75 ERA in June. Joakim Soria recorded the final out for his fifth consecutive save.

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### **White Sox visit La Rabida Children's Hospital for Sox Serve Week**

By Annie Costibile / Sun-Times / June 12, 2018

Sox Serve Week continued Tuesday morning with a visit by members of the White Sox organization to La Rabida Children's Hospital.

Second baseman Yoan Moncada, outfielder Charlie Tilson and designated hitter Matt Davidson spent time making the young patients of La Rabida feel like major-leaguers.

"It makes me happy to bring those kids joy," Moncada said. "I know it's a tough situation for them but we try to do our best to bring a little joy to those kids."

The players visited multiple hospital rooms and the kids' eyes sparkled once they appeared. They concluded their day with ballpark activities that included face painting, balloon animals and a visit from Southpaw. By the visit's end, it was hard to tell who was enjoying themselves more.

"For me, it's so amazing to have the ability to put on a jersey and see a kid's face light up like I'm some type of superhero," Davidson said.

The event was part of the team's week of community service, Sox Serve Week. The organization set the tone Monday with its Random Acts of Kindness event. White Sox front office staff and team members were deployed across Chicago to spread cheer.

The community outreach events will continue through the end of the week. Wednesday's event will grant the ultimate wish to a young Sox fan battling cancer.

Sox vice president of community relations Christine O'Reilly said the organization will bring the child to Guaranteed Rate Field to participate in the ultimate game-day experience.

The best part is the child has no idea.

"I think the White Sox really set the bar for community engagement and supporting our community," O'Reilly said.

As much as community outreach is part of the organization's culture, the players embrace it to the fullest. Every request is met with players eager to get involved.

"To be a part of an organization that wants to do this first and it kind of lines up with what we want to do personally too is awesome," Davidson said.

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### **The White Sox have a plan, and it can't come soon enough**

By Rick Telander / Sun-Times / June 12, 2018

The White Sox have been keeping a low profile, quietly losing two games for every one they win, keeping hope at the seed level, or lower.

If the Sox were public speakers, they'd be professional whisperers.

The club is entertaining (if that's the word) 16,780 fans per home game, roughly 4,500 fewer than last season, when the Sox weren't exactly deafening, either.

They finished 67-95 in 2017, 35 games out of first place in the AL Central. Who won the Central? The Indians, who are again in first place and in the midst of a four-game series with the Sox at Guaranteed Rate Field.

The Indians, you'll recall, came so close to beating the Cubs for the 2016 World Series championship. Their era is right now, and they seem to know this and perhaps are a bit desperate about it.

The Sox, on the other hand, are just chilling in the late spring sun, picking their teeth with straws, waiting for . . .

Well.

What are they waiting for?

They're waiting for a lot. And that is because they're in the midst of The Plan.

The Plan, of course, is the process of demolishing your team, starting over, losing at a record pace for years, and then — with all your new guys and young superstars assembled — winning everything!

The Plan has been around in some form forever, but it is now legion, having been turned into sacred dogma by the Cubs' and Astros' recent World Series success. Now we have about a third of major-league teams trying to win, a third stuck in the mud, and a third blatantly losing. All thanks to The Plan.

So other than just keeping quiet and promoting your ballpark food, rebuilding teams like the Sox tease fans with the promise of the future, with the unlimited acumen of the general manager, with the brilliance of upcoming trades, with free-agent acquisitions. And — above all — with the potential of the prospects soon to join the team.

I remember being at an Iowa Cubs Class AAA game in 2014, and there were Kris Bryant, Javy Baez and Albert Almora Jr. lighting up the cornfields as they waited to be critical parts of the Cubs' release from 108 years of misery. By 2016 those guys were pretty much everything Cubs president of baseball operations Theo Epstein and GM Jed Hoyer had claimed they would be.

The Sox are selling fans on prospects such as 21-year-old outfielder Eloy Jimenez and 22-year-old fireballing pitcher Michael Kopech. Both are young and talented — Jimenez is the No. 3 prospect in baseball, and Kopech has a fastball that can reach 100 mph.

But both are raw and have weaknesses. For power hitter Jimenez it is his defense, for Kopech it is control. Jimenez needs to see how major leaguers hit cutoff men, throw lasers to the plate and adjust to hitters and quirks of the park.

Kopech has walked at least one batter in each of the last eight innings in his last two games at Class AAA Charlotte.

So these guys are high-level projects, and GM Rick Hahn has said it would be disastrous to bring them up too soon. To destroy their confidence would be to destroy the Sox' future.

No matter what, said Hahn, hurrying this pair will not happen because of fan unrest and desire to see them in the majors. Expectation "is going to have nothing to do with when these players arrive," he said.

The Sox already have bright young players, such as second baseman Yoan Moncada, 23, and shortstop Tim Anderson, 24.

Slugger Matt Davidson is only in his second year with the Sox, but he is 27, and near-star first baseman Jose Abreu is still playing well, but he is 31.

So blending the active with the developing is an art. It is the part of The Plan that doesn't get a lot of chatter, because it is more art than science.

I often think Bryant was ready for the majors when he was 21 or 22. He came up when he was 23, after hitting 55 home runs in the minors. Those were wasted homers. He hit a trillion before that at every level he played, from peewee on up. His dad has said Kris basically hit home runs from the moment he picked up a Nerf bat.

But the timing worked for the Cubs.

Here's hoping the timing works for the White Sox, too.

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### **White Sox' Abreu leads AL first basemen in All-Star voting**

By Daryl Van Schouwen / Sun-Times / June 12, 2018

If the fans keep this up, maybe Jose Abreu will be an All-Star again.

It would mean a lot to the White Sox first baseman who was an All-Star as a rookie in 2014, his first year after coming to the United States from Cuba, maybe even more than the first time.

"It will be excellent because we play this game for the fans," Abreu said through a translator. "To have the honor to represent them — and when they know what I'm doing —that is really big. If that happens I would be really happy."

Abreu is the kind of player that appeals to fans. He shows up to work early, prepares with a plan, plays hurt, leads by example and by producing on the field and is loyal to an organization that hasn't won since he's been here.

He has had All-Star caliber performances in each of his four full seasons and is having another one in 2018, but hasn't had the honor of representing the Sox since 2014. The first fan balloting results were released Tuesday, and with 267,812 votes, Abreu leads all American League first basemen.

This doesn't happen in these parts very often. In fact, Abreu is the first White Sox player to lead at any point in the All-Star balloting process since Frank Thomas won the fan election at first base in 1996. Boston's Mitch Moreland (241,889) and Detroit's Miguel Cabrera (173,174) are second and third behind Abreu, who ranks first among AL first basemen in doubles, slugging percentage, OPS, total bases and extra-base hits and is second in average, on-base percentage and RBI.

Abreu would be the sixth Sox elected by the fans as a starter, joining Thomas (1994-96), Carlton Fisk (1981-82), Richie Zisk (1977), Dick Allen (1972-74) and Luis Aparicio (1970).

"It would be nice to see him there, to get the chance for the whole world to see who Jose Abreu is," Sox manager Rick Renteria said.

Making the All-Star game in Minneapolis in 2014 was a great source of pride for Abreu, and while he may downplay the possibility of going again, those close to him will assure you he'd rather go than take the days off during the All-Star break.

But you also know it's the truth when he said, "You know me, guys, I'm just thinking about ways to help this team win games, taking care of the at-bats, driving runs in. If [making the All-Star team] happens that is going to be good but I'm not thinking about that right now."

Abreu went 0-for-4 in the Sox' 5-1 victory Tuesday. He watched Yoan Moncada and Yolmer Sanchez (back-to-back homers to open the first against right-hander Adam Plutko), Matt Davidson (two RBI doubles off the fence) and Omar Narvaez (RBI double) stake right-hander James Shields (2-7) to a 5-0 lead.

Shields, 36, had the type of performance that made him an All-Star with the Rays in 2011, pitching seven innings of one-run ball in one of his best outings of the season. Shields gave up four hits, walked none, struck out two and surpassed the 2,500 innings mark for his career. Despite a serviceable 4.63 ERA, he was looking to halt a streak of 12 starts without a win since Opening Day.

When Abreu went in to the All-Star Game in 2014, he brought his parents and was thrilled to meet Derek Jeter, who retired after that season.

"Those are the experiences you never forget," he said.

"Just being there, being around great players and having the opportunity to share the field and locker room with them was very special."

Abreu was batting .290/.350/.512 with 10 homers, 25 doubles and 38 RBI through Monday. He ranked second in the major leagues in doubles, including 20 in his last 32 games, and was on pace to hit 63, which would tie Detroit's Hank Greenberg (1934) and Pittsburgh's Paul Waner (1932) for the fourth-highest total in history.

"We all know what the projections are in those stats," he said, "but I just try not think about it. Just keep doing my job. I just ask for good health because if I stay healthy, good things will happen."

Good things, like maybe another All-Star appearance.

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## White Sox' top prospects remain in holding, developing pattern

By Daryl Van Schouwen / Sun-Times / June 12, 2018

Patience, White Sox fans.

It's not something everyone wants to hear or exercise when it comes to outfielder Eloy Jimenez and right-hander Michael Kopech, the faces of the Sox' farm system.

Jimenez, 21, is the No. 3 prospect in baseball, according to MLB Pipeline, and he's hitting a ton at Class AA Birmingham. Kopech, 22, is the No. 8 prospect and has struck out 80 batters in 59 1/3 innings at Class AAA Charlotte.

They are the hottest things going, and everyone wants to see them. Like, now.

But general manager Rick Hahn and the rest of the Sox' brain trust want to be absolutely certain Kopech and Jimenez don't struggle when they get to the majors. Jimenez still has a stop to make — Charlotte — before he arrives, Hahn said.

Before the Sox opened a homestand with a 4-0 loss Monday to the Indians, Hahn was asked when fans will see them in Chicago.

"They are available at Charlotte and Birmingham," he said, cracking a grin.

Hahn said that Kopech and Jimenez have "various developmental matters" they are working on and that what happens on the field at the major-league level "is going to have nothing to do with when these players arrive."

Right-hander Lucas Giolito struggled through developmental matters of his own against the Indians, throwing only 46 of his 93 pitches for strikes and allowing four runs, four hits and four walks in five-plus innings. Giolito, who has walked 43 batters in 66 innings, has a 7.09 ERA after pitching to a 2.38 ERA in seven starts after being called up last season.

Giolito said his stuff was as good as it has been this season, but he had no feel for where the ball was going.

"I'm beating myself, 100 percent," he said. "I'm going out there walking a bunch of guys. Not going to have success that way."

Kopech has walked nine in eight innings in his last two starts, and the last thing the Sox want is to have him struggle like Giolito at the major-league level. He walked five in his most recent start, the latest indication he's not commanding the strike zone. He is 2-4 with a 4.70 ERA with 34 walks and seven hit batters.

"He's put together a few real good starts and had others that still show you the elements he needs improvement in," Hahn said.

Jimenez is batting .321/.373/.576 with 10 home runs, 13 doubles and two triples in 47 games. He hits with power to all fields, has a plan at the plate and sure looks ready, although his defense is behind his offense.

"It's going to be based strictly upon their own development and when they are ready for the next challenges presented by the big-league level," Hahn said.

Awaiting Jimenez in the majors are pitchers such as the Indians' Carlos Carrasco, who allowed two hits and struck out 11 in seven innings Monday.

"We all know that once they get here it's a different world, and they're going to have to deal with all the nuances of being at the major-league level," manager Rick Renteria said.

Kopech, who has a fastball that can touch 100 mph, is getting closer, but his changeup still needs work and his command of his fastball and slider isn't screaming "ready."

"You get here, these guys are going to study him," Renteria said. "They're going to try to take advantage of any weakness he has. And he's going to have to try to exploit them."

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## **Early fireworks spark Chicago White Sox to elusive win over Indians**

By Scot Gregor / Daily Herald / June 12, 2018

The Cleveland Indians probably going to cruise to a first-place finish in the AL Central for the fourth straight season.

If everything goes right, it would not be a shock if the Indians played in the World Series for the second time in three years.

The Chicago White Sox are on track for their sixth straight losing season, and they last made the playoffs in 2008. One day in the near future, the Sox want to be in Cleveland's current position.

"I think we aspire to be, hopefully, a part of the best of the best," White Sox manager Rick Renteria said. "I tell the players that all the time."

Dating back to last season, Cleveland won 10 of 11 against the White Sox before falling 5-1 Tuesday night at Guaranteed Rate Field.

Yoan Moncada and Yolmer Sanchez set the tone for the Sox with back-to-back home runs leading off the first inning. Matt Davidson added RBI doubles in the first and fifth.

After giving up 7 runs in 6 innings in his start last Thursday at Minnesota, White Sox right-hander James Shields held the Indians to 1 run on 4 hits in 7 innings.

Wins have been tough to come by for the Sox (23-42) this season, against Cleveland and everybody else. After Tuesday's victory, there was a strobe light in the Sox's clubhouse and smoke from a fog machine.

"We're trying to celebrate our wins," Shields said. "Enjoy the moment instead of looking too far ahead or dwelling on what we've done. We hope to continue the roll and try to win the series, beat the No. 1 team in our division."

Eye on Moncada:

Yoan Moncada took another called third strike in Tuesday night's win against Cleveland, but the pitch from Indians reliever Zach McAllister was over the plate.

Monday night, Moncada was 0-for-4 with 3 strikeouts, 2 looking. Afterward, White Sox manager Rick Renteria went to bat for his young second baseman.

"He has as good an eye as anyone in the game of baseball," Renteria said. "Sometimes he gets some pitches called on him that should not be called -- flat-out, straight-up. It's a tough job that those umpires have to do every day, but this poor kid, honestly, I think he gets the short end of the stick a lot of times."

As he gains experience, Moncada undoubtedly will get a better feel for what to expect from home-plate umpires. In the meantime, the 23-year-old switch hitter probably is going to have to swing the bat more.

"I think I will have to make some adjustments because I'm getting too many calls that for me are not strikes," Moncada said through a translator. "They are calling those pitches strikes and I will have to make some adjustments in order to take advantage of the situation or put the ball in play."

Moncada came out swinging Tuesday, leading off the first inning with a home run off Indians starter Adam Plutko.

"I think that everybody knows that my offense right now is not as good as it can be," Moncada said. "But I'm working hard. I'm doing all the things that I can possibly do to improve my offense and get the results done."

Eye on Charlotte:

Out since April 23 with a strained right hamstring, right fielder Avisail Garcia played in his first rehab game with Class AAA Charlotte on Tuesday night and was 1-for-2 with a walk.

Garcia, an all-star with the White Sox last season, batted second and was the Knights' designated hitter.

Emerging pitching prospect Jordan Stephens started for Charlotte and had 7 strikeouts over 6 scoreless innings.

Earlier Tuesday, starting pitcher Spencer Adams was promoted to Charlotte from AA Birmingham.

The White Sox's second-round pick in the 2014 draft out of White County High School in Cleveland, Georgia, Adams was 3-6 with a 4.59 ERA in 13 starts with the Barons. Over his last 3 starts, the 22-year-old righty allowed 1 earned run in 21 innings.

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### **Abreu is Chicago White Sox's undisputed shining star**

By Scot Gregor / Daily Herald / June 12, 2018

As much as he has been encouraged about the improved recent play of late at the big-league level, general manager Rick Hahn realizes most of the players expected to help the Chicago White Sox contend in the future are still in the minors.

"We're excited about the fact we have six Southern League all-stars, we have five Carolina League all-stars, and seven Sally League all-stars," Hahn said. "That's a nice little haul, a nice little reinforcement that things are headed the right way for the future."

Outfielder Eloy Jimenez, catchers Zack Collins and Seby Zavala, shortstop Danny Mendick, starting pitcher Dane Dunning and reliever Ian Hamilton are the six Southern League all-stars from Class AA Birmingham.

Outfielders Luis Alexander Basabe and Joel Booker, starters Dylan Cease and Bernardo Flores and relief pitcher Matt Foster are going to represent high Class A Winston-Salem in the Carolina League All-Star Game.

In the Southern Atlantic League, low A Kannapolis outfielders Luis Gonzalez and Craig Dedelow, second baseman Tate Blackman, shortstop Laz Rivera, starter Blake Battenfield and relievers Tyler Johnson and Jake Elliot are all-stars.

As for the White Sox, they're only expected to send one player to the July 17 All-Star Game at Nationals Park in Washington.

Jose Abreu is the overwhelmingly obvious choice, and he leads American League first basemen in early voting.

Abreu has 267,812 votes, ahead of the Boston's Mitch Moreland (241,889) and Detroit's Miguel Cabrera (173,174).

To say the strong likelihood of playing in his second All-Star Game is a distraction for Abreu would be inaccurate.

"You know me, guys," Abreu said through White Sox translator Billy Russo. "I'm just thinking about ways to help this team win games. To be comfortable at the plate, taking care of the at-bats, driving runs in. If that (all-star) happens that is going to be good, but I'm not thinking about that right now."

Abreu does have fond memories of his first All-Star Game, which came in his rookie season (2014) with the Sox.

"You work for it, and at that time it was recognition for all my work and for the journey to come to the U.S. and the majors," Abreu said. "One of the best moments was when I met Derek Jeter. He was in his retirement year and it was a very special moment for me.

"Just being there, being around great players and having the opportunity to share the field and locker room with them was very special."

Abreu is most likely going to play for a White Sox team that finishes with a losing record for the fifth time in as many years, but he is having another special individual season.

Heading into Tuesday night's game against the Cleveland Indians at Guaranteed Rate Field, Abreu led the Sox in batting (.289), RBI (38) and OPS (.859). He also ranked second in the majors with 25 doubles.

"The opportunity to work with him every day is something really special," teammate Yoan Moncada said. "He likes to work and you are always learning from him, the things that he does, how he handles himself, his routine. That's something that you really appreciate. I always thank him for having me, allowing me to be close to him.

"For him, it's going to be a really big honor to be in the All-Star Game and be in the All-Star Game fans voting. That will be something really, really good."

At 31, there still are expectations that Abreu is going to be traded sometime before next season's July 31 nonwaiver deadline.

Signed through 2019, Abreu has hit 25 or more homers and driven in at least 100 runs in each of his first four full seasons.

"We've made no secret about our affection for Jose, and it's not just based upon the contribution between the white lines," Hahn said. "It's based on what he does in that clubhouse.

"I don't think there's a finer representative for what it means to be a White Sox or what we hope for our players to be on and off the field than what Jose Abreu provides us.

"Again, we don't have to make any decisions on how he fits for the long term for a little while now. He's under control through the end of next season. If at that point, before that point, if we haven't come to terms on an extension we certainly will have time then to revisit that."

Abreu gave an expected answer Tuesday when asked about his future with the Sox.

"Right now, I am with this organization," he said. "I am glad and really grateful for everything this organization has done for me. I would like to stay here forever, but right now I am just taking advantage of every moment, every game that I spend with this team. Hopefully I can stay here my whole career."

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## What the near and distant future holds for Carson Fulmer

By James Fegan / The Athletic / June 12, 2018

When Carson Fulmer was optioned to Charlotte after lasting just two innings in his start against Texas on May 18, the closing line from Rick Renteria and Fulmer alike was that he would be back, and in all likelihood, fairly soon.

“For me it’s being quick but not being too fast,” said Fulmer of his delivery last month in Charlotte. “I’m working on a little bit of a pause to make sure my body is underneath me. For me to be consistent in the strike zone I have to master my mechanics and my delivery. At times this year in the big leagues I’ve had success, but when I’ve had success I was in control of my body. When I had bad results I wasn’t. That’s the main focus here and be able to throw everything in the strike zone and be able to put some good outings together.”

Fulmer reiterated multiple times that he felt his marching orders upon arriving in Triple-A were pretty clear, and not overwhelming nor extensive. Given his self-critiques and his description of what mechanical bugaboos he was looking to eliminate, it’s clear it had something to do with “throw more strikes.”

“When I get rotational my ball seems to come back over spots that I don’t want it to,” Fulmer said. “When I’m up and down, I’m able to stay consistent and have good run on my fastball and have good life on my other stuff. Just keeping it simple. I think the demotion is going to be good for me. I hope that it brings everything back to the middle. I know I’ll be back up soon. I just have to come back here and get going and get going in the right direction again.”

By those standards, his most recent start (5 IP, 9 H, 6 R, 5 ER, BB, 5 K, 2 HR) was a measure of progress for reducing walks, even amid clear disappointment in his inability to keep runs off the board. In four starts with the Knights, he has a 15.6 percent walk rate in 22 innings, which is worse than the walk problems that are keeping Michael Kopech’s electric stuff in Charlotte with him.

More complicating is that the relative lack of more qualified starters that made Fulmer a shoe-in for a spot in the rotation in spring training. Even with Miguel González’s injury and Carlos Rodón’s return, it would be criminal to mess with Dylan Covey’s run at the moment, and James Shields is even having his best season as a member of the White Sox. Even the Knights rotation is now crowded with prospects such as Kopech, Jordan Stephens and now Spencer Adams, who’s knocking on the door of a big-league call up.

The window to give Fulmer a longer leash in the major league rotation is seemingly narrowing, if not closed. If he gets back to the rotation it will have to be because he’s dominated in Charlotte. And Alec Hansen returning to Double-A and Dane Dunning making the Southern League All-Star Game reminds that it will be a competitive fight to stick if he does. The White Sox obviously are profiling Fulmer as a starter until they stop giving him starts, but Rick Hahn thoroughly acknowledged a move to the bullpen being a possibility, and possibly being the result of a numbers game.

“We’ve told you before that we’ve tried to accumulate as much potential front-of-the-rotation talent and that ultimately there’s probably not going to be room at the end for everyone who is capable of being in a big league rotation and some of those will play a role in bullpens,” Hahn said. “It’s possible in our view of him as a starter or not, it’s possible Carson is one of those guys who winds up being a dominant reliever, but for now we’re going to continue to give him opportunities to pitch in the rotation in Charlotte.”

To have spoken to anyone who dealt with Fulmer as a dominant starter at Vanderbilt is to have heard absolute raves about his makeup. It’s not just something Hahn or Nick Hostetler like to spout during his struggles. Those raves usually come with insistence that in time, given the opportunity to find a comfort zone with his mechanics, he will be successful.

“He’s still finding his way,” said Braves shortstop Dansby Swanson, who was Fulmer’s teammate at Vanderbilt. “He’s still got elite arm talent, it’s just a matter of figuring out what works for him, I think. That’s

the biggest battle when you get to professional baseball: What works for you, and how can you perfect what works for you? It can take you a while.”

Swanson also admitted that the 2017 season was a major struggle for Fulmer as he shuffled through various tweaks to his delivery. And even scouts who back his stuff and makeup and insist on his eventual success, vary on what form that success will take.

Fulmer showed in the early innings of his starts that he can hum it up to 95 mph with his four-seamer while getting arm-side run, and his hard cutter was effective for swing-and-misses this season. Paired together in short bursts, that combination could be effective coming out of his high-intensity delivery when it's in the zone, and if he relieves, he won't be in a role that derails games on nights where it isn't in the zone. It's an easy fallback option to envision success with, which might be why the Sox are staying so positive with Fulmer at such a difficult point in his development.

“We very much still view Carson as playing a role in our future,” Hahn said. “We had to send Joe Crede back to the minors, we had to send Aaron Rowand back to the minors. It happens. Mike Trout got sent back to the minors. It's not ideal for Carson probably in his mind. The fact that he went back to Charlotte doesn't remove him from playing an important role in our future.”

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### **Stark: How MLB expansion could lead to realignment, a new playoff format, a universal DH and more**

By Jayson Stark / The Athletic / June 12, 2018

“I want to be clear about expansion. ... We've made clear we have two big issues — Tampa Bay and Oakland — that need to be resolved before we think about it. But the fact of the matter is, we're blessed. We've got cities out there that want to have Major League Baseball. And I think Major League Baseball has to show some receptivity to that because down the road, we are interested in it.”

-Commissioner Rob Manfred, to the Athletic's Ken Rosenthal last month

Close your eyes and imagine baseball in the year 2025. Close your eyes and imagine baseball after Rob Manfred's expansion dreams come true.

Imagine a sport that could look dramatically different with 32 teams instead of 30.

Imagine a realignment, based almost solely on geography, that could blow up the structure of the leagues and divisions as we've always known them.

Imagine a postseason that could also expand, to 12 or even 16 teams.

Imagine a totally overhauled schedule, with fewer games and saner travel.

Imagine a sport where every team would use the designated hitter, possibly because there could be no such thing anymore as a National and American league.

Yes, it's a funny thing. When the commissioner utters that magic word, expansion, the first question most people tend to ask is: “Where?” But in some ways, that's the least interesting question revolving around expansion these days.

When people inside the game discuss where expansion is heading, they're gazing far beyond the geography. What they see is expansion as a powerful vehicle that could open doors to untold possibilities, whenever the stars line up to make it all possible.

“The benefits of having 32 teams are so clear,” says one baseball official, “that at some point, we've got to get to 32 — whether it's in two years or 20.”

That question – when? – is probably the hardest to answer. But those other questions? Let's take a look at them, informed by extensive conversations with people around the sport.

#### WHICH CITIES HAVE THE BEST SHOT?

Let's just assume that one of these decades, the stadium situations in Oakland and Tampa Bay actually get resolved. Crazy idea, we know. But let's go with that – and assume that neither the A's nor the Rays wind up relocating.

That opens the expansion field to every major city in North America that currently lacks a big-league baseball team. We've explored all the cities that have been connected with MLB at any point. Here is how we would rank those cities, based on our own reportorial instinct:

- 1) PORTLAND, ORE. – It's the 22nd largest media market in America, with a metropolitan area that is home to nearly 3.2 million people. One baseball official described Portland as the most organized of all the cities bidding for a team. So it has that going for it. Its biggest drawback is that it's less than 200 miles away from Seattle, so a team in Portland would face many of the same travel challenges that the Mariners face. But ... if baseball is headed toward realignment (and a schedule) based around geography, having two teams in the Pacific Northwest would actually ease the travel burden in both Seattle and Portland. And that could be a major selling point, assuming a new ballpark and TV rights deal fall into place.
- 2) CHARLOTTE, N.C. – One of the fastest-growing cities in America, Charlotte ranks No. 17 among all American cities in population (over 850,000) and ranks as the 23rd largest media market. Charlotte actually has a larger population, within its city limits, than Atlanta, Miami, Tampa or Nashville. It's a hotbed of pro and college sports passion. And another team in the Southeast would fit perfectly into baseball's geographic profile. Naturally, it always comes down to money – and building a ballpark. So there's still that. But by any other measure, Charlotte appears well-positioned to be one of the 32.
- 3) NASHVILLE – Very similar profile to Charlotte, though in a slightly smaller media market (No. 27). Nashville has showered love on the Titans and Predators, has a long and successful minor-league history, and fits the geographical allure of adding a team in the South. It would also need a ballpark and TV deal. But as one longtime official put it, "I've always been surprised that Nashville wasn't higher on this list."
- 4) MONTREAL – It's the largest city in North America without a baseball team, with an estimated 1.7 million people living in the city and approximately 4 million in its metropolitan area. Plus, it feels as though baseball owes Montreal a second chance, after everything the labor wars of the '90s did to doom the Expos to failure. But there are numerous issues behind the scenes. The prospects for a new stadium and big TV deal are shaky. There are the same tax and currency-conversion challenges the Blue Jays face. And the political enthusiasm for doing what it takes to attract a team doesn't seem to match the energy in Stade Olympique every March, when the Blue Jays stop by for their annual exhibition games. A lot more would have to happen to bring baseball back to Montreal than it might appear from afar.
- 5) SAN ANTONIO/AUSTIN – The Rangers and Astros wouldn't be big fans of any attempt to install a team in San Antonio or Austin, two of the fastest-growing cities in America. But we found it interesting that they were the first two areas mentioned by one official we surveyed – if only because Austin is the largest city in the United States that has no team in any of the four major professional sports, and San Antonio is the largest with just one team (the Spurs). But MLB would have to make significant concessions to the other Texas franchises to make this happen.
- 6) LAS VEGAS – In hockey, the Golden Knights just wrote themselves the greatest expansion script ever. The Raiders will arrive in 2020 if all goes according to plan. And when the Supreme Court signed off on the legalization of sports gambling from coast to coast, it removed much of the weight that had always hung over the idea of baseball in Vegas. But Las Vegas would be the smallest media market in baseball (No. 40), even smaller than Milwaukee and Cincinnati. So there would be built-in revenue challenges from

Day One. And let's face it: Vegas is one scorching place in the summer, with an average temperature over 100 in June, July and August. So "even with a dome or a retractable-roof stadium," says an official of one team, "I just don't think you have the same energy or commerce in Vegas in the summer as you do during the winter."

7) MEXICO CITY – The commissioner has mentioned Mexico City (population: nearly 9 million) as a potential expansion site numerous times. But there are so many obstacles to putting a team in Mexico, on almost every front, that one source we surveyed went so far as to say: "I think you'd see a team in London before you see a team in Mexico."

Are there possibilities other than these? Of course. Indianapolis? Oklahoma City? New Orleans? A third team in New York (or North Jersey)? A third team in the Los Angeles/Orange County metroplex? A team in Connecticut? None would be completely impossible. But none would be even remotely close to likely, either. Get back to us in five years.

#### HOW WOULD REALIGNMENT WORK?

Close your eyes and imagine baseball in the year 2025. Yeah, we know we've used that line before. But here is where that flight of imagination begins to carry you to places you never expected to travel.

Imagine the Yankees and Mets, Giants and A's, Dodgers and Angels, Cubs and White Sox – all in the same division.

Imagine the Astros playing the Red Sox in October – in the World Series.

Imagine if baseball divided its landscape along the geography-based lines of the NBA – as opposed to the artificial, league-based lines drawn up in 1901.

Is that really where baseball is headed?

To be honest, it's way too premature to tell. What we can tell you, though, is that baseball's Strategic Planning Committee has looked at that realignment-by-geography scenario long and hard.

A bunch of different ideas remain in play. But a geographic realignment easily could look like this:

#### MLB EAST

##### BAMBINO DIVISION

NY Yankees  
NY Mets  
Baltimore Orioles  
Washington Nationals

##### SPLINTER DIVISION

Red Sox  
Blue Jays  
Phillies  
Pirates

##### AARON DIVISION

Braves  
Marlins  
Rays  
Charlotte\*

##### MUSIAL DIVISION

Cardinals  
Tigers  
Reds  
Indians

#### MLB WEST

#### JACKIE DIVISION

Dodgers  
Angels  
Diamondbacks  
Padres

#### MAYS DIVISION

Giants  
A's  
Mariners  
Portland\*

#### BRETT DIVISION

Royals  
Astros  
Rangers  
Rockies

#### ERNIE DIVISION

Cubs  
White Sox  
Brewers  
Twins

(\*-expansion team)

Now, there are obviously many, many variations on that alignment. It wouldn't be hard to redraw the map to keep Yankees/Red Sox, Cubs/Cardinals, Dodgers/Giants, etc., in the same division, for instance. But you get the idea.

"When we talked about this, it just felt like a very futuristic conversation," says one source who was present for these discussions. "It might seem so radical. But it has so many advantages from a scheduling, fan and attendance standpoint."

And it isn't just him talking. When Rob Manfred sat down with Ken Rosenthal, the first advantage he cited when he began ruminating on expansion was getting to "a more geographically based alignment."

There are other ways to get there, though. Baseball could opt for two eight-team divisions in each league over four four-team divisions. But among the folks we surveyed, there was clearly more support for more, smaller divisions – because of the geography advantages and because it would allow eight teams to tell their fans, "Hey, we won our division."

The most dramatic question of all, however, would be this:

Does baseball really want to blow up the National and American leagues?

It's neat. It's clean. It's efficient – geographically speaking. But doing that means offending the traditionalists – and there are still plenty of them, sitting in owners' boxes and in the bleachers.

Doing that also means bringing the DH to all 32 teams, because there would be no such thing anymore as an "American League." On the other hand, a universal DH could happen with or without any sort of realignment. They're not necessarily linked.

So could baseball realign by geography without waving goodbye to the National and American leagues? Well, not as cleanly. But it could go to something like this:

## NATIONAL LEAGUE

### NL NORTHEAST

Nationals  
Mets  
Phillies  
Pirates

### NL MIDEAST

Cubs  
Cardinals  
Reds  
Brewers

### NL SOUTH

Braves  
Marlins  
Rays\*\*  
Charlotte\*

### NL WEST

Dodgers  
Giants  
Padres  
Diamondbacks

## AMERICAN LEAGUE

### AL EAST

Yankees  
Red Sox  
Orioles  
Blue Jays

### AL MIDEAST

Indians  
Twins  
White Sox  
Tigers

### AL SOUTH

Astros  
Rangers  
Royals  
Rockies\*\*

### AL WEST

Mariners  
Portland\*

A's  
Angels  
(\* - expansion team)  
(\*\* - changed league)

There are several variations on that idea, too, naturally. And something like that might eventually be how this turns out. But whether realignment turns out to be radical or not-so-radical, the ripple effects would be dramatic. Which leads us to ask ...

#### HOW WOULD THIS AFFECT THE SCHEDULE AND POSTSEASON?

We should make clear that baseball is still years away from having to answer those questions. But all of this will be on the table:

**FEWER GAMES, MORE PLAYOFFS** – We found nobody who didn't see expansion as a trigger for both of the above. The postseason field could expand to either six teams per league or as many as eight. The regular season then would shrink – likely to 154 games – so the postseason could begin sooner and the World Series could end before Thanksgiving.

**WHY A 154-GAME SCHEDULE** – Lopping eight games off the schedule also cuts about 10 days off the regular season. So an extra postseason round could fit comfortably into that time frame. And the schedule-makers would be eternally grateful for finally having the opportunity to make out a schedule with A) an even number of teams in each league, B) an even number of teams in each division and C) more wiggle room. As one official put it, "What everyone involved with the schedule tells me is that 32 teams and 154 games is the single easiest schedule to make."

**BALANCED OR UNBALANCED** – This debate has been going on for two decades. It won't be going away no matter how baseball realigns. There is so much emphasis now on the importance of winning your division that an unbalanced schedule makes sense – unless you're ensconced in the wild-card race. Then an unbalanced schedule punishes teams in the best divisions, and that has never seemed very fair. In his interview with *The Athletic*, Manfred suggested that a more balanced schedule "probably" makes sense. But if the biggest selling point of geographical realignment is to make travel less crazy, that swings the scale back toward unbalanced, right? This is a tough one!

**HOW GEOGRAPHICAL REALIGNMENT COULD HELP OCTOBER** – In his conversation with Ken Rosenthal, Manfred raised a typical postseason scheduling nightmare that he would love to avoid – when a team like the Red Sox plays a team like the Angels in a best-of-five Division Series. Besides the grueling coast-to-coast travel, he said, there's another problem: "You're either playing too early for the people in Anaheim or too late for the people in Boston." But if MLB divided its leagues by geography, NBA-style, it would never face one of those matchups before a best-of-seven round, because the early rounds would be either all-East or all-West matchups. Is it possible to make that happen without blowing up the leagues? Sure doesn't seem like it. And that could factor heavily into the realignment strategy down the line.

**A NEW ROUND OF PLAYOFFS** – Does baseball really want to follow the NBA and NHL toward a 16-team postseason field? That would likely mean starting the postseason with eight best-of-three-game series. And in a sport that plays every day, that would mean overlapping games – and would probably work only if baseball goes to total geographical realignment. So adding a sixth playoff team seems more likely, leading to an NFL-type format in which the Nos. 3 and 4 seeds among the division winners would host the two wild cards in each league. Would that be a one-and-done game or a best-of-three? Too early to say. Just bear in mind that baseball's national TV deals with Fox, Turner and ESPN run through 2021. And you know what drives those deals? October.

It's fascinating to take a step back and see how all these pieces fit together once expansion opens the box to this puzzle. But with 30 teams, doing any of this turns into a sport-wide migraine.

So you can close your eyes and try to picture all of this. But this is no Rob Manfred pipe dream. This is going to happen. This isn't a matter of if. It's a matter of filling in the year – and then filling in all the brave-new-world details that are guaranteed to follow.

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### **Five observations: Power surge sets up James Shields for easy victory**

By James Fegan / The Athletic / June 12, 2018

This game was probably just as dull and lifeless for Cleveland fans as Monday's snoozefest was for the target subscriber base for my articles.

About five minutes into the bottom of the first inning, the recently recalled Adam Plutko was down 2-0 after back-to-back booming home runs from Yoán Moncada and Yolmer Sánchez opened the scoring. After about five more minutes, he was down 3-0 after Matt Davidson hit the first of his two RBI doubles to center that drove in Daniel Palka.

With nothing much other than Francisco Lindor slapping and shanking bloop doubles down the foul lines against James Shields, that just about put everything out of reach for the night in an easy 5-1 victory for the White Sox (23-42), who got their first win over Cleveland in five tries.

Rick Renteria managed to use three relievers in the ninth, but since the game ended on a warning track fly ball with two runners on, it might have been necessary.

"Yeah, simple as that," Renteria said when asked if Nate Jones' one out walk after a leadoff double prompted the switch.

Afterward, the White Sox celebrated their victory with a smoke machine and rotating disco lights in the clubhouse.

"We are trying to celebrate our wins," Shields said. "We are trying to take every game one at a time and every series one at a time over the last few weeks. We are going to enjoy the win."

#### 1. Many Games James

With a dazzling array of moderately well-struck lineouts and flyouts hit right at outfielders, some bouncers, a pair of strikeouts, cutters, changes, and curves, and just strikes upon strikes upon strikes, Shields glided through seven innings of one-run ball. Troubled only by a pair of Lindor doubles with sub-80-mph exit velocities, the latter of which led to an RBI sacrifice fly, Shields reached the 2,500 career innings plateau in the seventh, and as he is wont to do, just kept on pitching right through it. His ERA is down to 4.63 on the year and he has now gone six innings or longer in 10 consecutive outings. He could make some mid-level contender that doesn't want to pay too much very happy in the next few months.

"My body feels really good right now," Shields said. "Last couple of years my body hasn't been up to par and no excuses on my part. But at the end of the day my body feels good and I'm working really hard in between starts. So we are going hopefully continue this roll and try to win this series here."

#### 2. Moncada's struggles

Outside of smashing a 2-1 up-and-in fastball out to dead center, not much went right for Moncada on Tuesday. He faced a fuselage of pregame questions about dealing with umpires and their wacky strike zones after his manager and general manager suggested that was part of his month-long slump. After putting the onus on himself to adjust, he struck out twice –including once looking on a borderline Zach McAllister fastball inside — and continued toward his record-setting strikeout pace. He was victimized by an insane dive into the stands by José Ramírez on a foul popup, and he couldn't backhand a Michael Brantley smash to second, leading to Lindor advancing to third in the sixth and eventually scoring the lone Cleveland run. At least the original error call was reversed, and hey, that dinger was pretty long.

“I went into that at-bat with an aggressive mentality, to be more aggressive in that at-bat,” Moncada said of his home run through team interpreter Billy Russo. “Everything is part of the process. I’ve been working hard, and I’m going step by step. I have plenty of confidence in my approach. I’m pretty sure and pretty confident that things are going to turn out and going to be in my favor now.”

### 3. Davidson whirrs back to life

Bad, floating Plutko changeups proved to be the key to shaking Davidson out of his June slump as he tripled his extra-base hit total for the month with a pair of booming doubles to the wall. He’s continued drawing walks — he drew one on Tuesday — and is mostly laying off pitches out of the zone during this slide, so it seems more like a regular slow stretch than a collapse of his encouraging approach.

### 4. The eternally steady Yolmer Sánchez

Sánchez made Moncada’s game-opening blast off Plutko look quaint by instantly repeating the feat, and he also walked, got bailed out of getting picked off by a questionable balk call and made a beautiful backhand play on a grounder deep in the hole, which he capped off by firing a bullet across the diamond to retire Yan Gomes in the fifth. His day at the plate pulled his wRC+ back above 100 (league average) for the season, and at least one person watching appreciates his contributions.

### 5. Jace Fry is the best reliever on the team now?

Fry is basically recreating the season he had at Double-A last season in the majors at this point. So far, he’s more of a guy who annihilates lefties and is OK enough against righties to make it shake out to pretty good overall, so it will be worth watching how he fares as his role gets less specialized. But as someone whose career path was pretty uncertain this time last year after two Tommy John surgeries, you can tweak your neck tracking his ascent from staying in Arizona when the season started to becoming a key high-leverage major league reliever. After two strikeouts in a scoreless eighth, his K-rate is up to 30.1 percent, behind only Bruce Rondón, Xavier Cedeño and Danny Farquhar.

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## **White Sox confident Yoán Moncada’s breakout is coming: ‘He will ultimately be everything everybody hopes he will be’**

By James Fegan / The Athletic / Juen 12, 2018

Yoán Moncada is the guy who remained fully confident in his approach when he was making a hard adjustment to the majors last year, and during his struggles the first couple weeks of this season, so it means something that nearly a month after returning from the disabled list for a tight left hamstring, his answer to whether his timing is back is a pretty clear “no.”

“Right now I have to go little by little, step by step,” Moncada said through team interpreter Billy Russo. “I’m getting to that point. I don’t feel completely 100 percent in sync with my offense but I’ve been working hard and I think that I’m close to it.”

Moncada has hit .200/.246/.309 during a 27-game stretch since returning from the DL. Even piling up 13 strikeouts in the past six games only brings his strikeout rate during the 27 games to 33.1 percent — obviously high but not out of character or too high for him to have success.

He’s had cold stretches before, like when he first debuted last July and at the start of this season, but this is the first time his previously constant predilection to take a walk has dissipated below league average. He’s walked in just 5.9 percent of his 118 plate appearances since returning, which marks him as significantly less patient than Tim Anderson during that time, in the ultimate testament to development not being linear. The White Sox acknowledge he’s out of sync, but also reaffirmed he’s relatively early in his maturation process, as general manager Rick Hahn reminded that Moncada wasn’t playing professional ball three years ago. But they’re also arguing balls and strikes on his behalf.

“One of my good buddies in Major League Baseball deals with the umpires so I don’t want to go too far down this path,” Hahn said. “But Moncada had some tough ABs over the course of this road trip in terms of balls and strikes and the challenge for him, the developmental element for him just this week, is making sure he remains true to his approach, as opposed to overreacting to some perhaps bad strike-three calls over the course of the last week.”

Moncada dealt with a wide C.B. Bucknor strike zone during a four-strikeout game last week in Minnesota, but after the 23-year-old’s difficult time Monday against Carlos Carrasco, manager Rick Renteria brought it up again.

“He has as good an eye as anyone in the game of baseball,” Renteria said. “Sometimes he gets some pitches called on him that should not be called — flat out, straight up. It’s a tough job that those [umpires] have to do every day but this poor kid, honestly, I think he gets the short end of the stick a lot of times. Undeservedly. You have to continue to understand what the zone is for particular guys without getting outside of your hitting zones.

“I think as you gain more experience as people see and understand he has a pretty good eye. Historically you have hitters or pitchers over time who get one, two, three, four baseballs off [the plate] ... [Tom] Glavine and [Greg] Maddux. Those guys end up earning respect over time.”

Moncada is definitely not getting star calls yet, and his approach leaves him very vulnerable to getting burned on borderline third-strike calls, but this is an admittedly incomplete answer. His troubles as a right-handed hitter have been well documented, and are understandable considering he has fewer than 150 big league plate appearances from that side. It’s understandable that he’s rusty after coming straight off the disabled list — all these struggles have dropped him down to .231/.318/.405, for a 98 wRC+ — and being a league average hitter at an up-the-middle position at age 23 is a very understandable place for him to be.

But given that he was the No. 1 overall prospect, the centerpiece of a trade for possibly the best, if not simply the most talented, pitcher in franchise history, there’s an undercurrent of disappointment (albeit possibly just in my Twitter mentions) that things are progressing for him at a reasonable level and not a prodigious one. If ultimately the good ones have a way of forcing the issue and outpacing normal development timelines, Moncada is creating consternation by having a fairly normal one. And that’s concerning, because on balance, the more normal result for a ballyhooed No.1 prospect is a run of several years as an above-average regular, and the more abnormal one is that he becomes a superstar.

“He will ultimately be everything everybody hopes he will be, I believe,” Renteria affirmed again Sunday. “But he’s a young man, just developing and evolving and I think he’s going to be in a good place as he moves forward.”

Between being pulled into Renteria’s office after some uncompetitive at-bats on April 12 and heading to the disabled list, Moncada hit .323/.405/.662 even while striking out in a third of his plate appearances. It was a smaller sample than the skid he’s in now, but he hit for power, he flashed his quickness, his bat speed looked indomitable, and every doubt about him was getting obliterated into the gap. And he turned that on pretty quickly after looking as hopeless as ever, which is the eternal risk of doubting a supremely talented young player.

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