



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

"Vizquel a natural in first year as Class A skipper" ... Scott Merkin, MLB.com

"30 breakout performers -- 1 for each team"... Will Leitch, MLB.com

"Baseball prospects like the White Sox's Eloy Jimenez are developing faster, being called up later" ... Russell Dorsey, Chicago Tribune

"Series preview: White Sox at Indians" ... Chicago Tribune Staff

"Splits before, after All-Star break tell story for White Sox, Cubs" ... John Grochowski, Sun-Times

"So far, so good for White Sox' Class A manager Omar Vizquel" ... Daryl Van Schouwen, Sun-Times

"Vizquel sees why Chicago White Sox are fired up about future" ... Scot Gregor, Daily Herald

"Scouting report: White Sox vs. Cleveland Indians at Progressive Field" ... Scot Gregor, Daily Herald

"How Jace Fry can become the White Sox closer" ... James Fegan, The Athletic

"TA30: The last MLB power rankings of the season set the stage for October" ... Matthew Kory, The Athletic

"Sox is singular: Good White Sox news of late is often balanced by a cold reality" ... Jim Maraglus, The Athletic

---

### **Vizquel a natural in first year as Class A skipper**

By Scott Merkin / MLB.com / September 17, 2018

CHICAGO -- The first year of managing for Omar Vizquel finished as a true success.

Vizquel's Class A Winston-Salem squad, which is the White Sox representative in the Carolina League, reached the playoffs by winning both the first and second half in the Southern Division, and producing an overall record of 84-54. Vizquel, who previously managed Team Venezuela during the 2017 World Baseball Classic and served as the Detroit Tigers' first-base coach from 2014-17, was named the 2018 Carolina League Manager of the Year.

Winning games at the Minor League level is important, especially for a White Sox rebuild trying to build a certain culture as players move toward the Majors. But in working with top White Sox prospects -- including right-handed pitcher Dylan Cease (No. 5), outfielder/designated hitter Micker Adolfo (No. 11), outfielders Luis Robert (No. 3), Luis Alexander Basabe (No. 9) and Blake Rutherford (No. 7) and infielder Nick Madrigal (No. 4), who also happened to be the team's top pick in the 2018 Draft -- development defines success as much as victories.

And Vizquel -- 51, with 24 years of big league experience, 11 Gold Glove Awards earned at shortstop and 2,877 hits -- was the right man to combine both goals.

"Well, it was a very exciting year," said Vizquel during a Monday morning conference call. "It was interesting, because sometimes you don't know what to expect from these guys. But as soon as you see them go on the field, you see the kind of talent they have. We played the game the right way. And in the long run, got to know some of the guys that I never worked with before."

"It's been awesome," said Madrigal during a recent interview of playing for Vizquel. "Even just talking the game. You can tell he has a great baseball mind and knows the game really well. It's been awesome getting close to him."

Madrigal spoke about Vizquel taking ground balls before some games and looking as if he never lost a step. So Vizquel led by example as well.

Vizquel gave high marks to his staff made up of coach Guillermo Quiroz, pitching coach Matt Zaleski and hitting coach Charlie Poe for contributing to the Dash's success. Vizquel compared managing at this level to being a teacher in second grade in that sometimes you have to send the message two or three times until it processes.

Once the young players trust the information and see it work on the field, they begin to understand the right things that need to be done to get to the next level. Communication, according to Vizquel, is the key, which is a mantra he preached upon first taking the job.

"Yeah, no doubt about it. I think that's the No. 1 thing you have to do with your players," Vizquel said. "If you know what the plan is and give it to them, and they know what their role is for the team, it makes things easier for everybody. They are not expecting anything weird. Every time you make a change or something different with them, you have to let them know.

"You can't catch them by surprise, because that's when things start getting mixed up. But if you have a plan and you give it to them and you kind of work at that, and you try to improve on that, they know where you are coming from and what are the things you are trying to accomplish."

---

### **30 breakout performers -- 1 for each team**

*Whether rookies or players who finally turned the corner, a look at the season's breakthrough performances*  
By Will Leitch / MLB.com / September 17, 2018

Of the hundreds of great Albert Pujols factoids, here's my favorite one: He only made the Cardinals' roster in 2001, his rookie season, because Bobby Bonilla had a Spring Training injury, opening up a roster spot. All Pujols did that year was hit .329/.403/.610, win the National League Rookie of the Year Award and, of course, begin a career that'll finish in Cooperstown. It was his breakthrough year, and it was undeniable.

You can't expect everyone -- or anyone -- to have a breakthrough like Pujols did. But when a breakthrough happens, you can't miss it. Today we take a look at players on each team who, in 2018, had the breakthrough year that augurs great things for the future. Some of them are rookies, some of them just finally turned the corner, but all of them are players we'll be talking about for years to come. And this was the year they got it all started.

#### **AMERICAN LEAGUE EAST**

Blue Jays: Teoscar Hernandez, OF

Key stat: 20 homers

The strikeouts are a little higher than you'd like, but for a guy who didn't make the Opening Day roster, the power has been a revelation for the Blue Jays.

Orioles: Tanner Scott

Key stat: 12.9 K/9

It has been the sort of year in Baltimore that a middle reliever with a high strikeout rate is your breakthrough player ... but a 23-year-old with that strikeout rate shouldn't be ignored.

Rays: Blake Snell

Key stat: 2.03 ERA, 19 wins

This was the year the Rays were waiting for from Snell. Maybe he's the only starter they need!

Red Sox: Xander Bogaerts

Key stat: .288/.359/.519

Remember, Bogaerts was a below-average hitter last year. With all the homers at Fenway this year, it's easy to miss that he has more than doubled his total from 2017.

Yankees: Aaron Hicks

Key stat: 4.1 WAR (Baseball Reference)

With all the injury problems the Yankees have, Hicks is proving that he can be a near-star-level player.

## AL CENTRAL

Indians: Jose Ramirez

Key stat: .282/.396/.578

Sure, Ramirez was terrific last year too, but by converting those doubles into homers, he has turned into the AL Most Valuable Player Award candidate no one saw coming.

Royals: Brad Keller

Key stat: 3.04 ERA

Keller had a 4.68 ERA in Double-A Jackson last year, but he has been the Royals' best pitcher this year. He just turned 23 years old as well.

Tigers: Niko Goodrum

Key stat: 16 homers

Goodrum was 1-for-17 in 2017 with Minnesota and never hit more than 13 homers in eight years in the Minors. He may end up leading the Tigers in homers this year.

Twins: Jose Berrios

Key stat: 3.81 ERA, tied for league lead in complete games and shutouts

Berrios will end up adding about 50 innings to his 2017 total, which gets him closer to being the ace the Twins have been waiting on. He's still 24.

White Sox: Carlos Rodon

Key stat: 3.10 ERA

Rodon's strikeout rate has dropped, but everything else has been golden for him this year, and he looks like a rotation mainstay moving forward.

## AL WEST

Angels: Shohei Ohtani

Key stat: .370 OBP, 3.31 ERA

The injury is (obviously) a bummer, but seriously, once it heals, it looks like Ohtani really might be able to both pitch and hit in this league, and at high levels.

Astros: Alex Bregman

Key stats: .294/.401/.551

Bregman has unquestionably been the best position player on a team full of great ones.

Athletics: Matt Chapman

Key stat: 8.1 WAR (Baseball Reference)

We all knew Chapman could play defense like no one else on earth. But he has raised both his OBP and SLG 50 points from his rookie year. Look out.

Mariners: Edwin Diaz

Key stat: 55 saves

The Mariners have relied on Diaz more than any team has relied on any reliever, and he has responded nearly every time.

Rangers: Jose Leclerc

Key stat: 13.8 K/9

Leclerc has always been able to strike guys out, but he dropped his walk rate in half this year.

## NATIONAL LEAGUE EAST

Braves: Ronald Acuna Jr.

Key stat: .292/.368/.574

Remember when Acuna was struggling? He looks like he'll be ready to compete for the NL MVP Award as soon as next year. Acuna won't be able to buy his first drink until December.

Marlins: Brian Anderson

Key stat: .270/.353/.395

If Anderson's competition consisted of mere mortals instead of some absolute studs this year, he'd be a legitimate NL Rookie of the Year Award candidate.

Mets: Jacob deGrom

Key stat: 1.78 ERA

It's possible that deGrom may be what we remember most from this season.

Nationals: Juan Soto

Key stat: .305/.421/.532

It's easy not to fret about your former superstar teenager possibly leaving when you have another one that just shows up on your roster.

Phillies: Aaron Nola

Key stat: 16-5, 2.42 ERA

The Phillies have been excited about Nola for a while. But even they didn't see this coming.

## NL CENTRAL

Brewers: Christian Yelich

Key stat: .313/.381/.556

Yelich is not only having a better year than Marcell Ozuna, he's having a better year than Giancarlo Stanton.

Cardinals: Jack Flaherty

2.86 ERA

The Cards have had a few of these guys -- from Miles Mikolas to Harrison Bader to Yairo Munoz -- but we'll go with the guy who would start the NL Wild Card Game.

Cubs: Javier Baez

Key stat: .294/.328/.563

The batting average and on-base percentage are about what you'd expect from Baez, but that slugging leads the NL.

Pirates: Trevor Williams

Key stat: 1.19 second-half ERA

If the real Williams is anything close to this, with Jameson Taillon and Chris Archer, the Pirates have quite a threesome in the rotation moving forward.

Reds: Eugenio Suarez

Key stat: 101 RBIs

No Red has led the NL in RBIs since Dave Parker in 1985, and Suarez is right there with Trevor Story and Baez for the top spot.

## NL WEST

D-backs: Patrick Corbin

Key stat: 11-5, 3.05 ERA

The pending free agent has picked an excellent year to have his career season.

Dodgers: Max Muncy  
Key stat: .258/.389/.577

Muncy has cooled down a little bit in the second half, but of all the players to lead the Dodgers in homers this year, this guy would have been pretty far down everybody's list in the preseason.

Giants: Dereck Rodriguez  
Key stat: 2.30 ERA

The Giants are almost too old to have too many breakthrough players, but Rodriguez has actually been the team's leader in WAR (Baseball Reference) this year.

Padres: Franmil Reyes  
Key stat: .848 OPS

The numbers are better than many realize, but the real joy of Reyes is bringing something unique and exciting to a franchise that could use it.

Rockies: Kyle Freeland  
Key stat: 15-7, 2.96 ERA

According to Baseball Reference WAR, Freeland is having the second-best season by a Rockies pitcher in franchise history ... and he's got a real chance to chase down 2010 Ubaldo Jimenez by season's end.

---

### **Baseball prospects like the White Sox's Eloy Jimenez are developing faster, being called up later**

By Russell Dorsey / Chicago Tribune / September 17, 2018

After trading away Chris Sale, Todd Frazier, Adam Eaton and other veterans to begin their rebuild, the White Sox have overhauled their roster. With a plethora of young players on the way, the Sox could be the next team to join baseball's latest evolution — a youth movement.

The Nationals turned to a 19-year-old rookie out of necessity — a decision that may have exposed baseball to its next star talent. Juan Soto has been the Nationals' best hitter since his arrival May 15 and is one of the best stories of the 2018 season.

The Braves also gave Ronald Acuna Jr. a chance to show he could stay in the big leagues, and he has drawn comparisons to Andruw Jones.

Despite the overwhelming talent these two budding stars have shown, opportunities like theirs seemingly have become rare in today's game.

Seventy-one players have made their major-league debuts at age 19 or younger since 1970, according to baseball-reference.com, but those numbers have dipped sharply recently. Only 11 of those players have come in the last 18 years, including Mike Trout, Bryce Harper, Felix Hernandez, Melvin Upton, Justin Upton and Soto.

From the dead-ball era to the days of the pre-draft "Bonus Babies" like Sandy Koufax and Harmon Killebrew, the roots of teenagers in Major League Baseball run deep.

Even in the early days of the draft, teams included signing bonus incentives, allowing signees — usually high school seniors — a spot on a team's major-league roster. Such contracts were given to players such as Rangers flameout David Clyde, who, fairly or not, never quite lived up to expectations.

J.J. Cooper, executive editor of Baseball America, said that teams of the past often brought up their young players for marketing reasons.

“It wasn’t that unusual for an 18-year-old to come up. Teams would want to ‘sell the sizzle, not the steak’ — whether he was ready or not. It was normal and more common,” Cooper said. “A lot of the general managers and front office people in the 1970s grew up in that environment.”

The decline in major-league teens hasn’t been caused by a lack of talent. The development of prospects has gotten dramatically better, specifically at the amateur level. The rise of the showcase circuit has concentrated baseball’s talent pool, allowing the best amateur players the opportunities to play against one another, as AAU tournaments have done in the last few decades for basketball.

Jim Callis, MLB.com’s draft and prospect expert and a former executive editor at Baseball America, said there is no comparison between the current development atmosphere and those of the past.

“It’s not like 20 years ago, when you might not have faced any quality pitching as a high school kid or very rarely unless you were on Team USA or the Area Code games,” Callis said. “Internationally, too, it’s not quite as structured, but there’s still more structure than there was 20 or 30 years ago.”

That talent has translated from amateur potential into big-league production; of the teens to debut since 1970, 87 percent (62 of 71) have played at least five major-league seasons, with six — Bert Blyleven, Ken Griffey Jr., Tim Lincecum, Ivan Rodriguez, Alan Trammell and Robin Yount — inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame.

Despite the overwhelming talent and high success rates of those getting early promotions, executives are not making the same decisions as their predecessors. A player becomes a free agent after his sixth full season in the majors, and there are arbitration benchmarks along the way. A “sure-thing” prospect, such as Kris Bryant with the Cubs in 2014-15 or Eloy Jimenez currently with the White Sox, may see a team wait to bring him up so his “clock” starts later, giving the team an extra season of control of the player before he becomes a free agent.

“In the ’70s and ’80s, we weren’t talking about arbitration. No one knew what a ‘Super 2’ was,” Cooper said. “It’s a different system, and there’s no question it plays a role in determining when you bring a player up.”

The Braves waited until April 25 this season to call up Acuna, even though he had a strong spring training. Soto made his debut with the Nationals on May 20.

“You can look a year ago at Ronald Acuna Jr., he probably could have played in the big leagues last year at 19, in terms of talent,” Callis said. “He tore up every level he was at, but there was no real reason for the Braves to do that. We saw that this year too. He had a great spring training, he was clearly one of their best players. They weren’t necessarily expecting to contend coming into the year, so they kept him in the minor leagues for three weeks and now they’ve delayed his free agency by a year.”

While the White Sox’s announcement that Jimenez will not be called up this season is viewed as a service-time issue, it may have just as much to do with the team not wanting to repeat past mistakes such as rushing highly drafted prospects Gordon Beckham and Carson Fulmer to the majors.

If the Jimenez decision is any indication, the White Sox will continue to take the conservative approach in grooming its next wave of young players such as Luis Robert, Nick Madrigal and Dylan Cease.

“You have to be extremely talented and you have to have the right situation,” Callis said. “If Soto was on the Royals, who are also rebuilding, he’s not in the big leagues right now.”

---

### **Series preview: White Sox at Indians**

By Chicago Tribune Staff / September 17, 2018

All games on WGN-AM 720.

Tuesday: 6:10 p.m., NBCSCH.

LH Carlos Rodon (6-5, 3.10) vs. Corey Kluber (18-7, 2.91).

Wednesday: 6:10 p.m., WGN-9.

RH Dylan Covey (5-13, 5.64) vs. RH Carlos Carrasco (16-9, 3.43).

Thursday: 6:10 p.m., NBCSCH.

RH James Shields (7-16, 4.53) vs. RH Josh Tomlin (1-5, 6.49).

---

### **Splits before, after All-Star break tell story for White Sox, Cubs**

By John Grochowski / Sun-Times / September 17, 2018

It has been a season of split personalities for the Cubs and White Sox, who will play this weekend on the South Side.

The Sox are 26-28 (.481) since the All-Star break, showing a glimmer of rebuild hope after starting 33-62 (.347).

The Cubs entered their game Monday against the Diamondbacks at 32-24 (.571) since the break. That's not far off their first half of 55-38 (.591), but they took a different route to get there.

Let's look at some of the first-half/second-half splits that have the Cubs leading the National League Central and the Sox becoming more competitive:

Sox: Sox pitchers have a 4.49 ERA in the second half after a 4.93 ERA in the first. There also has been an offensive improvement from 4.04 runs per game to 4.26.

Their starting pitchers' ERA has dropped from 5.21 to 4.53, and their strikeouts per nine innings have increased (6.5 to 7.4) while their walks have decreased (4.3 to 3.4).

Sox starters also have been better at stranding runners, with 71.6 percent left on base in the second half after 67.2 percent in the first. There's some chance involved, just as there's chance in a .264 batting average on balls in play in the second half after .272 in the first.

Major strides have come from Carlos Rodon, who has a 2.81 post-break ERA after a 3.56 ERA before it. Oddly, Rodon has been striking out fewer batters (6.5 per nine innings after 7.3) and walking more (4.1 after 3.6). But BABiPs of .225 in the first half and .198 in the second suggest a correction is coming.

So do Rodon's fielding-independent pitching numbers (5.03 in the first half, 4.50 in the second). He has been successful at getting pop-ups, with an 11.9 percent infield-fly percentage that's the highest of his career. That includes 14.1 percent in the second half.

Cubs: The Cubs led the NL in offense in the first half, scoring 5.12 runs per game. Since the break, they've scored only 3.96 per game.

By weighted runs created plus, the good news has come from Anthony Rizzo, Ben Zobrist and Javy Baez.

With 100 signifying an average hitter, Rizzo has soared from 101 before the break to 163 after it, 13th in the majors. Zobrist, who was at 118 pre-break, is at 143 after, and Baez has been outstanding throughout a breakthrough season with 132 before the break and 133 after it.

Kris Bryant, who is at 108 after 131 in the first half, is the only other Cubs player above 100 in the second half. That's subpar compared with his career 141 and in part reflects a fall-off to 11 home runs after 26, 39 and 29 in his first three seasons.

There have been major second-half shortfalls. Albert Almora Jr. has followed 114 in the first half with 46, Ian Happ 122 with 70, Willson Contreras 122 with 80 and Addison Russell 100 with 29. Russell's wRC+ is the fifth-weakest of 292 players with at least 100 plate appearances since the break.

Having that much below-average offense has made runs difficult to come by. And with the all-Chicago series coming up, the Cubs have been outscored 227-222 in the second half — not as much better than the Sox' 262-230 deficit as Cubs fans would hope.

---

### **So far, so good for White Sox' Class A manager Omar Vizquel**

By Daryl Van Schouwen / Sun-Times / September 17, 2018

So far, so good for Omar Vizquel's managerial résumé.

In his first season as a skipper, Vizquel — a three-time All-Star and an 11-time Gold Glove shortstop in 24 major-league seasons — was named Carolina League manager of the year last week after leading the White Sox' Class A Winston-Salem affiliate to an 84-54 regular-season record. He was hired by the Sox last winter.

"I had a lot of high expectations because we had a lot of top prospects in the organization, and I know we're going to win with them," Vizquel, 51, said on a conference call Monday. "It was interesting because sometimes you don't know what to expect from these guys. But as soon as you see them go on the field, you see the kind of talent they have. We communicate a lot, and we tried to play the game the right way.

"My coaching staff was unbelievable, so good, and we were able to tackle every situation and teach them, 'This the way you make it to the big leagues.' It was a very exciting year for us."

Vizquel had spent the previous four seasons as the Tigers' first-base coach, so he is well-acquainted with both sides of a major-league clubhouse. He said communication is king for a manager.

"No doubt about it," Vizquel said. "That's the No. 1 thing for players. If you know what your plan is and they know, it makes it easy. Every time you make a change or try something different with them, you have to let them know. You can't get them by surprise because that's when things get in their head and they start doubting their ability. But if you have a plan, give it to them and have them work on that and try to improve on it. They know where you're coming from and what you want to accomplish."

Winston-Salem was the only team in the Carolina League to have three hitters named to the year-end all-star team: designated hitter Micker Adolfo, outfielder Blake Rutherford and catcher Yermin Mercedes.

"Managing these younger kids is a lot different [than working with major-leaguers]," Vizquel said. "Sometimes it takes two or three times till it gets through their head because they're used to doing things their way. If you give the information three or four times and stick with it — and they realize it's better for them — they start trusting it. The problem sometimes with younger kids is they're not sure they can do it.

"That's different with big-leaguers. In the big leagues, you already have the tools, and most of the time — most of the time — you're already prepared to do a lot of things."

Vizquel suggested infielder Nick Madrigal, whom the Sox selected fourth overall in the draft in June, is a cut above most prospects. Madrigal finished his first pro season at Winston-Salem.

"What's great is his mindset," Vizquel said. "He has good ability, he has very quick hands, he can turn some good double plays and get to a lot of balls. But what separates him from the rest of the young kids is his maturity.



"He thinks outside the box. He's always asking questions about how to make a play another way, even if he can already make it. He's thinking ahead of the game. He's always talking to pitchers about different situations. You don't see that in young kids very often. That's what I really like about this guy."

---

### **Vizquel sees why Chicago White Sox are fired up about future**

By Scot Gregor / Daily Herald / September 17, 2018

Creeping up on the two-year mark in the rebuild, the Chicago White Sox remain bullish on their future despite costly injuries to top prospects Michael Kopech, Jake Burger and Zack Burdi.

Managing high Class A Winston-Salem this season, Omar Vizquel has seen the future.

"It was a very exciting year for us," Vizquel said. "I had a lot of high expectations for the team because we had a lot of top prospects in the organization. It was interesting because sometimes you don't know what to expect from these guys, but as soon as you see them go on the field, you see what kind of talent they have."

Vizquel was voted Carolina League manager of the year after going 84-54 in his first season in the Dash's dugout.

"We communicated a lot and we played the game the right way," said Vizquel, who also heaped credit on hitting coach Charlie Poe, pitching coach and Arlington Heights native Matt Zaleski and bench coach Guillermo Quiroz.

"I think that's the No. 1 thing you have to do with your players. If you know what the plan is and give it to them, and they know what their role is for the team, it makes things easier for everybody."

As a standout major-league player for 24 years, including two seasons (2010-11) with the White Sox, Vizquel let his Hall of Fame-caliber performance do most of the talking.

That changed when he moved into the dugout, but the 51-year-old manager also benefited from a deep roster that featured top prospects Luis Robert, Nick Madrigal, Dylan Cease, Blake Rutherford and Micker Adolfo.

After being drafted in the first round (No. 4 overall) out of Oregon State in June, Madrigal played his final 26 games of the season with Winston-Salem and batted .306/.355/.347 while striking out only five times in 98 at-bats.

"What's great is his mindset," Vizquel said. "He has good ability; he has very quick hands; he can turn some good double plays and get to a lot of balls. What separates him from the rest of the young kids is his maturity. He thinks outside the box. He's always asking questions about how to make a play another way, even if he can already make it.

"He's thinking ahead of the game; he's always talking to pitchers about different situations. You don't see that in young kids very often, and that's what I really like about this guy."

In addition to managing many of the Sox's top-end prospects, Vizquel also got great production from lesser-known young talents such as Luis Gonzalez, Tanner Banks, Bernardo Flores, Laz Rivera and Gavin Sheets.

Rivera, a 28th-round draft pick in 2017, was a huge surprise for the Dash with a .280/.325/.458 slash line. The infielder also had 15 doubles, 7 home runs and 37 RBI in 61 games after being promoted from low Class A Kannapolis.

"He has solid bat-to-ball skills and some sneaky pop," said Chris Getz, the White Sox's director of player development. "Nothing jumps out at you other than he has a really strong understanding of how to play the game and maximize his skill set. We continue to challenge him, and he continues to answer the bell."

---

## Scouting report: White Sox vs. Cleveland Indians at Progressive Field

By Scot Gregor / Daily Herald / September 17, 2018

TV:

NBC Sports Chicago Tuesday and Thursday; WGN Wednesday

Radio:

WGN 720-AM

Pitching matchups:

The White Sox's Carlos Rodon (6-5) vs. Corey Kluber (18-7) Tuesday; Dylan Covey (5-13) vs. Carlos Carrasco (16-8) Wednesday; James Shields (7-16) vs. Josh Tomlin (1-5) Thursday. All games 6:10 p.m.

At a glance:

The White Sox end their road trip with a three-game series at Cleveland. The Indians on Saturday clinched their third straight AL Central title. The Sox are 3-10 vs. Cleveland this season (0-6 at Progressive Field). Rodon is 4-2 with a 2.44 ERA in 13 career games (12 starts) vs. the Indians. Kluber is second in the AL with 18 wins and sixth with a 2.91 ERA. Heading into Monday's play, Cleveland third baseman Jose Ramirez ranked third in the league with 38 home runs and 101 RBI. Shortstop Tim Anderson has 19 home runs and 26 stolen bases. With 13 games left in the regular season, he's trying to become the first player in White Sox history to hit 20 home runs and steal 30 bases in a season.

Next:

Cubs at Guaranteed Rate Field, Friday-Sunday

---

## How Jace Fry can become the White Sox closer

By James Fegan / The Athletic / September 17, 2018

During this past weekend's series against the Baltimore Orioles, White Sox broadcaster Steve Stone said that Jace Fry has the stuff to close, which gives some old-school credibility to an idea that a random passerby to Fry's FanGraphs page might have.

The 25-year-old former third-round pick has the 14th-highest strikeout rate (34.4 percent) of any qualified reliever in baseball, and the eighth-best FIP (2.29 in 47 2/3 innings). There's more to pitching than just the strikeout, walk and home run rates that go into FIP, but give me an eight-man bullpen of best relievers by FIP (Edwin Diaz, Josh Hader, José Leclerc, Blake Treinen, Aroldis Chapman, Craig Stammen, Will Smith and Fry), and I'm pretty confident we'd get all the outs we need. Fry's also only allowed 25 percent of his inherited runners to score, compared to a 31 percent league average, for good measure. He gets outs at an elite rate, and eventually that translates into preventing runs at an elite rate.

Still, maybe it's the ups and downs of life as a reliever that have spiked Fry's ERA to a pedestrian and unrepresentative 4.15, or that he was asked the question right after back-to-back outings in which he allowed a combined four earned runs, but he blanched a bit when asked: "Why has this season been so awesome for you?"

"It's been ups and downs for me," Fry countered. "I've had a few grooves where pitching became easy for me this year and executing a high percentage of my pitches. Even pulling my oblique early in spring helped me slow everything down this year and not set my expectations too high. In doing so it made me stay within myself and just become a better pitcher."

As detailed earlier this season, Fry credits his rehab work at Camelback with pitching coach Brian Drahman for getting all five of his pitches to start coming out of the same arm slot as he recovered from his oblique strain. He also credits his second Tommy John rehab in 2016 for ironing out the more violent elements of his delivery.

That injury was the tipping point in rerouting Fry's career to the bullpen, and his rapid rise from a low-strikeout High-A starter prospect in 2015, to a pretty poor major league reliever at the end of 2017, to a high-leverage option now down the stretch, comes as a result of his rehab stints serving not as setbacks but springboards toward his current role. Now it seems unlikely he sees the minors again unless it's to rehab an injury.

It helps a little bit that his switch to the bullpen didn't involve learning a new pitch, or paring down the four-seamer, two-seamer, curveball, slider, changeup mix he already threw.

"That helps but I think finding the ones that are most effective for righties in big situations, or aggressive righties vs. non-aggressive righties," Fry said. "Lefties, I've pegged lefties down pretty good this year so far in the sense where I think my stuff plays up to them with the action of my fastball. My two-seam plays up against them. I feel like that's been a little bit easy for me but I've been working harder on righties and figuring out what the most effective thing is for me to get righties out. We're still working on that."

Fry has held left-handers to a helpless batting line of .128/.200/.179 this season with a 37.6 percent strikeout rate. Beyond lefties just getting a poor look at his four-seamer and slider as would be expected, Fry is very comfortable dropping in a high, arcing curveball early in the count to lefties for strikes and pairing it with his running and sinking two-seam fastball — a clever inversion of the high fastball/hard, sinking curveball approach that's become common throughout the league. He just has too many weapons that work on both sides of the plate for lefties to have a chance.

But as Fry said, handling lefties has gotten to be something he can rely on at this point, and even during his worst mechanical stretches of the season, manager Rick Renteria slid him into single-batter appearances against left-handers. With Caleb Frare and Aaron Bummer around, the White Sox don't have a shortage or need for pitchers who can come in and get one lefty batter out. But if Fry wants to step forward into a larger role, he knows he needs to thrive, not just survive when opposing managers adjust to his presence against their best left-handed hitters.

"Absolutely because that's who they're going to pinch hit for," Fry said. "They're going to pinch hit for lefties in the game and once we kind of peg down and I get more consistent at commanding a few different pitches on the inner half to righties, I think it'll only get better."

Righties are managing just a .227/.306/.351 line against Fry, so it's hardly open season against him. He's effective at using his breaking balls to backdoor righties, but needs to counter it with getting under the hands of right-handers consistently to set up his changeup as a finishing pitch. But again, it's just an issue of doing it more, rather than a question of his ability to do it.

Even with Nate Jones back and looking like himself again, Fry already had a good argument for being the best reliever in the White Sox bullpen. Ian Hamilton and Ryan Burr were college closers and high-leverage options in the minors, but in the major league bullpen, production and stuff supersede pedigree. At the end of a difficult 2018 for the team and most of its young talent, and even a season that's had "ups and downs" for Fry, it's clear he has what it takes.

There was a noticeable bit of pride in Renteria's voice when he noted that a franchise-record 10 different pitchers have saved games for the White Sox this season. But even his flexible ninth-inning approach tends to adjust when his relievers have a clear hierarchy, and Fry is working his way up.

---

### **TA30: The last MLB power rankings of the season set the stage for October**

By Matthew Kory / The Athletic / September 17, 2018

Every week, we ask all of our baseball writers — both the local scribes and the national team, more than 30 writers in all — to rank the teams from first to worst. Here are the collective results.

Welcome to the first last TA30 of the season ever! Think about it, and it'll make sense, I promise. Maybe one day, baseball will expand the playoffs and everyone will make it, a true utopian nightmare scenario.

But for now, the season is growing short for most. October is just around the corner, so the TA30 is winding down, but fret not, for we've still got today together. You can print this out, frame it, and put it up in your living room to help keep you warm on those cold winter nights when baseball seems so so far away.

Now, for one last time, let's rank some teams!

1. Boston Red Sox, 103-47 (last week: 1)

How many different ways can you say "the Red Sox are the best team in baseball?" We've sure said it a lot in this space, so apologies for repeating ourselves, but what can you do? So just to switch it up, here's "the Red Sox are the best team in baseball" in German, at least according to Google Translate: Die Red Sox sind die beste Mannschaft im Baseball. Here it is in Japanese! レッドソックスは野球で最高のチームです

Variety is always a good thing.

In other news, just because you are the best doesn't mean you can beat the other best. But it doesn't not mean you can't not beat the best! I think that's right?

2. Houston Astros, 94-55 (last week: 2)

The A's were right up there in Houston's business, but at some point, a starting rotation composed of the Three Stooges and Laurel and Hardy has to come back to bite you, and now the Astros' lead is a safer 4.5 games. That means it's probably time to start thinking about how to set things up for the playoffs. Perhaps move the ottoman over there, turn the carpet around, and move that fern over by the window? There! Perfect. The Cleveland Indians await.

3. New York Yankees, 91-58 (last week: T-3)

The Yankees are 6-8 in September, which isn't what you'd call closing speed. They've lost four games in the standings and the AL East is now securely Boston's for the second straight season. So it's the wild card for the Yankees, though if they win, that 11.5 game lead in the standings will melt away and they'll be on more or less equal footing with the Sox. Just win that one game. Possibly to that end, they've brought up someone who might be able to help from the minor leagues.

4. Chicago Cubs, 87-62 (last week: T-3)

All season it's mostly been the Cubs' pitching holding the team back. Fortunately for Chicago, the NL Central, like your eighth-grade science teacher who came to class late and left early, has been perhaps overly forgiving. The playoffs won't be so gentle. Now without Pedro Strop, the Cubs starters have finally turned things around, at least for the moment. How far can Lester and Hamels take a team? In the NL this season, it could be pretty far.

5. Cleveland Indians, 83-66 (last week: 5)

It's taken 144 games to make official what most of us have known deep down in the cockles of our hearts since spring training: Germans love David Hasselhoff. Also, the Indians are AL Central champs again. Maybe next year the division will be won by The Bad News Bears or the Hawaii Little League All-Stars or, maybe, going out on a limb, the Twins. But probably not.

6. Atlanta Braves, 83-66 (last week: 7)

Should Ronald Acuña be the NL MVP? If you're a believer in WAR, then the answer is a resounding no. If you're a believer in either happiness or Ronald Acuña, then the answer is, maybe, yes! In other news, the Braves are gonna be in the playoffs thanks as much to them playing well as to the Phillies tripping over their own feet, and then their own shoelaces, and then stepping on a series of rakes.

T-7. Oakland Athletics, 90-60 (last week: 6)

It's time for a TA30 pop quiz! Which of these groups is, in fact, the Oakland A's current starting pitching staff?

Dirty Dave Rudabaugh, William Bonney, Butch Cassidy, Kyle Lohse  
John Pershing, Winfield Scott, George Patton, Douglas MacArthur, Wily Peralta  
Armando Galarraga, Jarrod Parker, Mike Bolsinger, Felix Doubront, Rich Harden  
Grimace, Hamburgler, Mayor McCheese, Captain Crook, Ray "Burger" King  
Trevor Cahill, Mike Fiers, Daniel Mengden, Brett Anderson, and Edwin Jackson  
Look for the answer in next year's TA30!

T-7. Los Angeles Dodgers, 82-68 (last week: 9)

Sometimes good players perform poorly. That seems to be what's happening with the Dodgers, who have an extremely talented roster, and yet are a half game behind the Rockies in the division. (Our writers, at least, clearly believe they're better than that.) But at the same time, the Dodgers have received unexpectedly great seasons from Max Muncy, Yasmani Grandal, and Matt Kemp on the hitting side, while Walker Buehler has stepped into the void in the rotation. It hasn't all been underperformance from star players.

9. Milwaukee Brewers, 85-65 (last week: 8)

People seem ready to hand the NL Central title to the Cubs, but like one of those jerks who steals your Amazon package off the porch, the Brewers are lurking in your bushes. Maybe don't make that into a t-shirt, though.

T-10. Colorado Rockies, 82-67 (last week: 11)

Getting shut out in consecutive games against a Giants team just playing out the string is never what you want when you're holding onto first place by your fingernails, like Wile E. Coyote desperately trying not to tumble what must be 20 miles to the hard clay below. And yet, want it or not, that's what happened. At least the Rockies came back and took Sunday's contest.

T-10. Arizona Diamondbacks, 78-72 (last week: 10)

The Diamondbacks aren't done just yet, but one of their best starting pitchers is done for this season. Clay Buchholz has a strained flexor, which is either a fun robot toy, the newest Tesla model, or possibly a body part. (Knowing Buchholz, I'm going robot toy.) The injury will keep him out for the rest of the year, even if the D-Backs make a deep playoff run. Buchholz will be a free agent at the end of the season, but he may be back with Arizona anyway.

12. St. Louis Cardinals, 82-68 (last week: 12)

Here are five things the Cardinals must do to make the playoffs. And here are five more things the Cardinals must do to make the playoffs:

Keep mascot Fredbird from suiting up in the bullpen. Manager Mike Shildt has called on Fredbird a few times in close games and the results have been bad.

Play Matt Carpenter as much as possible. It stands to reason that if he plays multiple positions in one game, he would get multiple spots in the batting order, right? More Carpenter equals more wins.

Don't accidentally trade Jack Flaherty. Or on purpose. Don't do either one.

I just have a feeling that if the Cardinals give Daniel Ponceleon more playing time he'll find the wins.

Win lots of baseball games.

13. Tampa Bay Rays, 82-66 (last week: 14)

It's been a pretty sweet run, and if they weren't so unlucky to be in the AL East with Boston and New York, it's a safe bet the Rays would be preparing for the playoffs right now instead of lamenting too little too late. Did anyone have a tougher schedule? Did anyone do more with less? In some ways, the Rays have had the most remarkable of seasons, a season that will sadly be mostly forgotten in the wake of the binary success or failure that making the playoffs represents. Rays fans shouldn't forget. Hold this team close. This was one of the good ones.

#### 14. Philadelphia Phillies, 76-72 (last week: 15)

You can't accuse Gabe Kapler of being conventional. He pulled Scott Kingery, his starting shortstop, for a pinch-hitter in the second inning. Kinda makes you wonder why Kingery started in the first place, but maybe don't think about that so much and just enjoy the fall foliage, Phillies fans. And it was a game the Phillies won, even though the guy Kapler pulled Kingery for, Cabrera, struck out with the bases loaded, but again, the leaves are going to be beautiful this year.

#### 15. Washington Nationals, 76-74 (last week: 18)

Will Bryce Harper be back? Will they spend money on Manny Machado instead, or will they plow that dough into fixing the pitching staff? Who knows! You'll find the Nationals mentioned as a potential landing spot for eight of these high profile free agents. Eight! There could be some serious turnover in Washington this offseason.

#### 16. Seattle Mariners, 82-67 (last week: 13)

Sadly, another Mariners season will end without the playoffs. So the question becomes, what next? Should the Mariners re-sign Nelson Cruz? Maybe, sure. This is a good case for it. But winning the AL West is going to take more than a 38-year-old DH. Hopefully, the Mariners know that. And no, I don't think making 78 teeny tiny trades over the off-season is going to get it done.

#### 17. Los Angeles Angels, 74-76 (last week: 16)

Once again, it's time for Angels fans to look forward to next year, even though this season isn't over yet. Justin Upton is hitting just in time for... nothing at all, but hey, better late than never. And there's always Albert Pujols insisting he's fine to play first base even though he'll be 39 next year and moves like a U-Haul backing up. Sorry, Angels fans, even the positive stories are depressing.

#### 18. Pittsburgh Pirates, 74-74 (last week: 17)

With each passing day, the Chris Archer trade looks stranger and stranger. What were the Pirates trying to accomplish? How does the deal fit in with their long-term plans in Pittsburgh? In any case, the more they can get out of Archer the better, so this seems like a good development. Sometimes you just gotta put on your bright yellow shirt and your pillbox hat, smile, trust the front office, and take your hands off the wheel a bit, ya know?

#### 19. New York Mets, 69-80 (last week: 21)

Jacob deGrom started against the Red Sox on Sunday. Prepare yourself for this, Mets fans, because this is big. He... [wait for it]... DIDN'T LOSE! I mean, the Mets still lost, when Seth Lugo gave up a run in the eighth inning, but deGrom didn't get the loss! At this point in the season, when it sometimes seems there isn't much left to play for, play for less embarrassment.

#### 20. San Francisco Giants, 70-80 (last week: 19)

Look, National League, we need to chat. I know you've never had the DH, and that it's your history and your heritage and what you've always done. You grew up with it. I get it. I do. But look, asking pitchers to hit is a bit like asking fishermen to rebuild your engine. Pitchers can't necessarily hit. But they can get hurt.

And injuries from pitchers hitting just ruin things for everyone. Can we please use the DH in the NL? Pretty please, with sugar on it?

#### 21. Minnesota Twins, 68-81 (last week: 20)

One of the things that good teams do is draft talented players, develop them in the minors, and turn them into stars when they get to the big leagues. The Red Sox have done that with Mookie Betts and Xander Bogaerts. The Indians have done that with José Ramírez and Francisco Lindor. The Astros have done that with Carlos Correa and Alex Bregman (and George Springer) (and José Altuve). The Twins should have done that with Miguel Sanó and Byron Buxton... but they haven't. Despite loads of talent, Sanó is barely playable and Buxton supposedly isn't even ready for a September call-up. If you're looking for the difference between Minnesota and every playoff team in baseball, that's it in a nutshell.

#### 22. Cincinnati Reds, 64-86 (last week: 22)

When you think of the Reds nowadays you think of two things: 1) Joey Votto, and 2) last place. The Reds are, again, in last place, and they still have the great Joey Votto, who, it should be said, is a gift to baseball. The problem is Votto just turned 35, so he may not remain a gift to baseball for a whole lot longer. As for the last place thing, well, at least they have the Dodgers' number.

#### 23. Toronto Blue Jays, 67-82 (last week: 23)

At this point, the Blue Jays are all about the future. The Jays went into the season hoping to compete, but at the trade deadline it was clear they couldn't, so they traded eight players, about a third of their major league roster. You might think they would have tanked since... but they haven't. At the trade deadline, the Jays were 48-58, for a .453 winning percentage. Since the trade deadline, the Jays are 19-24. That's a .442 winning percentage, or the difference between winning 73 games and winning 72 games. What does that say about the players they traded and the team they kept?

#### 24. Detroit Tigers, 61-88 (last week: 24)

In a season that has seen highs, lows, more lows, and [checks list] also lows, it's nice to reconnect with a part of the team's past that represents one of the highest points in team history. That's what happened when Justin Verlander returned to Comerica Park. It's sad that he's no longer a Tiger, perhaps sad in a way that he's found a new home and success with the Astros in Houston, but also it's a happy thing. The Tigers will be back, eventually, and in the meantime, Justin Verlander gets to pitch meaningful innings. Days like that tell us something we already knew: That, regardless of the hat he puts on his head, on some level Justin Verlander will always be a Detroit Tiger.

#### 25. Texas Rangers, 64-85 (last week: 25)

Some things are bigger than the game, and this is one of those things. In other, less meaningful news, the Rangers might not be going to the dance, but they aren't done wringing value out of this season.

#### 26. Chicago White Sox, 59-90 (last week: 26)

The White Sox are your grandmother's house. There's all this nice expensive china around, and then you and your little brother and sister go in there and start running in circles and knocking stuff over, and before you know it Michael Kopech needs Tommy John surgery. So a depressing season on the field becomes a depressing season off the field, too. At least White Sox fans have... Blake Battenfield?

#### 27. Miami Marlins, 58-91 (last week: 27)

On Saturday the Marlins and Phillies combined to use 15 pitchers, which I believe is a crime against humanity under the rules set forth by the Geneva Convention. Marlins manager Don Mattingly stepped up after the game and criticized the September roster rules. Now, that's fine in theory, and I don't disagree,

but it's tough to listen to someone say that immediately after using seven pitchers in a nine-inning game. If you don't think a team should use seven pitchers in a nine-inning game, then DON'T USE SEVEN PITCHERS IN A NINE-INNING GAME.

28. San Diego Padres, 60-90 (last week: 28)

How many catchers is too many catchers? Two catchers might not be too many catchers if the two catchers are these two Padres two catchers.

29. Kansas City Royals, 52-97 (last week: 30)

It's likely the Royals will lose their 100th game of the season sometime this coming week. That doesn't mean there haven't been some things to enjoy in this, the first season of the latest rebuild. There's first baseman Ryan O'Hearn, who seems to have figured the whole power thing out. There's Brad Keller, who could win the AL Rookie of the Year award! There's... probably other stuff. Those sweet blue hats, for example. And barbecue!

30. Baltimore Orioles, 43-106 (last week: 29)

The Orioles are proof that you don't have to tank to be really and truly awful. They are last in batting WAR, fourth to last in pitching WAR, and last in defensive measurements of all sorts. Add to that nobody knows exactly who is running the team, who will run the team, or who will manage the team. The Orioles are an Etch-a-Sketch where the little magnetic filings have lost their magnetism.

---

### **Sox is singular: Good White Sox news of late is often balanced by a cold reality**

By Jim Margalus / The Athletic / September 17, 2018

With a fortnight remaining in the regular season, I think we can abandon all hope of the White Sox putting definitive stamps on their collective or individual performances.

They spent the week playing the two American League teams ahead of them in the draft standings over six games in Kansas City and Baltimore, and of course they went 3-3.

A .500 performance is generally acceptable on the road, and the White Sox beat Baltimore in a season series for the first time since 2008, so it's a triumph regardless of the record. But it would've been nice for the White Sox to look like they're indeed a year ahead of the newest crop of rebuilding teams, and they couldn't quite do it.

Case in point: Yoán Moncada's series at Oriole Park. He opened Friday by going 3-for-4 with a walk and zero strikeouts from the leadoff spot. He closed it out Sunday by going 0-for-5 with three strikeouts and a pair of defensive miscues.

He's probably going to need the winter to internalize everything he learned from a long and trying season, with the hope that he shows up in 2019 with an answer for at least one of his fatal flaws. But he's not the only one whose positive developments always come with strings attached. James Shields is going to blow past 200 innings and lead the American League in losses. It's just that kind of season.

From this weekend alone, Moncada had the company of several teammates. For instance:

Good news: Avisail García tied his career best with his 18th homer on Saturday.

Except: Homers are all García can point to this season.

His average is down, his walks are down, his strikeouts are up, his games played are down and his defensive metrics are down. Add it all up, and there's a case against tendering García after the season. Then you look at the way García has matched his 2017 homer total in a half-season, pulling the ball in the air like never before. That .218 ISO would have turned García into a positive contributor despite shortcomings in any of his other seasons, but it wouldn't be Avi if all of his seasons weren't missing one



key piece. (With his generally impeccable All-Star performance in 2017, he was missing the timing that would've made such a season matter.)

Is it worth giving Garcia \$8 million or whatever for 2019 in hopes that he supplements this standout power with at least one other marketable skill? Is it worth watching a chronically uneven TV show all the way through the end in hopes it'll all be explained in the finale? Most people who bail a season early don't seem to have regrets.

Good news: Daniel Palka leads the White Sox in homers!

Except: Now he's hurt.

Palka, the fan and media favorite, smashed his 23rd and 24th dingers of the season, and they covered the spectrum his strength affords. The first blast was a prodigious clout toward the B&O Warehouse that earned both the flame and rocket emojis from @DingerTracker for its 112-mph exit velocity and 40-degree launch angle. The second blast was one he merely flicked out to the opposite field at 108 mph, strengthening his #108ing credentials.

Then he jarted himself into right field of Oriole Park in his attempt to make a sliding catch that clanked off his wrist, leaving a divot as if he tried a flop shot with a snow shovel. He had to leave the game, but he didn't sound terribly concerned about it.

Good news: Jose Abreu returned to action.

Except: He's 0-for-20 with seven strikeouts over his last five games.

Without any rehab games to evaluate his readiness, I didn't have high hopes for the rest of Abreu's 2018. The "testicular torsion" card is a free pass for a lot of things, and it wouldn't surprise me if he lacked his usual timing and power the remainder of the season. But it'll be a shame if his impeccable statistical track record loses some of its luster on his Baseball-Reference page because of a freak condition.

Good news: Reynaldo López is on a roll.

Except: He's facing a pretty weak slate of opponents.

López has a 1.10 ERA over his last five starts, with 35 strikeouts to just 29 baserunners allowed over 32 2/3 innings. He's shut down the Yankees and Angels, which is no small feat, but he's also faced the Tigers twice and Orioles once, and they have the two worst offenses in the league.

This doesn't quite count as a point against López, because a win against a tanking team counts as much as any other, and they're the kinds of wins he'll be expected to notch even if he meets the median set of expectations and develops into a decent No. 3 or strong No. 4 starter.

But by bringing up the strength of schedule, we can shift the conversation to Lucas Giolito, who also faced the Tigers twice and Orioles once over the same stretch. His numbers took a thumping in the last two of those three starts. To compare: Giolito has induced 14 swinging strikes over three September outings, while López racked up 15 in his start against Los Angeles.

In September 2017, I thought Giolito had a better chance than López when it came to sticking in the rotation. López had problems maintaining his velocity and lacked command of his curveball, and while a back problem could have contributed to both, well, he had a back problem.

A year later, López is carrying his best velocity far deeper into games, and the recent renaissance of his changeup gives him a pair of secondary pitches to toggle between. Meanwhile, the two-seamer/changeup combo that served as the foundation of Giolito's resurgent August hasn't been nearly as effective in September, so I'm back to being uncertain about his bread and butter.

I'm now tilting toward López, but I'm more tempted to stop ruminating over such questions with a team that refuses to provide clear and convincing answers. Assuming he doesn't bombard the camera well with a hail of errant throws over the next two weeks, congratulations to Tim Anderson for proving he can play shortstop for the long haul. Just about every other development we'd hoped to see in Year 2 will have to wait for Year 3.

---