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White Sox focused on adding depth in '18 Draft

Director of amateur scouting Hostetler feels good about club's prep

By Scott Merkin / MLB.com / June 3, 2018

CHICAGO -- White Sox director of amateur scouting Nick Hostetler already knows who he wants to select with the team's top pick at No. 4 when the 2018 MLB Draft begins today.

"Yeah, I do," said Hostetler, who is now stationed in Chicago leading up to the Draft. "I have a pretty good feel on who I would like to take. I have a pretty good feel on everybody as a whole. All of our staff, [general manager] Rick [Hahn], [executive vice president] Kenny [Williams], [assistant general manager] Jeremy [Haber], [director of player development Chris Getz], guys who have seen players.

"I feel pretty good about where we are at with it. The way I look at this is our order, what our order is. It's only four picks. So I have a pretty good feel of what our order is going to be barring anything crazy happening in the next 10 days. I'm pretty confident."

The 2018 Draft will take place today through Wednesday, beginning with the Draft preview show on MLB Network and MLB.com today at 5 p.m. CT. MLB Network will broadcast the first 43 picks (Round 1 and Competitive Balance Round A), while MLB.com will stream all 78 picks on Day 1. MLB.com will also provide live pick-by-pick coverage of Rounds 3-10 on Day 2, with a preview show beginning at 11:30 a.m. CT. Then, Rounds 11-40 can be heard live on MLB.com on Day 3, beginning at 11 a.m. CT.

Go to MLB.com/Draft to see the Top 200 Prospects list, projected top picks from MLB Pipeline analysts Jim Callis and Jonathan Mayo, the complete order of selection and more. And follow @MLBDraft on Twitter to see what Draft hopefuls, clubs and experts are saying.

Here's how the Draft is shaping up for the White Sox, whose first selection is the fourth overall pick.

In about 50 words

If the White Sox didn't post a 21-21 record over the final 42 games of the 2017 season, they might be looking at the No. 1 pick. Some still view this No. 4 pick as a can't-miss for Chicago in Year 2 of the organization's rebuild, and Hostetler certainly wants to find a high-impact player with this selection, but he has a broader focus of also adding key players and depth throughout the rest of the Draft.

The scoop

There's no focus on pitcher or position player at No. 4. The best player available will be the White Sox choice when the time comes.

"Pitcher or hitter is irrelevant at this point. Position is irrelevant at this point," Hostetler said. "Doesn't matter if we have it in the big leagues. Doesn't matter if we have a wealth in the Minors. Doesn't matter if we just drafted it. We are going to take the best guy regardless of position."

First-round buzz

Hostetler indicated their list at No. 4 is down to six, maybe seven, with that seventh player coming into play if something unexpected plays out before the fourth pick. Callis has the White Sox taking right-handed pitcher Brady Singer out of Florida in his last mock draft, but don't overlook Oregon St. infielder Nick Madrigal, Auburn right-hander Casey Mize, Georgia Tech catcher Joey Bart, Wichita State third baseman Alec Bohm and South Alabama outfielder Travis Swaggerty among the other possibilities.

Money matters

Under the Collective Bargaining Agreement, each team has an allotted bonus pool equal to the sum of the values of that club's selections in the first 10 rounds of the Draft. The more picks a team has, and the earlier it picks, the larger the pool. The signing bonuses for a team's selections in the first 10 rounds, plus any bonus greater than \$125,000 for a player taken after the 10th round, will apply toward the bonus-pool total.

Any team going up to 5 percent over its allotted pool will be taxed at a 75-percent rate on the overage. A team that overspends by 5-10 percent gets a 75-percent tax plus the loss of a first-round pick. A team that goes 10-15 percent over its pool amount will be hit with a 100-percent penalty on the overage and the loss of a first- and second-round pick. Any overage of 15 percent or more gets a 100-percent tax plus the loss of first-round picks in the next two Drafts.

This year, the White Sox have a pool of \$10,589,900 to spend in the first 10 rounds, including \$6,411,400 to spend on their first selection.

Shopping list

Thanks to the talent acquisition stage of the rebuild, the White Sox have viable big league prospects at every position. They look very deep in starting pitching with the likes of Michael Kopech, Dylan Cease and Dane Dunning soon joining Carlos Rodon and Reynaldo Lopez. But depth remains a key in the rebuild, which will be one of the focuses of the Draft across the board.

• White Sox Top 30 prospects

Trend watch

Courtney Hawkins' run with the White Sox came to an end this season when he was released to make room for Eloy Jimenez's return to Double-A Birmingham. Since 2000, Hawkins represents the lone high-school position player taken by the White Sox with their first pick. There have been two high-school players selected overall by the team with that first pick (right-hander Kris Honel, 2001). The White Sox

almost certainly will go collegiate at No. 4, although Hostetler acknowledged one high-school player is in the mix.

"That's the Draft up top. Most of them are going to go college," Hostetler said. "I wouldn't be totally shocked if one high-school guy was top 5, but I would be really shocked if two were."

Recent Draft history

Rising fast

Ian Hamilton was taken in the 11th round of the 2016 Draft after picking up 28 saves for Washington State University. The right-hander hasn't slowed down since joining the White Sox, recording 22 saves and a 2.72 ERA over parts of three Minor League seasons. Hamilton has seven saves, a 1.50 ERA and 26 strikeouts against eight walks over 18 innings in this season entering Sunday, making him a strong candidate to join the South Siders later this season.

Cinderella story

As a 28th-round selection in the 2017 Draft, Laz Rivera was targeted more as an infield-depth piece in the White Sox system. But the 23-year-old has a .327 average and .876 OPS over 91 career games between the Arizona Rookie League squad and Class A Kannapolis entering Sunday since being picked last year. Rivera is hitting .361 with six homers, 10 doubles and 20 RBIs this season for the Intimidators, earning strong reviews from those who have watched him.

In the show

The offensive potential of Tim Anderson (first round, 2013) was on display during Saturday's 8-4 victory over the Tigers, as the shortstop hit two home runs and drove in four. Left-hander Jace Fry (third round, '14) has been almost unhittable out of the White Sox bullpen, while closer Nate Jones (fifth round, '07) serves as the elder statesman of the team. Rodon (No. 3 overall, '14) is expected back soon from his Minor League injury rehab assignment, while Hector Santiago, Chris Beck, Adam Engel, Trayce Thompson and Aaron Bummer are a few more drafted by the South Siders who have contributed this season.

The White Sox recent top picks

2017: Jake Burger, 3B, injured/Class A Kannapolis
2016: Zack Collins, C, Double-A Birmingham
2015: Carson Fulmer, RHP, Triple-A Charlotte
2014: Carlos Rodon, LHP, injury rehab/White Sox
2013: Tim Anderson, SS, White Sox
2012: Courtney Hawkins, OF, Released

Back-to-back jacks give White Sox series win

Palka, Engel homer, while Covey strikes out seven Brewers

By Max Gelman / MLB.com / June 3, 2018

CHICAGO -- Daniel Palka was not a household name before this season. He has never appeared on top prospect lists and was an offseason waiver claim from the Twins.

But so far in 2018, Palka has forced his way into a regular role for the White Sox. Though the left-handed-hitting slugger wasn't in Sunday's starting lineup against Brewers southpaw Brent Suter, he made the difference in the South Siders' 6-1 victory over Milwaukee at Guaranteed Rate Field with a pinch-hit two-run homer off reliever Matt Albers to break a sixth-inning tie.

"I just took it as the first at-bat of the game," Palka said. "It's easy getting ready down here since we've got the cage right here in the tunnel. Same routine as starting a game."

The homer was Palka's sixth of the year and the first White Sox pinch-hit clout of 2018, and the win sealed a series victory over the National League Central-leading Brewers.

Adam Engel followed with a solo homer of his own for back-to-back homers, and he got an assist from Brewers center fielder Lorenzo Cain. The ball bounced off the top of the fence, off Cain's glove and over the fence. Jose Abreu and Engel each added an insurance run in the eighth inning through RBI doubles.

Palka has played in 31 games since his April 24 callup, hitting .283 with an .872 OPS. Though his outfield defense continues to be a project, with Palka admitting as much a few weeks ago, the White Sox rarely leave his bat on the bench, given they entered Sunday with the third-fewest runs scored in the Majors.

"We know if he can get into one, any opportunity he gets at the plate, there's a chance he can pop one out of the ballpark," White Sox manager Rick Renteria said. "I know he's going to continue to work and try to develop his defensive skill set and do everything he can to put himself in a position where he can play more. Certainly his bat brings a little something to the table."

Palka continues to work on his defense before most games, doing extra outfield drills with first base/outfield coach Daryl Boston.

Palka's home run also resulted in a quirky, chess-type win for manager Rick Renteria when he pinch-hit for designated hitter Jose Rondon. In the top of the sixth, Brewers skipper Craig Counsell subbed out his own DH, inserting Ryan Braun for Ji-Man Choi with a man on first. Braun lined out to Yoan Moncada, who quickly fired to Jose Abreu at first base to double off Domingo Santana.

On the mound, Dylan Covey turned in another solid start for the White Sox, throwing five-plus innings of one-run ball, though the run was unearned. Covey lowered his ERA to 2.82 through four starts and has made a case to remain in the rotation as Carlos Rodon nears a return from his left shoulder injury.

"The changeup was really working for me late in counts, kind of like my putaway pitch today," Covey said. "I was able to use my fastball up in the zone, and then if they didn't offer at that, you just go down late with the changeup and they weren't laying off it today."

Rodon completed his fourth rehab outing Sunday, pitching five innings for Triple-A Charlotte. He gave up two runs on six hits, striking out eight while walking three. Renteria would not indicate who Rodon would replace in the rotation or on the 40-man roster upon being activated from the 60-day disabled list.

"I certainly think that once whatever happens with the [Rodon] situation, we'll all talk and see how we want to move forward," Renteria said.

MOMENTS THAT MATTERED

Welcome to the show: Rookie catcher Alfredo Gonzalez picked up his first MLB hit and RBI Sunday, and they came in a key situation. Gonzalez lined a single to left field in the fifth to drive home Yoan Moncada from second base. He reacted with a huge cheer on first base and yelled toward his teammates in the dugout.

"I was really excited. I was dreaming for that moment my whole career. For me, that was like living a dream," said Gonzalez through interpreter Billy Russo.

SOUND SMART

Chris Volstad earned the win Sunday despite not retiring a single hitter. The only out recorded with Volstad pitching was when Gonzalez threw out Jonathan Villar trying to steal second base.

HE SAID IT

"A couple were OK. There's still some work to be done. I think it's still the soft stuff down out of the zone a little bit. He'll continue to adjust. The looks when he comes into the dugout are more of a curiosity look, in terms of what he might do the next time. He's a work in progress." -- Renteria, on Moncada's right-handed at-bats Sunday. Moncada's second-inning triple was his fourth extra-base hit from the right side. He has 16 extra-base hits as a left-handed hitter.

MITEL REPLAY OF THE DAY

With two outs in the top of the sixth, Villar attempted to steal second base off Volstad. Gonzalez, fresh off his first MLB hit and RBI in the fifth, popped up and threw a dart to Moncada at second base. Villar was called out on the field, but the Brewers challenged the call. After a review that lasted 1 minute and 2 seconds, the play stood as called, erasing a potential scoring threat for Milwaukee.

UP NEXT

The White Sox have Monday off before beginning a four-game series in Minnesota with a doubleheader on Tuesday. Game 1 is scheduled to begin at 3:10 p.m. CT and will make up April's rained-out Jackie Robinson Day. Reynaldo Lopez takes the hill for the South Siders in Game 1 with Lucas Giolito pitching the nightcap.

Bob Uecker joined Hawk Harrelson in the booth for a meeting of broadcasting legends

By Eric Chesterton / MLB.com / June 3, 2018

This year marks Hawk Harrelson's 33rd and final season in the White Sox television booth. It's only fitting, then, that he receive a bit of a farewell tour to celebrate his fantastic run.

During the bottom of the third and top of the fourth innings of Sunday's White Sox-Brewers game, legendary Brewers broadcaster Bob Uecker joined Harrelson in the White Sox booth. They seemed happy to see each other:

As MLB.com's Scott Merkin detailed, Harrelson and Uecker go way back. So, naturally, the two started out by describing how they first met in Spring Training years ago.

But, by the top of the fourth inning, the conversation turned to the game at hand. After Uecker explained why he thinks Craig Counsell is a good manager for the Brewers, they both reflected on the biggest changes they've seen to baseball over their long careers. Hawk identified the growing importance of bullpens to making a good team. Uecker used the opportunity to reflect on how he mysteriously made "below the minimum" salary as a player.

Though the meeting of legends was nothing short of cordial, Harrelson couldn't help but throw in some good-natured jabs at Uecker. At one point in the top of the fourth inning, he contrasted his counterpart's broadcasting career with his playing career. "Hall of Fame announcer," Hawk said, "but I can't say Hall of Fame player."

All jokes aside, the two legends ended their inning together with a long and friendly handshake ... or did someone declare a thumb war?

Sunday's top prospect performers

By Mike Rosenbaum / MLB.com / June 3, 2018

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

Hunter Greene is in the win column.

The Reds' No. 2 prospect (No. 20 overall) recorded his first professional win Sunday as he matched his career highs with eight strikeouts in five innings for Class A Dayton. He issued one walk and carried a no-hit bid into the fifth inning before yielding two hits -- one of them a solo homer -- and finishing his outing with 77 pitches (46 strikes). The Dragons, meanwhile, survived a late comeback, beating Lansing 11-8 after scoring eight runs in the first two innings.

Greene's first win comes in his 10th start this season and 13th as a professional after being selected No. 2 overall by Cincinnati in the 2017 Draft. The 18-year-old has understandably scuffled at times in his first full season while learning how to harness his easy triple-digit velocity and develop his secondaries.

Greene has, however, shown improvement of late, as Sunday's outing was the third straight in which he's allowed no more than one earned run while giving up four or fewer hits. For the season, Greene has pitched to a 6.32 ERA -- it sat at 10.06 prior to his aforementioned three-game stretch -- with 44 strikeouts and 15 walks in 31 1/3 innings.

The rest of the best performances from top prospects Sunday

- No. 23 overall prospect Brendan McKay (Rays' No. 3) drove in four runs and reached base five times, finishing 2-for-3 with three walks in Class A Advanced Charlotte's win over Bradenton. One of his hits was a two-run double, and he also plated runs with a single and a walk in his second multihit performance in 10 games since joining the Stone Crabs. Appearing in 31 games as a hitter this season, the 22-year-old two-way star has produced a .235/.444/.306 batting line with five extra-base hits and more walks (38) than strikeouts (22).

- No. 24 overall prospect Sixto Sanchez (Phillies' No. 1) dominated once again for Class A Advanced Clearwater, this time firing a two-hit shutout in Game 1 of a doubleheader against Florida. The 19-year-old right-hander issued two walks, struck out five and generated 10 ground-ball outs in the performance, throwing 56 of his 72 pitches for strikes.

Sanchez has allowed just two earned runs over his last 25 2/3 innings to lower his overall ERA from 4.71 to 2.51. He's compiled 29 strikeouts against four walks in that span, giving him a 45-to-11 strikeout-to-walk ratio in 46 2/3 frames (eight starts) on the season. 2016 No. 1 overall Draft pick Mickey Moniak (Phillies' No. 4) supported his pitcher's gem with his first home run of the season, a three-run shot in the third inning.

- No. 53 overall prospect Dylan Cease (White Sox No. 5) allowed a home run to open the second inning but otherwise was unhittable as he completed six frames of one-hit ball to improve to 7-2 in 11 starts for Class A Advanced Winston-Salem. The 22-year-old righty struck out five and walked two while throwing 50 of his 81 pitches for strikes. He's pitched to a 2.81 ERA this season, compiling 69 strikeouts and 26 walks in 57 2/3 innings.

- No. 57 overall prospect Franklin Barreto (A's No. 3) collected four hits including a game-tying solo homer in the top of the eighth inning that would help Triple-A Nashville edge Round Rock, 3-2, in 10 innings. He also hit a double and scored two runs, finishing 4-for-5 at the plate in his first game back from the Major Leagues. The 22-year-old middle infielder owns an .859 OPS with seven home runs in 33 games with Nashville.

- No. 84 overall prospect Jahmai Jones (Angels' No. 3) and Brandon Marsh (Angels' No. 3, No. 95 overall) combined for six hits and four RBIs in Class A Advanced Inland Empire's loss against Lake Elsinore. Marsh collected a team-high four hits, going 4-for-5 with four singles and two RBIs. Jones went 2-for-5 with a double and a two-run home run, his third in his past five games and sixth of the season.

- No. 100 overall prospect Alex Kirilloff (Twins' No. 6) blasted his 10th home run of the season in his third straight multihit game for Class A Cedar Rapids. Those 10 homers give the 20-year-old outfielder a share of first place in the Midwest League, a circuit that he also paces with 45 RBIs and 119 total bases. After missing all of 2017 due to Tommy John surgery, Kirilloff has returned fully healthy to slash .332/.385/.598 in 51 games.

- Rockies No. 25 prospect Chad Spanberger hit a pair of home runs for a second straight game as Class A Asheville fell to Greenville, 7-6. The four homers in two days pushed the 22-year-old first baseman's season total to 14, second-most in a South Atlantic League that he's currently leading in OPS (.986), RBIs (41) and total bases (119).

- Yankees No. 27 prospect Garrett Whitlock tossed five strong innings for Class A Advanced Tampa en route to his first Florida State League victory. Starting for the third time since his promotion from Class A Charleston, Whitlock allowed one earned run on four hits and one walk while fanning six. The 21-year-old

rightly, a 2017 18th-rounder, owns a 1.01 ERA, 0.84 WHIP and 62-to-11 strikeout to walk ratio in 53 2/3 innings (10 starts) this season.

Yoan Moncada, Tim Anderson being the middle infield of the future won't stop White Sox from drafting an infielder at No. 4

By Vinnie Duber / NBC Sports Chicago / June 3, 2018

One of the names you will hear most associated with the White Sox and their No. 4 pick in the upcoming MLB Draft is Nick Madrigal, a middle infielder at Oregon State.

There's plenty to know — and like — about him. He's short. He's also a really, really, really good baseball player: a career .367/.428/.512 slash line including a .395/.459/.563 in limited action this season.

But the thing that will likely jump out the most to White Sox fans is his position. He plays second base for the Beavers, and he's played some shortstop in the past, too.

Wait a minute, aren't those the positions that Yoan Moncada and Tim Anderson play?

There's nothing South Side baseball fans enjoy more during these rebuilding days than plotting out future lineups, and a vast majority of those projections have Moncada and Anderson entrenched up the middle for years to come. So if the White Sox, courtesy of the team's poor record in 2017, have the opportunity to add a premier player with the No. 4 pick in the draft, why wouldn't they spend it on a position of greater need?

The answer is that they just don't care about that.

That might sound harsh, but that's the thought process in the White Sox draft room, where the braintrust is planning on taking the best player available, regardless of his position and who is or will be playing there in the present and near future.

"Doesn't play into it at all," White Sox scouting director Nick Hostetler told Chuck Garfien and Ryan McGuffey on a recent White Sox Talk Podcast. "We don't talk about it. It's not an issue for us. It's not anything we've even discussed.

"It really, truly has not come up one time in discussing anything with Rick (Hahn) or Jeremy (Haber) or Kenny (Williams) or (Chris Getz) about who we have in the big leagues, who we have in the minor leagues. It means absolutely nothing when we're drafting in the first round with that first pick because we've got to get it right, we've got to take the best player."

Fans and observers might see the upcoming draft as an opportunity for the White Sox to add to their crazy collection of prospects in their quest to build a contender for the 2020 season and beyond. Be it Madrigal or whoever, the player the White Sox take at No. 4 would figure to join the likes to Eloy Jimenez, Michael Kopech, Luis Robert, Dane Dunning and Alec Hansen as the most talked about players in the farm system.

But the player selected with the fourth pick might not be in the same grouping as those guys from the perspective of time. He might not plug a hole that quickly or rise to the level of all those names. His development could take time. And so the White Sox aren't drafting with the mindset that their pick will be someone who joins the major league squad in a rapid manner.

"I don't want to say it doesn't go into it at all because you do look at the timeframe of the player. And there's some misconception that just because he's a college player, he fits in with this next group of the Alec Hansens and the Zack Collinses and the Luis Roberts and Eloy Jimenez. That doesn't always necessarily mean that that's the case," Hostetler said. "Some of these college guys develop slower. Some of them develop very quickly.

“So I think that it’s all based off of each individual player. Now I will say that when we do look at it, it doesn’t factor in to us evaluating the player. When we evaluate the player, it’s strictly based off of his tools, his makeup, on the field, off the field. All of those factors go into it. We don’t look at the timeline.

“As scouts, we just want to evaluate all of the data, put that in order, and then if Rick, Kenny, if they feel it’s important to add in what the timeline’s going to be and where he fits, then I let them do that. But just as scouts and scouting director, we strictly base ours off of tools and data and that’s it”

If the White Sox choose Madrigal on Monday night, there are some important things to remember. It won’t mean they’ve surrendered on the idea of Moncada and Anderson as their middle infield of the future for many years to come. For the time being, it would simply bolster the depth at the position.

And Hostetler mentioned the idea of giving Madrigal, should he be the choice, a chance to play a multitude of other positions — despite also mentioning that he’s been described as a Gold Glove type defender at second base.

“It’s been noted that his second base defense is Gold Glove caliber defense. He can flat out play,” Hostetler said. “He’s played shortstop before, played it when he was in high school, played it as a freshman, played it some on Team USA. ... It is a really, really plus defender at second base.

“You look at it and you say, ‘Can he play another position? Can he play third? Can he play short? Can he play center?’ Because he can run. All of those factors are yet to be answered because we don’t really know. We haven’t seen enough. There isn’t a big enough sample size for us to say, ‘Yes he can.’ We have to look at the tools, the way the body works, the way the feet work in sync. There’s a chance. I’d give this kid a chance to play anywhere on the field this year.”

But taking Madrigal — or another player at any other position that already seems to be locked up — also provides the White Sox a big-time safety net should Anderson or Moncada not become the productive everyday big leaguers they were envisioned to become. Moncada has been good, for the most part, this season. But Anderson has been streaky. He’s got a lot of homers and a lot of steals, which are great, positive signs for a player who struggled so badly last season. But he’s also gone through long stretches of little production. He’s still in the thick of a “prove it” season. Having a backup plan would be a wise strategy, even if the White Sox think the world of Anderson and what he can become.

And then there’s that point Hostetler made about guys taking time to develop. It’s very possible that the White Sox could pick Madrigal and wait for him to become ready for the majors while Moncada and Anderson are starring on contending teams at the big league level. Hahn always talks about planning for the long term, and building organizational depth at every position is a big part of that.

So remember that the MLB Draft is a different animal from the NFL and NBA Drafts. The White Sox won’t be drafting for need Monday night, even though they’ll have the opportunity to add someone who could be in the bigs relatively soon.

“It’s ‘for each their own’ in baseball. That’s the great thing about this game,” Hostetler said. “We’re not having to draft a point guard to play against LeBron, I’m not trying to draft a corner to cover Allen Robinson. I’m trying to draft a baseball player.”

Winning agrees with the White Sox as they take series from the 1st-place Brewers

By Phil Rogers / Chicago Tribune / June 3, 2018

Music played in the White Sox clubhouse Sunday, and everywhere you turned an unlikely hero explained his part in a spirit-building victory against the Brewers.

It was almost as if James Shields had ordered up this 6-1 win a day earlier, when he vented his frustration about a team that could set a franchise record for losses.

But it's not like Shields and his teammates haven't been trying to win all season, even as big segments of their fan base focus on prospects in the pipeline.

"He's exactly right; all we want to do is win," rookie outfielder Daniel Palka said. "It's not fun to lose. That's the only thing on people's mind — wanting to win."

Palka and Adam Engel hit back-to-back home runs in the sixth inning to turn a 1-1 tie into a 4-1 lead, rewarding Dylan Covey and the bullpen for a solid day's work in the deciding game of a three-game series against the NL-leading Brewers.

The Guaranteed Rate Field crowd of 25,338 seemed to enjoy the sunny, 75-degree afternoon as much as the White Sox players. Fans cheered Alfredo Gonzalez for a long time after he picked up his first career hit, a hard single to left field that tied the score 1-1.

"It was a lot of fun," Palka said about the crowd. "I think me and Engel noticed that in the third inning. It was a nice day, a lot of fans."

Gonzalez, who was promoted when Wellington Castillo was suspended after a positive test for PEDs, beamed at first base. He was getting only his third start and isn't guaranteed many more with Kevan Smith off the disabled list in Triple A.

"I was really excited," said Gonzalez, who was hitting .169 as Smith's backup at Charlotte. "I was dreaming for that moment my whole career. For me, that was like living a dream."

Gonzalez threw out the Brewers' Jonathan Villar on a stolen-base attempt when the score was 1-1. He worked well with Covey, who held the Brewers to one unearned run in five innings.

"I've known Covey from the minors," Gonzalez said. "Our plan today was very good against a very good team. I think we were smarter than them, and he executed. He did all the things he needed to do for us to get the win."

Covey isn't looking anything like the wide-eyed guy who was stuck with a 7.71 ERA after 70 innings last season. He got 15 swinging strikes from the Brewers, who are fifth in the National League in scoring.

Four of those came on his changeup, which he threw at 87, about 8 mph slower than his average fastball. He threw 13 changeups, eight for strikes.

"The changeup was really working good late in counts," said Covey, who got the no-decision while lowering his ERA to 2.82. "It was a good pitch today. I was able to use my fastball and go up in the zone and then to get them off of that, just go down low with the changeup."

Manager Rick Renteria believes Covey is harnessing the potential he and his coaches saw last season, when he took lumps after the pitching staff was stripped in midseason trades.

"His stuff is the same in terms of his action," Renteria said. "It's just a lot more strikes. He's able to get it over the plate a little bit more. If he's able to command, he's working 93, 94 miles per hour with really good action. If he's able to command, it puts him in a position to be able to generate a lot of ground balls. He's got good stuff."

Dylan Covey could have staying power with the White Sox

By Phil Rogers / Chicago Tribune / June 3, 2018

Dylan Covey is showing he might have staying power.

He was viewed mostly as a short-term option when he replaced Carson Fulmer in the White Sox rotation two weeks ago, but it's no longer a lock that Carlos Rodon will move into the Fulmer/Covey spot in the rotation when he's activated, possibly as early as Friday against the Red Sox.

"I certainly think ... we'll all talk and see how we want to move forward," White Sox manager Rick Renteria said.

Covey allowed the Brewers only one unearned run in five innings Sunday and is 1-1 with a 2.82 ERA after four starts this season. He seemed to be clinging to a tenuous spot on the 40-man roster after going 0-7 with a 7.71 ERA last season but has bounced back in a major way, also pitching well in Triple A this season (3-1, 2.33 in seven starts).

"Definitely I've figured some things out," Covey said. "From spring training this year and going forward, I think I get a little bit better every outing. Even in Triple A I was getting better every outing. I'm just going to keep working hard and doing what I'm doing, and hopefully things keep working out for me."

Hector Santiago, who moved into the rotation when Miguel Gonzalez went on the disabled list April 23, could return to the bullpen to make room for Rodon. Santiago is scheduled to start Wednesday in Minnesota and is likely to make that start as Rodon and Covey won't be ready to go until Friday.

The Sox could use six starters for a turn or two through the rotation as they are scheduled to play 21 games in 20 days, beginning with Tuesday's doubleheader in Minnesota.

Different times: Renteria will be watching closely when Major League Baseball begins its annual draft Monday night. He'll also be thinking how much the draft has changed since 1980, when the Pirates took him with the 20th pick.

"I was actually in my math class when one of my counselors and former coaches came in and asked me what I was doing in class," said Renteria. "I told him I was doing my work. He said: 'Well, the Pirates are trying to get hold of you. They just drafted you in the first round. You need to go home.' I said: 'OK, teach. I've got to get out of here, got to get home.' So I went home and waited for the phone call."

Renteria signed for \$40,000. Slot money for the 20th pick this season is \$3.12 million.

"I remember getting a call or two from a scout asking what it would take to sign," Renteria said. "I remember saying, 'I just want to play.'"

Looking ready: Rodon allowed two runs and struck out eight in five innings at Buffalo on Sunday. He walked three and threw 92 pitches. He has struck out 28 in 17 2/3 innings over four rehab starts, one with low-A Kannapolis and three for Charlotte.

Rodon, 25, underwent arthroscopic shoulder surgery in September. He could be an important player for the rebuilding Sox if his slider once again develops into a major weapon. While he hasn't fulfilled the high expectations he carried into his pro career, there's time to do it. He has three years left before free agency.

Quick study: Kannapolis right-hander Blake Battenfield is forcing his way into a discussion of the Sox's inventory of pitching prospects. He lasted until the 17th round in the 2017 draft after serving mostly as a reliever at Oklahoma State but has emerged as one of the best starters in the South Atlantic League.

He's 5-2 with a 1.59 ERA in 11 starts, striking out 62 in 56 2/3 innings. He credits his improvement to John Ely, a Homewood-Flossmoor High product who reached the big leagues with the Dodgers and was his pitching coach last year at Great Falls.

Battenfield said he's using a four-pitch mix after being primarily a sinker-slider pitcher in college.

"I've worked a lot with John Ely on solving my changeup, getting more consistent with that, adding a curveball and staying primarily with the four-seam fastball," said Battenfield, who was named White Sox minor-league pitcher of the month for May.

3 players the White Sox could draft with the No. 4 pick

By Paul Sullivan / Chicago Tribune / June 3, 2018

Here are three players who may be in the picture for the White Sox with the No. 4 overall pick in Monday's MLB draft.

Brady Singer, Florida RHP

10-1, 2.25 ERA, 92 SO in 88 innings this season

Pitching for the defending champs and top-seeded team in the NCAA tournament, the 6-foot-5 Singer was named Baseball America's national player of the year, the first pitcher so honored since UCLA's Trevor Bauer in 2011. He's also one of 25 semifinalists for the Golden Spikes Award as the national player of the year but sat out the last week of the regular season and the SEC tournament while nursing a hamstring injury. Singer was the most outstanding player at the 2017 College World Series, striking out 21 in 14 innings and setting a CWS record with 12 strikeouts in a 4-3 Game 1 win over LSU. He entered the 2018 tournament with a career record of 21-8 with a 3.18 ERA, with 359 strikeouts in 257 2/3 innings. He was selected by the Blue Jays in 2015 with the 56th pick but did not sign.

Nick Madrigal, Oregon State 2B/SS

.403, 2 HR, 31 RBIs, 28 runs, .464 OBP

Hall of Famer Nellie Fox, one of the most popular players in White Sox history, was a 5-foot-10, 160-pound second baseman. Madrigal is listed at 5-8, but his father, Mike, told the Sacramento Bee he's 5-7. Nick and his twin brother were born prematurely, and Nick weighed only 4 pounds. "He was so small at birth, I could put the twins in the palm of each hand," Mike Madrigal said. "As soon as Nick was old enough to walk and hold a Wiffle ball bat, he did. He'd rather do that than ride a bike." After helping Oregon State to a school-record 56 wins and a berth in the College World Series last year, Madrigal missed 26 games in 2018 after breaking his wrist sliding into the plate against Ohio State in February. But he returned and hit .403 in 124 at-bats with only five strikeouts. He also went 9-for-9 in stolen bases and was error-free at second base.

Alec Bohm, Wichita State 3B

.339, 16 HR, 55 RBIs, .436 OBP

The Sox took third baseman Jake Burger with the No. 11 pick in last year's draft, but he suffered an Achilles tendon injury while running to first base in spring training and reinjured it during his rehab. Bohm is projected by some scouts as the best hitter in the draft and could go to the Phillies at No. 3. He posted a .625 slugging percentage and a school-record three grand slams. Bohm also is a semifinalist for the Dick Howser and Golden Spikes awards as national player of the year.

With Carlos Rodon nearing return, Dylan Covey states case to stay in rotation

By Brian Sandalow / Sun-Times / June 3, 2018

Carlos Rodon likely will return to the White Sox' rotation soon. On Sunday, Dylan Covey made his case to keep starting when Rodon comes back.

In his fourth rehab start (third with Class AAA Charlotte), Rodon threw 92 pitches, allowed six hits and two runs and struck out eight in five innings. Rodon's next start on regular rest would be Friday, though manager Rick Renteria didn't say if the left-hander's next appearance would be in the majors or minors.

As for Covey, he lowered his ERA to 2.82 by going five innings and giving up one unearned run. He struck out seven.

“Definitely I’ve figured some things out,” Covey said. “From spring training this year and going forward, I think I get a little bit better every outing. Even in Triple-A, I was getting better every outing, and I’m just going to keep working hard and doing what I’m doing, and hopefully things keep working out for me.”

Right is right?

Yoan Moncada has been almost two different hitters this season.

Entering the game, Moncada was hitting .268 with a .348 on-base percentage and .493 slugging percentage off right-handed pitchers. But against lefties, the switch-hitting Moncada was slashing just .167/.241/.229.

Because of that, Renteria had Tim Anderson lead off and Moncada bat sixth against Brewers left-hander Brent Suter. The move paid off for Moncada, who had a triple and a walk against Suter before striking out in the eighth against lefty Dan Jennings.

Asked about Moncada’s right-handed at-bats, Renteria said “a couple were OK,” but “there’s still some work to be done.”

“I think it’s still the soft stuff down out of the zone a little bit,” Renteria said. “He’ll continue to adjust. The looks when he comes into the dugout are more a curiosity look in terms of what he might be thinking about, what he might do the next time. He’s a work in progress.”

Friends and competitors

Named the Sox’ May minor-league pitcher of the month, Class A right-hander Blake Battenfield is one of many prospects who sees an opportunity to make his mark in a rebuilding organization. Pitching at Kannapolis, Battenfield went 4-0 with a 1.16 ERA in five starts to earn the award.

And, like other prospects, Battenfield is trying to move up, something that can lead to competition among teammates.

“It’s a weird feeling knowing, ‘OK, I want guys, especially on the Intimidators right now because I’m really good friends with all of them, to do well,” he said. “But you are still competing for the same job. It’s a weird complex.”

Chris Volstad got the win even though he didn’t retire a batter. With two outs in the sixth and Volstad on the mound to face his first batter, Alfredo Gonzalez caught Milwaukee’s Jonathan Villar stealing. The Sox then scored three in the bottom of the inning to take the lead for good, and Volstad was replaced by Joakim Soria to start the seventh.

† Bob Uecker joined Ken “Hawk” Harrelson for the bottom of the third and top of the fourth innings on Channel 9.

† Class AA reliever Brad Goldberg, who appeared in 11 games for the Sox last year, was dealt to the Diamondbacks for cash considerations.

White Sox take series from NL-leading Brewers

By Brian Sandalow / Sun-Times / June 3, 2018

Much of the talk about the White Sox this season has centered on the future, but for the players on the roster, the rebuild isn't the focal point. Before the Sox' 6-1 victory Sunday against the Brewers, manager Rick Renteria reiterated that "it is about winning" for the 2018 group.

"I think we talk about it as often as we can as a reminder," Renteria said. "Nobody's here just to show up and get on the field with the idea that you're going to fail and not go out there and try to do things to help your club win. [James Shields] did everything he could [Saturday] to keep us there and give us an opportunity to win that ballgame. He's been doing it now for quite a while. He's a guy that's been around. It's very natural probably to have frustrations. He should. That's just the way it goes."

That Shields — or anyone on the Sox, for that matter — is frustrated shouldn't come as a surprise. The season has been a trying one, and the positives have been outnumbered by negative moments. The Sox are in last place in the American League Central and only ahead of the Orioles in the AL.

"This might be one of our toughest moments right now because we are truly going through a transition," Renteria said. "I don't talk about it that way. You're trying to win ballgames on a daily basis.

"That's our focus still, but there are transitions occurring, and we've got to make the best of them."

The Sox did make the best of things in the series finale against the Brewers, who have the best record in the National League. The Sox continued their mastery of Milwaukee, winning their 14th in the last 18 games and sixth consecutive series against the Brewers.

Daniel Palka, whose two-run home run in the sixth inning off Matt Albers gave the Sox a 3-1 lead, agreed with Shields, who said he didn't care about the rebuild, just about winning after the Sox' 5-0 loss Saturday.

"He's exactly right; all we want to do is win," Palka said.

"It's not fun to lose. That's the only thing on people's minds: wanting to win."

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- With Carlos Rodon nearing return, Dylan Covey states case to stay in rotation
- White Sox pitcher James Shields focused on winning, not rebuilding

Palka's blast was his sixth and the team's first pinch homer of the year. Not considered a prominent part of the Sox' future when he was claimed off waivers in November and called up in April, Palka has been making the most of his chance.

"That was the plan from the beginning, to take advantage of every opportunity I got," Palka said. "I've been getting a lot of opportunities, so I'm just going to stick with that."

Adam Engel followed Palka's homer with one of his own, giving the Sox back-to-back homers for the third time this season. Alfredo Gonzalez's run-scoring single had tied the game at 1 in the fifth inning and was the catcher's first big-league hit and RBI.

"It was a very exciting moment for me," Gonzalez said. "I've been working hard for this and to have that opportunity. To get my first hit and my first RBI was very special."

Taking a series from the Brewers might not be that special, but it did mean a little something to a Sox team straining for highlights.

"It's good," Palka said. "We came into this month wanting to kind of start over and refresh ourselves. It's a good start, going 2-1 against a first-place team."

Gregor: Chicago White Sox will draft Madrigal or Singer at No. 4

By Scot Gregor / Daily Herald / June 3, 2018

Monday is draft day, and there is one obvious question.

Who will be the Chicago White Sox's choice with the No. 4 overall pick?

We have examined four potential picks over the last week, and I think the Sox's wish list starts with Oregon State second baseman/shortstop Nick Madrigal, moves to Florida starting pitcher Brady Singer and ends with third basemen Alec Bohm from Wichita State and Jonathan India, Singer's teammate with the Gators.

Most outlets plugged into the draft have Auburn starter Casey Mize going to the Detroit Tigers with the first overall pick, followed by Georgia Tech catcher Joey Bart to the San Francisco Giants at No. 2 and Bohm to the Philadelphia Phillies at No. 3.

If that holds, the White Sox have the option of drafting Madrigal or Singer.

Two weeks ago, Sox general manager Rick Hahn saw Madrigal play against USC in Los Angeles. While he is only 5-feet-8, 165 pounds, Madrigal has been compared to Jose Altuve and Dustin Pedroia, and the right-hander had a .406/.473/.594 hitting line heading into the Beavers' NCAA regional championship game Sunday night.

According to OSU coach Pat Casey, Madrigal is a can't-miss talent.

"He's going to be a big-leaguer in a short period of time," Casey told The Oregonian. "He's going to play the game for a long time. His instincts are off the charts, and I give him a ton of freedom because he's a thoroughbred. You've got to turn him loose.

"He works his tail off and he's a humble kid, a great kid. If you had a blueprint for a baseball player with Nick's picture, that's all you'd need. He's pretty (darn) good."

So is Singer, who returned to the mound for Florida on Saturday night after missing three weeks with a hamstring injury. The 6-5, 210-pounder pitched 7 innings against Jacksonville and allowed 2 runs on 5 hits to go with 1 walk and 6 strikeouts.

Singer was voted Baseball America's National Player of the Year and the SEC's Pitcher of the Year last week, and he held hitters in college baseball's toughest conference to a .186 average.

When Singer was sidelined with the hamstring issue, Nick Hostetler, White Sox director of amateur scouting, wasn't at all concerned.

"We've seen what he is since high school," Hostetler said. "We've seen him a lot. We have a long track record with him. You're talking about a big-game Friday night guy that has taken the ball every Friday night against the best teams in the country and the best conference (SEC) in the country, and he's put up just amazing numbers."

There has been some speculation that the White Sox are going to draft a high school player such as outfielder Nick Schnell with their first-round choice. That would save slot money that can spent to pay more for later picks.

Anything is possible, but the feeling here is the Sox aren't going to take a gamble like that and ultimately will decide between Madrigal and Singer.

"We have to go with the best player, the guy that we feel has the best toolset, has the biggest ceiling and is going to help us win here," Hostetler said. "I feel pretty confident on the guy I want. We're still open-minded, we're still talking back and forth.

"The money part of it is starting now to come into it just with all the agent calls and everything like that, but I do feel pretty confident that we're all on the same page with that."

Major League Baseball has set the slot value of this year's No. 4 draft pick at \$6.4 million. That is more than half of the White Sox's allotted \$10.5 million for the entire draft.

Chicago White Sox ease frustration with 6-1 win over Brewers

By Scot Gregor / Daily Herald / June 3, 2018

Chicago White Sox manager Rick Renteria understands James Shields' frustration.

Following Saturday's 5-0 loss to the Milwaukee Brewers, Shields snapped a bit when asked about the hazards of playing for a rebuilding team.

"Frankly, I don't really care about the rebuild right now," Shields said. "I care about winning. They keep talking about rebuild, and I'm trying to win ballgames right now, period. I don't like losing. We are losing ballgames right now."

Said Renteria: "It is about winning. I think we talk about it as often as we can as a reminder. Nobody's here just to show up and be here, get out to the field with the idea they're going to fail, not help their club to win.

"A guy who's been around, it's probably natural to have frustrations. (Shields) should."

The frustration was eased Sunday in the Sox's 6-1 interleague victory over the Brewers at Guaranteed Rate Field.

Trailing 1-0 in the fifth inning, rookie catcher Alfredo Gonzalez tied the game with his first major-league hit, a single to left field.

Gonzalez was hitless in his first 7 at-bats with the White Sox after coming up from Class AAA Charlotte to replace suspended catcher Wellington Castillo.

"It was a very exciting moment for me," Gonzalez said through a translator. "I've been working hard for this. To get my first hit and first RBI was very special. I was really excited. I was dreaming for that moment my whole career. For me, that was like living a dream."

In the sixth inning, the Sox went in front for good on pinch hitter Daniel Palka's 2-run homer. Adam Engel followed with a solo shot to make it 4-1. Palka's 433-foot blast to right field off Milwaukee reliever Matt Albers was the White Sox's first pinch-hit home run of the season.

"Honestly, I just kind of took it as the first at-bat of the game," Palka said. "It's easy getting ready since we've got the cage right here in the tunnel. Same routine as starting a game."

Dylan Covey started for the Sox and pitched 5 innings, allowing 1 unearned run on 4 hits and 3 walks. Covey also had 7 strikeouts.

The White Sox (18-38) won two of three from the Brewers (37-23), who came in having won six straight series.

"It's big," Renteria said. "I think our guys should feel good about what they just did. It was a good club we took two out of three from. A lot of things had to go well.

"They're a club that takes advantage of a lot of mistakes and, fortunately for us in at least two of the three, we minimized those things and were able to come out on top."

Battle ready:

Blake Battenfield has come a long way from last season, when he was struggling in relief at Advanced Rookie Great Falls after being drafted in the 17th round out of Oklahoma State.

The big right-hander was 4-0 with a 1.16 ERA in 5 May starts with low Class A Kannapolis, earning minor-league pitcher-of-the-month honors.

"It means a lot," Battenfield said. "There's a bunch of really talented pitchers in this organization. I'm just glad that I could be recognized for what I did this past month. Hopefully I can continue to produce." The 6-foot-3, 220-pounder said adding a changeup and curveball and relying more on a four-seam fastball have allowed him to succeed as a starter.

"The four-pitch mix has been a big reason why I've had success here lately," Battenfield said. "I'm hoping to continue to develop the curveball and the changeup and always keep my fastball command good, because it always starts with the fastball."

Familiar face:

Tyler Saladino was at Guaranteed Rate Field over the weekend, but he was in the Brewers' clubhouse.

On April 19, Saladino was traded to Milwaukee for cash considerations. He played great baseball for the Brewers, batting .311 with 3 home runs and 8 RBI in 22 games before landing on the disabled list with a sprained left ankle Tuesday.

"It was a significant ankle sprain," Milwaukee manager Craig Counsell said. "Tyler was playing exceptionally well. He was filling in a little bit and he got off to an incredibly hot start. He had some great at-bats."

"He was incredibly productive offensively and, most important of all, he was flawless at shortstop. He just played exceptionally well."

Saladino was with the Brewers' training staff receiving treatment on the ankle most of the weekend.

How Blake Rutherford is leaning on his buddy Christian Yelich and tuning out the haters

By James Fegan / The Athletic / June 3, 2018

Blake Rutherford has the most polite way of saying he's trying to ignore the haters this season.

"Writers do a great job, they all have their opinions and they're entitled to them all," Rutherford said recently in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. "But I think as a baseball player it's too hard to read all the different opinions and what they're writing so I try to stay locked into the baseball and what I'm doing and try to go out there and compete."

Rutherford is trying to minimize his social media exposure after a difficult 2017, and has even taken to turning off his cell phone entirely in the lead-up to games so he can focus on his prep work on pitchers and read fewer opinions.

Milwaukee Brewers star Christian Yelich — who grew up in Thousand Oaks, California, a 15-minute drive from Simi Valley, where Rutherford, his friend since childhood, grew up — can relate to this approach.

"In the big leagues it's worse," Yelich said while in town for this weekend's series against the White Sox. "They have all the Draft Kings and the Beat the Streak, and you take an 0-for-4 and if you go on Twitter you have a ton of people telling you how much they hate you. It's all part of being a professional athlete, man, learning how to deal with that stuff, learning how to ignore it and just stay off social media."

Yelich, 26, has two younger brothers. Collin, 24, played two years in the Braves system, and Cameron, 22, is the closest to Rutherford in age and is now a U.S. Marine. The outfielder has known Rutherford

since his youngest brother played PONY baseball with him, and now that Rutherford is working his way through the exact same process of being a first-round pick and lauded all-around outfield talent out of high school, Yelich is serving as a sort of surrogate older brother again. After working out together in the offseason, they text every week or so, whether it's check-ins, simple congratulations after big games or longer discussions of hitting slumps or small tweaks.

Off to a .281/.324/.427 start at the plate, with three home runs and a 19.5 percent strikeout rate through his first 43 games in High-A Winston-Salem at the age of 21, Rutherford is bouncing back from deep struggles last year in Kannapolis. While he's at a higher level of baseball, he's still not producing the way he aspires to. And what he aspires to be is pretty specific: Christian Yelich.

"That's an honor for someone to say something like that," Yelich said. "I feel like we're similar players just as far as left-handed, throw right, both play outfield. He's got a great skill set. He has a chance to be a really good player. He's still really young. Just from working with him and being around him almost every day in the offseason, he has a great work ethic and I could see him turning into a pretty good player here pretty soon."

Yelich and Rutherford are also both very slender and lanky; Yelich still impossibly so — he has the credibility of a 20-home run season in the major leagues to dismiss concerns about whether his frame will ever produce power, but reminds that he had 20 combined in his first three big-league seasons before it emerged. Rutherford, on the other hand, faced plenty of scrutiny for his 2017 struggles, but most of all scouts have questioned whether he'll ever produce average power production after he went deep only twice all of last season.

In response, Rutherford spent his offseason focusing on adding leg strength with his personal trainer at Proactive in Westlake, California — where Yelich also trains, obviously — to give himself a "sturdier base" to push off from in his swing. He hasn't turned into Eloy Jiménez, but he clubbed his three home runs on the season inside the space of a week and is already over halfway to last season's total for extra-base hits.

"Power is the last thing that comes for you as a player, most of the time," Yelich said. "I just told him, 'Look dude, those homers are going to come.' As he gets older and understands his swing more and his approach and understands how to drive the baseball and you can pick your spots. That just comes from playing, repetitions and learning yourself as a player. The thing you don't want to do is get into worrying about hitting homers to please people who say you can't hit homers. Just be a good hitter first, just be able to hit. Once that comes, everything else kind of falls into place."

After posting a .338 average in April, Rutherford's power started to emerge in what was otherwise a difficult month of May, but he came about it organically from trying to drive the ball. His dramatic 10th-inning, three-run shot to beat the Salem Red Sox on May 9 was just his attempt to push home Joel Booker from third with a sacrifice fly. And free from some of the fatigue he felt last year, he's already legged out three triples. Dash hitting coach Charles Poe wants to keep him on the line-drive, plate-coverage approach he's currently geared toward, and he's confident more production will come as he continues to fill out.

"He really works hard on his approach and his routine," Poe said. "Matter of fact he's working in the cage right now. He does a lot of tee work. He knows how to square the ball up. His main objective is try to drive the ball hard up the middle every time. He's not worried about home runs. They will come. He's another one like [Gavin] Sheets, driving the ball all over the field and you see as of late he's starting to hit some home runs and sending some balls over the wall. They're going to come."

In the meantime, Yelich is an advocate of Rutherford tuning everyone out. Prospect scrutiny is always accelerating, and he feels like it didn't really get insufferable for him on social media until Double-A, putting Rutherford a bit ahead of schedule. But given Rutherford was invited to SoxFest and touted as part of the franchise's future before he even reached that level, he has to tune out the hype as well.

"I told him, 'At the end of the day, look man, just because someone says you're going to be a Hall of Famer, doesn't mean you're going to be a Hall of Famer,'" Yelich said. "Just because someone says you suck and you're never going to play in the big leagues, doesn't mean you suck and you're never going to play in the big leagues. Everyone's opinion is irrelevant, basically, so control what you can control. You know the kind of work you put in, you know the kind of player you're going to be and go from there."

That also means ignoring questions about how much upside he has. Coming out of the draft, Rutherford was a veteran of the Perfect Game circuit, and considered a more polished product than the normal high schooler because his parents had set him up with private coaches, like the hitting, baserunning and outfielding instructors he works with now during his offseason with Yelich.

His origin story is different than that of say, Tim Anderson, a high-ceiling athlete still learning the game during his ascent through the minors. But while having more support than others builds higher expectations, it also gives him an extra dose of motivation to show his parents that everything they did was worth it.

"I want to be the greatest player I can be, reach my full potential and I also play for my family too, for my mom, my dad, my brother," Rutherford said. "They drove me to countless hours of baseball. They've spent tons of money on hotels, on travel ball. I think there'd be no greater thing for them to be able to see their son live out his childhood dream and to be able to share a memory like that. From everything I've heard from players who have made the majors, there's just nothing more special than being able to play a game of baseball at the highest level and look up in the stands and see your parents cheering."

Why Dylan Covey deserves to stick in White Sox rotation

By James Fegan / The Athletic / June 3, 2018

Daniel Palka contributed to the White Sox's 6-1 win over the Brewers Sunday by hitting a ball to Beverly, and there's a story to be written sometime soon about how he's tagging big league fastballs despite one of the bigger swing loads in the majors. Alfredo González, doomed to be sent to the minors for Kevan Smith any day now, got the perfect moment in the sun every minor league grinder dreams about when he lined a game-tying single in the fifth for his first career hit. Adam Engel, who has pretty much always struggled at the plate as a major leaguer, had six total bases.

But the most significant story to address in the wake of the White Sox rising up from their moribund start to win a series against a team that came in with the best record in the National League seems like Dylan Covey. He got a no decision, walked three batters and burned out after just five innings of work, but nevertheless showed he deserves to stick in the rotation when Carlos Rodón returns from injury, though his manager declined to commit to anything Sunday.

Most fans were done with the idea of seeing Covey ever again, and he gave up 20 home runs in 70 innings last season, but he has yet to see one clear the fence in 22 1/3 innings this season, and fans should be interested in seeing him on a regular basis.

The most demonstrative difference in Covey, who lowered his ERA to 2.82 through four starts by not allowing an earned run through five innings Sunday, is that he's simply throwing harder. His average fastball velocity has jumped from 92-93 mph to 94-95 mph, depending on the tracking service, and Statcast had him averaging 94 mph and topping out at 96 mph Sunday as he struck out seven Brewers and allowed just four singles.

"I feel like I've always had it in the tank, I just feel really, really comfortable right now with my mechanics," Covey said. "I feel like I'm getting over my front leg really well. I think I'm able to be more consistent with my velocity now than even last year. Last year there were flashes of it, but I think mechanically right now I'm in a really good place and hopefully I can sustain it. I feel good, I feel strong."

His response to the velocity spike in his fastball has been to throw the thing an absolute ton. He was throwing the heater more than 70 percent of the time coming into the day, so turning to it 63 times in 97

pitches against Milwaukee — as he emphasized elevating it and pairing it with a changeup — represents him easing up on the gas a bit.

At that velocity, his heater has served as a swing-and-miss pitch he can elevate in the zone as he did in his dominant outing against Baltimore. But it's actually a two-seamer, and the significant drop he gets on it has contributed to a 63.2 percent ground ball rate so far this year in the majors to go along with a dramatically improved 21.2 percent strikeout rate.

Walks have been an issue since Covey came over last year as a Rule 5 pick from Oakland, and even during this hot start, they remain his biggest flaw, but his approach shift accounts for that. It's about realizing his fastball has enough natural life that he can challenge hitters with it wherever it finds the zone, and not exacerbating his control problems by forcing him to establish a lot of extra off-speed pitches he may or may not be commanding that particular day.

"Sometimes the movement on it is really good, sometimes it stays a little true," Covey said. "If I don't know what it's really going to do, I don't think the hitters [do]. It's not a consistent movement, but I'm throwing a two-seamer."

This line gets thrown out a ton for countless post-hype guys, and it's even something that could be said about journeyman Chris Volstad, but it's worth remembering that Covey is a former 14th overall pick. His development has been mostly undone — aside from the issues he dealt with upon discovering he had Type 1 diabetes after high school — by oblique injuries, mostly believed to be brought on by poor mechanics he feels he's now put behind him.

"His stuff is the same in terms of his action," manager Rick Renteria said. "It's just a lot more strikes. He's able to get it over the plate a little bit more. If he's able to command, he's working 93-94 mph with really good action. If he's able to command it puts him in a position to be able to generate a lot of ground balls. He's got good stuff."

It's not yet a perfect profile by any means, but Covey thinks it's getting better every single start, and with the struggles the White Sox starters have had with throwing strikes, missing bats, getting grounders, or any of things Covey has shown the ability to do in his audition, it's too good for them to turn away.
