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Sox power up for stellar Lopez in win over Cubs

By Max Gelman / MLB.com / September 21, 2018

CHICAGO -- Reynaldo Lopez has had his fair share of ups and downs in the midst of this rebuilding season. On Friday against the Cubs, Lopez seemed determined to end the year on a high note.

The young right-hander went toe to toe with an impressive Cubs lineup, keeping the North Siders off balance in a 10-1 White Sox victory at Guaranteed Rate Field. Lopez lowered his ERA to 3.94 -- the first time since the All-Star break that mark inched under 4.00 -- while going six-plus innings and allowing one or fewer runs for the fifth straight outing.

"He's been working and working to get to this point," White Sox manager Rick Renteria said of Lopez, who already surpassed his career-high innings total in a professional season. "We're certainly happy with the way he's developed. Commanding the zone, velocity's still really good. He was pretty sharp today. He was pretty excited, so we're glad it went well for him."

Looking to spoil the Cubs' division title hopes this weekend, the White Sox knotted the Crosstown Cup series at 2-2.

Lopez started the afternoon off with a mistake, hanging a full-count changeup to leadoff hitter Daniel Murphy, who hooked the pitch inside the right-field foul pole for a first-inning home run. The long ball was just the second Lopez has allowed over his last six starts.

But after that, it was smooth sailing. Lopez scattered four other hits over his seven innings, permitting just one runner past second base. He struck out eight and walked none, notching his fifth walkless start in 31 tries this year.

"The first inning I wasn't creating the arm angle that I always do," Lopez said through team interpreter Billy Russo. "That was something that [catcher Wellington Castillo], after that inning, he told me, 'Hey you need to create your angle, you need to make an adjustment because you're getting open when you're throwing the ball.' That was the adjustment that I did, and I was effective."

That downward angle Lopez referenced has proved effective for him over his last six starts. Lopez owns a 1.13 ERA in that span, walking nine batters and striking out 43.

"That has been the key for me," Lopez said. "I've always said I'm always learning. I'm always trying to learn in every outing and apply that lesson in the next one. My arm angle, my plan for every outing -- those are things that I try to execute the best that I can.

"I set my goal to finish this season with my ERA below 4.00, and now I know my ERA is below that number," Lopez added. "That's all that I want to do. I want to finish the season strong and finish with my ERA below 4.00."

Though the White Sox tallied a season-high 19 hits, Kevan Smith provided the biggest punches on offense against former White Sox All-Star Jose Quintana. Smith took the left-hander deep for a three-run homer in the second inning, giving the Sox a lead they would not relinquish, and led off the fourth with a double.

Daniel Palka iced the game with his fourth pinch-hit home run of the season in the sixth inning, setting the White Sox single-season franchise record. Palka's homer, his 27th overall, began an insurance-run barrage on the Cubs' bullpen -- the White Sox totaled 10 hits and five runs off the visiting relievers.

"It's kind of hard not to have fun when they were doing what they were doing," Renteria said. "The offense that they created today, it's kind of contagious and they picked up on each other. They enjoyed it. It'd be hard not to enjoy what they did today."

SOUND SMART

Yoan Moncada has nine hits in his last 18 at-bats and is hitting .333 over his last 19 games. Moncada went 3-for-4 with three singles, an RBI and a run, and Renteria said Moncada's play resembles how he looked before his DL stint in May.

"His at-bats have been improving over the past two or three weeks. I know, at times, we get so locked up in looking at his overall numbers and we overlook how he has been improving on both sides of the plate," Renteria said. "He's taking control of them a little bit more, he understands what he should or shouldn't be doing, and he's trying to make adjustments. Hopefully this is a little bit of a sign of how he'll continue to develop and move forward."

HE SAID IT

"We met last year as teammates. I didn't know that I was facing him today until this morning when I got the lineup and I thought, 'Oh, I'm going to face him.' It's always a good feeling when you're facing a guy like him. He was a very good teammate with me and when you're facing another Latino, it's always an extra excitement there, especially when you're facing a guy like him, it's good. It's a good feeling."
-- Lopez, on facing former teammate Quintana

UP NEXT

The White Sox continue their Crosstown Cup series on Saturday at 6:10 p.m. CT. The club will send Lucas Giolito (10-11, 5.77 ERA) to the mound at Guaranteed Rate Field. September has not treated

Giolito well, as the right-hander owns a 6.91 ERA in three starts this month after pitching to a 3.86 ERA in August. Jon Lester (16-6, 3.43 ERA) goes for the Cubs.

Palka sets club record with 4th pinch-hit HR

By Scott Merkin / MLB.com / September 21, 2018

CHICAGO -- When Daniel Palka launched a pinch-hit home run off Dillon Maples in the sixth inning of a 10-4 White Sox victory over the Cubs Friday at Guaranteed Rate Field, the rookie made no effort to retrieve the baseball.

Palka might have wanted to track that one down considering it became his fourth pinch-hit home run of 2018, setting a single-season franchise record.

"No, no. Whatever," said Palka with a laugh. "As long as a White Sox fan got it, we are good."

Cubs manager Joe Maddon pulled starter Jose Quintana at 88 pitches after Welington Castillo singled to open the sixth. Maddon went to the right-handed-throwing Maples, meaning White Sox manager Rick Renteria went with the left-handed-swinging Palka over designated hitter Kevan Smith.

All Smith had done to that point was hit a three-run homer to give the White Sox control in the second and then double and score in the fourth. Palka's connection off Maples came on a 2-2 pitch with an exit velocity on 110.4 mph. Palka now has 11 110-plus mph homers this year, per Statcast™, third in MLB behind Giancarlo Stanton and Joey Gallo (16 apiece). He also broke a tie with Nelson Cruz, who has 10.

The MLB record for pinch-hit home runs is shared by Dave Hansen (Dodgers, 2000) and Craig Wilson (Pirates, 2001), who both had seven.

"I just do my same pregame routine and when it's time, it's time," said Palka of his pinch-hit preparation. "I kind of forgot about [the record] for a second and maybe the next half-inning I just started cheating because I had forgotten about it."

"He wants to swing the bat," Renteria said. "And if he gets a pitch that he can handle, because of his strength, the bat speed that he has, he has a chance to do what he did today."

Palka's 27th home run also gave him the overall MLB lead among rookies, placing him one ahead of Atlanta's Ronald Acuna Jr. and two ahead of the Yankees' Miguel Andujar. That lofty perch with nine games remaining didn't really seem to move Palka any more than the rest of his success. He also tied Zeke Bonura for third on the single-season White Sox rookie home run list.

"It's nice. But it's not something I'm really thinking about," Palka said. "I'm just going out there doing what I can and whatever the outcome is. ... It's been a positive year in that aspect. It's just nothing but excitement."

Abreu willing to play through pain if cleared

By Scott Merkin / MLB.com / September 21, 2018

CHICAGO -- Jose Abreu will end up playing the fewest games of his five-year career with the White Sox during the 2018 season. In fact, this will be the first season the hard-working first baseman will play fewer than 140.

But the injuries sidelining Abreu over much of the past month are not baseball related. Abreu was out from Aug. 21-Sept. 10 after having surgery to relieve pain caused by testicular torsion, and he was hospitalized in Cleveland after developing an infection in his right thigh due to an ingrown hair.

Abreu continues to deal with pain, but he has not really thought about sitting out the final 10 games of the White Sox campaign.

"Everybody knows I like to play. It doesn't matter if I'm in pain or not. I like to be on the field," Abreu said through interpreter Billy Russo prior to Friday's series opener with the Cubs. "I'm a little sore right now, but at this moment we just have to wait to see the doctors, wait and see what they say about can I play or not play.

"I would like to help this team, as I always want. But at this moment, I can't play right now. We'll see what the doctors say."

The 2018 season will mark the first one of Abreu's stellar career in which he won't reach 100 RBIs or hit at least .290. He has a slash line of .265/.325/.473 to go with 36 doubles, 22 home runs and 78 RBIs through 128 games.

It has been a strange run for a player who doesn't like missing an at-bat, let alone a week's worth of games.

"Absolutely [strange]. In life, sometimes things happen that you don't have control of," Abreu said. "In those moments, you realize the people who really care about you. You appreciate that. I'm not happy in the way the last few weeks have been, but it is what it is. I'm just glad everything is going to be right.

"I'm feeling better. What the doctors did in Cleveland was outstanding. They took care of the situation. It was good. I have a lot to be glad for. I thank them a lot. All the people here have been very, very good with me. I'm just getting the treatment, taking pills and things to get the process going."

Giolito looking for good start to 2019

Saturday's contest marks start No. 31 for Lucas Giolito in a season where a 5.77 ERA on the back of his baseball card won't reflect some of the important knowledge gained by the 24-year-old. Giolito has cleaned up his mechanics through a change in long toss, not to mention an improved focus on the mound.

Giolito's goal in 2019 is to avoid the rough start he experienced this season, where the right-hander carried a 7.53 ERA through the first two months.

"It was a grind. That's the best way I could put it," said Giolito during a recent interview. "I was just grinding through, and luckily I was able to come out and start to produce better results.

"Obviously next year having that kind of start is unacceptable. It's about getting out here from the beginning of the year and being the type of starting pitcher I know I can be."

Just another series

Playing the Cubs in the second-to-last home series of the campaign becomes an interesting scheduling quirk for both the visitors and the host White Sox. But for manager Rick Renteria, it's close to being just another series.

"Obviously, it's not like any other series -- this is an in-city rivalry," Renteria said. "But we're looking to go out there and try and play good baseball against a good ballclub and give ourselves a chance to try to win some games."

The White Sox need three wins over their final 10 games to avoid a 100-loss season. But they could play spoiler as well regarding the Cubs' quest for a third straight National League Central title.

"If we play well, I think we gain a lot. We're competing against another postseason-bound club," Renteria said. "We've kind of been playing a lot of clubs that are postseason bound. You're gaining a lot of

experience and knowledge about what you can and cannot do. It raises the level of intensity and focus, I would hope."

Eloy Jimenez and Dylan Cease still in the minors, but White Sox end of the Jose Quintana trade looking real good right now

By Vinnie Duber / NBC Sports Chicago / September 21, 2018

Who won the Jose Quintana trade?

It's still way too early to actually answer that question. But a trade that seemed so beneficial for both the White Sox and Cubs when it was completed last summer seems to have a South Side lean at the moment, even if it's a very slight one.

That's not a knock against Quintana, who faced his former team for the first time Friday afternoon. He's doing his part in the mission the Cubs acquired him to accomplish. A rocky start that afflicted most of the North Side starting rotation means Quintana's season-long numbers aren't dazzling, but he's been excellent as the Cubs' division race with the Milwaukee Brewers has heated up, with a 2.10 ERA in his last six starts heading into Friday's Crosstown opener.

They acquired him to help them win another World Series, and he's pitching well enough as the postseason nears to be a big piece of that equation this October.

But the team that traded Quintana away probably isn't having second thoughts at the moment. While the return pieces in the Chris Sale and Adam Eaton trades haven't exactly hit the big leagues in dominant fashion — the ceilings of Yoan Moncada, Michael Kopech, Lucas Giolito and Reynaldo Lopez are all still very high — the two biggest return pieces in the Quintana trade are perhaps the two biggest reasons to be excited about the White Sox future at the moment.

Eloy Jimenez is being discussed as a superstar in waiting. His eventual promotion to the majors was the biggest discussion topic of the season, and though it didn't end up happening in 2018, it doesn't figure to be long into the 2019 campaign before he's playing big league ball.

He lit the minors on fire this season with a .337/.384/.577 slash line and 22 home runs in 108 games split between Double-A Birmingham and Triple-A Charlotte. After being promoted to Triple-A, he posted a .355/.399/.597 slash line and 12 homers in 55 games. He's currently ranked as the No. 3 prospect in the game.

Dylan Cease, meanwhile, was good enough to be named MLB Pipeline's minor league pitcher of the year. He posted a 2.40 ERA with 160 strikeouts in 23 starts between Class A Winston-Salem and Double-A Birmingham. That includes a sparkling 1.72 ERA in 10 starts following a midseason promotion to Double-A. He went to the Futures Game and pitched in the ninth inning on that All-Star stage.

Coming into the season, Cease was maybe the fourth most highly thought of White Sox pitching prospect, trailing Kopech, Alec Hansen and Dane Dunning — not to mention big leaguers Giolito and Carlos Rodon. But where the question then was whether Cease could find a place in a crowded rotation of the future, the question now is: Could he lead it? Cease's magnificent 2018 has sparked thoughts of him being the pitcher with the greatest promise in the organization.

And so that sounds like a pretty good state of the trade for the White Sox. Of course, the win-now Cubs probably feel similarly about their end of the deal, Quintana's performance of late helping to answer what was a glaring question earlier in the season.

It's worth repeating that it's extremely early to be making any definitive statements about the "winner" of this deal. It's also very early to be able to say with certainty what impact Jimenez and Cease will finally have when they reach the majors. The two most exciting White Sox youngsters at this time last season were Moncada and Kopech, and while the organization still thinks the world of both, fan expectations

have shifted as Moncada's first full big league season has been an up-and-down one and Kopech is days removed from Tommy John surgery that will wipe out his 2019.

In other words, things can change. And fast.

But right now, Jimenez and Cease are arguably the two brightest parts of the White Sox future. There's plenty of questions to be answered over the coming years, but in the moment, the South Side half of this win-win deal is living up to the billing.

Reynaldo Lopez outdueling Jose Quintana shows why White Sox future is so much brighter than their past ever was

By Vinnie Duber / NBC Sports Chicago / September 21, 2018

White Sox fans have been great at buying in to Rick Hahn's rebuilding effort.

But if there were controversies along the way, they stemmed from the dealing away of two of the best young pitchers in the American League.

Chris Sale and Jose Quintana represented the White Sox in the All-Star Game back in 2016, perhaps as good a 1-2 punch as there was in the Junior Circuit and a dream tandem to throw in a playoff series, if the South Siders could ever get there. But they couldn't. Not in the state they were in. And so Hahn shifted from win-now mode to rebuilding mode, with the trading away of Sale the move that jumpstarted the whole thing.

Half a year later, Quintana was shipped across town to the win-now Cubs. Fourteen months after that, Quintana faced his old mates for the first time at Guaranteed Rate Field.

The other big trade that's gone heretofore unmentioned was the Adam Eaton deal, which brought back a trio of pitching prospects in Lucas Giolito, Reynaldo Lopez and Dane Dunning. Lopez got the head-to-head matchup with Quintana on Friday to kick off the second Crosstown series of 2018, and while the Cubs and White Sox couldn't be in more different spots in terms of competing for this season's World Series title, it was Lopez who flashed why the White Sox future is so much brighter than their past ever was.

Lopez dominated the Cubs' offense, the team that still owns the best record in the National League made to look completely incapable by the hard-throwing 24-year-old. He struck out eight batters in a lineup trying desperately to hold off the Milwaukee Brewers in the NL Central race. After Daniel Murphy led off the game with a solo homer, Lopez held the Cubs to a scattered quartet of hits over seven innings.

"Their pitcher was good. Give him some credit," Cubs manager Joe Maddon said. "He threw the ball really well. I was watching him on video yesterday and even some this morning. He's got good stuff. His last three outings, he went seven, six and seven and he did it again, so a big part of why we didn't look so good was him. He was that good."

Indeed, it was the latest in a string of dominant starts Lopez is putting together to close out his first full major league season. The campaign hasn't always gone smoothly for him, his ERA still above 4.00 when Friday began, but he's finishing it off in a way that should have fans real excited for his long-term prospects. In his last five starts, he's got a pencil-thin 0.79 ERA, a stretch that's dropped his season ERA from 4.66 to 3.94.

"It's very important for me," Lopez said, through a team translator, of closing the season on such a strong note. "I set my goal to finish this season with my ERA below 4.00, and now I know my ERA is below that number. That's all that I want to do. I want to finish the season strong and finish with my ERA below 4.00."

"When you see all the work that you have put in day in, day out to get that result have shown, you feel very satisfied. Because that's what you work for. You work to get good results. You work to get better and

to perform. To be able to do that and to know that you're doing something like that, it's special and you feel good.”

Meanwhile, the White Sox offense did to Quintana what it could never do for him: scored a ton of runs.

Quintana's recent stretch of high-quality starts came to an end — he entered with a 2.10 ERA in his previous six outings — as his former team touched him up for five runs on nine hits and chased him from the game before the first out of the sixth inning. All in all, the White Sox had one of their best offensive days of the season, pouring it on against the bullpen and finishing with 10 runs on 19 hits.

Quintana remains a very good pitcher, and he could very well help the Cubs to another championship. But instead of having just Sale and Quintana, the White Sox now have five or six or seven guys either here or developing in the minor leagues, Lopez being just one of them. The future will continue to be on display this weekend when Giolito and Carlos Rodon pitch in the second and third games against the Cubs.

Friday's results are not to say that Lopez is a better pitcher than Quintana now or that he ever will be. But it was probably a little bit of vindication for the White Sox, a sign they made a good decision in pushing the rebuild button. The era of White Sox baseball in which Quintana pitched never ended in a postseason appearance. Hahn & Co. are hoping the era Lopez is pitching in ends in a championship.

Reynaldo Lopez shines, Jose Quintana hit hard in White Sox's 10-4 win over Cubs in City Series

By Phil Rogers / Chicago Tribunes / September 21, 2018

Jose Abreu was thinking about Jose Quintana, his former White Sox teammate, when he arrived at Guaranteed Rate Field before noon Friday.

“He was great as a teammate,” Abreu said. “He was a class act.”

Abreu shot Quintana a quick text message, telling him “good luck” in his first start against the Sox. That was the last act of kindness the Sox directed toward Quintana or anyone with the Cubs.

They spent the rest of the 74-degree day pounding the left-hander and his first-place teammates from the North Side, beating the Cubs 10-4 as the City Series resumed after a four-month break. It's tied two games apiece with two left to play this weekend.

The loss capped a generally troubling day for the Cubs. Shortstop Addison Russell was placed on administrative leave by Major League Baseball following new allegations of domestic abuse, creating an untimely distraction as they try to win a third consecutive division title.

Their lead in the National League Central dropped to two games over the Brewers, pending Milwaukee's game in Pittsburgh.

Quintana's first career start against the Sox was the most intriguing element of the matchup, but Reynaldo Lopez (7-9) unsurprisingly stole the show.

Lopez has quietly been terrific down the stretch in his first full major-league season, going 3-0 with a 1.13 ERA in his last six starts. He has given up only 24 hits and nine walks while striking out 43 in 39 2/3 innings.

Lopez said he was pumped to find out he was going against Quintana.

“It's always a good feeling when you're facing a guy like him,” Lopez said. “He was a very good teammate with me and when you're facing another Latino, it's always an extra excitement, especially when you're facing a guy like him.”

Daniel Murphy led off the game by hitting a 3-2 changeup into the right-field seats, keeping the ball just inside the foul pole. But Lopez allowed only two other runners to reach second base in his seven innings.

He elevated 97- and 98-mph fastballs to pile up eight strikeouts while not walking anyone. He threw 72 fastballs out of 108 pitches, getting 10 swing-and-misses on the four-seamer.

Murphy credited Lopez for disrupting hitters' timing. "It looked like he did a good job, especially when runners got on, of altering his times to the plate," he said. "He got that live fastball going, middle to top of the strike zone, which is really tough."

Lopez has lowered his ERA from 4.57 at the end of July to 3.94, with only one more start left this season.

"I set my goal to finish this season with my ERA below 4.00, and now I know my ERA is below that number," Lopez said. "I want to finish the season strong."

The Sox strung together five consecutive hits in the second inning off Quintana (13-11), grabbing control.

Singles by Matt Davidson and Welington Castillo were followed by Kevan Smith's long home run into the left-field seats. Daniel Palka delivered his fourth pinch-hit homer of the season in the sixth, setting a Sox record.

The Sox outhit the Cubs 19-9, and Lopez was tough with the lead.

"Their pitcher was good," Cubs manager Joe Maddon said. "He threw the ball very well. I was watching him on video Thursday and even this morning. He's got some good stuff. ... A big part of why we didn't look so good was him. He was that good."

Daniel Palka making powerful statement in bid to stick with White Sox

By Phil Rogers/ Chicago Tribune / September 21, 2018

When the White Sox promoted Daniel Palka to the big leagues in late April, he arrived determined to have staying power.

"I just wanted to make sure I made the most of every opportunity I got and made sure I produced enough so that the question was there, that maybe I would have to stay," Palka said Friday after the Sox's 10-4 victory over the Cubs. "In my mind, I'm not surprised."

Palka seems to have turned the potential cameo into a job that will extend into 2019 and possibly beyond. His pinch-hit home run off Dillon Maples on Friday was his fourth this season — setting a Sox record — and his 27th homer overall, which leads major-league rookies.

While Palka's fielding remains rough in the outfield corners, he seems to have a good shot to go into next season as the Sox's primary designated hitter. He's hitting .242 with 64 RBIs in 388 at-bats.

"He's a young man who understands and appreciates the opportunity that's been presented to him," manager Rick Renteria said. "He's thrived. He's had really big moments for us in key situations."

"He's worked extremely hard to put himself on the map, to be part of our conversation as an organization."

Palka has hit 30 home runs overall this season. He hit 34 two seasons ago between the Twins' Double- and Triple-A teams.

Extra innings: This is the latest in the year the Sox and Cubs have played since the 1906 World Series. ... Yoan Moncada is hitting .333 with five doubles and eight RBIs in his last 19 games. ... Yolmer Sanchez was out of the lineup because he's hitting .195 against lefties.

White Sox slugger Jose Abreu wants to play if doctors clear him

By Phil Rogers/ Chicago Tribune / September 21, 2018

Jose Abreu hopes to get back on the field for the White Sox this season but doesn't seem likely to be available for this weekend's series against the Cubs.

Abreu, who was hospitalized Monday in Cleveland to treat an infection in his right thigh, will be examined by doctors Friday. Their findings will determine if he can return before the season ends a week from Sunday.

"I think everybody knows I like to play," Abreu said through Sox interpreter Billy Russo. "It doesn't matter if I'm in pain or not. I like to play; I like to be on the field. I'm a little sore right now, but at this moment we just have to wait to see the doctors, wait and see what they say about can I play or not play."

Abreu had played only six games after returning from a stint on the disabled list for surgery to address a testicular issue. He was one of the hottest hitters in the major leagues when he was sidelined Aug. 21.

"In life sometimes things happen that you don't have control of," Abreu said. "In those moments you realize the people who really care about you. You appreciate that. I'm not happy in the way the last few weeks have been, but it is what it is. I'm just glad everything is going to be right."

Daniel Palka, Reynaldo Lopez reach milestones in White Sox victory over Cubs

By Steve Greenberg / Chicago Sun Times / September 21, 2018

Back in late April, when the White Sox called him up from Class AAA Charlotte to replace injured Avisail Garcia, Daniel Palka couldn't possibly have known he'd stick around for the season, let alone that he'd lead all major-league rookies with 27 home runs heading into the final week.

Palka hit a two-run shot Friday off Cubs reliever Dillon Maples in the sixth inning of the Sox' 10-4 victory at Guaranteed Rate Field.

"I didn't know what to expect [this season]," Palka said. "I just wanted to make sure I made the most of every opportunity I got and made sure I produced enough that the question was there — that maybe I'd have to stay.

"In my mind, I'm not surprised because I'm just confident in what I'm doing."

Palka's homer was his fourth as a pinch hitter, a Sox single-season record. It also tied him for third for homers in one season by a Sox rookie. The last one to hit 27 was Zeke Bonura in 1934 (but you knew that already).

Palka's take on rubbing elbows with such greatness?

"I saw that, and I thought it was weird that a guy in the '30s had the name Zeke," he said.

Lopez keeps dealing

Also reaching a milestone was right-handed starter Reynaldo Lopez (7-9), who became the first Sox pitcher to throw five straight games of six-plus innings with one or zero runs allowed since — wait for it — Eric King in 1989.

"To know you're doing something like that is special," Lopez said through an interpreter.

A bigger deal to Lopez: He lowered his ERA to 3.94.

“That’s very important for me,” he said. “I set my goal to finish the season with an ERA below 4.00.”

Tough love

Sox second baseman Yoan Moncada singled three times and is 9-for-18 (.500) over his last four games and 25-for-75 (.333) over his last 19.

Color his mentor, veteran first baseman Jose Abreu, unimpressed.

“As you know, I’m always looking for more ways for him to improve,” Abreu said. “He has plenty of room to improve and get better, to develop.”

Abreu’s offseason advice to his young friend: “Work. Work. Work with a purpose, and be around good people who can help him.”

Cubs are on notice

Saturday’s Sox starter, Lucas Giolito — who, despite walking seven batters, beat the Cubs at Wrigley Field in May — is psyched to face Cubs ace Jon Lester.

“I always enjoy going up against an elite- or premier-type starting pitcher,” he said. “For me, as a young player, it’s an even better experience than going up against another guy of my status in baseball. It gives you an extra edge of competitiveness. I’m going up against the best, so I’d better bring my best.”

‘Falling low’ might be best thing for White Sox’ Moncada, Renteria says

By Daryl Van Schouwen / Chicago Sun Times / September 21, 2018

CLEVELAND – Yoan Moncada almost got through a game without striking out Thursday. After reaching base four times in his first five plate appearances in the White Sox’ 5-4 win in 11 innings against the Indians Thursday, he whiffed for the 206th time with 10 games to play with two runners in scoring position and two outs in the 10th inning against submariner Adam Cimber.

That put the talented 23-year-old switch-hitting Sox second baseman within 17 strikeouts of record holder Mark Reynolds (223) of the Rockies in 2009 and 16 short of Adam Dunn’s franchise mark set in 2012. It’s a dubious distinction Moncada could do without but Sox manager Rick Renteria won’t be going out of his way to prevent it by limiting Moncada’s at-bats down the stretch.

If it stings a little, so be it.

“Sometimes allowing somebody to fall as low as they can possibly fall might be the biggest thing they get to move them forward,” Renteria said Thursday. “Sometimes it’s, ‘We don’t want to hurt his feelings.’ No, by all means hurt his feelings. Let him appreciate the frustration of what that’s about so he can appreciate how important it is to have a certain approach, or mindset, or sense of urgency.”

Yoan Moncada #10 of the White Sox is congratulated as he returns to the dugout after scoring on a single by Avisail Garcia #26 in the first inning against the Cleveland Indians at Progressive Field on September 20, 2018 in Cleveland, Ohio. (Photo by David Maxwell/Getty Images) ORG XMIT: 775137543

In an era when increasing strikeouts are shrugged off as no big deal, Renteria has no use for the whiff. Give him a productive out, he says.

You might not know it watching the Sox, who lead the majors with 1,485 this season.

“All it tells me is we have more work to do,” Renteria said.

A centerpiece of the Sox rebuild, Moncada had a productive night with a walk and three hits including a two-run double off the wall in the second against righty Josh Tomlin. The Sox won on Matt Davidson's RBI single in the 11th that scored Yolmer Sanchez (double). Hector Santiago (6-3) pitched three scoreless innings of relief as the Sox won for the first time in nine games at Progressive Field.

James Shields allowed homers on consecutive pitches to Francisco Lindor and Michael Brantley in the third but nothing else over six innings, and Omar Narvaez hit his ninth homer but the Sox bullpen gave up the lead in the eighth.

The Sox won for the first time after losing eight games at Progressive Field this season.

In his first full season, Moncada is one of eight players (12 times) to surpass 200 strikeouts, a list with some good current names on it like Aaron Judge and Giancarlo Stanton. Kris Bryant fanned 199 times as a rookie.

On the plus side, Moncada is not a chaser of bad pitches. He has a patient eye.

"The stats are the stats. I'm not sitting here going 'I'm leading the league in strikeouts,' " he said last week. "I'm just trying to focus on getting better."

Renteria said Moncada might one day laugh off the huge K total. And he doesn't care at all about the number, only Moncada's approach.

"Is he adjusting to moments and situations," Renteria said. "At times I see at, at times I don't. It's the inconsistency in which he's approaching those two strike at-bats that I'm more concerned.

"He knows he has to do a better job of putting balls in play, in situations where he might create a run, have a productive out.

"He had some really good at-bats from both sides of the plate tonight."

Renteria touts Moncada's 17 homers, 28 doubles, six triples, 11 stolen bases and 60 RBI. He has an improving .231/.309/.397 hitting line reaching base in 25 of his last 27 games, batting .294 in that stretch.

"Some people think this is a lost season for him but it is not," Renteria said. "He is going to grow and come out of this."

And deal with the strikeout record if it occurs.

"Remember, there are different ways of motivating people," Renteria said. "There's a pat on the butt and there's a kick on the butt. Maybe this will be a kick on the butt. But I'm not going to give up on that kid. No way. He has way too much talent. And one season is not making or breaking him."

Keeping cool in big moments making difference for White Sox' Lopez

By Daryl Van Schouwen / Chicago Sun Times / September 21, 2018

CLEVELAND — White Sox right-hander Reynaldo Lopez says he has a handle on his engine that would run too hot in big moments, which is a good thing with the Cubs coming to Guaranteed Rate Field for three games starting Friday.

Lopez, 24, faces the North Siders for the first time Friday, and close to a full house is expected.

"I know there's going to be a big crowd; the ballpark might be sold out," he said. "And that makes it fun because you can feel the energy."

Lopez (6-9, 4.05 ERA) is 2-0 with an ERA of 0.67 and 28 strikeouts in 27 innings in his last four starts. In his last 10 outings, he's 2-1 with a 3.88 ERA. He said the biggest thing in his recent good run is dealing with surges of energy running through his veins and not "putting added pressure" on himself and reaching back for extra in two-strike counts.

"Even when I was pitching well, there were times when I would get overexcited when I'd get two strikes on a hitter," he said. "I would be super-hyped, and I'd try to finish off a batter, and it would backfire on me. Now it's just, keep it simple, execute every pitch and be in control of the whole game when I'm on the mound. Maintain the same level of intensity. That has been the big key."

The Sox won one of three games against the Cubs at Wrigley Field, and manager Rick Renteria tweaked his rotation to have Carlos Rodon, their ERA leader among starters, pitch Sunday.

The intensity figures to be running higher than usual with a big crowd of fans from both sides of town.

"What we need to do is play good baseball," said Renteria, who managed the Cubs in 2014. "If we play good baseball, we have a chance. And if we don't, we won't."

The Sox are trying to avoid 100 losses, and the Cubs are in first place in the National League Central, trying to hold off the Brewers with 10 games to go.

The Sox know they can be a spoiler.

"I see them like any other team," Lopez said. "As a pitcher, you have to. For me, it's just another game to perform my best."

Abreu doubtful

An infection on his right thigh likely will keep Jose Abreu out of the lineup against the Cubs. Abreu spent a night in a Cleveland hospital, watched a game at the team hotel and was at the ballpark for the series finale, although walking with a slight limp. Abreu is taking antibiotics for the infection, which stemmed from a hair follicle.

† Outfielder Nicky Delmonico was still dealing with a stiff neck, Renteria said, and Welington Castillo is nursing a sore left elbow. Both are day-to-day.

Tickets

Scattered seats were available for the Saturday and Sunday games against the Cubs, with sellouts expected on those days. As of Thursday afternoon, a few thousand seats remained for Friday.

José Abreu yearns to return this season after latest weird lower-body injury

By James Fegan / The Athletic / September 21, 2018

José Abreu's right thigh was bandaged and he was walking with a slight limp.

He was due for another checkup from White Sox team physicians Friday to deal with an infection spurred by an ingrown hair follicle, which already led him to a hospital stay during the team's series in Cleveland. There are 10 games left in a season that will likely see the Sox lose more than 95 games, and see him fall short of the gaudy personal statistical goals he sets for himself at the beginning of every year. He's not ready to hang up his spikes just yet.

"I think everybody knows I like to play," Abreu said through team interpreter Billy Russo. "I like to play. It doesn't matter if I'm in pain or not. I like to play; I like to be on the field. I'm a little sore right now but at

this moment we just have to wait to see the doctors, wait and see what they say about can I play or not play. I would like to play. I would like to help this team as I always want. But at this moment I can't play right now. We'll see what the doctors say. Once we have that analysis we'll have it from there."

Abreu praised the doctors who attended to him in Cleveland and said he was still on a regimen of pills to address the infection as his soreness persists. As it stands, it would seem like a quick turnaround to get Abreu back to full function if the Sox were fighting for their playoff lives in a division race, rather than acting in accordance to his dedication to the ideal of playing whenever possible.

Abreu is only 10 days removed from his return after a three-week absence for testicular torsion. He was re-activated on Sept. 10 and slapped three soft singles in his first game back, but has mostly hit like a guy trying to hop back into major league action with no rehab stint since then (.125/.222/.125 in six games). In a sport that does not reward pressing or trying extra-hard at the plate, he seems doomed to have an age-31 season that will look like the worst of his major league career on the back of his baseball card (.265/.325/.473).

"In life, sometimes things happen that you don't have control of," Abreu said through Russo. "In those moments you realize the people who really care about you. You appreciate that. I'm not happy in the way the last few weeks have been but it is what it is. I'm just glad everything is going to be right. You just know you are not in charge of this. It's God. We are here just following the things he guides you, he tells you to do. If you understand that, it will be easier to take all these things, to digest all the things happened the last few weeks. I've done it."

The White Sox are still treating this injury as a day-to-day issue, because Abreu's condition is not yet close to making them weigh the merits of having him play again. A relaxed shutdown at the end of the season seems well-deserved for a player who has put together strong seasons during the most lean years of the franchise, and is naturally the reward he would refuse to accept unless they make him. In a week's time it's easy imagine Abreu stumping to play both halves of the doubleheader in Minnesota.

The White Sox should probably stop him. As much as the last two seasons have been a testament to the value of having a top-level professional in the clubhouse practicing his craft just for its own sake, if it's really possible for Abreu to be an impactful presence for future contending teams years from now, a little more rest won't hurt.

Reynaldo López is rolling downhill during his breakout hot streak to close 2018

By James Fegan / The Athletic / September 22, 2018

White Sox catcher Welington Castillo gave a good key for Reynaldo López's recent success before Friday's crosstown opener with the Cubs, following up on his previous comment about the 24-year-old starter throwing with angle. Downward angle, specifically.

"His changeup, his slider, everything plays better when he has that kind of angle," Castillo said. "Every time he's going like up, downhill and (getting) his fingers behind the baseball, that's when he gets that kind of life. Every time he pushes it, his fastball is flat and moving side-to-side because it doesn't have angle."

On cue, López opened the game by pushing three straight four-seam fastballs that swept out of the zone to the arm side. And even though he recovered and found the gusto to drop a 3-2 changeup on Daniel Murphy, the Cubs second baseman was able to sit on it and golf it around the right-field foul pole.

"When he goes side to side instead of up and down, that's when he gets in trouble," Castillo said.

It's good that Castillo provided a note on what López looks like when he gets in trouble since there wasn't another sample for the rest of the afternoon. If shutting out the 108-loss Baltimore Orioles his last time out

wasn't quite enough to get on everyone's radar, seven innings of one-run ball in a 10-4 blowout of the Cubs was his opus to cap off the best six-start stretch of his young career.

"I think the first inning I wasn't creating the arm angle that I always do," López said through team interpreter Billy Russo. "That was something that Wely after that inning, he told me, 'Hey you need to create your angle, you need to make an adjustment because you're getting open when you're throwing the ball.' That was the adjustment that I did and I was effective."

López struck out eight Cubs hitters off 14 swinging strikes, the vast majority of which came after he went up and down the ladder with his mid-90s four-seam fastball. Even just pumping it right down the pipe seemed to work fine against a sleepy Cubs offense, as López maxed out at 97.9 mph even while stretching his career high in innings to 182 2/3 and lowering his ERA back down to 3.94, which he mentioned as a personal goal.

"He had a pretty good fastball today," Kyle Schwarber said. "He was moving it around and getting it up in the zone. He was getting some strikes up there and he just went a little bit higher and he got some swings and misses. You give the kid credit. He went out there and he did it."

I won't say this is what the White Sox pitching staff needed, because they need all their young pitching to develop all the time and give them as many options as possible, so that a year from now they're not touting how their analytical models can predict which 30-year-old pitcher is going to be worth \$180 million through their contract. But with Michael Kopech down, Carson Fulmer ending the season as a Triple-A reliever and Carlos Rodón still searching for the snap he had pre-surgery, López's development looks like the standout story of a rotation that, yes, could certainly use one. Maybe it will be López's locker getting crowded around on the first day of spring training in February now, even if the cameras and radio stations still avoid a young man who uses an interpreter.

This stretch is certainly what López needed. Even by the end of July it was still a mystery why someone who sat 96-98 mph, with an off-speed arsenal that had made him a top-100 prospect before Don Cooper taught him a swing-and-miss slider, wasn't garnering the strikeouts necessary to balance out a fly-ball-heavy approach that was still seeing him threaten four walks per nine innings. It was the sort of road bump that would eventually lead observers to wonder whether the bullpen was a way around it.

Now he's working vertically and living in the zone with 94-97 mph, to the tune of just nine walks in 39 2/3 innings over his last six times out, along with a 1.13 ERA and 43 strikeouts. Ironically, the missed bats that make the whole profile sing are coming after Rick Renteria praised López pregame for no longer trying to muscle and overthrow while gunning for strikeouts, but just executing. Turns out there was another thing to focus on for that.

"Getting around it less — that's all for him, he's simple," Castillo said. "Every time it's up, downhill, his fingers behind the ball, that's when he gets that (snaps fingers) that kind of life. When he tries less, the ball takes off."