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Palka rewards Rodon's gem with walk-off HR

White Sox DH goes yard in 9th after starter twirls 8 shutout frames

By Scott Merkin / MLB.com / August 10, 2018

CHICAGO -- Carlos Rodon is talented.

That much was known about the White Sox left-hander from the first time he threw a pitch as part of the organization. But Rodon also is confident, and most importantly, fully healthy after last September's season-ending arthroscopic shoulder surgery.

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This combination has made him virtually untouchable since the start of July, with a Major League-best 1.27 ERA. Rodon added eight scoreless innings to his ledger during Friday's 1-0, walk-off victory over the Indians at Guaranteed Rate Field, meaning he has allowed just six runs on 22 hits in his last 42 2/3 innings.

Along with healthy, confident and talented, the words "White Sox ace" should be attached to Rodon's resume.

"I feel pretty good," Rodon said. "I might not have all my stuff, but it's working. Just throwing it up over the dish and letting the defense do the work for me. We got through some games, and I've been fortunate.

"Just the confidence is there. Just feel like you belong. and you get your shoulder fixed, and you know there's no issue, nothing wrong. There's no doubt in your mind when you go out and I step on the mound that I'm healthy and I'm coming to compete. It's a big thing for anyone in this game to have that confidence when you step on the field, to say I can play with you guys."

Before further plaudits deservedly are placed upon Rodon, a little credit must be given to Daniel Palka for providing all of Friday's offense. Palka opened the ninth by launching a 1-2 fastball up and out of the zone from reliever Neil Ramirez into the left-field stands for his 18th home run of the season.

Palka had struck out in three previous at-bats before going deep, just as he had struck out four times Sunday in St. Petersburg before beating the Rays with a mammoth homer to center. The best pitch to hit of that final at-bat was a first-pitch fastball fouled off by Palka, but he made do.

"They were getting me on some bad pitches to hit, down, whether it was heaters or breaking balls, early in the game," Palka said. "I just wanted something up in the zone. I didn't think I'd get another one after I missed the first pitch, but he came back to it and I got it."

Trayce Thompson has the only other walk-off homer for Chicago this season, coming on May 3 against the Twins.

Rodon's eight scoreless innings matched a career-high, striking out five and walking two. In his last six starts, Rodon has walked 19 and struck out 36.

Of his 106 pitches Friday, Rodon threw 38 sliders and topped out at 97.4 mph on the fastball, per Statcast™. His only real trouble came in the first inning, when Francisco Lindor and Edwin Encarnacion walked and then executed a double steal with two outs. But Rodon struck out Brandon Guyer to end the frame.

"[Rodon's] stuff was phenomenal," Cleveland manager Terry Francona said. "Like a lot of good pitchers, it seemed like he got stronger as the game went along. His best velocity was late in the game, and he's got a good breaking ball to go along with it. We've seen him pitch good before, but he was on top of his game tonight."

"He's throwing the ball really, really well," White Sox manager Rick Renteria said. "His off-speed, his breaking balls are working well. That front-door action also. He's throwing the ball very, very well. Very focused. He's having fun, he's relaxed."

Cleveland starter Shane Bieber was equally effective, hurling 6 2/3 shutout innings. Bieber struck out eight and walked two, He yielded a leadoff double to Yoan Moncada in the fifth, but struck out Ryan LaMarre and Nicky Delmonico, then retired Yolmer Sanchez on a fly ball to right.

MOMENTS THAT MATTERED

Too much of a sacrifice: LaMarre opened the eighth with a single to right off of reliever Oliver Perez, and Renteria pinch-hit Adam Engel for Delmonico with the purpose of laying down a bunt. Engel tried three and failed three times for a strikeout. LaMarre never moved from first as Jose Abreu flied deep to center against Ramirez to end the inning.

Success by committee: Renteria used three pitches to get through the ninth inning, with Jace Fry facing three batters and eventually earning the victory. With runners on first and second, Fry struck out Yan Gomes as the culmination of an 11-pitch at-bat and then retired Jason Kipnis on a popup to Sanchez.

SOUND SMART

The White Sox are 5-3 in their past eight games and 6-4 in their past 10 against the American League Central.

YOU GOTTA SEE THIS

Sanchez added a new twist to his entertaining walk-off celebration. Instead of dousing himself with the water as he has done in the past, he nailed third base-coach Nick Capra as Palka rounded third.

"That was hilarious," Palka said. "I wasn't sure what he was doing, and right when I noticed he was getting Cappy, I couldn't help but start laughing."

HE SAID IT

"I like being in those moments. The outcome is the outcome, but I definitely enjoy the pressure, so to speak."
-- Palka

UP NEXT

On a day when Jim Thome will be honored for his Hall of Fame induction and Mark Buehrle will be at the ballpark, James Shields takes the mound Saturday at Guaranteed Rate Field for a 6:10 p.m. CT first pitch. Trevor Bauer will get the start for the Indians. Shields is 0-3 with a 4.88 ERA and .264 opponents average over his last four starts, but he's 3-4 with a 2.85 ERA and .195 opponents average in his past 10 starts at home.

Bulldog, Big Foot eager for Players' Weekend

By Scott Merkin / MLB.com / August 10, 2018

CHICAGO -- If Hector Santiago had his druthers, Swiss Army Knife would have been the name on the back of his jersey for Players' Weekend from Aug. 24 to Aug. 26.

That nickname was given to the southpaw by former White Sox manager Robin Ventura, representing the pitching versatility Santiago provides to a staff. That choice was rejected, so Santiago went with Bulldog, a nickname given to him by now third-base coach Joe McEwing while Santiago played for McEwing in the Minors.

"It was supposed to be 'Bulldog' last year and they put 'Bulldoze,'" said a smiling Santiago, who almost went with Chameleon.

The list of White Sox Players' Weekend nicknames shows two Avis for Chicago, in right fielder Avisail Garcia and left-handed reliever Luis Avilan. But there are few slightly deeper stories behind some of the uncommon nicknames.

Big Foot, as an example, was given to Lucas Giolito by his teammate, Tim Anderson.

"Earlier this season, April/May, I was knocking a lot of stuff over being clumsy, and TA started calling me Big Foot," Giolito said. "I was going to go with Gio because that's what everyone calls me."

"But I was kind of thinking I wish I could find something with a little more personality, a little funnier. TA called me Big Foot and I said, 'Hey, let's go with that.'"

Reliever Thyago Vieira opted for Negs, a nickname he had in Brazil. Nate Jones went with Nate's Nation, the collective name for all his family and friends who help the right-hander and his wife, Lacy, with charitable endeavors in the offseason.

"It kind of works for the Players' Weekend, too," Jones said. "It's not just me and my name on the jersey, it's Nate's Nation that's part of me getting here, too."

White Sox get a special Draft appearance

Matt Klug, the White Sox 38th round pick in the 2018 MLB Draft, never will play for the organization. But in visiting Guaranteed Rate Field on Friday, he already feels like part of the family.

"Definitely," Klug said. "Everyone's been saying, 'Anything we can do, just let us know.' They've really welcomed us back there."

Klug, who will be studying business at the University of North Georgia, lost his mother in November 2016 after a 16-year bout with COPD and emphysema. In November 2017, he lost his father after a seven-year battle with cancer. Klug's best childhood friend passed away in November 2015 from an undiscovered brain tumor.

He was truly honored and even speechless when the White Sox drafted him. On Friday, Klug mingled with players, coaches and front office personnel, as well as throwing out one of the ceremonial first pitches. Jose Abreu was the first player Klug got to meet.

"It was super cool," Klug said. "I'm looking up. He's just like a skyscraper."

"The highlight was going back in the clubhouse and meeting a lot of the guys and seeing their pregame routines and getting to talk to them and seeing how they get ready for their game. They're just hanging out like normal dudes."

Klug's life definitely has changed since being drafted, after he was recommended by scout Kevin Burrell to Nick Hostetler, the White Sox director of amateur scouting.

"We've just gotten so many calls and texts. The support has been really crazy," Klug said. "I already had a new outlook on life when my parents passed away, but seeing these big-time players and scouts taking a little story like mine and blowing it up for me, it's just been really cool."

Third to first

- Nicky Delmonico moved to the leadoff spot and Yoan Moncada dropped to eighth in Friday's lineup.

"Trying to give [Moncada] a break, push him back a little bit," White Sox manager Rick Renteria said. "Still need him to be in there, we need him to get his at-bats."

"We're going to give him a little breath as opposed to just sitting him and not playing him. Have him watch other guys go about their business. He's been working hard. Moncy will be back, he'll be back in that slot."

- Jones continues to play catch in working his way back from a right pronator muscle strain that has sidelined him since June 12. He got back to 90 feet on Friday.

- The White Sox Senior RBI team defeated Arizona Friday to win the World Series. Jeffrey Massey (.600) and Michael Bolton (.556) finished second and fifth in average during the tournament, while Kendal Ewell tied for first with nine RBIs.

White Sox win Senior RBI World Series title

By Jarrid Denney / MLB.com / August 10, 2018

MINNEAPOLIS -- Chicago White Sox RBI teammates Kendal Ewell and Angel Cantelo have been locked in a head-to-head competition of who can drive the ball furthest each game all season.

So when Ewell launched a solo homer in the biggest game of the season on Friday, Cantelo knew he needed to one-up his friend.

"As soon as he was coming back into the on-deck circle, I bumped helmets with him and told him, 'Hey, I got you right now,'" Cantelo said.

Sure enough, Cantelo followed with a longball of his own, a rocket over the left-field fence that sent Chicago's dugout into a frenzy and helped spark a four-run inning en route to a 7-4 win over RBI Arizona

in the Reviving Baseball in Inner Cities (RBI) Senior Division championship game at Siebert Field on the University of Minnesota campus.

Chicago head coach Marcus Rodgers took the White Sox's junior squad to the championship game a year ago in Cincinnati, only to fall short in the title game. On Friday, with a large faction of that group now playing for his senior squad (ages 16-18), Chicago scored seven unanswered runs in the final three innings to lock up its first senior title.

"It's huge for the program," Rodgers said. "The White Sox do an amazing job of supporting these kids. They do an amazing job of putting resources into them so that they can be as successful as possible. So it's huge, and kind of our way to say thank you for all of that. We really appreciate the things that go into this."

Arizona's offense had been one of the hottest in the tournament over the past week, and showed no signs of slowing down on Friday. Justin Flebbe hit a two-run double in the third for a 2-0 lead, while Ramon Ramirez Jr. smashed an RBI double and later scored on a wild pitch to make it 4-0 in the fourth.

With their team on the ropes, Ewell and Cantelo delivered back-to-back blasts in the fourth, and Jacob Schroeder and Pierce Jones each drove home runs later in the inning to knot the game at 4.

An inning later, Arizona walked the bases loaded before Brandon Laux scored the go-ahead run on a wild pitch. Cantelo then lifted a sacrifice fly to pad the lead, and Chicago added another run in the seventh.

Arizona sent its Nos. 4-6 batters to the plate in the seventh with hopes of rallying, but Chicago reliever Tommy Washington sat them down in order.

Jeffrey "J.P." Massey tossed 5 2/3 innings and struck out five for Chicago, and Cantelo was named the MVP of the title game, going 1-for-2 with two RBIs.

"It was rough," Cantelo said. "We were down, 4-0, we were kind of dead. All of a sudden, Kendal comes up and hits a home run to right-center, then I hit one to left. From there, it was all confidence. We knew we would start rolling."

For Rodgers, Chicago's title is proof the baseball culture is continuing to grow in the neighborhood in which he grew up. Rodgers spent three years playing college ball at University of Arkansas Pine Bluff, and he then returned home because he wanted to provide kids in his community with lessons he didn't learn until he reached college.

"I grew up in Englewood -- one of the toughest neighborhoods in the country," Rodgers said. "To a two-parent household where my mom and my dad worked hard for myself and my brother, to just put us in positions to be successful. It was paramount for us that we had those opportunities. And I just want to give these other kids those opportunities as well."

Friday's top prospect performers

By Manny Randhawa / MLB.com / August 10, 2018

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

What more can be said about Vladimir Guerrero Jr.? His torrid season continues, and his bat is doing plenty of talking. The 19-year-old Blue Jays prospect, ranked the No. 1 prospect in baseball, homered in his third straight game during Triple-A Buffalo's 5-4 victory over Toledo. He's hitting .433 (13-for-30) with two doubles and the trio of homers since his promotion from Double-A New Hampshire.

Guerrero, son of Hall of Fame outfielder Vladimir Guerrero, slashed .402/.449/.671 with 14 homers in 61 games for New Hampshire, and is continuing his rapid ascension toward the Majors.

Other top prospect performances from Friday's action:

- Twins No. 2 prospect Alex Kirilloff, the No. 30 overall prospect in baseball, went 3-for-3 with a double and sacrifice fly in Class A Advanced Fort Myers' 6-4 victory over Florida. The 20-year-old right fielder is hitting .371/.394/.543 in 43 games since his promotion from Cedar Rapids, where he slashed .333/.391/.607 with 13 homers in 65 games.

- White Sox No. 5 prospect Dylan Cease, the No. 44 prospect overall, gave up a run on two hits and struck out six over 5 2/3 innings during Double-A Birmingham's 18-2 rout of Montgomery. He did walk five batters, though he worked around his control issues to lower his ERA to 1.94 over eight starts since his promotion from Class A Advanced Winston-Salem, where he posted a 2.89 ERA over 13 starts.

In the same game, Chicago's No. 8 prospect, Zack Collins, capped a huge performance with two homers in the ninth inning, a solo shot and later a grand slam. Overall, the catcher was 3-for-6 with six RBIs, and is hitting .246 with 14 homers in 105 games.

- A pair of Astros prospects starred for Class A Advanced Buies Creek as Seth Beer (No. 7) and J.J. Matijevic (No. 20) each homered in a 6-4 victory over Frederick.

Beer, whom the Astros selected 28th overall in this year's Draft, went 2-for-4 with his first homer at the Class A Advanced level, and is 9-for-34 (.265) since his promotion from Class A Quad Cities, where he posted a .934 OPS in 29 games.

Matijevic belted a two-run homer in the first inning for his 15th of the season. The left fielder has homered in four of his last five games and is hitting .261/.330/.510 in 69 games for Buies Creek this season.

- T.J. Zeuch, the Blue Jays' No. 16 prospect, tossed six scoreless innings in Double-A New Hampshire's 4-1 victory over Richmond. He yielded four hits, walking none and striking out five to lower his ERA to 3.12 in 17 starts for the Fisher Cats this season. Over his past two outings, the right-hander has turned in 12 scoreless frames.

- Brewers No. 3 prospect Corey Ray continued his power surge at the plate with his third homer in five games during Double-A Biloxi's 3-2 win over Tennessee. The center fielder has hit 25 homers in 113 games for Biloxi this season, after hitting a career-high seven in 112 games for Class A Advanced Carolina in 2017.

- Michael Rucker, the Cubs' No. 13 prospect, threw six strong innings in Double-A Tennessee's 3-2 loss to Biloxi. He gave up a run on one hit, walking one and fanning four. He's yielded just three runs over his last three starts (1.59 ERA). Overall, he's posted a 3.12 ERA in 22 starts this season.

- Mets prospects Franklyn Kilome (No. 5) and Adrian Hernandez (No. 14) turned in strong performances, with Kilome striking out 10 over 6 2/3 innings for Double-A Binghamton, and Hernandez going 3-for-4 with a homer -- his third in four games -- in the DSL.

Kilome gave up two runs on six hits, walking two in the 5-2 loss to Reading. In three starts for Binghamton, the right-hander has a 2.95 ERA. Prior to being traded from the Phillies in the deal that sent Asdrubal Cabrera to Philadelphia, Kilome had a 4.24 ERA in 19 starts for Reading.

- Rays No. 22 prospect Tobias Myers tossed seven scoreless frames in Class A Bowling Green's 2-0 loss to West Michigan. He gave up four hits, walked two and struck out six, and has a 0.96 ERA (three earned runs in 28 innings) over his last four starts. Overall, the 20-year-old right-hander owns a 3.50 ERA in 20 appearances (18 starts) this season.

- Twins No. 19 prospect Luke Raley went 3-for-5 with a triple, homer and three RBIs in Double-A Chattanooga's 8-2 victory over Jackson. The outfielder/first baseman is hitting .273/.349/.481 with 19 homers across two levels this season, including eight games at Double-A over which he's batting .250 (7-for-28) with a pair of homers.

Finch headlines Women in Sports event

By Scott Merkin / MLB.com / August 10, 2018

CHICAGO -- Somewhere in the crowd of 25 girls at Guaranteed Rate Field's Conference and Learning Center Friday night could have been the next Jennie Finch.

And if they don't end up as one of the most accomplished softball players of all time, then maybe they will be part of a Major League Baseball team's front office, such as White Sox senior director of Minor League Operations Grace Zwit. Let's also not forget the coaching avenue, represented Friday by Patty Gasso, the head softball coach for the University of Oklahoma.

All three were part of the private, pregame event called "Game Changers: Women in Sports." The event featured a discussion and Q&A session, where questions about role models and getting started in their specific field were expertly asked by young women who participate in the White Sox Jersey program and Bulls/Sox Academy programs.

"It's so important and something that I absolutely adore," said Finch, who was set to run her softball camp Saturday for 200 kids from more than 20 states. "Empowering, giving them strength and courage to face not only the athletic field but life in general, and share some of the stories we went through and encourage them, give them a boost and just be a testament of, 'You can do anything.'"

"There's so much opportunity through sport, either on the field or not on the field. Gender doesn't play a part in that."

Game Changers is a signature event series for the White Sox diversity and inclusion campaign called "BasebALL: One Game for All." The campaign emphasizes the importance of being kind to others, accepting individual differences and preventing bullying among youth through sports.

The opportunity for young women today is different from when Finch started out, on her way to becoming an Olympic softball gold medalist, an All-American pitcher and an MLB youth softball ambassador.

"I never got to see it on TV," Finch said. "These girls are growing up watching college softball on their TV every weekend during the season. They are that much further ahead. They realize they can do anything. They can Google any sport and see a female athlete represent that sport. I never had that opportunity growing up."

"Golf, swimming, anything across the board. I saw a woman on TV and it was, 'I'm locked in and I don't care what sport it is.' There's one after another when they turn the channel. It's exciting for them to know there are no limits."

Daniel Palka's power — and a knack for the clutch — could make him one of White Sox rebuild's biggest surprises

By Vinnie Duber / NBC Sports Chicago / August 10, 2018

As Rick Hahn has said throughout the White Sox ongoing rebuilding process, rebuilds are full of surprises.

Count Daniel Palka among the biggest, at least during this developmental campaign.

The White Sox plucked Palka from the Minnesota Twins organization last November, and nine months later he ranks second on the team in home runs and has hit some of the season's most dramatic dingers in recent weeks.

His pinch-hit blast beat the Kansas City Royals on Aug. 2. His ninth-inning homer beat the Tampa Bay Rays three days later. And Friday night, he broke a scoreless tie in the bottom of the ninth with a walk-off round-tripper to beat the Cleveland Indians.

Palka's power is obvious. His knack for the clutch is becoming more and more apparent, too.

"He's had big moments throughout the time he's been here with us," manager Rick Renteria said after the game. "In this instance, his last at-bat of the game. But he continues to go out there, he has fun, he wants to do damage. And he got a good pitch that he could handle and did what he needed to do."

"I like being in those moments," Palka said. "The outcome is the outcome, but I definitely enjoy the pressure, so to speak."

While it's much too early to finalize who will be a part of the roster the next time the White Sox are ready to contend for a championship, Palka is doing enough in the present to at least stay in that conversation. Not all of his numbers are demanding he get etched into those future lineups — he entered this weekend's series against the division-leading Indians with a .238 batting average and a .281 on-base percentage — but his 18 home runs rank just two behind team-leader Jose Abreu's 20.

As the game's pendulum swings further and further toward the home run, though, there's always a place for power. Especially if that power is the difference between a win and a loss, like Palka's has been three times in this just week-and-a-half-old month of August.

Will Palka end up this rebuild's biggest surprise, a diamond in the rough stolen from a division rival? It's too early to answer that question. But considering he didn't make the team to start the season, it's safe to say he's been one of this campaign's biggest surprises.

"I think he's doing a great job, obviously," Renteria said. "For him, he's had a lot of big moments, big at-bats. He goes out, has three strikeouts or whatever, comes down to the last at-bat. It's not the first time, either. He's given himself a chance to do that a couple times now.

"You've got to give the front office, Rick and all these guys, credit for doing what they do in terms of trying to identify guys. (Palka's) taken advantage of the opportunity and done a great job."

Ace of the future? Carlos Rodon is pitching like an ace of the present

By Vinnie Duber / NBC Sports Chicago / August 10, 2018

With the focus on the future on the South Side, it's easy to get caught up in who could one day lead the team's starting rotation the next time it's ready to contend for a championship.

But it's also becoming increasingly easy to see that the best candidate might be the guy anchoring this rotation right now.

There's plenty of development left to occur before that future starting staff is set. Michael Kopech, Dylan Cease, Dane Dunning, Alec Hansen and a few other names haven't hit the majors yet. Lucas Giolito and Reynaldo Lopez are hardly finished products at the big league level.

But Carlos Rodon is pitching like one of baseball's best right now.

Rodon has been outstanding since the beginning of July, a six-start span in which he's posted a 1.27 ERA, the best in the bigs since July 1. Friday night, he was darn near untouchable against the division-leading Cleveland Indians. He scattered four hits and a pair of walks over eight shutout innings, with the Tribe counting just a two-on, two-out situation in the first inning as their only real scoring chance against him.

It was the fourth time in Rodon's last five starts that he pitched into the eighth inning.

"I feel pretty good. I might not have all my stuff, but it's working. Just throwing it up over the dish and letting the defense do the work for me," Rodon said after the game. "We got through some games, and I've been fortunate.

"The confidence is there. Just feel like you belong. And you get your shoulder fixed, and you know there's no issue, nothing wrong. There's no doubt in your mind when you go out and I step on the mound that I'm healthy and I'm coming to compete."

Rodon is answering the questions he carried into the season, when an arm injury — in this case, shoulder surgery last fall — pushed his season debut back to June for the second year in a row. There was a mystery about whether he could remain healthy, about what kind of pitcher he'd be after back-to-back significant injuries.

Well he's been fantastic over the last month and a half, a string of consistently great performances that have sparked the thought that he could live up to the very high expectations that came with being the No. 3 overall selection in the 2014 draft.

"He's throwing the ball really, really well," manager Rick Renteria said. "He's keeping the opponents to minimizing anything they can do. His stuff is really good. ... For him, he's just pitching. He tries to outduel his opponent, and I think he's been executing fairly well and doing a nice job."

The question of "future ace" has been asked in regards to Rodon as well as Lopez and Giolito this season as their developments continue on a start-by-start basis on the big league stage. But only one of those guys is looking like an ace of the present.

"You guys have asked me about Lopey, Lucas, Los," Renteria said. "The type of stuff and the way that they command on the days that they command, like he did today, yeah for sure (he could be an ace). We sent him out there in the eighth, this was his game pretty much. We ended up starting to think about helping him out, but pretty much he ended up taking control of the landscape today and doing what he wanted to do against a pretty good team."

This season has had its ups and downs for nearly every one of these pitchers in the mix for future rotation spots. Rodon, though, is on a huge upswing right now. And he's looking more and more ace-like with each outing.

Yoan Moncada moved down in White Sox lineup as he tries to shake second-half slump

By Vinnie Duber / NBC Sports Chicago / August 10, 2018

The White Sox quest to cure the struggling Yoan Moncada has reached the "move him down in the batting order" phase.

Rick Renteria moved Moncada out of the leadoff spot, his typical place against right-handed pitching, to the No. 8 spot for the start of this weekend's series against the visiting Cleveland Indians. The manager said he'll have to see how things play out before determining whether this is a one-day strategy or one that will last deeper into the future.

Moncada is no stranger to not batting leadoff, as he is usually swapped out for Tim Anderson when the White Sox face off against a left-handed starter. But this move is somewhat significant in that it's not a reaction to Moncada's drastic righty-lefty splits but an attempt to allow Moncada to right the ship amid some deep struggles at the plate against both kinds of pitchers.

Heading into Friday's game, he led baseball with 163 strikeouts and owned a .218 batting average on the season, a number dragged down by a woeful .122 mark to begin the second half.

Renteria talked recently about perhaps giving Moncada a day off to rest up and recharge a bit, though this seems to be the final manifestation of that suggestion, one that allows the still-developing Moncada to keep getting big league experience in his first full big league season while not feeling the need to produce specific outcomes as his team's first hitter.

"Trying to give Moncy a break, push him back a little bit," Renteria explained before Friday's game. "Still need him to be in there, we need him to get his at-bats. We're going to give him a little breath as opposed to just sitting him and not playing him. Have him watch other guys go about their business. He's been working hard. Moncy will be back, he'll be back in that slot.

"It's a part of the ability for us to be able to have him continue to have at-bats, not put him in the situation where he feels he has to do something by leading off. I think he's been working extremely hard. Obviously, he hasn't had a whole lot of success over the last 10 days, maybe two weeks. Maybe this will just push him back and give him a breath."

Moncada's struggles, which haven't been strictly confined to the handful of games since the All-Star break, have been a big topic of discussion surrounding this White Sox season, perhaps the biggest. As a guy who made his South Side debut last season after being dubbed the No. 1 prospect in baseball, the expectations were big when the campaign began. Obviously, the production has not lived up to those expectations.

But this is still a 23-year-old in his first full major league season, meaning that these struggles should not at all be considered a representation of what Moncada's entire pro career will end up looking like. Renteria has continued to praise Moncada's eye at the plate and his knowledge of the strike zone, and it's those aspects — ones that help make his future so promising — that seem to be leading to one of the most maligned trends of his season: strikeouts looking. Perhaps moving Moncada out of the leadoff spot could have a beneficial impact on how he approaches his at-bats, allowing him to be more aggressive, as he and Renteria have talked about him needing to do.

"He's got a good eye, works very well in the strike zone," Renteria said. "I think we've been talking a lot about the strikeouts, making sure he doesn't get outside of the zone. Don't want him chasing pitches, but he's understanding that guys are doing certain things with him and there are going to be times when he's got to fight pitches.

"Like I said, he's got a really good eye and it's just a matter of him continuing to work and develop that skill set and allow him to move forward."

The intense focus on Moncada's struggles this season has been a byproduct of fans and observers watching his continued development on a daily basis as the White Sox rebuild moves along. As general manager Rick Hahn has often said, the team's young players are not finished products, even though they have moved from the minor leagues to the major leagues. It's just that some of their growing pains are happening on the big league stage.

Renteria is trying this latest strategy to help Moncada improve his results. Time to see if it works.

Carlos Rodon's gem sets stage for Daniel Palka's walk-off homer in 9th to give White Sox 1-0 win over Indians

By Phil Thompson / Chicago Tribune / August 10, 2018

Now there's no question: Carlos Rodon is baseball's best pitcher — at least if you're counting since the beginning of July.

The left-hander threw a sparkling eight scoreless innings during the White Sox's 1-0 win against the Indians on Friday night, punctuated by Daniel Palka's first career walk-off homer. Palka gave Guaranteed Rate Field fireworks, but it was Rodon throwing fire.

Rodon looked strong throughout, still comfortable throwing 97 mph fastballs to Michael Brantley in the eighth. Most of his trouble came in the first, when he walked two.

"Just took a little bit to settle in the first," Rodon said. "Tough at-bat from (Francisco) Lindor to lead off. Thought I punched him out, but it was a ball. ... And then another tough at-bat from (Edwin) Encarnacion. Luckily we got through it and out of that inning."

Rodón was just as effective with breaking balls, particularly sliders, his go-to pitch on all five strikeouts.

“He’s throwing the ball really, really well,” manager Rick Renteria said. “He’s ... minimizing anything (the opponents) can do. His stuff is really good. He was hitting 96, 97 today again. His off-speed, his breaking balls are working well. That front-door action also. Very focused.”

It doesn’t hurt that Rodón has put his recovery from offseason shoulder surgery further in the past.

READ MORE: Daniel Palka on Yolmer Sánchez’s Gatorade prank: ‘That was hilarious’ »

“I feel pretty good,” he said. “I might not have all my stuff, but it’s working.”

Friday’s outing dropped his ERA since July 1 to 1.28, eclipsing the Giants’ Dereck Rodríguez (1.50) to lead the majors in that span.

So does this mean he’s the Sox’s best pitcher? Earlier in the season, the answer was Reynaldo López without question. The fact it’s up for debate now is a good problem.

“You guys have asked me about Lopey, Lucas (Giolito), ‘Los,” Renteria said. “The type of stuff and the way that they command on the days that they command, like he did today, yeah, for sure.”

“We sent him out there in the eighth, this was his game pretty much. We ended up starting to think about helping him out, but he ended up taking control of the landscape today and doing what he wanted to do against a pretty good team.”

Rodón said the staff feeds off one another, regardless of whose turn it is on top.

“It rubs off on other guys when a guy throws well,” he said. “You take that as motivation. You don’t want to be the guy who screws it up. I build off of it when a guy has a good start.”

Yoán Moncada, meanwhile, had a moral victory of sorts. Or perhaps a morale victory is more like it. Moncada walked and doubled, though he did strike out, bumping his MLB-leading total to 164.

Like Rodón, Moncada has been acclaimed as one of the foundational pieces in the Sox rebuild, but the second baseman had been scuffling lately, mired in a .122 slump over his previous 19 games. The primary leadoff man was dropped to eighth in Friday’s lineup for the first time since the Sox acquired the former Red Sox prospect in the Chris Sale trade in 2016.

Strikeouts have been a problem all season. At times he has been too discriminating, electing to take some hittable pitches.

Before the game, Renteria said, “I don’t think there’s pressure for him” in the leadoff role, but he hoped the move down the lineup would give Moncada a different perspective.

“Trying to give Moncy a break, push him back a little bit,” Renteria said. “Still need him to be in there; we need him to get his at-bats. We’re going to give him a little breath as opposed to just sitting him and not playing him. Have him watch other guys go about their business ... not put him in the situation where he feels he has to do something by leading off.”

In Moncada’s first at-bat against starter Shane Bieber, caution served him well. He took three balls in the upper inside corner, his weakest area, and walked on a high fastball over the middle.

Having built some confidence, Moncada cranked a liner off the right-field wall for a double, just his third extra-base hit this month and second in as many games. However, he struck out in his next plate appearance, looking at Oliver Pérez’s sinker.

Moncada eventually will return to the leadoff spot, Renteria said. Nick Delmonico handled Friday night's duties and went 0-for-3 with two strikeouts.

Sox hitters overall couldn't do much with Bieber, who struck out eight in 62/3 innings and gave up three hits.

Palka struck out three times against him but launched Neil Ramirez's 1-2 fastball to left field leading off the ninth.

"I was looking up," Palka said. "They were getting me on some bad pitches to hit down, whether it was heaters or breaking balls early in the game. I just wanted something up in the zone.

"I didn't think I'd get another one after I missed the first pitch, but he came back to it and I got it."

Daniel Palka on Yolmer Sanchez's Gatorade prank: 'That was hilarious'

By Phil Thompson / Chicago Tribune / August 10, 2018

Daniel Palka's first walk-off home run Friday against the Indians not only capped a night of milestones for the White Sox, it set up Yolmer Sanchez, Chicago's clown prince of baseball, for more of his Gatorade histrionics.

This time, though, Sanchez didn't pour the sports-drink bucket on himself to celebrate a teammate's game-winning play. The "lucky" recipient was third-base coach Nick Capra, who appeared never to see it coming.

"That was hilarious," Palka said. "I wasn't sure what he was doing, and right when I noticed he was getting Cappy, I couldn't help but start laughing as I was rounding third."

Traditionally, the player who homered is supposed to be doused as he crosses the plate, but teammates and baseball fans have gotten a kick out of Sanchez's twist on tradition.

He grabbed national attention May 3 when he dumped a water cooler on himself after Trayce Thompson's walk-off homer against the Twins. Later that month, he video-bombed Wellington Castillo's interview by stepping in front of the camera and pouring more Gatorade on himself.

Meanwhile, Palka still got his garden-variety shower Friday: Teammates mobbed him at the plate.

When umpires make controversial calls, they need to be accountable

By Paul Sullivan / Chicago Tribune / August 10, 2018

After greeting a pool reporter knocking on the door of the umpires room Friday afternoon at Wrigley Field, Bill Miller explained his call ruling Willson Contreras out for interference after Contreras had reached on Anthony Rendon's errant throw in the seventh inning of the Cubs-Nationals game.

A similar scenario played out Monday at Guaranteed Rate Field, where I knocked on the umpires room door and asked Angel Hernandez about a controversial call he made the day before on a game-ending strike to Anthony Rizzo.

Miller explained his call was correct and the poor throw to first was irrelevant. Cubs manager Joe Maddon had argued it was a bad rule because the throw was so poor the first baseman would not have caught it, comparable to interference being called on an uncatchable ball in the NFL.

"It doesn't have anything to do with the throw," Miller said. "It has to be a decent throw — that throw was borderline. If (Rendon) would've thrown the ball over everybody's head because the guy was running inside, and he said, 'I had to throw it over his head,' it doesn't (matter).

“(Contreras) did not interfere with that guy’s ability to catch the ball if (Rendon) throws it high. As long as the throw is somewhere in the same neighborhood, the (runner) has to be in the lane.”

As for Hernandez, he admitted his call was incorrect and Rizzo should’ve been awarded first on ball four.

“It was a cut fastball, 3 inches off the plate,” Hernandez said. “Rizzo was right. I’m not perfect.”

No matter what anyone thought of the calls or of the umpires in question, the fact Miller and Hernandez made themselves available to answer questions deserves praise. Fans want to know why calls are made, and umpires should be accountable.

Rizzo — who went on an extended rant after the call went against him, calling it “unacceptable” — said Friday he appreciated that Hernandez looked at the video and admitted Rizzo was right.

“I have tremendous respect for the umps,” Rizzo said Friday. “They’re not perfect, we know that. I like Angel and get along with him great.

“I think it’s really cool he did that. He didn’t have to talk, didn’t have to say anything. They’re not required to do that. It shows he’s a good person. I don’t ever want to cause controversy.”

Contrast these two moments with one that occurred June 23 in Cincinnati after plate umpire Greg Gibson tossed Cubs bench coach Brandon Hyde, who was trying to protect Contreras. It turned out Contreras had asked for a timeout while batting and drew Gibson’s ire for not saying “thank you” before he got back in the box.

“You’re welcome,” Gibson replied sarcastically. Contreras, who hails from Venezuela, did not know how to interpret the remark, but he understood the tone, leading to the fireworks and Hyde’s ejection.

Gibson was gone by the time Contreras explained what happened, so a few reporters went to the umpires room the next morning for a comment. Gibson said he was busy getting ready for the game and declined to speak, then complained to the Reds media relations department that reporters had knocked on his door “without an escort.”

Most umpires understand when they talk to the media, they’re actually talking to fans. A few don’t seem to think they have to answer to anyone.

It’s a problem the umpires union should fix, and the sooner, the better.

End of an era?

With a career-high 5.73 ERA, the Mariners’ Felix Hernandez has been sent to the bullpen.

“King Felix” is a six-time All-Star and won the 2010 American League Cy Young Award but has fallen on hard times at the still-young age of 32. The Mariners are in contention for a wild-card spot and can’t afford to keep running him out there, whether he is the king or not.

“It’s never easy, but hopefully he takes it the right way,” manager Scott Servais told reporters. “He’ll get a chance to pitch at some point down there, and maybe he can work his way back into the rotation. We’ll see. He’ll let us know on that.”

Telling a legend he’s being demoted is one of the toughest things for a manager to do. Back in 1997, Cubs manager Jim Riggleman said Earl Weaver once told him “the toughest thing he ever had to do was pinch hit for Brooks Robinson.”

Riggleman wound up benching 37-year-old Ryne Sandberg in late May that year when the future Hall of Famer was hitting .207.

“He was a complete professional about it,” Riggles said after the move. “He said, ‘I’m for whatever it takes to get us going.’ ”

Hernandez had not addressed the decision as of Friday.

Tough loss

The Dodgers lost closer Kenley Jansen for most of the stretch run after he was hospitalized Thursday with an irregular heartbeat.

There’s no concrete timeline, but the loss of Jansen is a blow to the Dodgers’ chances of winning the National League West. Naturally, the pennant race is secondary in comparison with Jansen’s heart problem.

“His health obviously is most important,” manager Dave Roberts said Friday.

According to the Los Angeles Times, the Dodgers plan to use a bullpen by committee until Jansen returns, most likely leaning on Scott Alexander and Kenta Maeda.

Three up

Matt Carpenter: Cardinals’ mediocrity only thing preventing “Carp” from MVP consideration. Entered weekend leading majors with 12 homers, .873 slugging percentage in second half.

Nathan Eovaldi: Red Sox starter has been best trade deadline acquisition so far with 0.43 ERA in first three starts of second half, walking only one and striking out 17 in 21 innings.

Adam Engel: White Sox center fielder hasn’t established himself as a major-league hitter, but robbing Yankees of home runs with leaping grabs on back-to-back nights was impressive.

Three down

Kyle Barraclough: Strong first half goes down the drain for Marlins reliever with 22.24 ERA and three blown saves in first seven appearances of second half.

Yoan Moncada: Regressing even further with .122 average since All-Star break, worst in majors, along with 37.5 percent strikeout rate. And his 16 errors are worst among MLB second basemen.

Rangers: The hotter it gets in Texas, the farther the ball flies. Staff had posted 6.07 ERA in second half entering weekend while serving up 39 home runs in 20 games.

The list

RBI with runners in scoring position (through Thursday)

Javier Baez 65

J.D. Martinez 64

Xander Bogaerts 61

Khris Davis 57

Edwin Encarnacion 57

Fact check

With 25 home runs and 19 stolen bases, Javier Baez could join Sammy Sosa as the only Cubs in the exclusive 30/30 club. Sosa accomplished the feat in 1993 (33 homers, 36 steals) and ’95 (36 and 34). Baez

already is the third Cub with at least 25 homers, 30 doubles, five triples and 15 stolen bases in a season, joining Ryne Sandberg (1985 and '92) and Alfonso Soriano (2007).

Former White Sox pitcher Esteban Loaiza pleads guilty in drug case

By Tom Musick / Sun-Times / August 10, 2018

Former White Sox pitcher Esteban Loaiza pleaded guilty to federal drug charges and faces a minimum of 10 years and a maximum of life in prison.

Loaiza, 46, was arrested in February after authorities found 44 pounds of cocaine hidden in a vehicle at his townhouse near San Diego. Investigators said Loaiza drove across the border into Mexico on the day of his arrest.

In 14 seasons, Loaiza went 126-114 with a 4.65 ERA and earned more than \$43 million. He won 30 games in parts of two seasons with the Sox, including a remarkable 2003 campaign when he went 21-9 with a 2.90 ERA and was selected to his first All-Star Game.

His sentencing is scheduled for Nov. 2.

Rick Renteria drops Yoan Moncada to 8th in batting order

By Tom Musick / Sun-Times / August 10, 2018

Yoan Moncada had to take a long glance before finding his name listed eighth in the lineup Friday before the Sox' 1-0 victory against the visiting Indians.

It marked the lowest spot in the batting order for Moncada since he joined the Sox last season. The 23-year-old primarily has led off, but a prolonged slump prompted Rick Renteria to make a change.

Moncada (1-for-2, one walk) has 164 strikeouts, most in the majors, and is hitting a paltry .132 (10-for-76) since the All-Star break.

"Trying to give [Moncada] a break, push him back a little bit," Renteria said. "Still need him to be in there. We need him to get his at-bats. We're going to give him a little breath as opposed to just sitting him and not playing him. Have him watch other guys go about their business."

The strategy paid off in Moncada's first at-bat, when he drew a walk on five pitches. That gave him 50 walks. His on-base percentage is now .302.

The Sox want Moncada to be aggressive at the plate without being reckless.

"There are times and situations where pitches are manageable, they're hittable, you can do things with them," Renteria said. "They don't have to be completely in the box, they just need to be in a manageable area. The one thing we don't want him to do, like all our hitters, we don't want them to be chasing balls in the dirt, getting so far outside the zone that it compromises their good eye."

Nicky Delmonico (0-for-3, two strikeouts) led off for the second time in his career.

Special day

Matt Klug visited Guaranteed Rate Field for the first time since the Sox selected him in the 38th round out of Brookwood (Georgia) High School in the 2018 draft.

Klug was far from a typical draft pick. He lost his mother in 2016 and his father one year later, and his high school coach nominated him for a local Positive Athlete award because of the way he inspired his teammates.

Sox scout Kevin Burrell suggested the selection of Klug, who will attend the University of North Georgia. He plans to study business and hopes to work in baseball.

Klug chatted with players before the game and threw out the ceremonial first pitch. His life has changed since being drafted.

"We've just gotten so many calls and texts," Klug said. "The support has been really crazy. I already had a new outlook on life when my parents passed away, but seeing these big-time players and scouts taking a little story like mine and blowing it up for me, it's just been really cool."

Rodon dazzles before Palka's walk-off blast for Sox

By Tom Musick / Sun-Times / August 10, 2018

When Carlos Rodon is pitching well, batters often fail to hide their frustration.

Just ask Omar Narvaez. The Sox catcher squats a few feet away from off-balance opponents as they struggle with Rodon's mix of fastballs, sliders and changeups.

"When he's going that good, I think everybody gets pissed," Narvaez said.

As of late, the 25-year-old southpaw has been better than good. He maintained his torrid stretch with eight scoreless innings against the first-place Indians on Friday. He scattered four hits, walked two and struck out five.

Daniel Palka provided the heroics with a walk-off home run to lift the Sox to a 1-0 win. Teammates rushed the field to celebrate with Palka, while reliever Jace Fry enjoyed his first career win.

Yet Rodon provided the most important storyline as he matched the longest scoreless outing of his career.

In his last six outings, Rodon is 2-0 with a 1.27 ERA (six earned runs in 42%⁰⁰ innings). He has recorded a quality start in each of those performances and boasts a 2.61 ERA overall.

"The confidence is there," Rodon said. "You feel like you belong. You get your shoulder fixed, and nothing is wrong, there's no issue. I think there's no doubt in your mind when you go out there and step on the mound, or when I step on the mound, that I'm healthy and I'm coming to compete."

Teammates have taken notice. Veteran starter James Shields smiled when asked to explain Rodon's hot streak.

"You're trying to figure out why he's been dominant?" Shields said. "Have you been watching the games? For me, he's not in that 'I'm going to strike out everybody' mode. He's staying aggressive, he's around the plate, and he's mixing his pitches up. He's becoming a pitcher."

It is a path Shields knows well. Many young pitchers arrive to the majors trying to blow everyone away, but the best ones mature and discover the importance of quick outs.

When it's time to rear back for a necessary strikeout, Rodon can do that, too.

"You're never going to take that out of him," Shields said. "It's just a matter of when the right time is to go try to strike somebody out, and when is the time to try to get a ground ball and a quick out. His mentality is to go as deep as he possibly can in the game, and that's what he's done over the past five or six starts."

Rodon can be fiery on the mound but has learned to harness his emotions.

The latest evidence came in the first inning when he walked Francisco Lindor on a borderline call. Rodon glared at the grass before collecting himself. He walked Edwin Encarnacion three batters later but escaped the jam with a strikeout.

Those were Rodon's only two walks of the night.

"He's throwing the ball very, very well," manager Rick Renteria said. "Very focused. He's having fun. He's relaxed."

Shields sees Rodon transforming into an elite pitcher. He often scrutinizes the game with his younger teammate.

"We talk a lot," Shields said. "We're on the bench in between starts, and he's asking me stuff, I'm asking him stuff, and we just communicate. In certain situations, we may be on the bench and say, 'What would you throw in this situation here?' Things like that, just kind of getting us to think a little bit."

Meanwhile, Narvaez purposely has avoided Rodon lately.

"Right now, I don't even talk to him just because I don't want to get him to overthink," he said. "If I see him struggle, then I'll talk to him."

Narvaez making most of opportunity with White Sox

By Scot Gregor / Daily Herald / August 10, 2018

Major-league opportunities come in many forms.

Injuries are a common way for young players to get a shot, and trades have also opened many a door.

For Omar Narvaez, it was a suspension.

On May 24, Welington Castillo was banned 80 games after testing positive for performance enhancing drugs.

Castillo was the Chicago White Sox's starting catcher, and Narvaez was playing sparingly in a backup role.

That quickly changed.

"He stepped up his game," Sox general manager Rick Hahn said of Narvaez. "It's been a bit of a bright side of a lousy situation."

While 2016 first-round draft choice Zack Collins and Seby Zavala are still viewed as the White Sox's catching duo of the future, it's hard to overlook Narvaez's success this season.

Heading into Friday night's game against the Indians, Narvaez ranked first among qualified major-league hitters with a .396 (38-for-96) batting average since June 7.

The 26-year-old catcher raised his overall average from .170 to .288 during the surge.

"I feel pretty comfortable," Narvaez said. "Getting more game time, I'm seeing the ball way better and I feel like I'm on time now."

Not know for his power, Narvaez did hit 3 home runs in 49 at-bats in July, showing he does have some pop in the bat.

"I would like to hit for more power, and maybe it comes with time," Narvaez said. "The more I'm playing, the better it gets. But I don't really think about home runs. I focus on hitting the ball well and wherever it goes, it goes. I just try to get hits and help the team however I can."

Castillo is eligible to be activated from the suspended list at the end of the month, and he is signed through next season.

It remains to be seen how much playing time Castillo gets when he returns to the roster, but Narvaez has shown he deserves to be in the White Sox's lineup on a regular basis.

"I think he's fallen into a groove," manager Rick Renteria said. "As a hitter, you can do that. You start seeing the ball very well and he's always had a very good eye. He's had more opportunity and has been able to put it to use."

Rodon, Palka spark White Sox to 1-0 win over Indians

By Scot Gregor / Daily Herald / August 10, 2018

Carlos Rodon and Daniel Palka were quite the tag team Friday night.

Facing the first-place Indians at Guaranteed Rate Field, Rodon delivered his sixth straight quality start, scattering 4 hits and 2 walks over 8 innings.

With the game still scoreless in the ninth, Palka led off the inning with an opposite-field home run to left field, giving the Chicago White Sox a 1-0 win.

Over his last 6 outings, Rodon has a 1.28 ERA, the lowest in the major leagues over that stretch.

"I feel pretty good," said Rodon, who continues to perform like the Sox's ace of the future. "I might not have all my stuff, but it's working. Just throwing it up over the dish and letting the defense do the work for me. We got through some games and I've been fortunate."

Rodon survived a rocky first inning, when he allowed both walks and the Indians stole 2 bases.

"It just took a little bit to settle in the first," the 25-year-old lefty said. "Luckily we got through it and out of that inning."

Rodon breezed through 8, tying a career high, but Cleveland starter Shane Bieber matched him for 6 $\frac{2}{3}$ innings and the Indians' bullpen held the White Sox scoreless until Palka connected on Neil Ramirez's 96-mph fastball that was high and outside.

"I was looking up," said Palka, who struck out in his first 3 at-bats. "They were getting me on some bad pitches to hit down, whether it was heaters or breaking balls, early in the game. I just wanted something up in the zone. I didn't think I'd get another one after I missed the first pitch, but (Ramirez) came back to it and I got it."

Making the most of a rare win against Cleveland, Yolmer Sanchez dumped a bucket of Gatorade on third-base coach Nick Capra as Palka rounded the bag.

"That was hilarious," Palka said. "I wasn't sure what he was doing, and right when I noticed he was getting Cappy, I couldn't help but start laughing."

Dropping down:

Mired in a 2-for-29 slump with 18 strikeouts, Yoan Moncada was dropped to No. 8 from the leadoff spot Friday night.

"Trying to give him a break, push him back a little bit," manager Rick Renteria said. "He still need him to be in there; we need him to get his at-bats. We're going to give him a little breath as opposed to just sitting him and not playing him."

Moncada responded to the move, going 1-for-2 with a walk. Nicky Delmonico batted leadoff and went 0-for-3.

Collins tees off:

Catcher Zack Collins hit 2 home in the ninth inning for Class AA Birmingham in an 18-2 win at Montgomery Friday night.

The second homer was a grand slam. Collins was the Sox's first-round draft pick in 2016.

Carlos Rodón doesn't have all the stuff working, just all the confidence and results

By James Fegan / The Athletic / August 10, 2018

As one of the foremost Carlos Rodón experts and advocates, Omar Narváez was not falling over himself with astonishment about his battery mate taking a no-hit bid into the sixth inning in Anaheim last month.

"I think he's got more than that," Narváez said. "Just got to keep working. He's growing up."

What he has more of, isn't necessarily "stuff."

Rodón got up to 97.4 mph by the end of his eight scoreless innings in a 1-0 Daniel Palka-powered victory over division-leading Cleveland on Friday. That's the exact same max velocity he had in Anaheim — albeit via the same slow build he's exhibited all year, which often sees him sitting 89-90 mph early on. It's not intentional, like vintage Justin Verlander, but Rodón has learned to manage his velocity and wade through the initial innings.

Despite being known as an elite stuff guy coming out of the draft and the minors, the relatively mundane eight punchouts in 7 2/3 innings in Anaheim remains a season-high, and his five-strikeout Friday night was more of the same. Rodon's 19.9 percent strikeout rate for the season would put him right below Kyle Hendricks, in the bottom third of the league if he had enough qualified innings. But Rodon has shown enough flashes to wade through jams while delivering heavy workloads (6 1/3 innings per start) of what is now elite run prevention (2.69 ERA).

"I feel pretty good," Rodón said, hinting at a more contact-oriented approach. "I might not have all my stuff, but it's working. Just throwing it up over the dish and letting the defense do the work for me. We got through some games and I've been fortunate. Just trying to eat innings and go deep in the game for the boys. That mentality has been working out."

What Rodón has more of, Narváez would argue, is composure. And by not giving into frustration, he shows a presence of mind that he used both to navigate a two-walk first inning, including that leadoff walk to Francisco Lindor, and to know when to mete out his best stuff. As much as he's learned to deal with not having top velocity in the initial couple innings, Rodon has the ability to ramp up his velocity on command by the end of a game, as he did to jam José Ramírez into a fly out to end the eighth.

"The biggest thing is he's just been calmed down during the whole game," Narváez said. "When he gets frustrated is when he loses his pitches. He's been able to calm down and come back."

Rodón says that steadiness comes from being healthy, or more specifically knowing that he's healthy. While 42 2/3 innings over his last six starts, with 644 pitches thrown over that time might sound like a lot, for Rodón it's what he always planned to be able to provide when he could trust his arm.

"Just the confidence is there," Rodón said. "Just feel like you belong and you get your shoulder fixed and you know there's no issue, nothing wrong. There's no doubt in your mind when you go out and I step on

the mound that I'm healthy and I'm coming to compete. It's a big thing for anyone in this game to have that confidence when you step on the field, to say, 'I can play with you guys.'"

Is this sustainable? Surely the struggles of the White Sox rotation have provided enough assurances that eight innings of scoreless ball are not something easily stumbled upon. Two entries in Rodón's six-start run of dominance, which have rekindled the "ace" conversation, have seen him navigate around marked control problems and emerge with a quality start to show for it, where others likely would falter. Maybe it will take a night like he had in Texas, where everything is going wrong and he needs to ramp up his stuff the whole night to pitch out of it to test his new approach, and maybe even then that will only prove that bad nights happen even during what has a chance to be his best season.

This isn't a journeyman pitcher who is coming in and pitching to soft contact and racking up innings, it's Carlos Rodón—a third overall pick who touches high-90s from the left side with an elite slider. It's someone who the Sox have been waiting to assert his hold on the top of the rotation, and are prepared to give him every opportunity to prove the time is now.

"We sent him out there in the eighth, this was his game pretty much," manager Rick Renteria said. "We ended up starting to think about helping him out, but pretty much he ended up taking control of the landscape today and doing what he wanted to do against a pretty good team."

Better yet, the Sox feel like Rodón has more than that in the tank.

How Daniel Palka's simple approach is helping him survive in different roles

By James Fegan / The Athletic / August 10, 2018

We are living in the last pre-Eloy days, where left field in Guaranteed Rate Field still feels like it's open to whoever shows up that day with the might and will and to seize it, rather than reserved for a potential Hall of Famer for the next decade. Even when Jiménez arrives, the daily sight of Daniel Palka doing early fielding work with first base coach Daryl Boston — fly balls in left, fielding hits to left, and, in advance of some future opportunities, grounders at first — will likely persist.

"I enjoy it," Palka said. "The preparation part has always been fun for me. It's not like I have to go out there every day, it's more like I want to. I enjoy it."

These have been pretty good times of recent for figuring out Palka's role on the team. He's appeared in each of the Sox's past 13 games. With Nicky Delmonico back in the fold, only one of these appearances has actually involved a start in left field, but Palka's unique brand of offensive success (.238/.281/.494) and his left-handed power bat have allowed him to work his way into a rotation at DH with the right-handed Matt Davidson.

When pressed for details on his approach after he clubbed his third pinch-hit home run of the season — a decisive three-run clout to key a 6-4 victory over Kansas City last Thursday — Palka seemed keenly aware of what he's expected to deliver when he's brought in.

"One hundred percent, homer," Palka said of his goal. "Yeah, seriously. I wanted a ball up I can hit."

As it would turn out, this does not require an aggressive departure from Palka's normal approach. He doesn't do a lot of going with the pitch and poking singles. He keys in on zones to drive pitches from with each pitcher, and when he's facing a sinkerballer who is mixing off-speed, he waits for something mistakenly left up and hammers it, as most of his damage has come against finesse hurlers.

Despite a somewhat above-average launch angle and fly-ball rate, and the wide strikeout (33.5 percent) to walk (5.7 percent) disparity to indicate otherwise, Palka is not someone who builds his game around trying to elevate the ball or uppercutting pitches on the lower half of the strike zone. When you hit with enough exit velocity to hang balls on a line and out of the park, the fly ball revolution isn't very relevant.

"The more I try to elevate, the less success I have," Palka said. "So ultimately it's more looking for hard contact and just letting my swing play out. There's a lot of guys who can hit .150 and hit 60 home runs but that's not going to get you anywhere, so just cut it down. You're going to produce more."

If all the extra sessions with Boston serve the same purpose of providing Palka with as many avenues to get his bat into the lineup as possible, his pinch-hitting prowess might be just as important. Power is obviously Palka's carrying tool, but if he needs everyday opportunities to get in rhythm to tap into it, it's going to be an uphill climb to find playing time or hold onto a roster spot. His success at pinch-hitting is established by all of 15 plate appearances, during which he's struck out six times, taken a pair of walks, collected a single and clubbed three homers, but he feels a specific comfort with the approach it requires.

"It's funny how comfortable you can be sitting after six innings and then coming in but I guess it's just competitive nature, being locked in," Palka said. "It's funny, I don't chase as much pinch hitting, coming in or anything. It's comfortable. I've got some extra time to go check out dudes on film and what not. There's a lot of accessibility to resources."

Palka is 26, but still has less than 300 major league plate appearances under his belt. His walk rate could easily tick up to his minor-league levels, he could get on base more, and he could very well rise to the top of the Sox DH picture that figures to be some mixture of Davidson, Delmonico and Palka going into next year barring an outside addition.

But after waiting in vain for major league opportunities with the Twins, Palka's game is built to try to thrive and deliver the pop his frame promises in whatever role is available. Despite a very prominent leg and hand load in his swing that looks complicated to maintain, Palka has drawn the praise of the coaching staff for an approach that is simple and easily slipped into. He waited long enough for his major league shot to have everything pretty much down by the time he arrived.

"Part of the routine every day, part of why everybody goes to the cage is to get repetitions time after time, it's to be able to implement during the game without thought process," hitting coach Todd Steverson said. "If I'm thinking about it, I can't hit the baseball. It's a daily thing. He's been doing for a long time, it's not like it's new. He's had success in the past and he's been doing good while he's been here so far."

Stark: The Useless Info Dept., Teenage Masher Edition

By Jayson Stark / The Athletic / August 10, 2018

When the home run champ strikes out against a guy who isn't even a pitcher... when a home run in the bottom of the 10th isn't a walkoff... when the scoreboard looks identical after both games of a doubleheader... you know it's been another Useless Information-laden week.

But before we get to the latest wackiness, we present this incredible look at a teenage rock star in Washington who seems driven to accomplish more this year than both houses of Congress combined!

TEENAGE MASHER OF THE WEEK

Before we get down to the business of telling you just how absurdly good Juan Soto is, we need to make you feel old. So here we go....

OLDER THAN JUAN SOTO: Kylie Jenner, the Iowa septuplets, Trae Young, Katie Ledecy, Lonzo Ball and Juju Smith-Schuster. Along with like two-thirds of the residents of the entire planet.

ALSO OLDER THAN JUAN SOTO: The Rays, the Diamondbacks, Google, Netflix, the Onion, Rotten Tomatoes, "Will & Grace," "Buffy the Vampire Slayer," Dolly the cloned sheep and "Titanic."

OK, feel ancient yet? Excellent. Just making sure. Now on with our production.

It's now Aug. 10. And Juan Soto, at 19 years old, has more home runs (14) than Kris Bryant or Ryan Braun... has a higher slugging percentage (.551) than Aaron Judge or Manny Machado... has virtually the

same on-base percentage (.423) as Joey Votto... and has Giancarlo Stanton beat in OPS (.975) by over 100 points!

Friends, we've never seen anything like this. Not from a teenager in the major leagues. Especially not when you look at that Kylie Jenner/Buffy the Vampire list three paragraphs back.

"Hell, no," laughed one longtime scout this week after we started reading him our favorite Juan Soto tidbits. "Hell, you had me at Juju."

So what makes the Nationals' left-field phenom so special? Oh, just some cool stuff like this:

HE'S THE GREATEST TEENAGE HITTER EVER

Yeah, well, there's that. This isn't even hard to prove, assuming Soto just keeps doing what he's doing.

STAT	SOTO	TEEN RECORD
OPS	0.975	0.921, Mel Ott, 1928
SLUG	0.551	.530, Tony Conigliaro, 1964
OBP	0.423	.397, Ott, 1928
OPS+	157	139, Ott, 1928
wRC+	161	140, Ott, 1928

(Sources – Fangraphs, baseball-reference.com) (**-since 1900)

We could keep going, but you get the idea. Look at that .975 OPS. Now look at the fabled teenage hitters who got significant playing time and never even had an .800 OPS: Mickey Mantle (.792), Ken Griffey Jr. (.748), Al Kaline (.652) and Ty Cobb (.749). And Juan Soto is at .975.

"You know, I would never, ever compare anybody with Griffey," said the same scout. "But with the walk and the swagger, I have to admit I see some of it in this guy."

HE CRUSHES LEFT-HANDERS

Juan Soto is a 19-year-old left-handed hitter who has been in the big leagues for less than three months. But here is his slash line against left-handed pitchers:

.371/.451/.694/1.144 OPS

We could focus on any of the crazy numbers in that stat line. But let's just take that .694 slugging percentage.

How many other left-handed hitters in the big leagues are slugging .694 against left-handers? None. Of course. The next-closest hitter with that much playing time is Christian Yelich. He's over 100 points back – at .575.

So we should really be asking: How many other active left-handed hitters have ever had a season in which they slugged .694 against left-handers? Um, guess what? That answer, incredibly, is also none of them. In fact, since World War II, here are the only left-handed hitters who have ever done this in a season with this many plate appearances:

Barry Bonds (3 times)
Ken Griffey Jr. (2 times)
Larry Walker (2001)
David Justice (2000)
Stan Musial (1948)

And lurking just off that pace is somebody named Ted Williams (.691 in 1955).

Hold on. What? That's it? Yep. That's it.

HE WEARS OUT THE OPPOSITE FIELD

Juan Soto has hit 14 home runs. He has pulled less than half of them (as in six of 14). Only five other left-handed hitters in the entire sport have that many home runs and that low a percentage of pulled home runs.

But wait. This gets better. Soto pulls the ball just 36.3 percent of the time. And when he hits it the other way, he's hitting an outrageous .486, with a .914 slugging percentage. So how many other left-handed hitters can match that when they go the other way? That would be (you've got it) none.

In fact, to find the last left-handed hitter to do that, you have to go all the way back to 2010, to Adrián González (.516/.968). Should we remind you again we're talking about a 19-year-old?

"I still remember the first time I saw him in the minor leagues last year," the same scout said. "I knew he was special because he just naturally had the rhythm to hit the ball in the left-center-field gap. He didn't have to force it. It just happened."

And guess what? It's still happening!

... BUT THERE'S ALSO ALL THIS!

— As MASN's Mark Zuckerman tweeted this week, this isn't only about age. The other part of the Juan Soto saga we should all remember is that he got just 35 minor-league plate appearances above Class A ball! According to the Elias Sports Bureau, the only other active position players who have hit this many homers in their careers with that little playing time above A-ball are Albert Pujols and Yoenis Céspedes.

— Oh, and Soto also has been one of the most consistent players in the big leagues since the day he arrived. He has had at least a .398 OBP in every month since May. And only one other player in the big leagues can say that – Votto.... Soto also has racked up at least a .924 OPS in every month since May. Just J.D. Martinez, Matt Carpenter and Eugenio Suárez can also say that....But who else in the big leagues has done both? Uh-huh. Nobody.

— And how about his two-strike approach at 19? Soto has a .747 OPS with two strikes – which ranks 10th in baseball. And everyone ahead of him is an All-Star.

— Finally, there's his plate discipline. Exactly 70 games into his big-league career, he has 50 walks, 53 strikeouts. The only other teenager in history with that good a BB/K ratio and double-figure homers in any season was Ott (52 BB, 36 K) – 91 years ago.

So we get the fixation with Juan Soto's age. But at this point, isn't it time to stop calling him one of the greatest teenage hitters of modern times – only because the "teenage" portion of that sentence isn't even necessary.

"I think we should just say he's one of the most impactful rookie hitters ever to come into the game," said another longtime NL scout. "I don't give a crap about age anymore."

MYSTERY PITCHER UPDATES OF THE WEEK!

We've now had 52 position players trudge to the pitcher's mound so far this season – 52! And they keep making history. That's the good news.

Unfortunately, it's not the kind of history we'll be interrupting any network programming to show you. And that's the bad news. But here at Useless Info World Headquarters, it's our job to keep track of that history, wherever that leads us. So in case you missed all this ...

JOSÉ DID YOU SEE – The Mets almost made it through four months without having to succumb to the mystery-pitcher epidemic sweeping our land. Then José Reyes showed up on the mound in that epic 25-4 game in Washington on July 31 – and wound up facing 11 hitters! And throwing 48 pitches (third-most by any position player in the last 50 years)!

Reyes did get the leadoff man out. Then, alas, the next nine went: Double, homer, walk, walk, homer, single, out, triple, hit batter. Yikes! So what was his historic claim to fame? He's the first position player to give up a cycle since Red Kress did that for the New York Giants – 72 years ago, on July 17, 1946.

HISTORIC EPILOGUE – So what does a guy do for an encore after a messy trip to the mound like that? Well, Reyes went out the next day, resumed his day job and hit two home runs. Ha. Of course he did.

He'll be delighted to learn that before he came along, no living human had ever seen any player give up multiple homers as a pitcher one game, then hit at least two the next game. According to our friends at Elias, the last man to do that was Cap Anson – a mere 134 years ago, on Aug. 5 and 6, 1884, for those ahead-of-their-time Chicago White Stockings.

A BALK IN THE PARK – So perhaps you thought Reyes' efficient little outing was the ugliest position-player performance of the year. Heh-heh-heh-heh-heh. Are you kidding? It wasn't even the ugliest of the week. Nope, that honor goes to Tampa Bay's always-entertaining Carlos Gómez.

He took the ball in Baltimore on July 27. And here's how his outing went:

Ball, ball, ball, ball, ball, ball, ball, ball, ball, ball, strike, balk, run-scoring balk, fly-out, strike, ball, foul, ball, ball, ball, ball, ball, ball, ball.

That happened. Really.

That comes to 21 pitches, 4 strikes, 4 walks, 2 balks. And how many relievers in history – position players or otherwise – have ever crammed that many walks and balks into an outing of one inning or less? That, naturally, would be none!

EXTRA, EXTRA, EXTRA, EXTRA-SPECIAL – But wait. We have one more contender for the most unsightly pitching line by a position player since we last visited this topic. Can't overlook Brewers slowball king Hernán Pérez, who tossed his hat in the ugly-outing derby Aug. 2 – in his third pitching appearance of the year.

So what made Pérez's evening on the mound so historically memorable? After a couple of outs (including a strikeout of Austin Barnes) and a couple of hits, the next four hitters went:

Double, double, Yasiel Puig homer, double.

That's four extra-base hits in a row! And even for a position player throwing 69 miles per hour, that's tough to do. In fact, it's so hard to do, Elias tells us that no position player in the expansion era (all 58 seasons of it) had ever served up four extra-base knocks in a row.

Heck, Cubs closer Brandon Morrow has faced 122 hitters this year and still hasn't allowed four extra-base hits all season. But maybe Pérez is getting arm-weary. He has now pitched three times this year, faced 17 hitters and thrown 74 pitches!

DOWN GOES THE CHAMP – What do you say we end this mystery-pitcher update on a more upbeat note? How about that Matt Davidson of the White Sox. We're not sure anymore which was his highlight of the year: Hitting three home runs in a game Opening Day or coming in to pitch Monday and striking out Giancarlo Stanton.

But if we had to vote, let's go with that whiff of Giancarlo. And here's why: Lots of men have hit three home runs in a game. But how many other position players have ever struck out the reigning home run champion?

You know the answer. It's zero. According to Elias, Davidson is the first position player in the expansion era to whiff a reigning home run king. And the only other position player in the same span who even struck out a guy who won a home run title at any point was Matt Franco of the 1999 Mets, who punched out Andruw Jones – six years before he led the league.

So in a season where those 52 position players have almost a 10.00 ERA, let's hear it for Matt Davidson – the position player who gave us the whiff heard round the world. Well, around the Useless Information world anyway.

USELESS INFO OF THE WEEK

CALL THE COPS – Two days in a row this week, White Sox center fielder Adam Engel was clearly in no mood to watch the Yankees show off their nightly home run trots. So on Monday, he reached over the fence and robbed Greg Bird of a home run. Engel obviously enjoyed that so much that on Tuesday, he stole a Kyle Higashioka home run.

And how often do you see any outfielder pull two Yankees home runs back from Home Run Land in back-to-back games? Well, the Sports Info Solutions home-run-robbery database goes back 16 seasons. And guess how many other outfielders have done that against the Yankees? Yessir. That would be none.

GOT CHANGE FOR 100? – We need to invent some sort of new stat to sum up the career of Edwin Jackson. How about, say, the Teams Per Win Ratio? Or is it the Wins Per Team Ratio? We'll call the Sloan Sports Analytics hotline at M.I.T. on that and get back to you next week.

Either way, Jackson, now with the A's, just won his 100th game. And it's been quite a journey. He pitched for 13 teams and won a game for 11 teams in order to join that 100-Win Club. And just in case you were wondering, no one else who ever threw a baseball in the majors has traveled that path to his 100th win.

— Most teams pitched for by any previous pitcher in his first 100 wins? That would be nine, according to the Elias Sports Bureau. Miguel Batista and Brett Tomko used to share that "record."

— Most teams won for by any previous pitcher in his first 100 wins? That would also be nine, by Tomko.

So here's to Edwin Jackson, your all-time leader in Wins Per Team Ratio. Or Teams Per Win Ratio. Hey, we're making these stats up as we go along. Bear with us, OK?

BOX SCORE LINE OF THE WEEK – We've always loved watching the great Félix Hernández. But not this week! His line Tuesday against Texas was so unkempt, it's hard to even type it:

6 IP, 8 H, 11 R, 7 ER, 4 BB, 2 K, 3 HR, 1 HBP

HIS CLAIM TO FAME: Did you know King Felix was just the third pitcher ever to give up 11 runs after once winning a Cy Young? Sad but true. The others: Barry Zito on April 9, 2005, and Rick Porcello last Aug. 25.

STREAKER OF THE WEEK – Speaking of Cy Youngs, for Max Scherzer's latest trick, he has now ripped off a six-game hitting streak. So he's hitting .300 for the season. And here's what you need to know about Mad Max's sweet-swinging offensive exploits:

— If you ignore AL pitchers who only got a handful of at-bats, just one pitcher has ever hit .300 and won a Cy Young in the same season: Bob Gibson in 1970. (Yep, I'm aware Scherzer isn't a lock to win this Cy Young. Yep, I'm aware of the existence of Jacob de Grom. Just enjoy these notes on their own merit, OK? Thanks.)

— Last pitcher to win a Cy Young and have a hitting streak of six games or more in the same season? That would be Ferguson Jenkins – in 1971 (when he had an eight-game hitting streak).

— This is actually the second six-game hitting streak of Scherzer's career. He's the only active pitcher who can say that. And the seven previous Cy Young winners with multiple hitting streaks of six games or longer all did it a loooooong time ago: Jenkins, Gibson, Jim Perry, Don Drysdale, Early Wynn, Don Newcomb and Warren Spahn – none of them more recently than 47 years ago!

— And one more thing, from loyal reader Ryan (The Ace of) Spaeder...

Ryan M. Spaeder

✓

@theaceofspaeder

Hits with runners in scoring position and two outs this season:#Nationals Max Scherzer - 6#Angels Mike Trout - 6

9:39 PM - Aug 2, 2018

538

157 people are talking about this

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TOUGH TIMES FOR ROYALTY – Thanks to our friend, Kurtis Seiboldt, of SportsRadio 810 in Kansas City, for passing along this bizarre nugget.

— The Royals' record over the last five seasons: 380-382.

— Stuff the Royals did over those last five seasons: Go to the World Series twice – and win it once.

Seiboldt reports that just two other teams in history have managed to pile up a losing record over a five-season span that included two World Series: Stuffy McInnis' 1913-17 Philadelphia Athletics and Mark Lemke's 1988-92 Atlanta Braves. And why is that?

It's hard to do!

CALL IN THE HEAVYWEIGHTS – Had the Yankees and Rangers just stayed on normal rotation, we would have seen something Sunday we've never seen before:

Nearly 600 pounds worth of starting pitchers occupying the same mound!

As loyal reader Chris Isidore reports, CC Sabathia and Bartolo Colon were lined up to face each other Sunday in Yankee Stadium – in a historic match-up featuring baseball-reference.com's heaviest pitcher of all time (that would be CC, at 300 pounds) versus the third-heaviest (Bartolo, at 285).

The second-heaviest, incidentally, is Jon Rauch (290). But he never started a game against either Sabathia or Colon. So this would have been the World Series of poundage.

Sadly, we regret to report that the Rangers thwarted this epic duel by pushing Colon's start back a day, until Monday. We can console ourselves with the knowledge that you can't trust anybody's "official" weight in baseball history, anyway. But what a classic this could have been – 585 pounds and 489 wins.

STRANGEST BUT TRUEST FEATS OF THE WEEK

STRIKE THREE, YOU'RE (NOT) OUT – Baseball is a funny game, isn't it? If you're ahead with two outs in the ninth inning and you strike out the guy at the plate, you'd probably think it was time to shake hands, high-five and head for the clubhouse to celebrate, right?

Um, not so fast. Not this year.

On Sunday, the Brewers became the third team this season to discover there is life after striking out with two outs in the ninth – tying the game after what should have been the final out because of a strikeout/wild pitch or strikeout/passed ball.

The Giants pulled off that same trick July 21. And so did the Cardinals on June 18. Crazy, all three teams then lost anyway in extra innings. But that isn't the important part.

The important part is that it had happened three times in the previous 18 seasons put together. Then, of course, it happened three months in a row.

Baseball!

EXTRA CREDIT – Have we mentioned baseball is a funny game? If you're the home team, you're playing in extra innings and one of your hitters launches a two-run homer, they call that a walk off, right?

Wrong. Not this week. A salute to our friend, Doug (Kernels) Kern, for catching this one. On Tuesday night in Chicago and Toronto, Jose Abreu and Kevin Pillar both hit two-run bombs in the bottom of an extra inning – and neither was a walk off.

Abreu's homer tied the White Sox's game with the Yankees. Pillar's home run for the Blue Jays just turned a five-run deficit into a two-run deficit. And both their teams lost. But here's the Strangest But Truest part:

How many other days in baseball history have featured two different teams hitting multi-run homers in the bottom of any extra inning and neither of them was a game-ender? Yessir. That would be nada.

Baseball!

BATTING OUT OF ODOR – One more reason baseball is a funny game, as demonstrated by Rougned Odor's five-walk game for the Rangers on Aug. 2:

Odor in April: 0 HR, 4 BB

Odor in just that one game: 1 HR, 5 BB

Baseball!

POWER RANGER – Name Game alert! In the history of this sport, one Suárez had never hit a home run off another Suárez – until the Phillies called up pitcher Ranger Suárez to make his big-league debut July 26.

He promptly allowed his first career homer – to Eugenio Suárez.

Baseball!

DH-JÀ VU DEPT – Finally, another Strange But True classic from Doug (Kernels) Kern....

— Braves' line score in Game 1 of their doubleheader Tuesday in D.C.: 3-7-0 (6 LOB)

— Braves' line score in Game 2 of their doubleheader Tuesday in D.C.: 3-7-0 (6 LOB)

Naturally, they lost Game 1 but won Game 2. That, however, wasn't the Strangest But Truest part, either.

How many other teams have had exactly the same line score in both games of a doubleheader over the last 15 seasons? Correct. Not a one. Until this week.

Baseball!
