



WHITE SOX HEADLINES OF OCTOBER 17, 2018

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Inbox: Who is on the White Sox offseason radar?

Beat reporter Scott Merkin answers early offseason questions

By Scott Merkin / MLB.com / October 16, 2018

CHICAGO -- Here's a look at this week's White Sox questions, with the answers coming fresh off Monday's Eagles concert at the United Center.

With the impending wave of young arms in the system, what kind of deal makes the most sense for a free agent pitcher this season?

Ryan, @Dunt1

Locking up a younger, veteran-type pitcher makes sense for the overall White Sox position, with maybe a two-year deal and an option for a third. Someone such as Nathan Eovaldi, the 28-year-old who started Game 3 of the ALCS for Boston, fits that mold. The White Sox have an apparent strong core of young starters, with Reynaldo Lopez, Lucas Giolito, Carlos Rodon and Michael Kopech already in the Majors, and Dylan Cease, MLB Pipeline's Pitcher of the Year and the White Sox Pitching Prospect of the Year, not far behind.

But the White Sox know a more experienced type of presence is needed in the group. They will probably go after a couple of starters, but one might be more of the bridge variety.

What is your assessment of the results produced by the current batting coach during his five seasons in that role?

Bill, Williamsburg, Va.

Paul Konerko once dubbed baseball's hitting coach position as the worst job in sports. Or maybe it was the toughest job in sports, but he isn't wrong in either direction. If the hitters come through, it's because of their talent. If they fail, a new hitting coach is needed.

White Sox hitters need to make more contact after a record-breaking strikeout season. At the very least, they need to do more with the at-bats where they aren't striking out. I don't necessarily think a change from Todd Steverson is needed in relation to that fact, if the hitters are connected to his work and there seems to be a central theme throughout the system.

This might be a stupid question, but here goes: Would the Sox consider using Matt Davidson out of the bullpen on a somewhat regular basis next season?

Sol, New York

Davidson has spoken about expanding his role to include part-time reliever and spoke of a planned offseason conversation with the White Sox to potentially explore that new role. He was not scored upon in three relief outings during the 2018 season and certainly looked more polished than a position player filling innings in a blowout, but the White Sox didn't seem quite as devoted to the added pitching responsibilities. It would have been interesting to see Davidson pitching in a somewhat higher leverage role for at least one game in September.

In reference to Tim Anderson's extension early in his career, should we be expecting (general manager Rick) Hahn to try and extend guys like Giolito, (Yoan) Moncada and Lopez anytime soon?
John, Hinsdale, @jbomba14

The tremendous contracts involving Chris Sale, Jose Quintana and Adam Eaton locked down key core players, and eventually enhanced their trade return, and in turn, the rebuild. The White Sox have been good about targeting the right players for these sorts of contracts and will almost certainly try again.

Which free agents do you think the Sox should target either this offseason or next offseason to finish the process?
Troy, Mokena, IL, @TroyTeske1

I've already mentioned Eovaldi. Going after Manny Machado this offseason or Nolan Arenado after 2019 obviously makes sense, as does Jeury's Familia or Adam Ottavino out of the bullpen. A multi-purpose player such as Marwin Gonzalez also fits well, or maybe a reunion with infielder Eduardo Escobar. These are just a few names, and remember, trades are also in play as part of the finishing process.

Better fit in free agency -- McCutchen or (A.J.) Pollock?
Jeremy, Highland, Ind., @jeremyrat47

I'd go for Andrew McCutchen for a couple of years. He would be a good fit with the younger players, although he's not a center fielder any longer, which would fit more of the White Sox need. The White Sox are prospect rich in the outfield, so it will be interesting to see how deep they go with outside additions in that area.

Robert making up for lost time in Fall League

By Jim Callis / MLB.com / October 16, 2018

Shortly before international signing rules drastically changed in the summer of 2017, the White Sox splurged one more time. That May, they gave Luis Robert a \$26 million bonus -- the second-highest ever for an amateur, trailing only the \$31 million the Red Sox handed Yoan Moncada -- and paid a matching amount as a penalty for exceeding their spending pool.

Robert had batted .401/.526/.687 in Cuba's top league as an 18-year-old in 2016, so Chicago hoped the potential five-tool outfielder could adapt easily to the Minors and advance rapidly. While his physical ability has been evident, he has had difficulty staying healthy.

Sent to the Rookie-level Dominican Summer League for his 2017 pro debut, he appeared in just 28 games while dealing with minor knee and ankle injuries. He injured ligaments in his left thumb on a slide during a Cactus League game this March, knocking him out for three months. He earned a promotion from low Class A Kannapolis to high Class A Winston-Salem after just two weeks, only to aggravate his thumb soon thereafter, forcing him to miss another month.

After all that inactivity, Robert, the White Sox No. 4 prospect, said he was thrilled and honored to get the opportunity to play in the Arizona Fall League. He worked on improving his English while sidelined but was frustrated by not being able to play.

"Unfortunately because of the thumb injury, I wasn't able to work on my game and keep getting better," Robert said through an interpreter. "But I'm happy that I'm here now."

Robert collected hits in his first four AFL starts for the Glendale Desert Dogs before tweaking a hamstring while running to first base on Oct. 12. His latest injury isn't considered serious and should cost him only a couple of games.

In 50 games between three levels this year, Robert batted .269/.333/.360 with 15 steals. He has the raw power and well above-average speed to be at least a 20-20 player, though he'll need to improve his plate discipline. Besides getting some much-needed reps, he hopes to use his time in the Fall League to hone his right-handed swing.

"My goal down here is just to perfect my swing," Robert said. "That way I can have better results here in the United States. I was coming in and out of the zone really quick with my bat. What we're trying to work on is that my bat stays on the plane a little longer so I can stay with the ball a little longer, maybe more with the secondary pitches."

Robert also needs to polish his center-field defense. With his speed and solid arm strength, he's capable of playing anywhere in the outfield, though it's his offensive potential that led the White Sox to invest \$52 million in him.

White Sox hitters in the Fall League

Luis Alexander Basabe, OF -- Part of the Chris Sale trade with the Red Sox in December 2016, Basabe introduced himself to a national audience by homering off a 102-mph fastball from the Reds' Hunter Greene at the SiriusXM All-Star Futures Game this July. A switch-hitting center fielder with 20-20 potential, the Venezuelan batted .258/.354/.445 with 15 homers and 16 steals between Class A Advanced and Double-A in 2018.

Laz Rivera, SS -- Signed for \$1,000 as a 28th-rounder out of Tampa in 2017, Rivera opened eyes by hitting .314/.361/.471 with 13 homers and 17 steals between two Class A stops during his first full pro season. He has impressive feel for the barrel and shows gap power with average speed and defensive ability.

White Sox pitchers in the Fall League

Tanner Banks, LHP -- A strike-throwing left-hander selected in the 18th round out of Utah in 2014, Banks led White Sox farmhands with 12 wins and ranked third with a 2.59 ERA while recording a 100/32 K/BB ratio in 146 innings between Class A Advanced and Double-A. His cutter is his best offering, and he also owns an 88-91 mph fastball and a curveball.

Zack Burdi, RHP -- The 26th overall pick in the 2016 Draft, Burdi ended his first pro season in Triple-A and seemed on the fast track to Chicago before having Tommy John surgery the following July. He showed closer stuff before he blew out his elbow, with a fastball that reached 102 mph and a sometimes-wipeout slider that climbed into the low 90s, and returned to work 6 1/3 innings in Rookie ball this summer.

Danny Dopico, RHP -- Dopico has averaged 12.1 strikeouts per nine innings since signing as an 11th-rounder from Florida International in 2015, getting swings and misses with a 92-96 mph fastball and a splitter and slider in the low 80s. He logged a 2.98 ERA with 77 strikeouts in 60 1/3 innings this year, mostly in high Class A.

Zach Thompson, RHP -- Thompson excelled in his first season as a full-time reliever, recording a 1.55 ERA with 76 strikeouts in 75 1/3 innings between high Class A and Double-A. The 2014 fifth-rounder from Texas-Arlington pairs a 92-96 fastball with a spike curveball that grades as a plus pitch at its best, and his 6-foot-7 frame creates nice angle.

Here's what happened in Tuesday's AFL action

MLB.com / October 16, 2018

Here's a team-by-team breakdown of how all 30 teams' prospects fared in Arizona Fall League action on Tuesday:

• Gameday: Salt River 2, Mesa 1 | Scottsdale 6, Glendale 1 | Surprise 8, Peoria 16

AL East

Blue Jays (Surprise)

No. 1 overall prospect Vladimir Guerrero Jr. continued to rake, going 3-for-4 with a double, three RBIs and a walk for Surprise. Guerrero also stole his first base of the Fall League season. Santiago Espinal (Blue Jays' No. 22 prospect) went 0-for-3 with two walks, a run scored and a stolen base. Zach Jackson allowed three runs on one hit and two walks with one strikeout in two-thirds of an inning of relief.

Orioles (Glendale)

Martin Cervenko went 1-for-3 with a double and a walk for Glendale. Steve Wilkerson went 1-for-4 from the leadoff spot.

Rays (Peoria)

Rays No. 9 prospect Lucius Fox went 2-for-5 with an RBI, a walk and two runs scored out of the leadoff spot for Peoria. Phoenix Sanders tossed 1 1/3 scoreless innings of relief, allowing one hit and two walks with one strikeout.

Red Sox (Mesa)

Red Sox No. 6 prospect Bobby Dalbec drove in a run, his fifth AFL RBI, as part of a 2-for-3 night.

Yankees (Glendale)

Yankees No. 2 prospect Estevan Florial went 0-for-3 with a walk and scored Glendale's lone run. Steven Sensley went 0-for-3 with a walk. Matt Wivinis tossed two scoreless innings of relief, allowing one hit and one walk with one strikeout. Hobie Harris allowed one run on one hit and one walk in one inning of relief.

AL Central

Indians (Glendale)

Indians No. 6 prospect Yu Chang went 1-for-4 with a single for Glendale. Connor Marabell went 0-for-4. Dalbert Siri pitched a scoreless inning of relief, issuing one walk.

Royals (Peoria)

Royals No. 2 prospect Khalil Lee went 2-for-5 with a two-run homer, his first long ball of the Fall League season, and a double for Surprise. Nick Heath went 3-for-4 with two walks, two runs scored and three stolen bases out of the leadoff spot. Meibrys Vilorio went 0-for-4 with a walk.

Tigers (Mesa)

Tigers No. 14 prospect Gregory Soto got the start for Mesa and gave up one run on five hits over four innings. Daniel Pinero went 1-for-3.

Twins (Salt River)

Twins No. 18 prospect Travis Blankenhorn drew a walk, but was otherwise 0-for-3. Adam Bray threw an inning in relief and gave up one run on two hits. Hector Lujan fared a bit better as he threw a frame and retired the side in order. Devin Smeltzer took the mound next and gave up one hit in a scoreless inning.

White Sox (Glendale)

White Sox No. 9 prospect Luis Alexander Basabe went 1-for-4 with a single for Glendale. Zach Thompson allowed three unearned runs on two hits in an inning of relief. Luis Robert (No. 4) got the day off.

AL West

A's (Mesa)

Athletics No. 30 prospect Skye Bolt put together a strong night at the plate as he went 2-for-4 with a triple. Eli White (No. 18) went 0-for-2.

Angels (Mesa)

Angels No. 4 prospect Jahmai Jones went hitless (0-for-4), while Daniel Procopio threw two scoreless innings and gave up two hits.

Astros (Scottsdale)

Astros No. 2 prospect Forrest Whitley tossed four innings and notched his first win of the Fall League season for Scottsdale. The right-hander allowed one unearned run on two hits and a walk, striking out six. Ronnie Dawson went 1-for-4 with an RBI double. Drew Ferguson went 0-for-3 with an RBI. Erasmo Pinales tossed a scoreless inning, walking two and striking out one. More »

Mariners (Peoria)

Mariners No. 20 prospect Ian Miller hit a go-ahead, three-run home run for Peoria, finishing 1-for-3 with three RBIs, two walks and two runs scored. Evan White (No. 2) went 1-for-5 with two RBIs and a walk. Chris Mariscal went 3-for-5 with a triple, two RBIs and two runs scored. Matt Walker allowed three runs on one hit and three walks in one-third of an inning. More »

Rangers (Surprise)

Yanio Perez went 2-for-6 with two RBIs out of the cleanup spot for Surprise. Julio Pablo Martinez (Rangers' No. 2 prospect) went 1-for-4 with two walks, a run scored and a stolen base. Joe Barlow struck out the only batter he faced in relief.

NL East

Braves (Peoria)

Braves No. 12 prospect Kyle Muller notched his first win of the Fall League season for Peoria, tossing two scoreless innings of relief. He allowed one hit and one walk while striking out three. Cristian Pache (No. 6) went 3-for-6 with two doubles and two runs scored out of the cleanup spot. Braxton Davidson went 1-for-2 with three walks and three runs scored.

Marlins (Salt River)

Marlins No. 26 prospect Bryson Brigman picked up a pair of his and went 2-for-4 out of the leadoff spot for Salt River. Brian Miller (No. 11) also got a hit and finished 1-for-3. Monte Harrison (No. 1) went 0-for-3, but reached once via a walk.

Mets (Scottsdale)

Mets No. 2 prospect Peter Alonso hit his second home run of the Fall League season for Scottsdale. He also doubled, drove in two runs and scored a pair, finishing 2-for-3. Ali Sanchez (No. 25) started at catcher and went 0-for-4. Matt Blackham pitched a perfect sixth inning and Joe Zanghi pitched a perfect seventh, each notching a strikeout.

Nationals (Salt River)

Nationals No. 23 prospect Luis Reyes tossed five scoreless innings of two-hit ball while giving up just two walks and striking out three. Reyes, who arguably has the best stuff in Washington's system but has struggled with command, also struck out three. Tres Barrera (No. 15) went 2-for-4.

Phillies (Scottsdale)

Phillies No. 11 prospect Arquimedes Gamboa went 1-for-2 with two walks and a run scored for Scottsdale. Luke Williams went 0-for-3 with a walk, an RBI and a run scored.

NL Central

Brewers (Peoria)

Brewers No. 1 prospect Keston Hiura (No. 30 overall) had a huge day for Peoria, going 3-for-5 with a home run, a triple, five RBIs, a walk and two runs scored. Hiura also made a nice defensive play during the sixth inning, using his glove to scoop a ground ball to first base for an out. Trent Grisham (Milwaukee's No. 19) went 0-for-3 with an RBI, two walks and a run scored. Mario Feliciano (No. 23) started at catcher and went 0-for-1. Bubba Derby got the start and allowed four runs on seven hits and three walks with three strikeouts in 3 2/3 innings.

Cardinals (Surprise)

Evan Kruczynski started for Surprise, tossing 3 2/3 scoreless innings with three hits allowed, three walks and three strikeouts. Conner Greene (Cardinals' No. 27 prospect) took the loss, allowing six runs on five hits and two walks in two-thirds of an inning of relief. Will Latcham allowed five runs on three hits and three walks in one-third of an inning of relief.

Cubs (Mesa)

Cubs No. 16 prospect D.J. Wilson was 0-for-4, as was Jhonny Pereda. Bailey Clark fired two perfect innings and struck out a pair in the process.

Pirates (Surprise)

Pirates No. 5 prospect Cole Tucker went 1-for-3 with two walks, an RBI and a run scored for Surprise. Bryan Reynolds (No. 9) went 0-for-3 with two walks, a run scored and a stolen base. Blake Weiman tossed 1 1/3 scoreless innings of relief, allowing two hits and striking out one. Matt Eckelman allowed two runs on two hits and one walk in one inning of relief.

Reds (Scottsdale)

Reds prospects Taylor Trammell (No. 3) and Shed Long (No. 8) each notched a single for Scottsdale. Alfredo Rodriguez went 2-for-4 with a run scored, while Trammell also scored a run. Ty Boyles tossed a scoreless inning of relief, allowing one hit and striking out two.

NL West

D-backs (Salt River)

Pavin Smith, the D-backs' No. 4 prospect, went 1-for-4, but the hit was a go-ahead single in the top of the ninth. Drew Ellis (No. 9) went 0-for-4.

Dodgers (Glendale)

Ben Holmes started for Glendale and allowed two runs on four hits and one walk with three strikeouts. It was Holmes' first loss of the Fall League season. Errol Robinson (Dodgers' No. 20 prospect) went 0-for-3. Jared Walker went 0-for-3 with a walk.

Giants (Scottsdale)

Chase Johnson tossed a scoreless inning of relief for Scottsdale, allowing one hit and one walk.

Padres (Peoria)

Padres No. 25 prospect Austin Allen entered as a pinch-hitter for Peoria and went 2-for-2 with an RBI, a walk and two runs scored. Travis Radke allowed one run on two hits and three walks with four strikeouts in 1 2/3 innings of relief.

Rockies (Salt River)

Josh Fuentes went 1-for-4 at the plate, while Sam Hilliard, the Rockies No. 9 prospect, went 2-for-4 and continued his fast start in the AFL. Justin Lawrence (No. 17) picked up the save and struck out two in his inning of work. [More »](#)

The strange case of Bryce Bush, a 33rd-round pick who immediately became a White Sox prospect
By James Fegan / The Athletic / October 16, 2018

GLENDALE, Ariz. — When Bryce Bush, one of the very best high school senior players in the Detroit area, fell to the White Sox in the 33rd round of this year's draft in June, it didn't raise many eyebrows.

Bush had, after all, committed to attend Mississippi State when he was a high school sophomore, and spent most of the previous summer playing travel ball nearby in the southeast (where he became friends with White Sox seventh-round pick Cabera Weaver). If the start of the third day of the draft — rounds 11 through around 15 or so — is where teams take fliers on hard-to-sign high schoolers who will require overslot bonus offers to be swayed out of their college commitments, then the 33rd round is where teams take fliers on players they have almost no shot of landing. Tyler Flowers is the best 33rd-round pick kicking around big league ball by a mile, and it's close to the territory where sons of front office staff members start getting picked.

Where things get weird is that Bush never wanted to go to college.

"It was surprising," Bush said of his slip through the draft. "I told every scout that I talked to, had in-home visits with that I wanted to go straight out of high school because of course it's quicker, better instruction than college. I really don't know the reason why but I guess it is how it is."

Bush, like his buddy and current roommate Weaver, was always steadfast in his belief that working with instructors and nutritionists in professional ball and playing with wooden bats would help him get to the majors quicker than spending three years playing weekend series and worrying about SEC conference standings. He said he never cared about what round he was picked in, and while everyone thinks it's cool to go in the first round, there's no reason to think he's lying.

Scouts don't assess draft prospects so much in terms of round as much as the bonus value they would be willing to recommend to sign them, and players and their representation in turn approach things the same way. When the price ranges for players and teams don't line up immediately — especially at the end of the second day of the draft — there can be a significant slide, but it also means the door is never shut if the right offer comes along. As a result, while Bush certainly thought it was likely he would have to start looking into apartments in Starkville, Mississippi when his name still hadn't been called by the time the rounds got into the 30s, when the Sox came with an offer of \$290,000, bonus money more typically seen in the sixth round, his reaction was pretty unambiguous.

"I mean honestly they told me what they would come up with and I was pretty much set with that," Bush explained matter of factly.

But how did Bush specifically become a guy that slipped? White Sox scouting director Nick Hostetler is always cognizant of players from cold weather areas being underexposed during the months leading up to the draft, and noted that another cold and rainy spring in Michigan delayed the start to Bush's season. That may have stalled his hype building up to an earlier June draft date than usual. But most expressly it seems like Bush was interested in a certain price point, and only certain teams had an area scout like Justin Wechsler pushing for him at that value, and were willing to double back at the end of the draft and push themselves further over their draft pool to get a deal done (The White Sox exceeded their pool allotment by almost \$370,000 per FutureSox).

"Especially now with the new — I say new, it has been in place now for seven years maybe — the system," Hostetler said. "I think you see more of this happening later on in drafts. (In the AL wild-card game), turn on the game and there's an 11th-round pick pitching to a 22nd-round pick, with (Luke) Voit and (Lou) Trivino. With now being able to spread out your money, a lot of these high school kids are realizing that some of them it's to their benefit to get out and start their careers."

Of course, this quirky little bit of budgeting and strange creation of the current draft system was not a story on draft day, save for fodder for a tweet solely consumed by draft nerds and other overly enthusiastic insiders. But it became a story when the 18-year-old Bush arrived at the White Sox complex, started playing with other recent draftees, many of whom were fresh off the three seasons of college ball that he bypassed, and hit.

Bush played 14 games in the AZL, at which time proceedings had reached the point of tangible absurdity. He hit .442/.538/.605 and in 52 plate appearances and struck out just four times. The strength in his sturdy 6-foot, 200-pound frame is obvious on sight, and league scouts say the ability to produce hard contact is real. It's just a question of whether he'll add the loft in his swing to tap into his power.

"For his age he's well-advanced," Sox minor league hitting coordinator Mike Gellinger said. "He's got really good hands. He's got a good swing, which takes care of a lot of problems. He looks to be like he's got a good awareness of the zone, so having those two things together it's probably why he's not going to strike out as much as you'd think."

His torrid start hit a snag when he was promoted to Great Falls in the Pioneer League, the more advanced of the Rookie Ball levels, as he slumped to .250/.327/.387 in 24 games in what is typically an extremely electric offensive environment. But what he struggled with in terms of teams preparing and scouting for him in a professional way for the first time only laid bare how much he was getting by on raw ability.

"It was different being in the AZL because they throw much harder but they've lost the command and everything," Bush said. "I got moved up and they've got movement on every pitch. They could be throwing 85 mph and it'll still be hard. That will probably be the hardest guy to hit. That's what I learned. It doesn't matter how hard you throw, you can get somebody out pretty easy."

"When I got moved up, I don't know if they had a scouting report, because they were shading me up the middle and my first game I hit three balls right into the shift and then they started me off outside corner with sliders. I didn't really see any fastballs, honestly."

But a nutty playoff run where Bush reached base 11 times in 18 trips to the plate, homered and smacked four extra-base hits in as many games as the Voyagers stampeded to a championship, cleared away most notions that he would struggle to adjust for a while. Whether it was the complexity of the game or light razzing for being the youngest guy in the clubhouse, Bush shrugged off trouble with a grin.

Of course, that we've yet to discuss anything about Bush's defense is telling. He tried his hand at third base to start his career, and suffered the troubling designation of a fielding percentage under 90 percent. He's played at the other infield corner in the past and also mixed in the outfield in the last two years and summed up his approach as "wherever we're winning, that's where I'll play," so he's open to searching for a defensive home as his bat carries him through the system for now.

It's a problem that will challenge his profile going forward, and there are warts and flaws and reasons why he's not a top-15 prospect in the organization yet, since he's still four levels away from the majors and all that. But it's hard to scrutinize right now, because he's only 18, he's already pretty good, and no one thought he'd be getting started so soon. From his vantage point, it's going pretty well.

"Won a championship my first year, it was exciting," Bush said. "Already what I experienced this year, made some of my best friends. I knew a couple people already but nothing can beat the friendships you make in baseball. They made it 10 times more fun than it was supposed to be."
