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In My Words: Delmonico on chemistry

By Nicky Delmonico / MLB.com/ April 12, 2018

I've been in a few locker rooms in baseball, dating back to my days as a bat boy when my dad was the baseball coach at Tennessee. I have to say, what we have right now with the White Sox is the best clubhouse I've ever been in. And the fact that it is at the big league level is unbelievable.

The character, the love we have in the locker room -- I don't think I've ever been a part of anything like it. It's a lot of fun to go out and play with these guys every day.

Last year, at the end of the season, we were getting really close. We were playing well, and everyone kind of meshed. We saw it then. Then, when we all got together during the offseason at SoxFest, we grew even more. You could feel it when we came to Spring Training. It was awesome to have everyone feeling the same thing.

Ricky [Renteria] sets the tone of how we do things. Minor Leagues, big leagues, the White Sox are one big family. So if you're in our organization, you're a part of our family. That is what he has established. We've got everybody from top to bottom buying into this. I saw it last year, I saw it even more in Spring Training, and I see it even more now with the season beginning.

When I got called up last year, I got welcomed with open arms. Everyone was awesome. It made me feel so comfortable. All the success I had last year was due to my teammates treating me with the utmost respect.

The biggest thing is being comfortable with yourself. Coming into our clubhouse knowing you can be yourself, and then going out and playing hard, everyone is comfortable in the clubhouse with each other. There's no worry about fitting in, trying to do the right thing. Everybody knows what you're coming in to do that day. You feel like everyone has your back.

James Shields does a great job of bringing everyone together, getting people to do stuff. He is one of the best I've ever seen at doing that. He's one of the greatest teammates I've played with.

You've got guys like Yolmer Sanchez, who keeps the clubhouse so much fun, loose. You've got Tim Anderson, who always has a smile on his face, cracking jokes. We just have a good group of guys who love coming to the field every day.

During Spring Training, we had fun with social media. Every day it was someone's day, and we all posted about him. For instance, we had a day where everyone would post about Matt Davidson. I had a day. It's just another thing we do to try to bring us together, along with interacting with the fans. It was a lot of fun.

Chemistry is big in this game. From my experience in baseball, the teams that get along the most, play for one another, play the game right, they tend to be successful. It was like that with my dad's best teams. If you look at any winning team, I don't think it has a bad clubhouse. They all get along. There are other parts, too, but chemistry goes a long way.

Everyone in our clubhouse believes that we're at the beginning of something special. We're all going to do it together and keep riding this train.

The Winston-Salem Dash won on a walk-off steal of home from Joel Booker

By Eric Chesterson /MLB.com / April 12, 2018

Baseball players play a lot of games over the course of their careers, meaning that they win a lot of games over the course of their careers as well. Among all those games and all those wins, some are more memorable than others.

For Joel Booker and the Winston-Salem Dash, Thursday night's 3-2 win over the Carolina Mudcats was likely of the memorable sort. Tied at 2 with two outs in the bottom of the 10th inning, Booker -- pinch-running for first baseman Gavin Sheets -- took a risk and attempted a straight steal of home:

The walk-off steal of home is obviously a rare event. In the Major Leagues, the last walk-off steal came in Game 3 of the 1997 ALCS when Indians center fielder Marquis Grissom took advantage of some confusion over a missed bunt.

Booker's steal didn't require any confusion. He was just fast and got a great jump, like Jackie Robinson in Game 1 of the 1955 World Series:

It may be a while until we see another walk-off steal of home, but it will certainly be a long time indeed until we see one as smooth.

White Sox add righty Volstad to roster

By Scott Merkin and Matt Kelly /MLB.com/ April 12, 2018

MINNEAPOLIS -- The White Sox announced Thursday that they have purchased right-hander Chris Volstad's contract from Triple-A Charlotte. The team also moved left-hander Carlos Rodon to the 60-day disabled list to clear a spot for Volstad on its 40-man roster, which returns to 40.

The 31-year Volstad takes righty Gregory Infante's spot, after the White Sox optioned Infante to Charlotte postgame on Wednesday. Volstad was excellent in Spring Training for Chicago, throwing 14 scoreless innings and allowing three hits, while pairing nine strikeouts with one walk. In the White Sox 4-0 loss Thursday, he tossed one scoreless inning, allowing a hit and a walk against one strikeout.

"I threw well and finished strong up here last season," Volstad said. "Carried over into Spring Training and did what I could. Tried to get better each day and build and improve off of what I would be doing. Focus in on that, and it takes the pressure off of a lot of other things. Just keep my head down and keep going."

Volstad was efficient in Cactus League action, averaging just 4.6 pitchers per inning. In his lone start for Charlotte so far this season, he allowed five runs over 4 2/3 innings. Volstad is entering his ninth Major League season, having compiled a 36-53 record and a 4.92 ERA over 725 innings. He can pitch in relief or spot-start for the White Sox.

"Having been around a little bit longer, I guess you do what you need to do to get ready for any situation," Volstad said. "Just focusing in on pitching. I went to Triple-A and started a game down there. So I'm kind of built up for multiple innings, if needed. Just whatever situation may come up, I'll be ready to go."

"He gives us flexibility to use him for multiple innings," White Sox manager Rick Renteria said. "He generates a lot of groundballs when we use him. He did a lot this spring. He did a lot for us last season. He gives me the flexibility to use him in multiple positions of the game."

Rodon, 25, is recovering from arthroscopic surgery on his left shoulder that brought his 2017 season to an end last September and left him out of action for six to eight months. He did not pitch in Spring Training and was not expected to join the White Sox until late May or early June at the earliest, so now being eligible for reinstatement from the disabled list as early as May 28 doesn't signal a change in his recovery.

Scott Merkin has covered the White Sox for MLB.com since 2003. Read his blog, Merk's Works, follow him on Twitter @scottmerkin, on Facebook and listen to his podcast.

Moncada 'not in sync,' but keeping head up

By Scott Merkin /MLB.com / April 12, 2018

MINNEAPOLIS -- Yoan Moncada failed to get down a suicide squeeze bunt with Omar Narvaez breaking from third in the seventh inning of Wednesday's 2-1 victory over the Rays, leading to Narvaez being thrown out and the White Sox not scoring.

But much like he has with his early-season struggles at the plate, Moncada directly addressed the mistake when asked pregame Thursday at Target Field.

"I got the play," said Moncada through interpreter Billy Russo. "I knew what I was supposed to do, but I wasn't able to execute it."

Moncada's bunting mistake added to his overall early frustration, which didn't abate with an 0-for-4 game in Thursday's 4-0 loss, dropping his line to .184/.298/.306 with 24 strikeouts in 49 at-bats. Moncada has particularly struggled against sliders, while White Sox manager Rick Renteria believes he's pulling his head a little bit and not keeping it down through the swing.

"He's not really seeing the ball into the zone as well as I would like him to," Renteria said. "But on top of that, [he needs to] just continue to eliminate noise."

"My swing is not in sync right now," Moncada said. "I hope -- probably in one or two more days -- I'll be able to adjust and put my swing where it's supposed to be. I've been patient. I've been recognizing the pitches. It's just my swing is not there."

Having a teaching-oriented manager such as Renteria helps a young player like Moncada, who felt better after talking with Renteria in the dugout following the missed bunt.

"I'm not saying that I felt good, because I knew that it was my responsibility," Moncada said. "But after we talked, I was able to digest a little bit better the situation, just because of the way he talked to me."

Saladino ready behind the plate

An MRI on Welington Castillo's sore right knee showed no further damage, but the White Sox catcher felt sore after the flight to Minnesota and was held out of the starting lineup Thursday. His absence left Narvaez as the starting catcher and infielder Tyler Saladino as the backup.

Saladino warmed up James Shields and Nate Jones during Wednesday's victory, noting, with a smile, the difference in their raw stuff. He also caught Carson Fulmer's side session Thursday and looked like a kid on Christmas wearing the catcher's gear as he talked to the media.

"I like catching. I caught all the way up until high school," Saladino said. "We played so much baseball as kids that we all kind of just played everywhere. I think that's why I like shortstop, also. You are kind of center of the diamond involved. There's a lot of stuff going on."

"We don't want anything to happen that would need me to be in the ballgame. But given the situation, I'm just trying to be best prepared as I can. It is kind of silly, when you see me walking around in the gear. But at the same time, I take it seriously."

Delmonico a Twins 'favorite'

Minnesota second baseman Brian Dozier dubbed Nicky Delmonico his "favorite player" after Delmonico's walkoff homer last Sept. 27 against Los Angeles knocked the Angels from the playoffs and gave the Twins a Wild Card spot. But the two have yet to meet.

"If I get on second or something, I'll definitely say a couple of things," Delmonico said. "Obviously, during the time I hit it, I didn't think about it until after. It was definitely a cool moment, to see their reaction, their video after I hit it."

Giolito settles in vs. Twins, but can't find win

By Scott Merkin/ Mlb.com / April 12, 2018

MINNEAPOLIS -- White Sox right-hander Lucas Giolito found his offspeed pitch over the final three innings he worked in a 4-0 loss to the Twins at Target Field on Thursday night. And that step forward for the right-hander might be more important than the game's final outcome.

"I was finally able to make a good adjustment after those first few innings," Giolito said. "Kind of found my curveball a little bit. That was useful in those later innings, throwing the slider for a strike."

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"Once he started settling down in the third, his stuff looked a little crisper," White Sox manager Rick Renteria said. "I thought his command improved."

For a third straight start this season, Giolito didn't appear to be working with his best stuff or complete repertoire at the outset. He pitched out of a jam in the first with runners on second and third and only one out, and he did not have a perfect inning through the first four.

But the righty looked stronger over the fifth and sixth, striking out Joe Mauer with a 1-2 curveball in the fifth and getting Eduardo Escobar on the same pitch in the sixth, with Eddie Rosario on third and one out.

Giolito allowed four runs (three earned) over a season-high 6 1/3 innings, striking out three and walking five. He threw 18 sliders and five curves, per Statcast™, getting three swinging strikes and four called strikes on the slider.

"There's a few positives to take out of today," said Giolito, who threw 59 of his 103 pitches for strikes. "Another day where I was just grinding as much as I could to get through it."

"Put up zeros for the club so the hitters could get back out there. The curveball definitely felt a lot better later in the game. I probably could have gone to it more, looking back on it."

The White Sox offense did nothing against Twins starter Jose Berrios, mustering three hits over seven innings against the righty. Berrios fanned 11, matching a career high last done against the White Sox on Aug. 30, 2017.

Mauer drove in three runs, picking up his 2,000th career hit with a two-run single to center off of left-handed reliever Aaron Bummer in the seventh. Those two runs were charged to Giolito, who left after walking nine hitter Jason Castro and allowing Brian Dozier's double.

Giolito wanted to keep going. But in this year of development for the White Sox, he left with a positive feeling overall for the night, knowing he can do more.

"I have to do a better job of commanding the fastball," said Giolito, adding he was pulling off and flying open on pitches. "That's my No. 1 pitch. When I throw it right, it gets guys out. I have to do a better job staying through it."

"I'm happy with my ability to compete and grind when I don't have a lot of stuff working in my favor. Mechanics are off. Falling behind a ton of batters. I'm looking forward to my next start. I'm constantly looking to the future. That's the biggest thing, is looking to get that opportunity to go out there and put it all together."

SOUND SMART

The White Sox had one at-bat all game with a runner in scoring position, in the ninth, and were hitless in that situation. They are 3-for-46 with RISP over the last six games, stranding 49.

HE SAID IT

"I didn't know he was at 1,999. I remember when I had that, his [third] at-bat when I struck him out, I remember the crowd was up and cheering. I was like, 'Oh, man. The crowd is really into it right now. They want to get that run across.'" -- Giolito, on facing Mauer during his milestone night

MITEL REPLAY OF THE DAY

Byron Buxton's speed directly produced the Twins' first run in the third and part of that work came on his 27th straight stolen base on a call overturned by video review challenge. Buxton opened with a single and originally was ruled out on Omar Narvaez's throw to Tim Anderson. But the replay showed Buxton beat the tag. He later scored on Dozier's grounder to Anderson, which the shortstop threw away in trying to get Buxton at home.

Catcher Wellington Castillo is day to day with right knee soreness but could be back to catch Reynaldo Lopez for Friday's 7:10 p.m. CT first pitch against the Twins at Target Field. Lopez has never faced the Twins but allowed two hits over seven innings in his last start against the Rays.

White Sox make latest bullpen addition, bring Chris Volstad up from Triple-A

By Vinnie Duber/ MLB.com / April 12, 2018

The White Sox bullpen makeover rolls on.

After replacing Juan Minaya with Bruce Rondon over the weekend, the White Sox replaced Gregory Infante with Chris Volstad ahead of Thursday's game against the Minnesota Twins.

The 31-year-old Volstad has parts of eight major league seasons under his belt, including 19.1 innings with the White Sox last year. He made six appearances, two of them starts, and finished with a 4.66 ERA and four home runs allowed.

Volstad's most illustrious season was his rookie year with the then Florida Marlins, when he put up a 2.88 ERA in 14 starts and one relief outing. He's yet to keep his ERA under 4.50 in a single season since. After four seasons with the Fish, he pitched with the Cubs in 2012 and with the Colorado Rockies in 2013. He didn't pitch in the majors in 2014 or 2016, those two seasons without a big league appearance sandwiched around two innings with the Pittsburgh Pirates during the 2015 campaign.

Volstad was excellent for the White Sox this spring, making eight Cactus League appearances and allowing no runs over his 14 innings of work. He made one start with Triple-A Charlotte last Friday, tagged for five runs on six hits in 4.2 innings.

The White Sox are spending the early part of their season retooling their bullpen, which entered play Thursday with a 5.59 ERA, ranked 27th out of 30 big league teams. Minaya went down after walking four straight hitters in a loss to the Detroit Tigers. Infante allowed three hits and walked two in a loss to the Tampa Bay Rays earlier this week. Both guys made the Opening Day roster after faring well at the end of last season.

But the White Sox have opted to put veterans on display, perhaps with hopes of trading them later this season, much like they did last year with Anthony Swarzak, Tommy Kahnle, David Robertson, Dan Jennings and Tyler Clippard. Rondon has already looked great, striking out the first five hitters he faced. Through two outings, he's yet to do anything but get batters out.

Bringing up Volstad meant clearing a spot on the 40-man roster, and the White Sox did that by moving Carlos Rodon to the 60-day disabled list. But before White Sox fans get worried about a setback in the pitcher's recovery from shoulder surgery, know that the DL placement is retroactive to right before the season started, meaning Rodon is eligible to come off beginning May 28. That's right in line with what the White Sox have been suggesting could be when Rodon makes his return to the big league team, around the beginning of June.

Wheel of Fortune makes up for previous White Sox snub

By Dan Santaromita / NBC Sports Chicago / April 12, 2018

Remember how Wheel of Fortune left the White Sox out of a puzzle involving Chicago sports teams?

Well, they made up for it.

Wheel of Fortune made amends for its White Sox dis by featuring the team in a new puzzle. This time the White Sox got the spotlight all to themselves.

The category was "People" and the solution was "White Sox fans."

This won't exactly go down in history as one of the best beefs in history, but Wheel of Fortune and the White Sox appear to have made nice.

Breathe easy, Sox fans. At least until the next inevitable slight against your team comes along.

Lucas Giolito continued a recent troubling trend for White Sox starting pitchers

By Vinnie Duber/ NBC Sports Chicago / April 12, 2018

To say White Sox starting pitchers have struggled with walks lately is a bit of an understatement.

Lucas Giolito continued a troubling trend for the White Sox rotation on Thursday. Giolito walked five in 6 1/3 innings and took the 4-0 loss in Minnesota. That marked the fourth time in the last five that a White Sox starting pitcher walked at least five. Only James Shields (6 strikeouts, 5 walks on Wednesday) had more strikeouts than walks in his last turn out.

Obviously the combined 18 strikeouts and 23 walks in the last five starts is not the way to keep your team in games. On the season, White Sox starting pitchers have 39 strikeouts against 37 walks in 69 1/3 innings. Reynaldo Lopez has been able to survive seven walks in 13 innings by only allowing four hits so far. Each of the other four pitchers in the White Sox rotation has an ERA above 4.00.

Daily White Sox prospects update: Winston-Salem wins on a walk-off steal of home

By Vinnie Duber/ NBC Sports Chicago / April 12, 2018

Class A Winston-Salem

Of course the action is happening in Winston-Salem. This time it wasn't one of the White Sox highly ranked prospects making noise — though Micker Adolfo had two hits and Luis Alexander Basabe hit a double — but Joel Booker, who pinch ran for Gavin Sheets in extras and stole home to give the Dash a walk-off win. Check it out:

Triple-A Charlotte

It was a rough day for Knights pitchers, with Charlotte falling 11-1. But reliever Thyago Vieira — a suspected candidate for a promotion to the big leagues as the White Sox continue to make major league bullpen adjustments — was roughed up for five runs while only recording one out. Vieira allowed four hits, including a homer, and walked one as his ERA ballooned to 15.00 on the season.

Double-A Birmingham

Pitching didn't go too well at the Double-A level, either, with Jordan Stephens scorched for six earned runs in his four-inning start, in which he allowed nine hits and walked one.

Class A Kannapolis

Outfielder Luis Gonzalez continued his hot start to the season with three more hits in Kannapolis' loss. He's slashing .308/.333/.462 through his first seven games.

If White Sox are caught in an emergency, Tyler Saladino ready to fill in at catcher

By Colleen Kane/ Chicago Tribune / April 12, 2018

White Sox infielder Tyler Saladino finished catching Carson Fulmer's side session Thursday afternoon at Target Field and sat down at his locker to do an interview in his catching gear.

He was enjoying the novelty of it too much to change.

"I might just leave it on all day," Saladino said with a smile. "Feels great."

Sox catcher Welington Castillo tweaked his right knee Tuesday. While an MRI revealed no structural damage, Castillo felt soreness after the Sox's flight to Minneapolis, and manager Rick Renteria held him out of the lineup against the Twins.

Third-year catcher Omar Narvaez will start until Castillo returns — Renteria hopes it will only be a couple of days — but Saladino is the team's emergency backup in the meantime.

Saladino, who has played every position but pitcher and catcher in the majors, always liked catching when he did it before high school. He has caught bullpens and practiced receiving off a pitching machine in past spring trainings, and he said he practiced putting down signs Thursday.

Renteria said bullpen catcher Mark Salas gave Saladino good reviews for his work during Fulmer's session.

"We don't want anything to happen that (they) would need me to be in the ballgame," Saladino said. "I'm just trying to be (as) prepared as I can. It is kind of silly when you see me walking around in the gear, but I take it seriously."

Saladino warmed up starter James Shields between innings during Wednesday's victory over the Rays and also caught a few warmup pitches from hard-throwing reliever Nate Jones.

"He was bringing it," Saladino said of Jones. "It was a little different. They are two different pitchers.

"Wely said, 'Make sure to open the eyes a little bit more before you catch Nate.' It was fun."

Back in the majors: Chris Volstad said things are getting hectic at Civil Society Brewing Co. The Florida brewery in which Volstad is a partner is planning to open a second location in that state, and the Sox reliever keeps in touch with the happenings from afar.

"It would be kind of nice to be around it, I guess, but this is the better alternative," Volstad said.

Volstad began his ninth season in the majors Thursday when the Sox purchased his contract from Triple-A Charlotte. Volstad, 31, replaces Gregory Infante, whom the Sox optioned to Charlotte on Wednesday after Infante allowed eight earned runs over 4 1/3 innings in six appearances.

Volstad made two starts and four relief appearances with the Sox late last season and didn't allow a run over 14 innings in spring training. He made a start at Charlotte and is stretched out enough to serve as a multiple-inning reliever.

A former starter with the Marlins and Cubs, he recorded his first victory in five years in September, when the Sox called him up after he had gone home from Charlotte for the offseason.

"Health-wise, physically and mentally, I feel I can keep going," Volstad said. "So I'm just trying to keep focused in on that."

To make room for Volstad on the 40-man roster, the Sox moved left-hander Carlos Rodon to the 60-day disabled list as he recovers from left shoulder surgery. Rodon will be eligible for reinstatement from the DL on May 28..

Jose Berrios shuts down White Sox, Twins take series opener 4-0

By Colleen Kane/ Chicago Tribune/ April 12, 2018

White Sox right-hander Lucas Giolito didn't realize Joe Mauer was trying for his 2,000th career hit when the Twins veteran stepped to the plate in the fifth inning Thursday night.

Giolito was surprised as the fans at Target Field rose to their feet and cheered, thinking they were suddenly very into the game.

He silenced the crowd by striking out Mauer on a curveball, but he didn't get a second shot to deny Mauer's milestone. After Giolito allowed runners to reach second and third with one out in the seventh inning, Sox manager Rick Renteria turned to left-handed reliever Aaron Bummer.

Mauer singled up the middle on a 2-2 count to drive in a pair of runs, reaching the milestone and helping the Twins pull away in a 4-0 victory.

"It would have been cool (to face him)," Giolito said. "It's obviously a great achievement for him. He's a great player, but I'm looking forward to facing him more in the future definitely."

Twins right-hander Jose Berrios also had a career moment, tying a personal best of 11 strikeouts in seven innings.

He outpitched Giolito, who gave up five hits and four runs — three earned — in 6 1/3 innings.

In his previous two starts this season, Giolito gave up eight hits and eight earned runs in 11 2/3 innings. More concerning were seven walks and four hit batters.

He walked five more Thursday, but the Twins didn't capitalize on the first four free passes. Giolito wiggled out of those predicaments in the first, second and fourth innings, but his seventh-inning walk scored thanks to Mauer.

He singled, stole second, advanced to third on a fly out to center field and scored on Tim Anderson's throwing error. The Sox shortstop fielded Brian Dozier's ground ball cleanly, but his throw to catcher Omar Narvaez was a little outside.

Mauer added an RBI single on his 1,999th career hit for a 2-0 Twins lead. Giolito didn't put together a clean inning until the fifth.

"I was finally able to make a good adjustment after those first few innings," Giolito said. "I kind of found my curveball a little bit. That was useful in those later innings, throwing the slider for a strike."

"The big thing is I have to do a better job of commanding the fastball. That's my No. 1 pitch. When I throw it right, it gets guys out. I have to do a better job staying through it."

Berrios was on point from the start.

The Sox entered Thursday 3-for-46 with runners in scoring position with 45 runners left on base in their previous five games. Berrios made that problem disappear because he didn't allow the Sox in scoring position in the first place.

On Thursday, Yolmer Sanchez and Anderson singled in the second and fifth innings and Avisail Garcia was hit by a pitch in the fourth as the only Sox to reach base in the first six innings. None advanced to second.

Berrios opened the seventh with strikeouts of Jose Abreu and Matt Davidson to tie the career high he last recorded against the Sox in August. After Nicky Delmonico sneaked a single into right field, Sanchez grounded out to end the inning.

"His breaking ball was working very, very well again," Renteria said. "It was a good fastball. He was able to elevate and use it in different ways. You've got to tip your cap to that young man there."

Temperature at first pitch Thursday night was 47 degrees, which while chilly was better than the forecast for the rest of the four-game series. Rain, snow and cold might threaten any of the remaining games. The Sox had one game postponed in their first 12, on April 1 in Kansas City.

"We still have to get some work (if there's a postponement)," Renteria said. "We might try to work in the cages, get some pens done in the cages. We'll do what we can, whatever the weather permits us to do, and then just adjust, just keep going."

Rick Renteria chats with Yoan Moncada after Sox loss: 'I want him to understand he's not a finished product'

By Colleen Kane/ Chicago Tribune / April 12, 2018

White Sox manager Rick Renteria took a few extra minutes after Thursday's 4-0 loss to the Twins to meet with second baseman Yoan Moncada.

Most of the Sox players had a difficult night at the plate against Twins right-hander Jose Berrios. But Moncada went 0-for-4 with three strikeouts, and his batting average dropped to .184 through the Sox's first 12 games. He also misplayed a groundball that allowed Eduardo Escobar to reach base in the eighth.

Renteria's purpose for the chat was twofold. He wanted to reinforce to Moncada that he should worry about himself and not outside expectations. And he wanted to remind Moncada he needs to maintain his focus and his willingness to learn throughout an entire game and an entire season.

"He's by no means a finished product, and I want him to understand he's not a finished product," Renteria said. "But I want him to understand there are certain things you have to do. You have to maintain focus, and if you're not hitting, you've got to catch the ball. And if you're not catching the ball, you better hit. But you can't fail at both, because then there's a problem. So a lot of it has to do with learning, focusing and continuing to concentrate."

It was the second time in two games Renteria has had to address Moncada specifically.

In Wednesday's victory over the Rays, the Sox called for a suicide squeeze with Omar Narvaez on third base. But Moncada laid off the bunt, and Narvaez was caught in a rundown.

"He just told me in those situations, I have to execute," Moncada said Thursday through a team interpreter. "It doesn't matter if it's a good or bad pitch, I have to bunt the ball. I understood that, and I know that it was my mistake."

"It's always good when you have a manager like Ricky who is able to communicate in your own language and can explain to you the things that you need to do and why things happen. After we talked, I felt better. I'm not saying that I felt good, because I knew that it was my responsibility, but after we talked I was able to digest a little bit better the situation just because of the way he talked to me."

The outside expectations Renteria spoke of Thursday are real for Moncada.

He joined the Sox organization last season from the Chris Sale trade as baseball's top prospect. After he finally was called up to the majors in July, he took a while to heat up before a solid September.

Moncada's taking a while this season too.

He is 9-for-49 with three doubles, a homer, three RBIs, eight walks and a team-leading 24 strikeouts.

His swing is not in sync, he said, and it doesn't help that he is playing for the first time in his life in cold, snowy weather. Renteria has also noticed an issue with head movement.

"He's got to just stay within his approach, get pitches he can handle, try not to do too much," Renteria said. "Honestly, I think he's pulling his head a little bit, so he's not really seeing the ball into the zone as well as I would like him to see the ball into the zone. But on top of that just continue to eliminate noise."

Moncada said he hopes guidance from the coaching staff and fellow Cuban Jose Abreu will help him to overcome his recent struggles.

"I'm not frustrated," Moncada said. "I know that probably the results are not there, the good results, but I still have plenty of confidence in me. I believe in myself because I know what I'm capable of doing. Right

now it's just a matter of a rough time, but I still feel very confident in myself.”

White Sox' Yoan Moncada — striking out half the time — on 'rough' early season

By Steve Greenberg/ Chicago Sun Times / April 12, 2018

MINNEAPOLIS — Yoan Moncada's troubles at the plate could simply be a matter of what he's doing with his head when he swings the bat.

“He's not keeping his head down through the swing,” White Sox manager Rick Renteria said. “I think he's pulling off a little bit so he's not allowing himself to track the ball as long as he possibly could.

Snow problem? White Sox get ready for blizzard conditions in Minneapolis
Sports media: What's bugging me? WGN's new score bug for Cubs, White Sox games

“He's got a really, really good eye. But I think from a physical standpoint, if he keeps his head down a little bit longer — I know the guys are working on trying to stay behind the baseball — he'll put himself in a better position.”

Is that all it is? Is that why the 22-year-old second baseman, as important to this Sox rebuild as anybody, is striking out in nearly half of his at-bats this season and living below the Mendoza line?

It's not the sort of performance Renteria had in mind when he anointed Moncada the team's leadoff man. Yet in his first two at-bats Thursday against Twins starter Jose Berrios, Moncada struck out looking and swinging, respectively — saddling him with his seventh multiple-strikeout game (out of 12) already this season. And when he watched three straight strikes from Gabriel Moya go by in the ninth inning of the Sox' 4-0 loss, he was staring at his third straight game with three strikeouts.

Berrios was dominant, tying a career high with 11 strikeouts in seven innings. It was his third time reaching that number, and the first since last August against the Sox. Moncada was bound to have a difficult time with the nasty right-hander.

Still, Moncada hasn't just had a problem with strikeouts. He has failed to hit the ball hard and been the opposite of clutch with runners in scoring position. So here's a question: Is his main problem what he's doing with his head when he swings, or what's going on inside it?

“I feel good,” Moncada said through an interpreter before the game. “I'm not frustrated. I know that probably the results are not there, the good results, but I still have plenty of confidence in me. I believe in myself because I know what I'm capable of doing. Right now, it's just a matter of a rough time — but I still feel very confident in myself.”

Moncada has reviewed video of his swings with coaches. He continues to receive guidance from friend and mentor Jose Abreu. He insists that batting leadoff is right in his wheelhouse.

“Even though I'm feeling good right now, my swing, my offense is not where it's supposed to be,” he said. “My swing is not in sync right now. I hope that probably in one or two more days, I'll be able to adjust and put my swing where it's supposed to be. I've been patient. I've been recognizing the pitches. It's just my swing is not there.”

On a night when 34-year-old Joe Mauer became the third Twins player to 2,000 hits — joining Rod Carew and Kirby Puckett — the struggles of the young Sox stood in interesting juxtaposition. Starting pitcher Lucas Giolito had his moments, but his five walks allowed were indicative of his uneven performance. Shortstop Tim Anderson had a throwing error that allowed an unearned run to score, and he appeared to get himself picked off first base for the second game in a row; only a numbingly long replay process saved him.

And then there was Moncada, who again just couldn't get anything going. After whiffing nine times in three games, he stood at 24 strikeouts in his first 49 at-bats on the season. It led to a postgame meeting with Renteria in the manager's office.

"They beat themselves up because they want to do well," Renteria said. "Most on the outside don't understand that the pressure that they put on themselves to have success, it's pretty daunting."

Meet the White Sox's new backup catcher: Tyler Saladino

By James Fegan / The Athletic / April 13, 2018

MINNEAPOLIS — The goofy smile on Tyler Saladino's face as he strode through the White Sox clubhouse in full catcher's gear was pretty indicative that he's fully aware of how unusual the team's current predicament is. That or he's just keeping warm in anticipation of the snowy forecast this weekend in Minneapolis.

"I might just leave it on all day, feels great," Saladino said. "We don't want anything to happen that would need me to be in the ballgame. But given the situation, I'm just trying to be best prepared as I can. It is kind of silly when you see me walking around in the gear. But at the same time I take it seriously."

A day after his right cleat got caught in the dirt and he left a game against Tampa Bay with knee soreness, starting catcher Welington Castillo felt more discomfort while on the plane to Minneapolis. Another doctor visit reaffirmed what his initial MRI revealed: no structural damage of note. But the lack of progress in how he feels left the Sox starting Omar Narváez for a second straight game on Thursday. Narváez played 90 games last year, so him starting is not the issue. With Kevan Smith already nursing an ankle sprain, the Sox are in limbo as they wait on a player who is day-to-day, and remain an injury — or even an ejection — away from putting their utility infielder behind the plate.

"I don't know exactly where he stands right now, but if he isn't able to go then I mean, I already got the signs down and practicing putting down some signs too," said Saladino, who caught Carson Fulmer's side for practice. "But I feel like I'm pretty much as prepared as I can be if it were to happen."

The Minnesota weather will probably solve the issue for the Sox. Most discussion at Target Field is centering around whether even half of this four-game set will be able to be played.

Carlos Rodón was always an extreme long shot to return before May 28, and even in spring training general manager Rick Hahn tamped down expectations that he could make a major league start before June, so placing him on the 60-day disabled list to make room on the 40-man roster for Chris Volstad to be added to the bullpen isn't much of an ordeal.

Thyago Vieira would have been one of the only options in the Triple-A bullpen if the Sox didn't have the ability to create a 40-man spot. The Brazilian flamethrower indeed throws extremely hard, and has struck

out five in 2 2/3 scoreless innings so far in Charlotte, but a league scout who watched him recently pushed back against the idea that his control or mechanical consistency is ready for a major league role.

Volstad, who was fellow Sox reliever Danny Farquhar's roommate during a showcase in Wilmington, North Carolina back when they were high school seniors, doesn't have the "future closer" ceiling that Vieira would offer, but he did throw 14 scoreless innings in the Cactus League and provides some more capability for long relief alongside Héctor Santiago. Either way, the Sox have already shown by sending down Juan Minaya and now Gregory Infante that they will have a surprisingly short leash.

“When we broke camp, one of the things we talked about was they had earned an opportunity beyond the spring for some of these guys that didn’t go as well as everybody would have wanted,” manager Rick Renteria said. “The idea was to give them an opportunity to get here, break with the club and see what they could do in the first couple of outings or whatever is they got in terms of performance. It didn’t go as well as we would have wanted it to. With the guys that performed well with some history from behind, and still in the minor leagues with us, we have the ability to make the switch to allow the guys to get back on track.”

Pitching prospect Dane Dunning's torrid start at High-A Winston Salem (0.79 ERA in 11 1/3 innings, 16 strikeouts and two walks) is bringing back memories of the way he tore through the competition at Low-A Kannapolis last April and earned himself a promotion in a month. Sending him back to Winston-Salem always seemed like an especially cruel decision toward hitters across the Carolina League, and now that Triple-A Charlotte has lost one of its starters, perhaps someone will get moved up from the loaded Double-A Birmingham rotation, and make room for Dunning to get challenged.

Jordan Stephens is 25 and is repeating the level at Birmingham, and it shows. Stephens' strong six-inning debut (one earned run on two hits, seven strikeouts) built off a strong Cactus League performance. He looks like the first Baron to get a trip to North Carolina at this rate.

Dunning gave some credit to James Shields for showing him a new grip for his curveball during spring training, and Shields put on a clinic with slow curves of all types against Tampa, including a version that clocks well under 70 mph that pitching coach Don Cooper calls “The Slow Boy.” At this point, Shields' fingerprints are visible all across baseball given his work with David Price, Alex Cobb, Chris Archer, Jake Odorizzi and others, but he said he views it as part of his role as a teammate, not as a mentor.

“I’m always around guys and talking to them and interested in what they’re doing,” Shields said. “Dane asked me how I threw my curveball. He was kind of struggling with it a little bit in spring training and sometimes year-to-year you don't really realize that you're changing your grip midseason or even year-to-year. You don't really realize it. You go into spring training naturally thinking you're going to have a good curveball and maybe it's just a little grip adjustment from the year before. I just showed him what I do and he ended up throwing it in a bullpen and feeling really good with it. I'm glad he's doing well.”

By the Numbers: Lucas Giolito’s control issues continue as José Berríos baffles White Sox once again

By James Fegan / The Athletic / April 13, 2018

MINNEAPOLIS — Lucas Giolito's various battles to command his arsenal, Tim Anderson losing his balance on a throw home to try to nab Byron Buxton, Aaron Bummer trying and failing to stall Joe Mauer from reaching history ... all were irrelevant landmarks on a crisp night at Target Field, where José Berríos pitched far too well for much else to matter.

Most pitching prospects take time and patience, because most pitching prospects are not Berríos, who at 23 years of age, overwhelmed the White Sox (4-8) for seven scoreless innings in a 4-0 Twins victory that could be matched only by the last time Berríos dominated the White Sox for seven scoreless innings, which was Aug. 30.

“He did a really nice job,” manager Rick Renteria said. “I thought he attacked the strike zone. His breaking ball was working very, very well again. It was a good fastball. He was able to elevate and use it in different ways. You’ve got to tip your cap to that young man there. Our guys kept trying to grind, kept

trying to get him up to where they could handle him a little bit more. They weren't able to get a whole lot going.”

Berríos probably won't pitch again this series, which is a source of solace.

3: Hits for the White Sox on the night. They were all singles. This isn't a very interesting stat, but what can be said? They did not do much.

8-12: The strikeout-to-walk ratio for Giolito three starts into the 2018 season after he walked five and struck out three in 6 1/3 innings. Given that volume of extra runners on the bases and the amount of balls in play, it remains some kind of impressive that he's kept the White Sox as competitive as he has in his outings without being able to command his offspeed stuff consistently. That said, this obviously won't do over the course of a full season.

“Just pulling off and flying open on pitches,” Giolito said of his control issues. “The big thing is I have to do a better job of commanding the fastball. That’s my No. 1 pitch. When I throw it right, it gets guys out. I have to do a better job staying through it.”

26.7 percent: Swinging-strike rate for Giolito's slider and curveball command on the night, which is pretty good all things considered. One of the things to consider is that his command for both —especially the curveball — really did not emerge until the latter half of the game. The fact that his fastball sat in the 89-92 mph range is still an issue. So is the fact that he lacked control of it. But the offspeed stuff reared its head eventually.

42.1 percent: Strikeout rate for Yoán Moncada after an 0-for-4, three-strikeout night. Before the game, Moncada reiterated that he's comfortable in the leadoff spot and is confident results are going to come, but the way he stared at an 0-2 fastball down the pipe in the ninth inning certainly did not look like a hitter who is in sync. Renteria had a meeting with Moncada in his office after the game. He said a day off for Moncada to watch from the sidelines and gather himself is possible, but that he had made no determination whether it was imminent.

“He’s by no means a finished product, and I want him to understand he’s not a finished product, but I want him to understand there are certain things you have to do,” Renteria said. “You have to maintain focus, and if you’re not hitting, you’ve got to catch the ball, and if you’re not catching the ball you better

hit. But you can’t fail at both, because then there’s a problem. So I think a lot of it has to do with learning, focusing and continuing to concentrate.”

11: Career-high number of strikeouts for Berríos, who was absolutely untouchable all night. If Giolito or Reynaldo López or Dylan Cease or anyone in the White Sox's system ever gets to the level of command with the curveball that Berríos showed while getting 12 swinging strikes on the pitch alone, that would be a developmental coup. Berríos is good, is what I'm saying.

2,000: Hits for Joe Mauer in a superb career full of timely, back-breaking hits against the Chicago White Sox, much like a two-run single he bounced through the middle off Aaron Bummer in the seventh for No. 2,000. Apparently a lefty specialist perhaps on the level of Chris Sale is needed to retire Mauer in a critical situation. The White Sox offense didn't show many signs of life to encourage the idea that a comeback from 2-0 was in the works, but at least Giolito's already muddied stat line could have been saved from further harm.

“I didn’t know he was at 1,999,” said Giolito, who struck Mauer out during his first crack at 2,000 hits. “I remember when I had that, his [third] at-bat when I struck him out, I remember the crowd was up and cheering. I was like, ‘Oh, man. The crowd is really into it right now. They want to get that run across.’”