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Here are the remaining needs for White Sox

After the deal for Nova, Chicago exploring more moves to upgrade roster

By Scott Merkin / MLB.com | December 13, 2018

LAS VEGAS -- The Mandalay Bay Resort & Casino seemed to be the perfect locale for a Bryce Harper announcement as quite possibly the biggest move in White Sox history.

Harper, one of the true premium free agents at 26 years of age, resides in Las Vegas, and the White Sox were in town this week for the annual Winter Meetings. But just because the White Sox departed Thursday without any sort of deal finalized with the multi-talented outfielder, or infielder Manny Machado for that matter, doesn't mean it can't happen.

This next phase of the rebuild, where the White Sox have positioned themselves to spend in the context of contending for multiple championships, should be an exciting one for the organization.

"We're excited to be discussing impactful moves for the long term," said White Sox general manager Rick Hahn following Thursday's Rule 5 Draft. "We've made no secret, it's been a tough couple years on everyone associated with the White Sox, an understandably tough couple of years given what we're trying to accomplish for the long term.

"It's good to have a seat at the table on some large, impactful moves. Now it doesn't necessarily mean that anything's going to come together. We still have a fair amount of work to do, and even if we are able to convert on something big, there's still going to be work behind it over the coming years to get us where we need to be."

Adding right-hander Ivan Nova in a trade with the Pirates became the only move made by the White Sox during the Winter Meetings. But as Hahn pointed out Thursday, they will get back after the process Friday after returning to Chicago.

"We've seen high-impact deals happen here," Hahn said. "Obviously, that wasn't the case this week at these meetings, but it doesn't mean something can't come together in the coming weeks. In the end, when it gets done is less important than getting it done. So, we're going to react accordingly to how the market unfolds."

BIGGEST REMAINING NEEDS

1. Premium free agent: The White Sox reportedly are in play for both Harper and Machado. While it seems unlikely to happen, they have the payroll room to add both.

2. C: Multiple reports had the White Sox linked to free agent Yasmani Grandal. With Welington Castillo in place and prospects Zack Collins and Seby Zavala moving through the system, the team also could opt for more of a backup sort of backstop.

3. RP: Alex Colome is in line to be the team's closer after being acquired via trade from the Mariners. The White Sox still want to add at least one more late-inning option, with the relief market starting to open late Wednesday night.

3. SP: Pairing Nova with Carlos Rodon, Reynaldo Lopez and Lucas Giolito does not preclude the White Sox from going after another starting pitcher. They do have right-hander Dylan Cease progressing quickly toward their big league rotation.

RULE 5 DRAFT

The White Sox selected right-hander Jordan Romano from Toronto with the third pick in Thursday's Rule 5 Draft but then traded him to the Rangers for cash considerations. Perhaps the biggest news was the White Sox keeping right-handed pitcher Zach Thompson, who was coming off a breakout 2018 campaign with a 1.55 ERA over stops between Class A Advanced Winston-Salem and Double-A Birmingham, but was left unprotected off the 40-man by the White Sox and at a risk of being selected.

GM'S BOTTOM LINE

"Those of you who know [White Sox chairman] Jerry [Reinsdorf] know how competitive he is. He was on board from the start with the rebuild. He's still on board with the long-term plan. He's still very comfortable with where we're at, and where we're headed. At the same time there is a competitiveness where you want to reinforce what we've done. You don't want the suffering to be for naught so to speak.

"There has to be a pot of gold at the end of this. He was very much on board when he, [executive vice president] Kenny [Williams] and I talked about this from the start, how things were going to unfold and some of the hardships that were going to be at the front end and some of the moves we wanted to be a part of potentially on the back end to move this thing along." -- Hahn, on Reinsdorf's and the White Sox desire to win another title

Nicky Delmonico hit a massive home run while playing Wiffle ball on the beach with fans

By Eric Chesterton / Cut4 by MLB.com | December 13, 2018

While some players take their talents to the Winter Leagues over the offseason, others choose to spend their time on the beach. But, that doesn't mean they're taking that time away from baseball. For White Sox left fielder Nicky Delmonico, it looks like the beach is where the the real competition is.

Playing in a game against White Sox fans, Delmonico smashed an impressive home run, flipped his bat and embarked on a leisurely home run trot. But, the other team wasn't about to let him have it that easy:

Nevertheless, Delmonico overcame those obstacles to complete his home run trot and even came away with a bit of strength training for his efforts. Based on how fun this looks, maybe more players should take their talents to the beach leagues.

Who's the next White Sox Hall of Famer?

By Chris Kamka / NBC Sports Chicago | December 13, 2018

Harold Baines is in the Hall. Last Sunday's announcement totally took me (and a lot of others) by surprise.

I was ecstatic to see the news. Baines was one of my favorite players growing up. I loved that iconic leg kick. When they traded him to the Rangers in 1989, nine-year-old me was devastated.

Now that Harold's in, who should be the next White Sox Hall of Famer? Here are six candidates:

Minnie Miñoso

If you haven't already, read this:

I'll summarize (though you really should read it). Miñoso had power, speed and on-base ability. His career may have been delayed due to the color line. If one feels his MLB career isn't enough, his Negro League career and his role as a pioneer for black Latino ballplayers are plenty to make up the difference.

Dick Allen

Dick Allen hit 351 career home runs. His slashline of .292/.378/.534 is very impressive, even more so when placed in the context of his era. The 1960s was a tough period for hitters. That being said, 1,749 games and 1,848 career hits don't jump off the page. According to WAR, he's borderline (61.3 Fangraphs, 58.7 Baseball-Reference). But when you dig a little deeper...

Weighted Runs Created Plus (wRC+) measures offensive production comparing to league average and adjusting for ballpark. 100 is league average, any point above or below represents one percent above or below league average. Dick Allen had a career wRC+ of 155, meaning he was 55% better than league average for his career. That's incredibly good. How good?

Career wRC+

(minimum 5,000 career plate appearances)

Boldface = Hall of Famer

1. Babe Ruth, 197

2. Ted Williams, 188

3. Lou Gehrig, 173

Rogers Hornsby, 173

5. Barry Bonds, 173

6. Mickey Mantle, 170

7. Ty Cobb, 165

Joe Jackson, 165

9. Stan Musial, 158

Jimmie Foxx, 158

11. Mark McGwire, 157

Johnny Mize, 157

Tris Speaker, 157

14. Mel Ott, 156

Dan Brouthers, 156

16. Joey Votto, 155

Dick Allen, 155

18. Willie Mays, 154

Frank Thomas, 154

Hank Greenberg, 154

There are 1,007 players with at least 5,000 career plate appearances. Allen is tied for SIXTEENTH. Dick Allen isn't just on a list of good players. He's listed among top tier all-time greats.

Billy Pierce

Pierce was arguably the best American League pitcher of the 1950s, and perhaps the third best in the Majors (behind Robin Roberts and Warren Spahn). He posted a career ERA of 3.27 (119 ERA+ 19 percent above league average) in over 3,000 innings and was one strikeout short of 2,000. He had 211 career wins and was the only pitcher during the 1950s to post a qualified ERA under 2 (1.97 in 1955).

Billy Pierce WAR	Career	1950s	1950s MLB rank	1950s AL rank
Fangraphs WAR	52.5	43.6	3rd	1st
Baseball-Ref WAR	53.2	43.7	3rd	1st

Mark Buehrle

Buehrle compiled 60.3 pitching WAR according to Baseball-Reference.com. That's the fifth most by a pitcher currently not in the Hall of Fame, behind Tommy John (62.5), CC Sabathia (62.2), Clayton Kershaw (62.1) and Andy Pettitte (60.7). He was remarkably durable; one of only eight pitchers in MLB history with at least 14 consecutive seasons of 200+ innings. The other seven are in the Hall of Fame.

He had 214 career wins; only three active pitchers have at least 200 (Bartolo Colón 247, CC Sabathia 246 and Justin Verlander 204). Buehrle tossed a pair of no-hitters (one perfect) and was a key member of the 2005 World Series championship rotation. He was a five-time All-Star and a four-time Gold Glove winner. His career ERA+ of 117 (adjusted for league and ballpark; 17 percent above league average) is better than Steve Carlton (115), Fergie Jenkins (115), Phil Niekro (115), Jim Bunning (115), Robin Roberts (113), Nolan Ryan (112), Don Sutton (108), Early Wynn (107) and Catfish Hunter (104).

Joe Jackson

Among players with 2,500 career plate appearances with the White Sox, the Shoeless One is the career leader in batting average (.340). He's also the Indians career leader in batting average (.375). His career average of .356 ranks third all-time behind Ty Cobb and Rogers Hornsby. He had a career on-base percentage of .423 (17th all-time).

Babe Ruth made the home run popular at the dawn of the Roaring 20s. Joe Jackson posted career highs of 12 home runs and 121 RBI in 1920, and then his career came to an end. He was banned for life because of his role in the 1919 Black Sox scandal. Could he have embraced the home run craze? Could he have had a run of 30 or 40-home run seasons for the White Sox had he remained in the game? Unfortunately we'll never know. Shoeless Joe Jackson wasn't a mythical figure from a popular movie. He was a legitimate all-time great.

Paul Konerko

Konerko is the next White Sox star to reach the BBWAA ballot, set to make his debut in 2020. He was the heart of the 2005 offense that went on to win the World Series, taking home ALCS MVP honors. Konerko is second in franchise history with 432 home runs and 1,383 RBI, behind only Frank Thomas in both categories. Overall, Konerko had 439 HR (only 43 players in MLB history have more) and 1,412 RBI (75th all-time) with a respectable .279/.354/.486 career slashline. He had seven 30-HR seasons and six 100-RBI campaigns; a six-time All-Star. The White Sox erected a statue in Konerko's honor in 2014 and his No. 14 was retired by the White Sox the following year.

New report offers details on White Sox quest to land Bryce Harper

By Vinnie Duber / NBC Sports Chicago | December 13, 2018

LAS VEGAS — Want some details about the White Sox pursuit of the biggest name on this winter's free-agent market and one of the best players in baseball?

Well, USA Today's Bob Nightengale offered some tidbits about the quest to bring Bryce Harper to the South Side.

The White Sox — who one analyst called the front runner in the Harper derby Wednesday — featured heavily in Nightengale's report from the Winter Meetings chronicling the sweepstakes to hand out what's expected to be the richest contract in baseball history. According to Nightengale, White Sox chairman Jerry Reinsdorf and Scott Boras, Harper's agent, have twice spoken via telephone, an interesting item in the wake of Boras' Wednesday press conference, when he said he always enjoys talking with Reinsdorf.

Nightengale added that the White Sox met with Harper on Nov. 19, a sitdown that reportedly included general manager Rick Hahn, executive vice president Ken Williams and Hall of Famer Jim Thome. Then there was this line, make of it what you will.

"Reinsdorf was not at the meeting, and still has not granted permission for Williams and Hahn to negotiate a contract."

So what's all this mean?

Well, it's just the latest reported example of the White Sox commitment to landing a big fish like Harper, to add a 26-year-old superstar to their rebuild effort and watch their highly touted prospects grow up around him, turning Chicago's South Side baseball team into a perennial championship contender.

Though teams like the Los Angeles Dodgers, the New York Yankees, the Cubs and, to an extent, the Philadelphia Phillies can pitch win-now rosters, the White Sox future-focused pitch seems to be working.

Hahn talked Wednesday about the positive feedback he's received from the other side of the table when it comes to the White Sox talking up Eloy Jimenez and Michael Kopech and Dylan Cease and Luis Robert. That quartet has played a grand total of four Major League Baseball games, but the future is so bright, it seems to be drawing the attention of some of baseball's big names.

What's been made abundantly clear at these Winter Meetings is that the White Sox are going to be aggressive in their pursuit of a player that fits their long-term plan. And Harper (not to mention his fellow mega free agent Manny Machado) certainly fits the long-term plan. Being aggressive also means being willing to pay the big bucks these kinds of players command, and the White Sox certainly seem willing to do that, too.

That doesn't mean they'll make the biggest offer, of course, because there are other teams out there willing to do that, too. Nightengale added that the Phillies are still the favorites in the Harper derby. They've vowed to spend "stupid" this offseason.

And so maybe the White Sox go to Glendale, Arizona, for spring training without Harper in tow. But what they will remain is serious about making this rebuilding effort yield a winner. This latest report is just the latest example of that here in Vegas.

5 takeaways for the White Sox and Cubs from a quiet winter meetings

By Mark Gonzales / Chicago Tribune | December 14, 2018

Cubs President Theo Epstein's declaration that "you guys will be busy" during the winter meetings didn't materialize fully. In fact, the Cubs didn't complete a transaction, unless we count the naming of the player to be named in the Tommy La Stella trade.

The Cubs did manage to plant some seeds for potential moves, but the White Sox compensated for the lack of action by their Chicago counterparts and many of the other 28 teams.

Here are five takeaways from the relatively quiet meetings at the spacious Mandalay Bay Hotel:

1. Shades of 2015?

The Sox's pursuit of Bryce Harper is similar to the Cubs' chase for left-handed pitcher Jon Lester four years ago in that each rebuilding team attempted to accelerate their timetable for success.

One difference is that the Sox's path to winning the American League Central could be enhanced should the three-time defending division champion Indians dismantle their roster.

Landing Harper would give the Sox a formidable 1-2 punch with Jose Abreu, who is entering perhaps his final season in Chicago. Adding slugging prospect Eloy Jimenez to the mix could give the Sox even more power to help provide their young starting pitchers with more run support.

2. Delay of game

Many observers were mystified by the lack of action by the Cubs, especially after their season ended a month earlier than they expected.

But the slow thawing of the free-agent market could help the Cubs as they wait for asking prices to drop to their liking as spring training approaches.

The Cubs still need quality at the back end of their bullpen, with closer Brandon Morrow likely to miss the season's first month.

3. Protect the kids

The Sox's acquisition of right-handed pitcher Ivan Nova in a trade with the Pirates was the first step in alleviating pressure of young starters Reynaldo Lopez, Lucas Giolito and Carlos Rodon.

The next step will be adding another pitcher in the Miguel Gonzalez mode of 2016-17. Sox general manager Rick Hahn hasn't ruled out a return by James Shields.

In an ideal situation, Lopez, Giolito and Rodon continue their progress while Kodi Medeiros, Dane Dunning and Dylan Cease succeed before earning late-season major league promotions.

4. Brain power

New Cubs pitching coach Tommy Hottovy assertively has stated his goal. He seeks to bring the best out of the entire pitching staff and not focus exclusively on the struggles of a few relievers.

Filling the bench coach vacancy created by the departure of Brandon Hyde to become the Orioles' manager could be a daunting task as manager Joe Maddon enters the final year of his five-year contract.

Epstein and Maddon are focused exclusively on winning in 2019, and there's little margin for error with a new staff exploring various ways to communicate better with a wide range of players.

5. Harold's horror

The acrimony over Harold Baines' election to the Hall of Fame by the Today's Game Era committee persisted throughout the winter meetings. It merely intensified after Tony La Russa's profanity-laced defense of his former White Sox player to host Chris Russo on the MLB Network.

If La Russa is going to use Baines' game-winning RBIs as a case for election, then a case can be made for Pat Tabler, who batted .489 (43-for-88) with the bases loaded during his 12-year career.

Regardless of the debate and the politics of the election, the hope is that Baines can enjoy his honor without being bothered by extremists on both sides.

White Sox's Bryce Harper bid could come down to the details: 'All we can do is put our best foot forward, our most aggressive foot forward'

By Mark Gonzlaes / Chicago Tribune | December 13, 2018

LAS VEGAS — When asked Tuesday what the White Sox biggest selling point is, manager Rick Renteria didn't hesitate.

"The future," he said.

That's not a surprising answer to that question, but it's one the White Sox are giving with an awful lot of confidence at these Winter Meetings, a week in Vegas where they're being rumored to potentially hit a free-agent jackpot.

In fact, just before general manager Rick Hahn held his Wednesday-evening media session, one analyst tossed it out there that the White Sox were the front runners in the sweepstakes for Bryce Harper, the biggest name on the market and a guy who could alter the future of the franchise by signing on.

The White Sox have been reportedly interested in both Harper and his fellow mega free agent Manny Machado for a while now, though in the wake of those initial reports, it seemed a team coming off a 100-loss season with nothing but plans for future success would have a tough time competing against suitors with win-now rosters. Money might unsurprisingly end up making the biggest difference in this whole thing,

and if the White Sox offer up the largest contract, certainly possible given their near complete lack of long-term financial commitments, then there you go, maybe that's the ballgame.

But Hahn has spoken confidently about his team's pitch, one that attempts to lure these big names to the South Side by talking up a loaded farm system and a collection of young talent that could grow up around an imported superstar and produce a perennial championship contender. The team's future is undoubtedly bright, and it sounds as if these free agents and their representation know that very well.

"There's very bright days ahead," Hahn said. "Now again, it might be a year premature in terms of selling this club as a postseason contender, but we've spent a lot of time over the last couple of years to put us in a position where we very reasonably, or objectively we have a bright future ahead of us. And we've heard from a number of different players about their interest in being part of it, which I don't think should be surprising.

"There's been a lot of positive feedback in terms of the long term. It's funny because when you are talking about a shorter-term deal, like a one- or two-year deal, you are getting a response from a lot of the players like, 'Hey, we want to be part of the fun times, too. I'll just do something a little bit longer.' It can cut both ways.

"Definitely, the general consensus is one of optimism."

And not only are players reacting well to what the White Sox are selling when it comes to their long-term outlook, but they're coming to the table with that knowledge already.

Harper's agent, Scott Boras, talked earlier Wednesday to a mass of reporters and confirmed that he's provided Harper with all kinds of information about teams, including details about their farm systems and what kind of talent they have coming down the line.

"It's been my experience there's been a very deep understanding on the other side of the table about what we're about and where we're going," Hahn said. "They might not have every detail about some of the amenities of the ballpark or some of the services we provide for families or player assistants or stuff like that. But when you're starting to talk about on-field product and where this thing is headed, while we have our own opinions on things, they come pretty well armed with an understanding of what we're about and where we're going."

The highly ranked prospects, the 2020 lineup projections, it's all common knowledge to fans who have been invested in this rebuilding project for two years now. But perhaps the lure of playing alongside Eloy Jimenez and Michael Kopech and Luis Robert and Dylan Cease is a lot stronger than originally anticipated, or at least as strong as the lure of playing on teams with win-now rosters like the Los Angeles Dodgers, the New York Yankees and, to an extent, the Philadelphia Phillies, other teams reportedly in the mix for Harper and/or Machado.

And that's got to feel pretty good, right? The White Sox have spent two years in rebuilding mode, and it's rarely been a pretty sight at the major league level during that span. But all those young players and their expected bright future seems to have the attention of the baseball world. So much so, in fact, that some of the best players in the game want to be a part of it.

But don't think that just being in the running for a player like Harper or Machado will completely validate the rebuild.

"Honestly, the only thing that's going to validate it is a parade at the end," Hahn said. "That's what it comes down to. It makes you feel good about some of the hard times of the past couple years, perhaps that it's been worth it to an extent. But in the end it's going to come down to rings. If this doesn't ultimately land us in a position to win multiple championships, then in my view it would not have worked."

And perhaps that helps explain the aggressiveness this winter. Again, this aggressive pursuit of free agents is part of the plan, not a sign of desperation from a 100-loss team. Adding that "finishing piece" is a step of this process that Hahn has talked about for a long time. If it's Harper or Machado, that goes a long way toward making the White Sox championship contenders down the road.

Maybe it's that much-ballyhooed financial flexibility that's keeping the White Sox in this hunt. Perhaps money does trump everything else and the biggest contract offer will win the day.

But there has to be other elements to this thing, and the elements the White Sox are talking up — that future that Renteria was so quick to bring up — might be getting through to the Harpers and the Machados of this free-agent world.

The White Sox are making progress just by being in the Bryce Harper sweepstakes

By Paul Sullivan / Chicago Tribune | December 13, 2018

The White Sox leave the winter meetings Thursday having accomplished what they needed to do.

For the first time since the start of the rebuild, they became relevant again.

No, the acquisition of alleged innings-eater Ivan Nova — who actually lasted more than six innings only six times in 29 starts last year — wasn't what did it. Nor was getting Harold Baines into the Hall of Fame a factor.

What made the Sox relevant was the nonstop discussion about their interest in signing a prime-time free agent, notably Bryce Harper, the star of the Las Vegas meetings.

The Sox are no closer to signing Harper than they were when the meetings began. No one outside of Harper and agent Scott Boras knows who really is in the mix, though the Sox and Phillies are the two teams that have been mentioned the most in the early going, and both teams have been vocal about their ability to spend money.

The usual suspects — the Yankees, Cubs and Dodgers — have done nothing to suggest they're interested in Harper, though that doesn't necessarily mean they're out of the picture.

"If something doesn't make sense today, it doesn't mean it won't make sense tomorrow," Yankees general manager Brian Cashman told reporters. "All I can keep telling you is, you know where my current focuses are, but at the same time we're a fully operational Death Star."

That was a reference to former Red Sox executive Larry Lucchino's assertion the Yankees were the "Evil Empire," a dated reference that could easily be attached to the Red Sox these days.

The Cubs' alleged lack of interest stems from budgetary concerns, which is why no one speculated Harper's friend Kris Bryant was carrying a message from his BFF when meeting with Cubs brass in their cushy suite on Wednesday.

The Dodgers already have two of the top five hitters in the National League — Justin Turner and the returning Corey Seager — and really don't need Harper to win the National League West again.

So what happens if it turns into a bidding war between the Sox and Phillies? Would Sox Chairman Jerry Reinsdorf blink after going this far?

If the final bids were in the same neighborhood, there's no reason to think Harper would automatically pick the Phillies over the rebuilding Sox because he wants to win.

Remember, the Phillies were one of the worst teams in baseball the final two months of 2018, going 16-33 after Aug. 7 to finish 80-82. They hit .232 in the second half, better than only two teams, and ranked 24th in runs scored after the break. Despite spending \$75 million on Jake Arrieta last winter and making noise about throwing around “stupid” money this winter, they are no closer to a World Series than the Sox.

What the Sox need to do is make an offer that’s front-loaded and includes an opt-out after four years, making Harper the highest-paid player in the game through 2022, by which point we’ll know if the rebuild worked. If it doesn’t pan out, Harper can leave at age 30 and sign another 10-year megadeal elsewhere.

We don’t know what Harper and Boras are thinking, so maybe it’s a moot point. Perhaps they’re just using the Sox for leverage, waiting for the Dodgers, Yankees or the always dependable “mystery team” to swoop in on the eve of spring training and blow everyone away.

Back in February 2004, Chicago was anxiously awaiting word on where Greg Maddux would wind up, with the hope he’d return to the Cubs, who had come five outs short of reaching the World Series. Boras, who once played minor-league ball in the Cubs system, acknowledged the storybook appeal of having Maddux end his Hall of Fame career back on the North Side.

“Hey, we’re all former Cubs here,” Boras said. “It would be a delightful story.”

Maddux signed a three-year, \$24 million deal to return to the Cubs, though it didn’t have a delightful ending. Maddux couldn’t prevent the Cubs from blowing a wild-card spot in ’04 or underachieving in ’05 and ’06, when he was dealt to the Dodgers at the trade deadline.

Harper to the Sox would be delightful as well, even though there’s no guarantee they will be contenders within two seasons.

But at least they would get some attention in a Cubs town, which is half the battle.

White Sox and Cubs avoid losses in Rule 5 draft

By Mark Gonzales / Chicago Tribune | December 13, 2018

General manager Rick Hahn was relieved the White Sox didn’t lose any players in the major-league phase of Thursday’s Rule 5 draft that concluded the final day of the winter meetings.

The Sox were bracing themselves for the loss of reliever Zach Thompson, who struck out 76 in 75 1/3 innings over 43 appearances for Class A Winston-Salem and Double-A Birmingham this year.

“We like Zach,” Hahn said. “When it comes to setting the (40-man) roster, you’re concerned guys may get taken and survive at the big-league level. Sometimes guys don’t check those boxes for you, and you take the risk they get exposed.

“But Zach has a bright future, and he’s still part of the White Sox organization.”

A team pays \$100,000 to pick a player in the major-league phase of the Rule 5 draft. If that player doesn’t stay on the 25-man roster for the entire season, he must be offered back to his former team for \$50,000.

The Sox selected reliever Jordan Romano from the Blue Jays, then traded him to the Rangers for cash considerations.

The Cubs didn’t have a player selected in the major-league portion, but pitchers David Garner (Blue Jays) and Yapsan Gomez (Indians) were selected in the Triple-A phase.

Relief-pitching market starts to thaw for White Sox

By Mark Gonzales / Chicago Tribune | December 13, 2018

The free-agent relief pitcher market has finally started moving, and the White Sox could add more bullpen depth in the upcoming days.

Multiple reports indicated that Jeury's Familia has agreed to a three-year, \$30 million contract with the Mets, and that Joe Kelly and the Dodgers reached a three-year, \$25 million deal.

The Sox acquired late-inning reliever Alex Colome from the Mariners two weeks ago but haven't let up in their pursuit of bullpen help to assist returnees Nate Jones and Jace Fry.

"If we like to add, we'd like to add from the top," Sox general manager Rick Hahn said earlier this week. "We'd have to see what the acquisition costs are."

Prized free-agent left-handers Zach Britton and Andrew Miller remain available, along with Adam Ottavino.

The Cubs may need to make a trade to clear some salary space, but they're also interested in adding bullpen depth.

Dreaming of the stars: White Sox envision Harper, Jimenez in same OF

By Daryl Van Schouwen / Chicago Sun-Times | December 13, 2018

LAS VEGAS — The White Sox didn't leave the winter meetings Thursday with free-agent outfielder Bryce Harper in tow, although he remains on their radar.

Meanwhile, somewhere in the Dominican Republic, Sox prospect Eloy Jimenez continued to swat winter-league baseballs with authority, the latest tantalizing example of his talent that will be on display in the major leagues soon, probably in April.

Jimenez's looming presence and impending arrival in Chicago is a big reason the possibility of Harper jumping into the outfield has everyone from the Sox' front office to the coaching staff to a wanting fan base on the edge of their seats.

Jimenez, who turned 22 last month, is a potential superstar-in-waiting, a likable teammate with a broad smile, an engaging personality and an explosive, polished bat. Picture him doing what he does offensively in left field and Harper in right, bookend stars wrapped around \$26 million Cuban prospect Luis Robert, 21, in center for the next half-dozen years or so.

Harper, at 26, and Jimenez could be for the Sox what Kris Bryant and Anthony Rizzo have been for the Cubs: middle-of-the-order bats under long-term team control, potential perennial All-Stars with larger-than-life presences in the clubhouse and on the field, a lefty-righty combo to be reckoned with.

Harper has studied the Sox' farm system, so he knows about Jimenez. So does Sox director of player development Chris Getz.

"He's a fun talent to watch," Getz said. "What, his second at-bat in winter ball, he hits a grand slam? He doesn't play for a couple of months and just walks right in there and does what he does."

Between Class AA Birmingham and Class AAA Charlotte in 2018, Jimenez batted .337/.384/.577 with 22 home runs and 75 RBI. For the Gigantes del Cibao in the Dominican Winter League, he was batting .448/.500/.759 through eight games. General manager Rick Hahn said Jimenez will finish up around the holidays.

“Eloy certainly has a chance to be one of those big-time players that you see on every other club — and maybe similar to some of the guys we’re trying to acquire,” manager Rick Renteria said this week.

“I don’t want to call him a Hall of Famer because that’s a lot to put on a kid’s plate. But he has the skill set to potentially be a very impactful front-line major-league player.”

As impactful as Harper?

“Absolutely,” Renteria said. “And I think it’s because of the expectation and the understanding of who he is and what he’s about and the skill set that he brings to the table. We’re all excited about the possibilities.”

Renteria always lights up when talking about Robert, who hasn’t played above Class A but, because of his better defense and speed, might have a more well-rounded upside than Jimenez. Defensively, Jimenez figures to be adequate at best.

Getz said Jimenez profiles best in left field.

“Speed is a component of playing in the outfield, and it’s not one of his biggest strengths, but he’s working on improving his routes,” Getz said. “I’d say he gets the most out of his ability out there.

“I saw him a couple of weeks ago in the [Dominican Republic], and it’s the best shape I’ve seen him in since he’s been a White Sox. He’s in a great frame of mind. And it looks like he’s in a position to improve his defensive side along with his baserunning, all facets of the game. He’s moving toward being a more improved, well-rounded player.”

Bryce Harper to the White Sox? Fans believe comment on Delmonico’s post is sign

By Madeline Kenney / Chicago Sun-Times | December 13, 2018

Marquee free agent Bryce Harper might just be the biggest troll to Chicago sports fans ever.

In the past, Harper, who is best friends with Cubs third baseman Kris Bryant, has posted several pictures of him wearing a Bulls hat. He’s also professed his love for Chicago and even his dog, Wrigley, is named after a local landmark. And do the hashtags — “#HarperToTheCubs” and “#Back2BackOneDay” — ring any bells?

Well now, Harper has White Sox fans freaking out over his latest Instagram comment, which some believe is a sign.

Harper on Thursday commented on Nicky Delmonico’s Instagram video of him, Yolmer Sanchez and Tim Anderson playing wiffle ball on the beach with Sox fans on a beach in Mexico.

“@NickDelmonico This is what it’s all about! Love this brotha!” Harper wrote.

Others took this as an opportunity to beg Harper to join the South Side.

Oh, and in case you were wondering what Harper would look like next season in a Sox uniform, Stadium — which Sox owner Jerry Reinsdorf has an ownership stake in — has you covered.

White Sox head home with Ivan Nova in tow, hope for Bryce Harper

By Daryl Van Schouwen / Chicago Sun-Times | December 13, 2018

LAS VEGAS — Here's the summary of what the White Sox accomplished at the winter meetings: They acquired a proven starting pitcher and created a whole lot of buzz about outfielder Bryce Harper.

The latter is all anyone is talking about, but the former addressed an immediate need, of which there are more to deal with before pitchers and catchers report to spring training Feb. 13.

"We made some progress on different fronts," general manager Rick Hahn said before heading to the airport Thursday. "We obviously talked about some of the other needs we had. You saw [Wednesday] the bullpen market started moving. Perhaps there will be something along those lines in the coming days — catching, as well. And then, obviously, we still need to figure out the outfield situation.

"It's a productive week in terms of talks, both with free agents and other clubs. We'll go back to Chicago and regroup [Friday] and get back after it."

A catcher to complement Wellington Castillo, bullpen help and perhaps another starter — right-hander Ivan Nova was acquired from the Pirates for a minor prospect and international-pool cash Tuesday — are on the docket. Jeurys Familia agreed to a three-year, \$30 million contract with the Mets and Joe Kelly to a three-year, \$25 million deal with the Dodgers to get the bullpen market moving.

As for Harper and infielder Manny Machado — both are on the Sox' list of mega-priced free-agent objectives, although Harper appears to be the top priority — their destinations might not be determined for weeks.

"You can't really force the timing of it," Hahn said. "Sometimes it happens [at the winter meetings], and sometimes it takes a little bit deeper into the offseason."

Harper watch

As for the pursuit of Harper, Hahn knows the bottom line is dollars for a record contract. But he also knows many things factor into a player's decision.

"A wife's family's location, family preference, spring training, all sorts of factors that come into this decision at the end," he said. "All we can do is put our best foot forward."

Chairman Jerry Reinsdorf's presence at the meetings seemed to suggest the Sox are serious about their pursuit.

Hahn acknowledged "the excitement" and "fever pitch" at the meetings.

"It's good to have a seat at the table on some large, impactful moves," he said.

Rule 5 draft

The Sox drafted right-hander Jordan Romano from the Blue Jays with the third pick in the Rule 5 draft and traded him to the Rangers for cash considerations.

They didn't lose Class AAA right-hander Zach Thompson, as they feared they might.

Yoán Moncada made his own plan for bouncing back from disappointing 2018 season

By James Fegan / The Athletic | December 13, 2018

LAS VEGAS — Near the end of a 2018 season season that saw him flirt with the all-time strikeout record and was mostly beneficial for the lessons all the disappointment taught him, Yoán Moncada approached manager Rick Renteria and hitting coach Todd Steverson with a proposal.

As he struggled to protect the edges of the strike zone on borderline pitches, Moncada wanted to establish an offseason plan to keep improving. And he didn't want to go out and find a new voice with a private hitting coach or work out at his home, but instead to go to the White Sox spring training facility in Glendale and keep working with Steverson and Renteria, if they were willing. Steverson lives near Phoenix during the offseason and was present at White Sox instructional league, so linking up for a couple of weeks just needed Moncada's initiative to happen.

"He said, I want to come down to Arizona and work on a few things, which for us was like, OK, this is pretty cool," Renteria said. "So Trick (Steverson) was there. I spoke to him there. Trick is the one that's been working with him quite a bit. I thought the work that he did was starting to bear some fruit. There were some adjustments that he was making to be able to manage a little bit more in the zone. He obviously has a great eye. So it's not just trying to make sure that he can manage as many pitches as possible throughout the strike zone and be impactful."

Moncada expressed confidence that he was on the right path throughout the season, but seeing the 23-year-old former No. 1 prospect respond proactively to his struggles (.235/.315/.400 but with a 33.4 percent strikeout rate in 2018) is also clearly a source of encouragement.

"He's taken it very seriously," White Sox GM Rick Hahn said. "It's great to see. It's not a surprise knowing the young man and I think he might have had his pride wounded a bit by some of his performance last year. It's really not a surprise to us how seriously he's taking trying to address those things."

Moncada's sessions at Camelback Ranch focused just on hitting with some workouts mixed in, as despite his stated openness, the White Sox have not set him on the path of preparing to play third base just yet.

A pair of relievers, both of whom the White Sox were linked to, signed three-year deals late Wednesday night in Joe Kelly and Jeurys Familia. Their signings likely will hasten the opening of the relief market, which the Sox should be active in. But while the Sox have repeatedly pledged their intent to be aggressive at the top of the market despite being at least a year early for their contention cycle because unique opportunities like Bryce Harper and Manny Machado exist, that policy doesn't sound like it necessarily extends to three-year contract for relievers.

Citing the instability of performance for relievers, Hahn said committing to them for a longer term when the initial year will not serve their efforts to compete for a title is not appetizing.

"I think if we felt like we were a piece or two away from creating a championship club, you're probably willing to take on a little bit more risk in the front end of a reliever contract," Hahn said. "Relievers are obviously very tough to predict and other than the elite, elite versions, you tend to see a lot of fluctuation, season to season. So when you're talking about whether to commit three years or more to a reliever, you have to be pretty confident about what you're going to get coming back, which is no easy trick in the reliever market. One of the appeals of the (Alex) Colomé situation is that it's a one-year deal at this point but we have control over him through arbitration and not a fixed price and that helps us maintain our flexibility."

The White Sox grabbing an elite closer like Craig Kimbrel at this moment doesn't seem likely either, but it would fit their current rationale more than three years for a middle reliever whose performance is tough to project for 2020 and beyond.

The Rule 5 Draft starts to feel really irrelevant when covering a team that's pursuing Bryce Harper, and it certainly didn't earn much attention from the White Sox with how it played out Thursday morning. The Sox did not lose anyone in the major league portion of the draft. Fans of former second-round pick Spencer Adams and major league-ready reliever Zach Thompson can rejoice.

They also did not add anyone to their major league roster, as for the second straight year, they used their high pick (third overall) to pick someone (right-hander Jordan Romano) and immediately trade him to Texas for cash considerations.

The White Sox are hoping the 6-foot-7 Thompson matures into a bullpen option after a breakout season (1.35 ERA in 21 appearances) in Double-A, which makes more sense than shoehorning some other team's prospect into their roster. Now the White Sox are free to explore that path with Thompson, who just turned 25, for another year.

"It's good," Hahn said. "We like Zach. Really when it comes down to setting the roster, you try to put it in order guys you are concerned may get taken and survive at the big league level. Sometimes those guys don't check those boxes for you and you take the risk they are getting exposed. But Zach has a real bright future and we are glad he's still part of the White Sox organization."

White Sox hope their pursuit of Harper, Machado ends differently than Rodriguez sweepstakes

By Phil Rogers / Forbes | December 13, 2018

Bryce Harper to the White Sox?

If not that, then how about Manny Machado to the White Sox?

Either of those could happen, despite the difficulty of selling a team coming off a 100-loss season to superstars at the top of the free agent market. But the Sox's pursuit isn't as surprising as it might seem on its face.

The team from Chicago's South Side is run by the highly competitive Jerry Reinsdorf, one of the most successful owners in American sports. It could give Harper or Machado a contract that goes beyond Giancarlo Stanton's record deal without even blinking.

Reinsdorf and a front office led by Rick Hahn prepared for this moment by creating almost unprecedented financial flexibility, with no dead money on the books, only about \$22.5 million in guaranteed contracts for 2019 and less than \$10 million for every season going forward.

They could theoretically pencil in a \$40-million salary and still keep their 2019 payroll around \$100 million, with the ability to add more big pieces for 2020-22 while still remaining below \$150 million. They are convinced they already have the core of a team that can chase down the Indians in the foreseeable future, led by Reynaldo Lopez, Michael Kopech, Dylan Cease, Tim Anderson, Eloy Jimenez, Yoan Moncada, Luis Robert, Micker Adolfo and Zack Collins.

It's significant Reinsdorf has done this before, and not just when he signed Albert Belle and Jose Abreu. The pursuit that most closely mirrors the White Sox's interest in Harper and Machado came 18 years ago, when Reinsdorf empowered rookie general manager Ken Williams to get a deal with Alex Rodriguez and his agent, Scott Boras.

You probably won't remember this unless you've followed the White Sox history closely. But the Sox were wildly disappointed when then-Rangers owner Tom Hicks stepped up at the Anatole Hotel in Dallas to sign Rodriguez to a 10-year deal worth \$252 million.

This is the most outlandish pursuit they've been in since that one, and in it they are using lessons learned the hard way from Boras and Rodriguez.

It's unclear how much the White Sox were prepared to offer Rodriguez because they never got their offer on the table. Boras kept them in the wings as a backup plan while he bounced between meetings with the Rangers, Braves, Mets and perhaps a few other teams, planning a meeting with Reinsdorf for after he left Dallas.

Then Boras reached a deal with Hicks on the last day of the meetings. The Braves' offer, believed to have been \$126 million — exactly half the size of the deal Hicks handed out — was the second biggest that was presented but sources said the Sox were prepared to go near \$200 million for Rodriguez, if not above \$200 million, after losing to his Seattle team in the Division Series a few months earlier.

Sandy Alderson, an MLB executive vice president under Commissioner Bud Selig, said he was "stupified" the Rangers would go to such lengths to sign Rodriguez. After all, the Mariners were offering only about \$95 million over five years to keep him.

"I guess I'm the stupefied," Boras said.

The Braves, as it turned out, weren't offering Rodriguez a no-trade clause, which he considered essential (although he later waived his no-trade so the Rangers could deal him to the Yankees). Boras essentially got the Rangers to bid against themselves, with the White Sox as a nifty backup plan if Hicks flinched.

Williams was livid Boras would not meet with him at the Anatole. Reinsdorf was not in Dallas and Boras demanded that the White Sox chairman be present for a meeting.

Reinsdorf celebrated six NBA titles with the Bulls in the Michael Jordan era but counts the Sox's 2005 World Series victory over Houston as his biggest success. He reluctantly signed off on the rebuilding project that began when Hahn traded Chris Sale to the Red Sox and is anxious to get his team back in the baseball conversation in Chicago, where the Cubs have ruled since Theo Epstein arrived in 2011.

Reinsdorf has been heavily involved in the negotiations for both Harper, who is represented by Boras, and Machado, who is represented by Dan Lozano after leaving Boras' stable. The White Sox haven't confirmed but the White Sox chairman is believed to have accompanied Hahn, Williams and Hall of Famer Jim Thome to a meeting with Harper in late November.

Reinsdorf has been a presence at the meetings, serving on the Hall of Fame's Today's Game Era Committee before participating in meetings with Boras and Lozano. He was thrilled when Harold Baines was elected to the Hall but has been all business ever since, which is no surprise.

Boras even praised Reinsdorf in one of his wide-ranging addresses to the media.

Jerry Reinsdorf would love to light up a victory cigar after signing Bryce Harper or Manny Machado to accelerate the White Sox's rebuilding plan. He's been very involved in negotiations with Scott Boras and Dan Lozano, who represent Harper and Machado. (AP Photo/John Raoux)

"Whenever I call him, or he calls me, we have a very respectful relationship and always have good baseball conversations," Boras said. "It's good to talk to a very steady guy, and Jerry is very much that about baseball. I'm sure Jerry will do anything that's good business for him."

It's worth noting that the Rangers weren't seen as a serious factor for Rodriguez before the deal was done. They had lost 91 games the year before and had an aging roster, which would go on to produce three consecutive last-place finishes even though Rodriguez led the American League in homers each of those years.

The White Sox need to create some buzz around Guaranteed Rate Field, where they finished 25th in attendance last year, as well as to drive viewers to the broadcasts on the cable network that Reinsdorf

owns along with the Cubs and Blackhawks. The Cubs are expected to depart for their own network after 2019, raising the stakes for the other teams.

Boras points out how Harper could have a dramatic impact. "TV ratings (in Washington) went from 22,000 households to 77,000 households," he said about the Harper era. "The ratings went from 0.8 to 2.8. The franchise value went from \$480 million to over \$2 billion."

The Sox are selling themselves as a team on the rise who Harper or Machado could lead back to the postseason, while living in a city that has long been a favorite for baseball players.

If the Sox don't sign Harper or Machado, it's possible they'll outbid the team that does.

And it's rare when agents leave money on the table.

Opt-out clause could be key in Harper sweepstakes

"All we can do is put our most aggressive foot forward," Rick Hahn says.

By Bruce Levine / 670 The Score | December 13, 2018

LAS VEGAS (670 The Score) -- As the Bryce Harper sweepstakes continued with plenty of mystery Thursday, a theme was stressed.

A key component in the 26-year-old Harper signing a long-term deal could be the creativity that comes in the contract structure, specifically regarding opt-out clauses, sources said. An opt-out clause three or four years into a new deal could be a big draw for Harper, as it would give him the power to determine his future and ensure leverage in pushing a team to spend big and build around him. Such a timeframe would also allow Harper to potentially re-enter free agency while still in his prime at age 29 or 30 and set another contract deal if the market is favorable to him at that time.

As for the White Sox, general manager Rick Hahn remained cautiously optimistic about his team's chances of landing Harper and the work the organization has put in.

"It is good there is excitement in what we are doing," Hahn said Thursday morning. "We are going to remain consistent with what our vision has been for this team the long term. If some things come together in the next few weeks, we will act on it. We will not get caught up in emotion just to do something for the sake of doing it."

Hahn understands the White Sox must be patient in waiting on Harper to make a decision.

"There is an excitement here," Hahn said. "There is a fever pitch here. People like to leave here with something to show for the effort. This is just about getting the right pieces in the organization no matter what time of the year it is. We are excited to be discussing impactful moves for the long term. It's good to have a seat at the table for some long impactful moves."

"This work does not mean anything is going to come together. We still have a fair amount of work to do. Even if we are able to convert on something big, there is a lot of work to do behind it to get us where we want to be (as an organization)."

Hahn believes the White Sox have put themselves in the best position possible to land Harper.

"There is only so much we can control in the end," Hahn said. "Ultimately, free-agent players have earned the right through hard work to choose their ultimate destination. Sometimes things beyond money factor into these things -- location, wife's family location, all sorts of things go into these decisions before they get done. All we can do is put our most aggressive foot forward and try to convert on necessary targets. The pace of these things is a bit of a balancing act. Some extremely high-profile deals happen as late as

February or March. That doesn't mean something can't come together in the coming weeks. At the end, when it gets done is not as important as getting it done."