



WHITE SOX HEADLINES OF JANUARY 11, 2019

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Inbox: What's the latest on free-agent pursuits?

White Sox beat reporter Scott Merkin answers fans' questions

By Scott Merkin / MLB.com | January 10, 2019

CHICAGO -- Here's this week's White Sox inquiries.

What is the realistic possibility that the White Sox sign both Manny Machado AND Bryce Harper? What if the two premier free agents said they would sign with us only if we took them both?

-- Bryan, Big Spring, Texas

I never really thought both players would end up on the same team, and this is not an NBA sort of situation where players go together to form a super team. With that said, the White Sox are positioned payroll-wise to make significant pushes for Machado and Harper, which they already have, and handle the large amount of money needed to sign both.

Merk, I'll save everyone time: When are we signing Machado? -- @MikeSox56

I know the answer, Mike, but I can't tell you. I'm kidding, of course. Most teams are reporting to camp around Feb. 13-14, so there's still some time for negotiations involving both players. But I'm going to guess Machado will pick a team prior to SoxFest from Jan. 25-27.

In an effort to convince Machado to sign, will the White Sox hire his dog to check the quality of the grass in center field? -- @JHantsch

There's no confirmation the Machados even have a dog. First baseman/designated hitter Yonder Alonso (brother-in-law) and outfielder Jon Jay (friend) have received a great deal of publicity for their personal connection to Machado, but they both help the White Sox at this stage of the organization's rebuild regardless of Machado's decision.

For the outfielders not already inked into the 2020-22 lineups (presumably Eloy Jimenez and Luis Robert), who is the most likely to play as a regular for the Sox: Blake Rutherford, Luis Alexander Basabe, Micker Adolfo, Luis Gonzalez or Steele Walker? -- @junkcycle

This isn't meant to be a cop out, but they all have chances to contribute. I believe Adolfo, at 100 percent, has a chance to be a star. I've felt that way since I first saw him playing during instructional league action a few years ago.

Does Rutherford have a shot at right field in 2019? -- @jrj360guy

Rutherford had a great season in 2018, flashing some extra-base power with 25 doubles, nine triples and seven home runs to go with 78 RBIs at Class A Advanced Winston-Salem. But the White Sox have stuck fervently by the plan not to rush any prospects, including Rutherford, who I don't see being in the Majors in '19.

Have there been any rumblings in another starter? A guy like Gio Gonzalez or Brett Anderson makes a lot of sense from the outside looking in. -- @dbh1127

If his great progress continues from last year, Dylan Cease will join Carlos Rodon, Reynaldo Lopez, Ivan Nova and Lucas Giolito sooner than later in the 2019 rotation. Other pitchers will be added to compete with Manny Banuelos, Dylan Covey and Jordan Stephens for that fifth spot, even if it ends up coming through the non-roster variety.

Would the signing of Machado be a sign that the Sox think they can be a contender in 2019 in the same way that the Bears' signing of Khalil Mack was an indicator that the Bears felt they were ready to contend this past season? -- Sol B., New York

The Bears did go from a stretch of four straight last-place finishes to winning the division, and Mack played a huge role in that transformation. So anything is possible. Let's be realistic in that the White Sox lost 100 games in 2018, so that's quite a jump, and the Twins and Indians still have solid rosters. But that goal of the White Sox being competitive put forth by general manager Rick Hahn at the end of last season receives a serious boost with the addition of Machado or Harper -- or dare I say both.

White Sox ink Jay to 1-year, \$4 million deal

By Scott Merkin / MLB.com | January 10, 2019

CHICAGO -- Since mid-December, the White Sox have added Manny Machado's brother-in-law and his good friend to their 2019 lineup. Could Machado himself soon be next for the South Siders?

Outfielder Jon Jay, the friend portion of the Machado equation, agreed to a one-year, \$4 million deal that the team announced on Thursday. The White Sox designated Charlie Tilson for assignment to make room on the 40-man roster.

Jay joins first baseman/designated hitter Yonder Alonso, Machado's brother-in-law, who was acquired in a trade from the Indians on Dec. 15. Their additions should assist at some level the pursuit of Machado, but as the veteran Jay pointed out during a conference call, they clearly won't make the final decision.

"Manny is going to do what is best for him and his family," Jay said. "We obviously have a great friendship, and Yonder is his brother-in-law and all that, but Manny is going to do what is best for his family."

"I haven't been involved in any of that. Those are their matters. Let's see how everything shakes out. We'd obviously love to have a Manny Machado, absolutely; the guy is unbelievable. But that is up to him and his family. Who knows what is going to happen?"

When asked about Machado's preparation and intensity, Jay described him as an "unbelievable worker."

"Like I said, he's a good friend of mine, and I'll leave it at that," Jay said. "I'm not here to talk about Manny's matters."

Both Jay and Alonso fit the rebuilding White Sox regardless of their connection to the premium free agent. The left-handed-hitting Jay, who turns 34 in March, hit .268 with a .330 on-base percentage and 74 runs between stops with Kansas City and Arizona in 2018. He is a capable leadoff hitter who can handle any of the three outfield spots as young prospects like Eloy Jimenez, Luis Robert, Blake Rutherford, Luis Alexander Basabe and Micker Adolfo work their way to the Majors.

"There's going to be some different options for us and some choices that are going to have to be made even if we don't make any additional outside additions here over the next few weeks," White Sox general manager Rick Hahn said of the team's outfield, which includes options such as Nicky Delmonico, Adam Engel, Daniel Palka and Leury Garcia. "A versatile guy like Jon is going to potentially fit in in a number of different ways, and we are going to have to wait to get a little closer to Opening Day to decide exactly what we are going to go with."

While Jay is only with the White Sox for one year and Alonso potentially two with a 2020 option, the additions could make things more comfortable for Machado to agree to a long-term deal with the White Sox. That reason wasn't the driving force for the moves, per Hahn.

"Again, these players are here because of what they bring specifically -- both between the lines and in the clubhouse," Hahn said. "We feel they make us better in 2019 and have the potential to have a lasting impact on what we are trying to build for the long term."

"I'm not going to get into the relationships they have with other players throughout the game. It's certainly a positive, but I wouldn't say it's by [any] means a reason to make a move to acquire either player."

Hahn: Hot stove misinformation 'frustrating'

By Scott Merkin / MLB.com | January 10, 2019

CHICAGO -- Rick Hahn tries to keep his "fan hat" on even while holding the position of White Sox general manager and presently engaging in the much-publicized pursuit of premium free agents Manny Machado and Bryce Harper.

Hahn remembers running home from school and calling Sports Phone to get an update on what was going on with baseball's free agency. So he understands fans' deep and constant attention regarding rumors surrounding these major talents who could greatly change the White Sox rebuild.

"With the age we live in, the age of Twitter, the age of social media, the age of rumors, it's sort of monitoring the horse race on free agency, it's part of it," Hahn said during a conference call on Thursday. "From a club perspective, quite frankly, it's frustrating."

That frustration, according to Hahn, centers on a lot of misinformation being out there.

"There's been numerous players that we're supposedly in on that we had not had conversations on," Hahn said. "There's been reports of offers or non-offers, being in, being out, that under the rules we're not allowed to respond to, so you just have to let those things play out.

"I realize it's part of the business, but especially when you're talking about negotiations, which are understandably and purposefully confidential and not something that we conduct through the media, the amount of rumors out there can get frustrating. We don't let it be a distraction.

"We stay focused on the matter at hand and continue with open communication with the relevant parties. We just have to allow the speculation to unfold until the point where these issues are resolved."

Those issues have the White Sox, Phillies and Yankees as apparently the main players for Machado, with the Phillies and White Sox reportedly part of the group in on Harper. Hahn doesn't seem surprised by this process still going on for both these players a little more than one month away from pitchers and catchers reporting.

"But there certainly have been points between the start of the offseason and now where I would've guessed it would've potentially been resolved in the not-too-distant future," Hahn said. "So it varies day by day in terms of your expectation about the pace of these things, and until something's done, it's not done.

"You stay on it and respond and make sure you're covered in other areas while you can. I don't think it's a shock, as I alluded to earlier. If you made me guess at the start of the offseason would this still be going on in early January, it wouldn't have been a shock to me that it's still going on at this time."

Hahn referenced and agreed with a quote from Cubs president of baseball operations Theo Epstein about not wanting to tell fans how to enjoy or digest their offseason. Worry exists over false information potentially influencing fan perception, but at the same time, Hahn knows at some point these matters will be resolved.

"We'll be able to speak a little more candidly about how we viewed things and how we approached things and what it means for us going forward," Hahn said. "It's perhaps temporary, but certainly how fans perceive and respond to such things is relevant. We're aware of it.

"Let's wait until we get to the point where we know what's up exactly with that and we can talk about how we're responding and how we feel. At this point, it's just speculative."

Machado or no Machado, Jon Jay brings plenty to White Sox (but Machado would be nice)

By Vinnie Duber / NBC Sports Chicago | January 10, 2019

Yes, it's true what you've heard: Jon Jay and Manny Machado are friends. It's also true that Yonder Alonso is Machado's brother-in-law. Together, the three of them make up the "Miami Baseball Brotherhood" the White Sox are hoping they can reunite on the South Side.

This would all seem to be a page out of the book of scandalous college basketball recruiting: signing the brother of the kid you really want, giving jobs to people around one of the highest-rated recruits in the land. It might look like that from the outside — and it's inarguable that by adding Alonso and Jay that the White Sox can offer Machado something his other suitors cannot — but the White Sox insist that's not what they're doing.

"These players are here because of what they bring specifically, both between the lines and in the clubhouse. We feel they make us better in 2019 and have the potential to have a lasting impact on what we are trying to build for the long term," general manager Rick Hahn said Thursday, discussing Alonso and Jay and their relationships with Machado. "Not going to get into the relationships they have with other

players throughout the game. It's certainly a positive, but I would say it's by no means a reason to make a move to acquire either player."

Now Hahn nor any other member of White Sox brass is going to come out and say, "Oh yeah, we spent X millions of dollars and handed out a pair of roster spots just to convince Manny to sign with us." That's not going to happen, even if it were true.

But there's no doubting that Alonso and Jay do make the White Sox a better team, no doubting that they help fill some of the White Sox offseason needs. Even without Machado, bringing these two players in accomplishes some of the goals Hahn and his front office had when the winter began.

Chiefly, they add a veteran presence in a young-and-getting-younger clubhouse. They are mentors to young players who are going to form the core of this team when it's planned to be a perennial championship contender.

But Jay, specifically, adds even more. He's a high on-base guy who doesn't strike out often, something this lineup needed. He's a defensive upgrade in right field, where the White Sox recently non-tendered Avisail Garcia, and so a position that was slated to have Daniel Palka and his questionable glove starting there now has a Gold Glove finalist starting there. He brings versatility with the ability to play all three outfield spots.

And like Alonso — and Ivan Nova and Kelvin Herrera, for that matter — he brings a veteran presence on and off the field and winning experience that he can impart on younger players.

"His energy, his professionalism, his focus, work ethic have all received very high marks at a number of his stops," Hahn said. "(Manager Rick Renteria) has talked about the culture we want here, the culture we are trying to create in Chicago as well as throughout the minor league system, and having players that reinforce that approach to each and every game and even each and every at-bat.

"It helps move that process along and expand that culture and helps teach young guys what it means to be a big leaguer, and Jon has through multiple stops — and Kelvin, as well — has received high praise for what they've done in the clubhouse and their ability to not only set a tone but help mentor young players and indoctrinate them into that culture."

And Jay is all aboard playing that role on the South Side.

"I just try to be a good person every day. I try to help out wherever I can," he said. "I truly care about the game, I truly care about my teammates. I want everyone to do well. I was blessed, came up through St. Louis in a great organization, and we learned there and I learned from a lot of Hall-of-Fame players. I try to pass that down, the things they learned before my time, to players, try to keep that moving."

The 26-year-old Machado, though he's been in the big leagues for seven seasons already, might be the kind of player who could benefit from someone like Jay, who also happens to be a good friend and winter workout buddy. Machado's much-publicized postseason antics made him a baseball villain of sorts. He didn't run out a ground ball, then made things infinitely worse by telling The Athletic's Ken Rosenthal that hustling wasn't his "cup of tea." He interfered with a couple double-play turns and had Milwaukee Brewers players calling him dirty when he dragged his foot across Jesus Aguilar's leg at first base. All this after multiple instances of throwing equipment on the playing field and a spikes-up slide that injured Boston Red Sox second baseman Dustin Pedroia.

Jay and Alonso have been influences on Machado forever, but they could continue to be positive influences during the season from a few steps away inside the White Sox clubhouse.

But just like brother-in-law Alonso said he wouldn't be doing any kind of recruiting, Jay said he was going to stay out of Machado's decision-making process, that he was here to play for the White Sox, not to play with Machado — even if that would be pretty nice.

"Manny is going to do what is best for him and his family," he said. "We obviously have a great friendship, and Yonder is his brother-in-law and all that. But Manny is going to do what is best for his family. That will be up to them privately. I haven't been involved in any of that. Those are their matters.

"Let's see how everything shakes out. We'd obviously love to have a Manny Machado, absolutely, the guy is unbelievable. But that is up to him and his family. Who knows what is going to happen."

The White Sox can offer Machado the chance to team up with two of his great friends. The Philadelphia Phillies can't offer that. The New York Yankees can't offer that. No mystery team can offer that.

There are so many other factors to his decision, that even being able to offer that might not be enough. And so even if Machado is wearing red or navy pinstripes instead of black ones when Opening Day rolls around, the White Sox will be happy they signed Jay and traded for Alonso.

White Sox Team of the Future: Designated hitter

By Vinnie Duber / NBC Sports Chicago | January 11, 2019

What will the next championship-contending White Sox team look like?

That's what we're setting out to determine (or at least make a guess at) over the next few weeks. Ten members of our White Sox content team here at NBC Sports Chicago put our heads together to try to project what each position on the diamond would look like in one, two, three years. Basically, we posed the question: What will the White Sox starting lineup be the next time they're capable of playing in the World Series?

That question can have a bunch of different answers, too. We didn't limit ourselves to players currently a part of the organization. Think the White Sox are gonna make a big free-agent addition? Vote for that player. Think the White Sox are gonna pull off a huge trade? Vote for that player. We wanted to see some creativity.

We're moving on to designated hitter, and while much of the roster of the future is made up of players who haven't even put on a White Sox uniform yet, the winner here is someone who's already become one of the best hitters in team history. Jose Abreu is our designated hitter of the future.

Penciling in Abreu at DH and not first base isn't a knock on his fielding skills, though the White Sox will likely use Abreu more at the DH spot in 2019, platooning him there and at first base with newly acquired Yonder Alonso, in an effort to keep him off his feet a little more and possibly extend his career a bit. That becomes important if the team determines that the soon-to-be-32 Abreu is a part of the long-term future.

That's a determination that still needs to be made, with Abreu now in the final year of his current contract. An extension has long seemed a very real possibility, even if Abreu's age is significantly higher than the majority of the players who figure to make up the long-term core, the Eloy Jimenezes, the Luis Roberts, the Michael Kopechs. If Abreu's production drops off, maybe the White Sox decide to move on. Or maybe developments in the minor leagues will kick the contention window a tad further down the road, making the remainder of Abreu's career a poor alignment with those long-term plans of perennial contention on the South Side.

But the most realistic outcome still seems to be Abreu sticking around. The White Sox love this guy, constantly touting him as a model for their young players. They rave about his work ethic and describe him as someone who goes about his business in exactly the right way. They placed Yoan Moncada, a big part of those future plans, right next to Abreu in the clubhouse, hoping one Cuban could learn a lot from another. Team chairman Jerry Reinsdorf bestowed a special ring on Abreu after he became just the sixth White Sox player ever to hit for the cycle. And Abreu himself always talks about his love of the organization and how he hopes to be a part of it for his entire career.

And while those off-the-field qualities might have the biggest impact on the fleet of highly rated youngsters making their way to the major leagues, the on-the-field production has been just as excellent. Abreu is one of three players in baseball history — the others Joe DiMaggio and Albert Pujols, two of the best to ever play the game — to start his career with four straight seasons of at least 25 homers and 100 RBIs. He was the 2014 AL Rookie of the Year, he's a two-time All Star, including the AL's starting first baseman in 2018, and a two-time Silver Slugger. He's received MVP votes in three of his five seasons, finishing as high as fourth in 2014.

Last season saw Abreu go on an uncharacteristic, prolonged slump in the middle of the season that dragged his numbers down. And yet thanks to a red-hot stretch, it was possible he could have reached that 25-homer, 100-RBI mark yet again. Two freak injuries snuffed that hope out, twice sending him to the DL in the season's final months.

With full health and more consistency, it wouldn't be at all surprising to see 2018, statistically, end up an aberration. Plus, more rest thanks to increased time at DH could help Abreu in both the short and long terms.

Will he be here when the White Sox are next contending for a championship? It's a possibility, and one that doesn't seem all that unlikely. Abreu likes playing in the field, but he's our designated hitter of the future.

Other vote-getters

Yonder Alonso. The newly acquired Alonso isn't under contract long, with only one guaranteed season on the South Side coming in 2019. There's an option for the 2020 season. Alonso has certainly been productive in the past, the very recent past, for that matter, as he's just two years removed from an All-Star season in 2017, when he had a .365 on-base percentage and slugged .501 with 28 homers. He's a solid pickup for the White Sox who figures to help out Abreu, provide the lineup with some on-base skills it desperately needs and potentially even assist in luring Manny Machado to the South Side. Is he part of the long-term answer? Probably not, soon to be 32 himself without the five seasons of White Sox service that Abreu has. But one voter perhaps envisioned the team's contention window popping open at some point in the near future, meaning Alonso could still be around, in 2020, to be part of a contending group.

Daniel Palka. Palka showed he could be a powerful presence as a designated hitter, hitting 27 home runs as a rookie last season. He's constantly working on improving his outfield defense, though he seems better suited as a DH. That being said, the opportunity to play there seems to have dried up in a hurry with the import of Alonso, who as mentioned will split time at DH and first with Abreu. So where does that leave Palka? Not as a full-time starter, that's for sure, especially now that Jon Jay has been signed to upgrade the outfield. Palka will probably still get his opportunities, and he'll have to take advantage of them to work his way into the long-term conversation at any position. But he's got lefty pop, always a valuable commodity, so there's obviously a chance.

Jake Burger. There were outside questions about whether the White Sox first-round draft pick from 2017 could stick at third base, questions seemingly answered by director of player development Chris Getz at last year's SoxFest: "From what I've seen, there's nothing that says that he can't play third base." But then came the pair of Achilles tears that Burger experienced during 2018, not only robbing him of valuable developmental time in the minor leagues, but perhaps even more emphatically throwing his ability to stick at third into question. That's not to say, though, that he's done by any stretch, and a guy who swung a big bat at Missouri State could keep swinging it in the minor leagues and find his way to the majors as a valuable part of the lineup of the future. And one voter thinks he'll be doing it as a DH.

Zack Collins. Another first-round pick with questions about where he'll end up defensively is Collins. The White Sox are still plenty confident he can be their long-term catcher, and that's the track he's on in the minor leagues. But he also got a lot of experience as a DH last season when he and fellow catching prospect Seby Zavala were on the same roster at Double-A Birmingham, playing catcher in only 74 of his 122 games. Even though he won the Double-A Home Run Derby, Collins' most impressive achievement in 2018 was a fantastic .382 on-base percentage, something that will definitely be of value, no matter what position he

ends up playing. There have been questions about his defense since he was drafted, rightly or wrongly, and so it's no surprise to see one of our voters putting him at DH.

Khris Davis. Here's a creative pick. Already one of the better designated hitters in the game, Davis is set to become a free agent following the 2019 season. He was sensational in 2018, finishing eighth in AL MVP voting after hitting a major league leading 48 home runs and driving in 123 runs for the playoff-making Oakland A's. Should the White Sox keep looking to make big free-agent splashes next winter — perhaps meaning they missed out on Machado and Bryce Harper this offseason — Davis could be an intriguing name in a loaded free-agent class.

As Jon Jay officially joins White Sox, Charlie Tilson becomes victim of roster crunch

By Vinnie Duber / NBC Sports Chicago | January 10, 2019

Jon Jay is officially a member of the White Sox. Next on the to-do list? Complete the "Miami Baseball Brotherhood" with mega free agent Manny Machado.

That still hasn't happened, as Machado has gone more than nine days into 2019 without picking between the White Sox, the Philadelphia Phillies and the New York Yankees. If he were to choose to sign up with Jay, good friend and winter workout buddy, and Yonder Alonso, good friend and winter workout buddy and brother-in-law, and the White Sox, that would be the start of a brand new era of baseball on the South Side.

An era now officially underway is the one specifically involving Jay, who figures to play a large role in the team's outfield plans during the 2019 season. While the biggest addition there will be Eloy Jimenez once he arrives from the minor leagues a couple weeks into April, Jay provides an offensive upgrade and a defensive upgrade in the wake of the non-tendering of Avisail Garcia. He's a high on-base guy who can give the White Sox more of the kinds of at-bats they're hoping to see from their young players. And alongside Adam Engel, he gives the White Sox a pair of 2018 Gold Glove finalists in the outfield.

Daniel Palka will probably still get his opportunities in right field, especially if his dedication to improving his defense pays off after a 27-homer rookie season. But those perhaps won't be quite as prevalent now that Jay is in the fold.

Jay's biggest contributions, though, will likely come off the field. He earns rave reviews as a positive clubhouse presence, another thing the White Sox needed as the rest of their roster is young and getting younger. He can lean on his wealth of playoff experience from his time with the Cubs and St. Louis Cardinals and show the youngsters how to do things the right way, something that will surely be appreciated by manager Rick Renteria and the White Sox front office.

One era that appears to be ending with Jay's official addition to the roster, though, is the one involving Charlie Tilson, who was designated for assignment as the corresponding move. While the loss of Tilson — the Wilmette native who slashed .264/.331/.292 in only 41 big league games last season — might not be a huge one, it's the start of a 40-man roster crunch that will take place over the remainder of the offseason. The White Sox have been active, so perhaps there aren't too many more additions to be made. But there's the possibility of Machado coming to the South Side and the need for one more starting pitcher, at the very least, which means Tilson is likely not the last person to lose his 40-man spot this winter.

One national writer joins South Side fans in recognizing White Sox are 'perfect' for Manny Machado and Bryce Harper

By Vinnie Duber / NBC Sports Chicago | January 10, 2019

OK, so not every South Side baseball fan is rooting for the Manny Machado and Bryce Harper sagas to end with one of the 26-year-old superstars in a White Sox uniform.

But a seeming majority of White Sox fans has been energized by the team's aggressiveness this winter. Rick Hahn's front office has landed itself as one of just a few contenders for the two biggest names on the free-agent market, a thrilling change of pace for a fan base that suffered through a 100-loss campaign in 2018 and a pursuit that fits right in with his carefully laid rebuilding plans.

Well, White Sox fans, you're not alone in seeing the South Side as the ideal destination for one of the game's best players.

MLB.com's Richard Justice penned a piece that looks at seven reasons why the White Sox are what he calls the "perfect" landing spot for either Harper or Machado, in other words touting them as the best option (contract specifics aside, of course) for any big-name player trying to decide where to play his home games for the better part of the next decade.

Justice, like the White Sox likely did in their pitches to Machado and Harper, started with the future, pointing out all those highly rated prospects that have already started making their way to the major leagues. He points out the weaknesses of the AL Central and that one of these superstars could change the division's balance of power in a hurry. He touts Chicago as one of the world's best cities, a no-brainer to us Windy City residents, even on a 16-degree morning such as this one. And he finishes up by complimenting manager Rick Renteria and the White Sox organization as great people to play and work for.

No argument here.

The White Sox have always seemed to have a nice list of selling points, chief among them what they have coming in Eloy Jimenez, Michael Kopech, Dylan Cease, Luis Robert and others. The opportunity to spend many years surrounded by that core would figure to put one of these guys in the thick of a playoff race on an annual basis. And while teams like the New York Yankees and Los Angeles Dodgers are better equipped to pitch winning rosters in the immediate, those teams are going to run into financial and roster crunches sooner. The White Sox, thanks to their rebuilding effort, have financial and roster flexibility that could keep that group together longer. Meanwhile, the Philadelphia Phillies, the White Sox chief competition in the Machado derby and one of the other teams in on Harper, might not have as attractive a present or future as they think they do strictly based on what the major league roster and top-prospects list look like today.

And that ties into another point of Justice's: the city. I don't have to extol the wonders of Chicago to Chicagoans and Chicago fans. But someone has to do that for Machado and Harper, and someone surely did and they did a better job of it than whoever pitched Philadelphia because both players are reportedly not big fans of the City of Brotherly Love. Machado got a firsthand lesson in Philly sports fans' passion when a construction worker yelled "do the right thing!" at him upon his arrival to his meeting with the Phillies during his free-agent tour. Philly fans are a passionate lot who love their teams, but it's a notoriously ruthless sports town when things don't go perfectly. Just ask Santa Claus.

Undoubtedly one of these guys could dramatically change things in the AL Central. Even though the White Sox might not even be a playoff team in 2019 with the addition of Machado or Harper, there's not much standing in the way of an ascent to the postseason in the American League. Ask the Oakland A's.

Right now, there are three teams destined for the postseason in the Yankees, Boston Red Sox and Houston Astros, with the Cleveland Indians another almost by default. With rumors of trades involving All-Star type starting pitchers swirling all offseason, the departure of Michael Brantley and a near consensus that the contention window is closing, how much longer can the Tribe be considered a playoff lock? Meanwhile, the Detroit Tigers and Kansas City Royals are in a deeper rebuilding modes than the White Sox, and the Minnesota Twins took a step backward last season. There's obviously a long way to go before the White Sox are where they want to be, a lot more development that needs to occur before the rebuild transitions to contention, but with so little competition in the division and across the Junior Circuit — is anyone really scared of the Seattle Mariners, Toronto Blue Jays or Texas Rangers? — it might not be long before the White Sox are back in playoff position.

And while some White Sox fans have their grumbles about Renteria or the organization as a whole, there's no doubt that players love playing for Renteria and for the White Sox. Many players discussed the buy-in to Renteria's brand of culture, with shortstop Tim Anderson using the phrase "Ricky's boys don't quit" more times than Hawk Harrelson last season. And Jose Abreu, to use one example, often talks about how he wants to be with the White Sox for his whole career and thanks the organization every time he's asked about an individual achievement. Grumble all you'd like, the guys in the clubhouse — which is what Machado or Harper would be — have nothing but rave reviews.

Of course, none of this is news to White Sox fans. But an explanation to the baseball world at large that the South Side of Chicago can be a more perfect place for the game's biggest names to land than New York or Los Angeles is refreshing to say the least.

We'll see if it ends up mattering to two guys who are expected to get a boatload of money thrown in their direction.

Manny Machado decision could reportedly come within a week: Are White Sox in a good spot?

By Vinnie Duber / NBC Sports Chicago | January 9, 2019

The Manny Machado free-agent saga might finally be nearing an end.

According to a report from The Score's Bruce Levine, Machado is expected to make a decision on where he'll be spending the better part of the next decade within a week.

Levine adds a few other interesting nuggets, leading with this: "The prevailing feeling across the MLB landscape is that momentum is building for the White Sox in the Manny Machado sweepstakes."

That ought to get White Sox fans jazzed, and it's not an illogical conclusion to draw. The New York Yankees have seemed pretty low-key in their pursuit of one of two 26-year-old superstars on this winter's free-agent market, reportedly unwilling to offer the kind of multimillion-dollar contract that the White Sox have reportedly already offered and the Philadelphia Phillies are expected to offer. Machado and fellow mega free agent Bryce Harper reportedly don't love the idea of playing in Philadelphia, a notoriously ruthless sports town with a roster that could use some improvements to keep pace with the Atlanta Braves and Washington Nationals in a competitive NL East.

The White Sox, too, have added incentive to the idea of Machado playing on the South Side, trading earlier this offseason for Machado's brother-in-law, Yonder Alonso, and reportedly agree to a one-year deal with one of Machado's good friends and offseason workout partners, Jon Jay. That goes along with what would figure to be an attractive pitch of Machado being the centerpiece of the final phase of the rebuild, playing alongside Eloy Jimenez, Michael Kopech, Dylan Cease and Luis Robert for the next seven years and forming a perennial contender.

But money often rules the day in these situations, and the Phillies are expected to throw a lot of it at Machado and also Harper, who they will reportedly meet with Saturday in Las Vegas. Levine speculates that the meeting with Harper could act as a sort of deadline for Machado to make his decision. The White Sox have already made their offer, described by USA Today's Bob Nightengale as "closer to \$200 million than \$300 million." Levine's previous report that the White Sox wouldn't go past seven years in offers to either Machado or Harper led to speculation that offer could be in the ballpark of seven years and \$210 million. Levine got a little more specific in his latest report, saying "the White Sox will be in on Machado in the \$200-million range for six or seven years," which isn't too far off that dot-connecting guesstimate.

Though it was reported earlier this week that the Yankees had not yet made an offer to Machado, Levine says all three teams have — and that a fourth team could be in on the action, too. How mysterious.

While things might be looking good for the White Sox at the moment, the Phillies could be the difference-maker here if only because they seem to be the only team that could significantly outbid the White Sox. If

it's truly down to these three, if the White Sox won't go past seven years and if the Yankees have no intention of even breaking the \$200 million mark with their offer — all ifs, of course — the Phillies, whose owner promised earlier this offseason he might "be a little stupid" with his free-agent spending, could make a decade-long offer worth more than \$250 million and blow the other bidders out of the water. No amount of brothers-in-law and offseason workout buddies could trump that, right?

We might soon find out, if the next seven days truly do provide Machado's decision.

Manny Machado will 'do what's best for his family' in free agency, says White Sox newcomer Jon Jay

By Phil Thompson / Chicago Tribune | January 11, 2019

White Sox general manager Rick Hahn understands how it looks. New outfielder Jon Jay realizes it too.

But both were adamant Thursday: The team didn't sign Jay to a one-year, \$4 million deal primarily to lure his friend and workout partner Manny Machado to the South Side.

"Manny's going to do what's best for him and his family," Jay, 33, said in a conference call Thursday after the team made his signing official. "Obviously, we have a great friendship, and Yonder (Alonso) is his brother-in-law and all that, but Manny's going to do what's best for his family.

"I haven't been involved in any of that. ... Obviously, we'd love to have a Manny on the team. Absolutely. But that's something ultimately that's going to be on them and their family. Who knows what's going to happen?"

Jay's acquisition follows a December trade with the Indians for first baseman Alonso, fueling speculation that the Sox were padding the nest — beyond negotiations over Machado's reported demands of at least \$300 million — to entice the elite free-agent infielder to pick them over the Phillies, Yankees and other suitors.

Machado is also friends with Sox catcher and former Orioles teammate Welington Castillo.

At one point Jay seemed to bristle at being asked about Machado: "He's a good friend of mine and I'm going to leave it at that. I'm here to talk about myself and signing with the Chicago White Sox. I'm not here to talk about Manny's matters."

General manager Rick Hahn said the Sox had been watching Jay in this and previous offseasons.

"Obviously much has been made about his relationships with other players and other potential free-agent targets," Hahn said. "And I can certainly tell you we signed Jon Jay ... for what he brings on and off the field, not because of his relationship with any other specific targets.

"These players (Jay and Alonso) are here because of what they bring specifically, both between the lines and in the clubhouse. We feel that they make us better in 2019 and have the potential to have a lasting impact on what we're trying to build in the long term. I'm not going to get into the relationships they have with other players throughout the game. It's certainly a positive but it's by no means a reason to make a move to acquire either player."

Hahn pointed to Jay's left-handed bat — he's a career .285 hitter with a .352 on-base percentage in nine major-league seasons with four teams — as well as his versatility — he can play all three outfield spots — and reputation as a vocal clubhouse leader.

"I just try to go out there and help out wherever I can," Jay said. "I truly care about the game, about my teammates, and I just want to go out there and see everyone do well."

The Sox had a carousel of outfielders last season as they tried to satisfy offensive and defensive needs and never really achieved an optimal mix on either front. The Sox would like get more pop from strong fielders such as Adam Engel, while power hitter Daniel Palka is a work in progress defensively, though it's a point of focus this offseason.

"We've re-signed Leury Garcia, who has the versatility to play center as well as the infield," Hahn said. "At some point over the course of the year, not at the start, but ... we expect to have Eloy (Jimenez) join us as well. That adds to guys we had last year in Nicky (Delmonico) and Adam Engel and Palka.

"There's going to be some different options for us and some choices that are going to have to be made."

Jay, who played with the Cubs in 2017, hit .268 and scored 74 runs last season for the Royals and Diamondbacks. He said signed with the Sox because he admires the organization and the city and has a chance to compete for a starting spot.

"(Manager) Ricky (Renteria) and I, we spoke, but we didn't really talk about a role," Jay said. "That's not important to me. I'm going to prepare every single day and I'm coming in to win a job. That's what I've done my whole career, so I'm going to stick to that."

To make room on the 40-man roster, the Sox designated outfielder and Wilmette native Charlie Tilson for assignment. Tilson, 26, a New Trier High alumnus, was a Cardinals second-round draft pick in 2011 and came to the Sox organization in a July 2016 trade.

Last summer, he hit .264 with 11 RBIs in 41 games with the Sox.

Nicky Delmonico and Daniel Palka join 'The Carbonaro Effect' prank on White Sox fans

By Phil Thompson / Chicago Tribune | January 10, 2019

Nicky Delmonico gets a kick when someone plants a rubber snake in the White Sox clubhouse to scare a teammate, so he appreciates the next-level pranking that "The Carbonaro Effect" has pulled on unsuspecting Sox fans.

On Thursday night's episode, 9 p.m. on TruTV, Delmonico and teammate Daniel Palka, another fan of the show, join comedian Michael Carbonaro as tricks customers at a Guaranteed Rate Field hot dog stands.

"Me and Palky watched the show for a long time, and I felt like a little kid. Just being able to be a part of it was really something special," Delmonico said.

The Carbonaro Effect - Press-Activated Condiments | truTV

White Sox outfielders Nicky Delmonico and Daniel Palka take part in a prank on "The Carbonaro Effect."

The bit involves pouring "press-activated" condiments on a hot dog — though Carbonaro should know better than to mess with Chicagoans and their condiments.

Carbonaro, in disguise as a mustachioed vendor, explains to a fan that mustard, relish and sriracha sauce can all be dispensed from the same packet through a "chemical change" that's activated by the number of times he presses it.

At the point the fan pulls a moist towelette from one of the packets, Carbonaro walks away and leaves the fan looking confused.

Delmonico has watched Carbonaro fool people with such magic tricks since the show's beginning. His favorite episode involves a Porta Potty. Let's just leave it at that.

"Ever since I've been in minor leagues playing baseball I'm coming in and watching the TV, either 'Impractical Jokers' or 'The Carbonaro Effect,'" Delmonico said. "So I always watched before I got out and

play. I'm a really big fan and kind of amazed at his show and what it does. ... It's funny how he gets people to really believe what he's doing."

Missing @Nicky_Delmonico and @Danielbpalka? Catch them on the #CarbonaroEffect with @carbonaro tonight at 9:00 p.m. CT on @truTV!

"The Carbonaro Effect" filmed new episodes in Chicago in September and reached out to the Sox about collaborating. Delmonico found out a day before the show that he and Palka, another big fan of the show, would be making a cameo.

"We kind of have natural pranksters in our clubhouse," Delmonico said.

Machado 'would be wonderful,' but will it happen for White Sox?

By Daryl Van Schouwen / Chicago Sun-Times | January 10, 2019

The White Sox are serious players in the Manny Machado sweepstakes, perhaps one of two teams in a coin-flip scenario for the star infielder's services.

The city — at least the fans on the South Side anyway — is on the edge of its seat.

And it might be down to the Sox and Phillies for Machado if the Yankees are out.

Now there's a sentence we didn't see coming back in October.

Are the White Sox' chances for landing Manny Machado looking up? (AP)

But that might be where it's at, unless another team, previously unheard from in the bidding or working sneakily behind the scenes, jumps in late to be a player.

There's certainly room at the table, what with a curiously small group competing for a player of Machado's talent and age (26) available on the open market. Why are so few teams, with industry revenues bulging at the seams, jumping in for these golden opportunities? Some, like the Cubs and Dodgers, already are stacked with talent and payrolls and might be trying to keep big-budget houses in order. Others are too far away in their rebuilds to justify spending big now.

The Sox are not there yet, either, and might not be even if they sign Machado. But they believe they will be in 2020, when Machado would be in only the second year of a possible contract of seven years or more, potential opt-outs not included.

And so they are all in on Machado, so to speak. And when Jim Thome, a former Sox and Phillie now working as a special assistant to general manager Rick Hahn, says of Machado on MLB Network, "That would be wonderful for our city and organization," the anticipation builds a little bit more.

"The boys, Rick and [executive vice president] Kenny [Williams], are working hard," Thome said. "We're excited. This is a fun time for us. We're a young organization with a bunch of talent, and we're hoping that gets done.

"We'll see what happens."

Sox fans hardly can wait to see, riding a wave of euphoria more fitting of a done deal than a possibility. The thing is, it's probably far from a done deal for the Sox.

Hahn, talking on a conference call to discuss the signing of Jon Jay, danced around questions about Machado.

But he gets the buzz, recalling how stoked he got as a young fan during the hot stove.

“That’s part of being a fan is getting excited about what is rumored to be going or to consume whatever is put out there regardless of the level of truth behind it,” he said. “It’s just part of being passionate, and I respect that fact that there’s a level of excitement about what we’re doing around here.

“For me, it can get worrisome at the point where there’s false information out there that may influence fan perception, but at the same time, I know that at some point these matters will be resolved, and we’ll be able to speak a little more candidly.”

And if the Sox don’t land Machado — or Bryce Harper, the other big prize they’re in on, though seemingly not to the same degree?

Hahn was asked about how disappointed he’d be if the Sox get neither, which, of course, remains a possibility.

“Let’s wait until we get to the point where we know what’s up exactly with that, and we can talk about how we’re responding and how we feel,” Hahn said. “At this point, it’s just speculative.”

Even Jay, Machado’s friend, said he doesn’t know what the star will do.

“We’d obviously love to have a Manny Machado. Absolutely, the guy is unbelievable,” Jay said. “But that is up to him and his family.

“Who knows what is going to happen?”

NOTE: To make room for Jon Jay on the 40-man roster, the Sox designated outfielder Charlie Tilson for assignment.

The wait goes on: White Sox still hunt for Manny Machado

By Daryl Van Schouwen / Chicago Sun-Times | January 10, 2019

As the White Sox set the table for coveted free agent Manny Machado by bringing in family and friends, the big unknown is whether they’ll be willing to pay enough to ensure the guest of honor’s attendance.

According to one report Wednesday, the Sox might have to outbid only the Phillies — the self-described “stupid money” spenders, who, as far as anyone knows, haven’t made Machado an offer. The Phillies do have a meeting with Bryce Harper, the other big free agent on the market, in Las Vegas on Saturday, adding to the web of mystery surrounding the pair of prized 26-year-old superstars.

Meanwhile, on Thursday, the Sox probably will announce the signing of a free agent not named Machado or Harper. That would be 33-year-old outfielder Jon Jay, on a one-year, \$4 million contract. Jay and recently acquired Sox first baseman Yonder Alonso — whose sister Yainee is Machado’s wife — are all close to Machado. Their relationship was featured in workout videos and a Players Tribune feature titled “The Miami Baseball Brotherhood.”

Sox fans clicked away to read that article, knowing Machado might choose a team somewhat soon. For the three Miami bros to come together, though, Sox chairman Jerry Reinsdorf might have to increase his original offer, which already more than doubles the biggest contract in Sox history.

Is he willing to go higher? Would he have to?

The only known offer for Machado, which USA Today reported last week, is from the Sox and is said to be closer to \$200 million than the \$300 million or more Machado and agent Dan Lozano are seeking. That’s a sizable gap. It’s unclear whether any other team or teams are in the hunt. According to Hector Gomez of

Z101 Digital, the team that Machado has been most enamored with, the Yankees, is out of the running, and it's down to the Sox and Phillies. But other reports say the Yankees are still in.

"That would be wonderful for our city and organization," Jim Thome, a former Sox and Phillie now working as a special assistant to Sox general manager Rick Hahn, when asked about Machado and the Sox. "The boys, Rick and [executive vice president] Kenny [Williams], are working hard. We're excited. This is a fun time for us. We're a young organization with bunch of talent and we're hoping that gets done."

"We'll see what happens."

Until it happens, the shortage of known facts surrounding Machado and Harper will probably continue to make the wait intriguing, mysterious, conflicting and even exasperating to those with their fingers crossed.

Financials aside, give the Sox props for trying to make Machado's corner of the clubhouse more comfortable by adding Jay. The move addresses a needy outfield that has center fielder Adam Engel, a Gold Glove finalist who produced a soft .235/.279/.336 batting line last season; right field option Daniel Palka, who hit 27 homers as a rookie but had a modest .240/.294/.484 line and struggled defensively; and a swift, capable utility player in Leury Garcia. Top prospect Eloy Jimenez figures to patrol left field when he arrives, probably in late April. Right fielder Avisail Garcia, a 2017 All-Star, was non-tendered in November, although the Sox haven't ruled out bringing him back.

Jay, who will turn 34 before the season begins, has a .352 lifetime on-base percentage, low strikeout rates and a quality clubhouse presence. But in 84 games after a trade to the Diamondbacks last season, he produced a .235/.304/.325 hitting line, well below his .285/.352/.378 career line.

The offseason additions of Alonso, relievers Alex Colome and Kelvin Herrera, starter Ivan Nova and second catcher James McCann are nice improvements as a whole, but if Machado rejects the Sox, closing the gap between 100 losses and a .500 team becomes a much taller order.

As a fallback, the rebuilding Sox could look at veteran third baseman Mike Moustakas. But if Machado isn't on board, they might be better off seeing how Yoan Moncada looks at third base while clearing a spot for 2018 first-round draft pick Nick Madrigal at second, with Yolmer Sanchez holding that spot down in the interim.

The better scenario, of course, is Machado throwing the ball across the infield to his brother-in-law at first base.

Stay tuned.

White Sox announce Jon Jay deal, DFA Charlie Tilson

By Daryl Van Schouwen / Chicago Sun-Times | January 10, 2019

The White Sox announced their one-year deal Thursday with free-agent outfielder Jon Jay. The former Cub will receive \$4 million in 2019.

To make room for Jay on the 40-man roster, the Sox designated outfielder Charlie Tilson for assignment.

The Jay signing was first reported Monday night.

"Jon is a veteran major-leaguer who can help a team win in any number of ways," Sox general manager Rick Hahn said. "From getting on base consistently, to being a solid hitter, smart baserunner and solid defender at all three outfield spots, Jon makes any team better."

Center fielder Jon Jay catches a fly ball for the Cubs during a game at St. Louis on Sept. 27, 2017. (AP)

Jay is a career .285 hitter with a .352 on-base percentage over nine major-league seasons with St. Louis (2010-15), San Diego (2016), the Cubs (2017), Kansas City (2018) and Arizona (2018). He has batted .275 or better in seven of his nine seasons in the majors. He owns a .996 career fielding percentage in the outfield, the highest among all active players, and has played in 67 career postseason games, including 13 in the World Series.

"It's a great organization a great city and good place for me and my family," Jay said. "Just an opportunity to come in there and compete for a job which is something I was looking for. Obviously there's a lot of potential on this team. I'm looking forward to seeing what happens the rest of the offseason and all that, but I am excited this opportunity."

Jay joins relief pitchers Kelvin Herrera and Alex Colome, starting pitcher Ivan Nova, first baseman Yonder Alonso and catcher James McCann on the list of Sox offseason acquisitions.

Jay can play all three outfield positions and will be one of the Sox' best fielders at any of the three spots.

The Sox continue in their pursuit of infielder Manny Machado, who is a friend of Jay, as well as Bryce Harper.

"Manny is going to do what is best for him and his family," Jay said. "We obviously have a great friendship. I haven't been involved in any of that (decision). Let's see how that shakes out. We'd obviously like to have him. Who knows what is going to happen."

Talking on a conference call, Jay answered questions about his relationship with Machado. The Sox also signed Machado's brother in law, Yonder Alonso, forming something of a drawing card for the free agent star. Hahn insisted the move was designed to improve the club and nothing more and Jay was less willing to discuss Machado than Alonso was when he was acquired by the Sox.

"He's an unbelievable worker," Jay said of Machado. "Like I said he's a good friend of mine and I'll leave it at that. I am here to talk about myself signing with the Chicago White Sox, I'm not here to talk about Manny's matters."

Tilson, a New Trier graduate, was a Cardinals well-regarded prospect when the Sox acquired him in a trade for left-hander Zach Duke during the 2016 season. He tore his hamstring in his only appearance that year while attempting to run down a fly ball in center field, and then missed the 2017 season with a foot injury. He appeared in 41 games for the Sox in 2018, batting .264/.331/.292.

Jay signing adds another layer of intrigue to White Sox's pursuit of Machado

By Scot Gregor / Daily Herald | January 10, 2019

On the ongoing Manny Machado front, White Sox general manager Rick Hahn stuck to the script Thursday.

After acquiring first baseman/designated hitter Yonder Alonso in a trade from the Indians on Dec. 15, Hahn was asked about the link between the two players. Machado is married to Alonso's sister and is an off-season neighbor in Miami.

"Fundamentally, this is a baseball deal," Hahn said. "We feel this makes us better. We like how Yonder fits in between the lines and in the clubhouse, and helps further what we're trying to accomplish in 2019 and beyond.

"The potential ancillary benefits to it in terms of his relationships with others really can't be part of pulling the trigger in making the decision to acquire a big-league player, especially a veteran one with this type of contract commitment."

On a conference call Thursday to discuss the signing of Jon Jay to a one-year, \$4 million contract, Hahn had similar thoughts. Jay is close friends with Machado and Alonso, and the trio are regular workout partners during the off-season.

To clear a roster spot for Jay, the Sox designated New Trier High School product Charlie Tilson for assignment.

"We are very pleased to add him," Hahn said of Jay. "Obviously, much has been made about his relationships with other players and other potential free-agent targets, and I can certainly tell you that we signed Jon Jay -- and he's been on our target list all off-season as well as other off-seasons -- for what he brings on and off the field, not because of his relationships with any other specific targets."

Jay acknowledged his friendship with Machado, but only to a point.

"We'd obviously love to have a Manny Machado, absolutely, the guy is unbelievable," Jay said. "But that is up to him and his family. Who knows what is going to happen? He's a good friend of mine and I'll leave it at that. I am here to talk about myself signing with the Chicago White Sox, I'm not here to talk about Manny's matters."

A prime free agent, Machado was rumored to be seeking a contract in the \$300 million range. According to USA Today, the Sox have offered "about \$200 million."

As expected, Hahn declined to shed any light on the White Sox's pursuit of Machado or Bryce Harper, this off-season's other coveted free agent.

Hahn is well aware that fans follow all of the rumors and are fired up at the prospect of seeing Machado or Harper in a Sox uniform.

"Part of being a fan is getting excited about what is rumored to be going on or to consume whatever is put out there, regardless of the level of truth behind it," Hahn said. "It's just part of being passionate and I respect that fact and respect the fact that there's a level of excitement about what we're doing around here."

"For me, it can get worrisome at the point where there's false information out there that may influence fan perception, but at the same time I know that at some point these matters will be resolved and we'll be able to speak a little more candidly about how we viewed things and how we approached things and what it means for us going forward."

Would Hahn be disappointed if the White Sox fail to land Machado? Or Harper?

"Let's wait until we get to the point where we know what's up exactly with that and we can talk about how we're responding and how we feel," the GM said. "At this point, it's just speculative."

White Sox make Jon Jay deal official, resist efforts to discuss only Manny Machado

By James Fegan / The Athletic | January 10, 2019

As we enter the umpteenth month of Manny Machado Watch and continue to seek every angle to assess the status of Manny Machado Watch, we are probably guilty of viewing every single White Sox thing that happens through the view of a Manny Machado Watch prism. As such, it may have resulted in some unrealistic expectations for newest White Sox addition Jon Jay — a noted friend of Manny Machado — whose contract was officially announced Thursday.

Jon Jay says he hasn't been involved in Manny Machado's decision process. Said they have a great relationship and would love to have him as a teammate, but that Machado has to do what's best for his family

Jay and general manager Rick Hahn, two people who would rather not speak about Machado directly, did conference calls with the local media on Thursday. After Yonder Alonso's potential for stabilizing the White Sox's first base/designated hitter contributions was overshadowed by interest in his brother-in-law, Jay did well to establish some boundaries after his first assurance that he wasn't given a \$4 million deal to recruit wasn't enough.

"He's a good friend of mine and I'll leave it at that," Jay said. "I am here to talk about myself signing with the Chicago White Sox, I'm not here to talk about Manny's matters."

James Shields was mostly too polite to gripe about it over his two years as part of the Sox rebuild, but given the work it takes to maintain your body to sustain a major-league workload into your mid-30s, there's some room for veterans to get miffed that the only thing people find remarkable about them at times is their influence on their younger peers. Hahn did his part to defend Jay's honor, placing him in the same category as Ivan Nova and Yonder Alonso as players the team has targeted for years.

Given that senior director of baseball operations Dan Fabian is revered in the organization for tracking every player who might be of interest to the Sox from their amateur days through their professional career, that can probably be said for just about any veteran they acquire. But Hahn's point remains — the Sox are saying they guaranteed millions to the 33-year-old Jay (and designated Charlie Tilson for assignment) so he can help keep them from setting the all-time team strikeout record again, get on base some and sharpen up the corner outfield defense in the instances he is rotated there, even if the testimonials of his off-field clubhouse leadership are not a small aspect of his touted value.

If Jon Jay can help bring Manny Machado to Chicago, his legacy in the White Sox's rebuild will be cemented no matter what he does on the field. (Stan Szeto/USA TODAY Sports)

The White Sox benefit from being able to mix in Daniel Palka's home-run pop as needed, rather than balance the full-time DH workload on his mighty shoulders. Their outfielders struck out (28.2 percent) as often as they got on base (.282 OBP) last year, so the additions of Alonso and Jay justify themselves regardless of their social associations. In the end, Hahn acknowledged the coincidence on the same level that everyone is factoring it into their analysis about where Machado is going: it probably doesn't mean much but it can't hurt.

"These players are here because of what they bring specifically both between the lines and in the clubhouse," Hahn said. "We feel they make us better in 2019 and have the potential to have a lasting impact on what we are trying to build for the long term. Not going to get into the relationships they have with other players throughout the game. It's certainly a positive but I would say it's by no means a reason to make a move to acquire another player."

The White Sox have a roster to build and a slow, painstaking rebuild to continue even outside the possibility of hitting the lottery on Machado, who at this stage is more likely than not going to have a better career than any one individual this rebuild will produce. But while Hahn spent a little time getting into some regular team minutiae like the fifth starter slot (it sounds like Nov. 1 trade acquisition Manny Bañuelos is the leader in the clubhouse as it stands), the White Sox are where they expected to be at this point in the offseason: battling to sell Machado on their future and not conceding defeat. Asked how the Sox would respond to losing out in their efforts for the top of the free-agent market, Hahn didn't seem very interested in the premise.

"Let's wait until we get to the point where we know what's up exactly with that and we can talk about how we're responding and how we feel," Hahn said. "At this point, it's just speculative."

A pet theory of mine that I've heard echoed from a few league scouts at this point is that this year will be a positive one on the South Side no matter how this bidding turns out. The sloppy 100-loss 2018 set standards low and the cadre of small additions of average or better veterans will shore up the depth shortfalls that plagued last year's team if nothing else. Plus, a weak AL Central will allow for a significant increase in wins, thus providing some assurance that things are on the right track.

But until then, Manny Machado is the important and fascinating thing in the White Sox's world, and everything else only seems relevant in as much as it relates to him. Maybe we can get a redo on Jon Jay's conference call in a few weeks.

Outfielder Jon Jay, White Sox finalize \$4M, 1-year contract

By Andrew Seligman / Associated Press | January 10, 2019

CHICAGO -- Jon Jay sees the rebuilding Chicago White Sox poised for big things with promising young players. He's looking forward to being a part of it.

"It's a great organization, a great city," he said.

The free agent outfielder and the White Sox finalized a \$4 million, one-year contract on Thursday.

The 33-year-old played for Kansas City and Arizona last season, batting .268 with three homers and 40 RBIs in 143 games. He also made at least 24 starts at each spot in the outfield.

The addition gives the White Sox another veteran hitter after they struck out 1,594 times last season, tops in the majors. Jay also is friends with slugger Manny Machado, one of Chicago's top targets in free agency.

"Manny's going to do what's best for his family," Jay said. "That's going to be up to them, privately. I haven't been involved in any of that. Those are their matters. Let's see how everything shakes out. Obviously, would we love to have Manny Machado on the team? Absolutely. The guy is unbelievable. ... Who knows what is going to happen?"

Chicago also acquired Yonder Alonso - Machado's brother-in-law - from Cleveland last month. But general manager Rick Hahn insisted the White Sox brought them in because of their attributes, not recruiting usefulness.

"We feel that they make us better in 2019 and have the potential to have a lasting impact on what we're trying to build for the long term," Hahn said. "I'm not going to get into the relationships they have with other players throughout the game. It's certainly a positive, but it's by no means a reason to make a move to acquire either player."

Jay, a Miami native, is a .285 career hitter in nine years in the majors. He made his debut with St. Louis in 2010 and helped the crosstown Cubs win the NL Central in 2017.

Chicago cleared a roster spot for Jay by designating outfielder Charlie Tilson for assignment.

Baseball payrolls drop for 1st time since 2010: Cubs had 3rd highest, White Sox second lowest

By Ronald Blum / Associated Press | January 9, 2019

Spending on Major League Baseball payrolls dropped last season for the first time since 2010, an \$18 million decrease attributable to drug and domestic violence suspensions and a player retiring at midseason.

Still, even a year with flat payrolls is unusual for MLB. The only previous drops since 2002 were by \$3 million in 2010 and by \$32 million in 2004.

Teams combined to spend \$4.23 billion on major league payroll last year, according to final figures compiled by the commissioner's office and obtained by The Associated Press. The decrease followed an offseason with a weak free-agent class that failed to push the average higher.

Seattle second baseman Robinson Cano lost about \$11.7 million and White Sox catcher Welington Castillo approximately \$3.5 million after positive drug tests. Closer Roberto Osuna's domestic violence suspension

cost him roughly \$2.1 million from Toronto and Houston, and Baltimore outfielder Colby Rasmus walked away from about \$1.5 million rather than try to come back from a hip injury.

World Series champion Boston had the highest payroll for the first time since the free-agent era started in 1976 at \$230 million. In a sign of increasing parity, a record 24 teams had \$100 million payrolls, and the Red Sox figure was the lowest for the top big league payroll since 2012. Luxury tax surcharges that started for the 2017 season appear to have changed behavior of high-revenue teams.

MLB Deputy Commissioner Dan Halem said the slice of revenue going to major and minor league players last year was 54.2 percent, the same as in 2012. He cited a \$9.4 billion revenue figure for 2018, up from \$9.1 billion in 2017, and luxury tax payrolls, which use average annual values of contracts and include benefits. MLB pegged the average salary increase at 29.1 percent since 2012 and the average luxury tax payroll rise since then at 28.4 percent.

"So although the top payroll in 2018 was the lowest since 2012, the average payroll has increased significantly, which means MLB has had payroll compression — which is a good thing for competitive balance," he said.

Union head Tony Clark declined to comment, spokesman Chris Dahl said.

Agent Scott Boras claimed the players' portion of the money has declined.

"The luxury tax, the new elements have dramatically quelled the market," he said. "The allocation of revenues to payroll has gone down."

Both sides agree on one fact: The pace of free-agent signings has slowed dramatically in recent offseasons. Jeff Berry, an agent who co-heads CAA Baseball, suggested a call to action in a memo he circulated last year that included suggestions such as boycotting marketing appearances and delaying arrival at spring training until the mandatory report date in late February.

"Despite increasing MLB revenues and franchise valuations, in this new world order of analytics, aging curves, tanking, shifting, openers, bull-penning, declining attendance and declining salaries, players should and do feel vulnerable and unsure," he wrote. "Rather than saber rattling about a potential strike in three years, the focus should be on taking pro-active steps to address current labor issues in the hope of avoiding a strike in 2021."

San Francisco had the second-highest regular payroll at \$210 million, followed by the Cubs at \$199 million.

Top-spending teams cut payroll to get below the luxury tax threshold in order to reset their tax rate. Only the Red Sox and Washington Nationals paid tax.

The Los Angeles Dodgers dropped to fourth at \$196 million after leading the major leagues for four straight years. The Dodgers, who spent a record \$291 million in 2015, cut by \$48 million from 2017 and had their smallest payroll since 2012, yet they won a second straight NL pennant.

Washington was fifth at \$185 million, followed by the New York Yankees at \$183 million — a drop of more than \$25 million from 2017 and their smallest since 2003. The Yankees had not been as low as sixth since they were ninth in 1992 at \$34.5 million in the final season of owner George Steinbrenner's 2½-year suspension.

Just five of the top 10 spenders made the playoffs, with San Francisco and Washington missing along with the Los Angeles Angels (seventh at \$177 million), St. Louis (eighth at \$166 million) and Seattle (10th at \$162 million).

Other playoff teams included Colorado (14th at \$148 million), Cleveland (15th at \$146 million), Atlanta (20th at \$127 million), Milwaukee (22nd at \$108 million, up \$40 million from 2017's big league low) and Oakland (28th at \$78 million).

Tampa Bay had the lowest payroll for the first time since 2007, at \$71.5 million finishing \$92,526 below the White Sox.

Payrolls are for 40-man rosters and include salaries and prorated shares of signing bonuses, earned incentive bonuses, non-cash compensation, buyouts of unexercised options and cash transactions. In some cases, parts of salaries that are deferred are discounted to reflect present-day values.

The average salary dropped for the first time since 2004 and for only the fourth time since record-keeping started 50 years ago, according to players' association calculations. The union pegged its average at \$4,095,686, down \$1,436 from last year.

Since the union started keeping track in 1967, the only previous declines had been by \$66 in 1987, when owners were found to have conspired to hold down salaries among free agents; a 5 percent decline in 1995 following a 7½ -month strike that wiped out the World Series for the first time since 1904; and by 2.5 percent in 2004.

MLB determined its average was \$4,007,987, up from \$3,955,920 in 2017. The average is based on 968 players on major league rosters and disabled lists on Aug. 31, the last day before the active player limit expanded from 25 to 40. That figure is impacted by the number of players on the DL because replacements usually make close to the minimum.

The union includes option buyouts in its average calculation while MLB does not.

Hahn downplays narrative on Jay, Alonso additions

"They make us better," Rick Hahn says of two players close with Manny Machado

By Bruce Levine / 670 The Score | January 10, 2019

(670 The Score) As the White Sox have positioned themselves as one of the finalists for star infielder Manny Machado in free agency, general manager Rick Hahn on Thursday pushed back at the widespread belief across the MLB landscape that the team has acquired first baseman/designated hitter Yonder Alonso and outfielder Jon Jay because of their close relationships with Machado.

Alonso is Machado's brother-in-law, while Jay is a good friend. The three often train together in the offseason.

"These players are here because we feel they make us a better team," Hahn said in response a question about the recruitment angle of Machado. "I am not going to get into relationships they have with other players. It is certainly a positive but by no means the reason to make a move and acquire either player."

Hahn and his front office staff have been annoyed, at the least, with some of the rumors flying around about their pursuit of Machado and the contract terms they may or may not have offered.

"That is a very fair question and a ripe one considering the time of year with so many rumors floating around," Hahn said. "On the one hand, I try to keep my fan hat on so to speak. I try to harken back to the days I would run home from school and hear baseball rumors in free agency.

"In the age of Twitter, the horse race of free agency is certainly part of it. From a club perspective, quite frankly, it's frustrating. There is a lot of misinformation out there. There were numerous players reported that we are in on that we have never had conversations with. There have been reports of offers and non-offers that under the rules we are not allowed to respond to. So you must let those things play out. I realize it's part of the business but especially when it's a part of negotiations which are understandable purposely

confidential, something we don't conduct through the media, frankly, gets frustrating. We don't let it be a distraction. We stay focused on the matter at hand. We just keep talking with the relevant parties until these matters are resolved."

The White Sox would like to add another starting pitcher in free agency, Hahn said. Of course, that's not the big storyline at this time as Machado and Bryce Harper remain on the open market.

With that in mind, Hahn was then asked about how the fan base should handle the rumor mill, and he responded by referencing one of his counterparts with the Cubs.

"Theo Epstein had a good quote recently -- 'you don't want to tell the fans how to enjoy their offseason,'" Hahn said. "I agree with that. That is part of being a fan and getting excited about what is rumored to be going or to consume whatever is being put out there no matter how much truth is being considered. That is just about being passionate. I respect that fact that there is a level of excitement about we are doing around here. For me, it can get worrisome to the point (if) it gets false information out there that may influence fan perception. At the same point, I know that these matters will be resolved. At that point, we will be able to speak a little more candidly about how we viewed and approached things. How fans perceive and respond to things is important, and we are aware of it."