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Sox bats silenced by Tribe in series opener

By Scott Merkin / MLB.com / June 11, 2018

CHICAGO -- The pitching performance turned in by White Sox hurler Lucas Giolito during Cleveland's 4-0 victory Monday night at Guaranteed Rate Field illustrates the inconsistencies plaguing the right-hander almost three months into this 2018 season.

For 3 2/3 innings, Giolito didn't allow a hit to the American League Central leaders. But a bout of wildness in the fourth eventually led to Giolito being pulled without retiring a hitter in the sixth. Giolito issued walks to Yonder Alonso and Melky Cabrera with two out and nobody on in the fourth, missing badly with some pitches, was followed by a Lonnie Chisenhall bloop single to score a run, giving the Indians a 1-0 advantage. Yan Gomes came through with a two-run double down the left-field line and the Indians had all the runs they would need behind Carlos Carrasco.

"He was missing his spots," said White Sox manager Rick Renteria of Giolito, who threw just 46 of his 93 pitches for strikes in slipping to 4-7. "He was missing locations. He was still more around the plate but not hitting his spots. Threw a couple of good changeups and breaking balls. Fastball [had] decent velocity."

"I didn't have very good feel tonight, even though I was pitching well," Giolito said. "I thought my stuff was really good, probably up there with the best it's been this year, but didn't have good feel. A lot of misfires really bad, going deep into counts against a lot of guys in the fourth inning kind of bit me."

Carrasco completely shut down the White Sox over seven innings, yielding two hits, walking one and striking out 11. The White Sox got Yolmer Sanchez as far as third base in the first, only to have Daniel Palka strike out to end the frame. Kevan Smith and Charlie Tilson singled in the second, but Adam Engel took a called third strike to end the team's other viable scoring chance.

Giolito topped out at 95.2 mph with his fastball per Statcast™, getting three swinging strikes and nine called strikes off the pitch. But he fanned just three and walked four, giving him 43 walks and 34 strikeouts over 66 innings pitched this season. Michael Brantley added a solo home run off of Giolito in the fifth.

Confidence has not wavered for the 23-year-old hurler, despite having a 7.09 ERA over 13 starts. But he needs to find a way to manage the frustration.

"That's the main thing is being able to control that," Giolito said. "I need to do a better job of staying relaxed and despite a misfire here or there, falling behind batters, just trusting my stuff and keeping it going. I didn't do a good job of that tonight."

"Yeah, I'm beating myself, 100 percent. My sinker was good today. My pitches felt good when I threw them right. It's just not doing it enough, not getting the ball over the plate. I'm going out there walking a bunch of guys, I'm not going to have success that way. I need to kind of find that click or whatever that is to go out there to be consistent, throw the ball over the plate."

SOUND SMART

- Yoan Moncada finished 0-for-4 on Monday. He struck out in each of his first three at-bats against Carrasco, covering only 10 pitches. Matt Davidson has eight strikeouts in his last two games.
- The White Sox bullpen has thrown 19 2/3 consecutive scoreless innings and owns a 1.85 ERA in June.

HE SAID IT

"I'm very confident in myself as a pitcher, I'm confident in my stuff. I know that if I throw the ball over the plate, I command my stuff, I'm going to get a lot of guys out. It's just [that] I don't have good feel, kind of getting frustrated. I have to do a better job of just kind of staying within myself and letting my talent play out there."-- Giolito

UP NEXT

James Shields (1-7, 4.92) is scheduled to make his 15th appearance of the season and 14th start with a 7:10 p.m. CT first pitch on Tuesday against the Indians. Cleveland will counter with right-hander Adam Plutko. Shields has made four straight quality starts at home, posting a 2.89 ERA with 24 strikeouts in 28 innings pitched. He has thrown six-plus innings in nine consecutive starts, but has not won since Opening Day.

Hahn pumps brakes on arrival of Eloy, Kopech

By Scott Merkin / MLB.com / June 11, 2018

CHICAGO -- Each time general manager Rick Hahn has talked to the media over approximately the last month, the same question is asked in some form.

When will White Sox fans see outfielder Eloy Jimenez, the organization's No. 1 prospect, per MLB Pipeline, and Michael Kopech, the organization's No. 2 prospect?

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"Well, they are available at Charlotte and Birmingham," said Hahn with a broad smile during Tuesday's media session.

After the brief dose of Hahn's sharp humor, he provided certainties amid uncertainties in regard to this duo's immediate Major League future.

"We don't have answers to that right now," Hahn said. "There continues to be various developmental matters that each of them are working on. All I can say is, we are trying to put them in the best position to have long-term success.

"As thrilling as it would be to potentially have one or both, or other enticing prospects up here tonight, just because that would be interesting and exciting, and perhaps even show some level of advancement in this rebuild, what happens here is going to have nothing to do with when these players arrive. It's going to be based strictly upon their own development and when they are ready for the next challenges presented by the big league level. Eventually, they will tend to force that issue."

Hahn mentioned Kopech's work on his changeup as one targeted box to check off, but he wasn't about to break down the right-hander's entire checklist. Basically, Kopech is getting closer, coming off of a 10-strikeout performance against Lehigh Valley on Friday, but he's not there yet.

There also will be a stop at Triple-A Charlotte for Jimenez, 21, who is hitting .321 with 10 home runs and 41 RBIs for Double-A Birmingham. The promotions had nothing to do with Super 2 arbitration status, per Hahn.

"They could come here and survive right now, especially if we wanted to drop them in the 'pen and use them for one or two innings every so often," said Hahn, referring more specifically to Kopech. "That's not what we are trying to do. We are trying to develop a front-end starter in Michael's instance."

"He's going to be a pretty special young man on the mound," said White Sox manager Rick Renteria of Kopech. "We're looking forward to seeing him somewhere in the near future."

Positive injury news

- Alec Hansen, the White Sox No. 4 prospect per MLB Pipeline, will make his first 2018 start with Double-A Birmingham this weekend. The Minor League strikeout leader in '17 has been working his way back from forearm soreness, which began in Spring Training.

- Outfielder Avisail Garcia, out of action since April 23 with a right hamstring strain, will begin a rehab assignment with Charlotte on Tuesday. He's going to need at least one week to 10 days of regular action to get his timing back.

"It's more getting into baseball shape at this point than anything physical with the hamstring," Hahn said.

- Outfielder Micker Adolfo, the No. 10 White Sox prospect, had a follow-up X-ray on his right elbow, allowing him to begin a throwing program with Class A Advanced Winston-Salem, with the goal being to get him back in the outfield at some point this season and avoid surgery. Adolfo had been working as a designated hitter after enduring a sprained UCL and a strained flexor tendon during Spring Training.

- Luis Robert, the team's No. 3 prospect, figures to move to Winston-Salem from Class A Kannapolis in the next 10 days. Robert is hitting .304 over 23 at-bats since returning from a sprained ligament in his left thumb.

White Sox solid up the middle

Development within the White Sox rebuild is taking place at the Major League level, as well, with second baseman Yoan Moncada and shortstop Tim Anderson standing as prime examples. Moncada had to deal with some close calls not going his way on balls and strikes during this past road trip, which is all part of the adjustments.

"Moncada had some tough ABs over the course of this road trip in terms of balls and strikes," Hahn said. "The challenge for him, the developmental element for him just this week, is making sure he remains true to his approach, as opposed to overreacting to some perhaps bad strike-three calls over the course of the last week.

"That's the kind of thing he has to experience up here, the pressure he feels here, the expectations he feels here. He has responded very well. It's unfortunate he had the hamstring injury. He was really rolling before that happened. He hasn't quite gotten back to that level of consistency he had before, but he'll get there."

Anderson continues developing on a path "where you can very reasonably project him to be a shortstop on a championship club," according to Hahn.

Rick Hahn's message on Michael Kopech's big league readiness remains unchanged: 'He's not there yet'

By Vinnie Duber / NBC Sports Chicago / June 11, 2018

Michael Kopech's stat lines might look ready for the major leagues. But according to the White Sox general manager, Kopech still needs time to cook in the minors.

There's been no greater focus for South Side baseball fans this season than the one on Kopech and fellow top-10 prospect Eloy Jimenez and when they might make the jump to the big leagues. Kopech has been striking guys out left and right at Triple-A Charlotte, and Jimenez has been raking at Double-A Birmingham. If you were playing fantasy baseball, you'd obviously want them on your roster.

But Hahn and his front office are not playing fantasy baseball, instead working to make the baseball fantasy of having this White Sox team compete for championships on an annual basis a reality. To do that, all that talent the organization has acquired over the past year and a half has to take the time to fully develop in the minor leagues.

Simply put, Kopech and Jimenez haven't reached those points yet. You will almost certainly see Kopech pitch in a White Sox uniform this season. But you won't see it right now. Jimenez, Hahn said for not the first time, will be going to Triple-A and not making the jump to the bigs from Double-A.

"There continues to be various developmental matters that each of them are working on. All I can say is we are trying to put them in the best position to have long term success," Hahn said Monday. "As thrilling as it would be to potentially have one or both or other enticing prospects up here tonight, just because that would be interesting and exciting and perhaps even show some level of advancement in this rebuild, what happens here is going to have nothing to do when these players arrive.

"It's going to be based strictly upon their own development and when they are ready for the next challenges presented by the big league level. Eventually they will tend to force that issue. I've said it before and I'll say it again, Eloy is going to stop in Charlotte. So those thinking his next stop is Chicago haven't been paying attention to what the developmental plan is for him. Kopech, he's put together a few real good starts and had others that still show you the elements he needs improvement in. But he's certainly getting closer."

Hahn and his front office ultimately will make the decision when it's time to promote Kopech to the big leagues, and he admitted Monday that he does not have an answer for when that might be.

What is a certainty is that if fans — and plenty of media folk, too — got to make that decision, Kopech would be here by now. It's easy to punch up Kopech's stats from this season and make the determination that he could be facing tougher competition. He's struck out 80 hitters in 59.1innings over 12 starts. (It's worth noting, though, that he's also got a less-than-appealing 4.70 ERA.)

But Hahn and his team are looking for far more than just strikeouts.

"You can't simply look at his stat line and say he's ready," Hahn said. "There are many factors that go into it, many of which happen in face-to-face conversations between he and the coaches and other players and our developmental staff that dictates when in fact he's ready for a promotion.

"Not getting too far down into Michael's checklist of what we want to see him accomplish, but he hasn't checked them all off yet. He's had some real good starts. He's getting closer, and it's not going to surprise me seeing him here at some point in the not too distant future. But he's not there yet.

"There have been flashes of real progress and there have also been some steps backwards along the way. We need to see more consistency. That's one of the things, one of the determining factors."

It's understandable why fans are antsy. Kopech carries enormous expectations and the promise of blow-em-away stuff that would be immensely fun to watch. Not only that, but future-hungry folks are watching inconsistent performances from Lucas Giolito and want to see a potential ace excel at the big league level. Even if there are growing pains to be had, why aren't they happening up here — where they happened for Carson Fulmer and where they're happening for Giolito?

"These guys certainly are equipped to come here and survive. There's no doubt they could come here and survive right now, especially if we wanted to drop them in the 'pen and use them for one or two innings every so often. That's not what we are trying to do," Hahn said. "We are trying to develop a front-end starter in Michael's instance.

"The difference between players who may not be having success up here is that they've already answered some of those questions at the minor league level. They checked the boxes we wanted them to check there, and now they are going through struggles at the big league level.

"There may come a point where you may have them go back for another finishing touch, take a half step back to take two steps forward. But how any individual is doing in Chicago has zero impact on Michael Kopech's developmental plan or when Michael Kopech gets here. He's in control of that."

Of course Hahn won't reveal exactly which boxes Kopech still needs to check. But know that the general manager's message remains unchanged: Kopech's not ready for the majors yet, and neither is Jimenez.

This year was always going to be about patience for this rebuilding organization. It's going to take plenty more before all the pieces arrive on the South Side.

Lucas Giolito keeps having command issues, keeping him from meeting preseason expectations

By Vinnie Duber / NBC Sports Chicago / June 11, 2018

No, this is not the Lucas Giolito that was expected. He knows that.

After seven mostly sparkling outings at the end of the 2017 campaign, Giolito was supposed to be the great hope of the White Sox starting rotation in 2018. He was supposed to be a sign of brighter days ahead for this rebuilding team, a potential ace of what's supposed to be a loaded rotation of the future.

Well, funny thing about preseason expectations. They don't always come true.

Fan expectations and team expectations don't always align, either, and Giolito's bumpy 2018 campaign might not have been completely unexpected by the White Sox themselves. This season as a whole was always going to be about the growing pains of the rebuild, a not-always-appealing look into how the sausage of a perennial contender gets made. Development isn't always linear, Rick Hahn will be quick to remind, and Giolito's 2018 struggles won't prevent him from being a key piece of the White Sox rotation in 2019 or 2020 or 2021 or beyond.

But once more Giolito is the American League leader in walks, with 43 to his name after four more free passes issued Monday night. He gave up four runs and was out of the game early in the sixth inning. That alone is far from the worst of Giolito's fortunes this season, on which he has a 7.09 ERA. But watching him miss his spots badly, making his catcher jump and stretch behind the plate, has become a frequent occurrence.

And Giolito is just as unhappy about it as anyone.

"I didn't have very good feel tonight," he said after the game. "Even though I was pitching well, I thought my stuff was really good, probably up there with the best it's been this year, didn't have good feel. A lot of misfires really bad, going deep into counts against a lot of guys in the fourth inning kind of bit me. I think I had two outs and walked two in a row and then base hit. I've just got to do a better job, despite how I feel or however it is, of just competing and throwing the ball over the plate."

While a White Sox pitcher battling similar issues, Carson Fulmer, earned a demotion to Triple-A earlier this season, manager Rick Renteria has been pretty adamant on multiple occasions that there's been no talk of Giolito receiving the same treatment. It means Giolito will continue to fight through these issues at the major league level.

You might've been able to point to some improvement in recent starts. Certainly his six innings of two-run ball against the Minnesota Twins last week ranked among his finer performances of the season. Monday's start snapped a stretch of four straight outings with three or fewer walks (though one of those was the hideous 1.1 innings and seven runs allowed against the Baltimore Orioles).

Of course, there's no reason to condemn the career of a 23-year-old pitcher with so much potential. And all you need to do is look back to last season to find Giolito flipping a switch during a bad campaign. Through his first 19 games with Charlotte, he had a 5.38 ERA. In his final five starts there, he had a 1.71 ERA. That stretch got him to the big leagues, where he posted a 2.38 ERA in his seven games.

That provides belief that he could do something like that again, though he said his problems are different this time around, perhaps easier to solve.

"Then it was all about confidence. I'd lost a little bit of confidence in myself during that time and I fought through it. I ended up having some good games, getting some confidence and coming up here and pitched well," Giolito said. "That hasn't changed. I'm very confident in myself as a pitcher, I'm confident in my stuff. I know that if I throw the ball over the plate, I command my stuff, I'm going to get a lot of guys out.

"It's just I don't have good feel, kind of getting frustrated, I have to do a better job of just kind of staying within myself and letting my talent play out there.

"I'm beating myself, 100 percent. ... My pitches felt good when I threw them right. It's just not doing it enough, not getting the ball over the plate. I'm going out there walking a bunch of guys, I'm not going to have success that way. I need to kind of find that click or whatever that is to go out there be consistent, throw the ball over the plate."

Consistency is the name of the game for any player, and that's what the White Sox are trying to develop at all levels of the organization this season. Giolito hasn't found it yet, and his struggles are more amplified because he's one of the few long-term pieces playing at the major league level.

Giolito hasn't met fans' preseason expectations, and it's a safe bet he hasn't come close to meeting his own preseason expectations, either. The White Sox, though, have expectations that stretch far beyond 2018, and those are the ones they want Giolito to meet. This season is about him figuring out how to meet them.

"We all saw in spring training what he was capable of doing, the end of last season," Hahn said Monday. "It's in there. Just a matter of getting it back out."

Avisail Garcia to start rehab assignment, nearing return to White Sox lineup

By Vinnie Duber / NBC Sports Chicago / June 11, 2018

Avisail Garcia's return to the White Sox is getting closer.

The outfielder, who's been on the shelf for almost two months while battling a significant hamstring strain, will begin a rehab assignment at Triple-A Charlotte on Tuesday, general manager Rick Hahn announced Monday.

Garcia was expected to be one of the biggest bats in the White Sox lineup this season after his breakout campaign in 2017, when he was statistically one of the best hitters in the American League with a .330/.380/.506 slash line.

But things didn't off to a good start for Garcia in 2018, with a .233/.250/.315 line through 18 games. While those numbers are not at all good, the small sample size is the bigger issue for a guy looking to make a case for his inclusion in the rebuilding White Sox long-term plans.

Don't be surprised if Garcia plays at Charlotte for a while. It's been some time since he's played, meaning he needs to get back up to speed.

"We're going to be flexible on that.," Hahn said. "He hasn't played, I believe, since April 23, I think was his last game. He's going to need at least a week to 10 days of regular action to get his timing back. It's more getting into baseball shape at this point than anything physical with the hamstring."

With a wealth of outfield prospects having strong seasons in the minor leagues — Eloy Jimenez, Luis Robert, Blake Rutherford, Micker Adolfo, Luis Alexander Basabe and Luis Gonzalez all come to mind — Garcia, who's under team control through the 2019 season, has plenty of competition for those long-term outfield spots. He has the luxury of playing at the major league level already, but he still has plenty to prove.

Getting back into games is a good first step.

Alec Hansen to make 2018 debut this weekend with Double-A Birmingham

By Vinnie Duber / NBC Sports Chicago / June 11, 2018

One of the top pitching prospects in baseball will finally be returning on a minor league mound.

Alec Hansen, ranked as the second-best pitching prospect in the White Sox loaded farm system and the No. 46 prospect in baseball, will make his 2018 debut this weekend with Double-A Birmingham, general manager Rick Hahn announced Monday.

It's been a long layoff for Hansen, who has been battling a forearm injury since spring training. Substantial updates on Hansen's progress had been few and far between until Monday's announcement, a big deal for the rebuilding White Sox, who get one of the key pieces of their bright future back pitching in games again.

Hansen, a second-round pick in the 2016 draft, was incredibly impressive last season, when he was one of the minor leagues' strikeout leaders. He punched out a combined 191 batters between three different levels. He had a 2.48 ERA in 13 starts with Class A Kannapolis and a 2.93 ERA in 11 starts with Class A Winston-Salem. He allowed five runs in 10.1 innings over two starts with Birmingham at the end of the season.

Hansen's return to action comes quick after the return of outfielder Luis Robert, meaning the top eight prospects in the White Sox system will all be active.

Hansen is one of the most intriguing names in a crowded field of candidates for spots in the White Sox rotation of the future. Michael Kopech, Dane Dunning, Dylan Cease, Lucas Giolito, Reynaldo Lopez and others all figure to be competing with Hansen for one of those five spots.

Returning to the mound is the first step in Hansen showing he deserves one of those spots on the starting staff.

Column: Is Lucas Giolito lucky or unlucky that the White Sox are leaving him up during their rebuild?

By Teddy Greenstein / Chicago Tribune / June 11, 2018

As the composed and cordial Lucas Giolito stood before his locker Monday night, trying to explain another tough night at the yard, the thought occurred to me: Giolito is lucky the White Sox are in rebuild mode. Otherwise he'd be in the minors.

On second thought, maybe I have that backward.

Giolito has walked an AL-high 43 batters in 66 innings. His ERA of 7.09 is third highest among starters to the Rangers' Matt Moore (7.88) and the Orioles' Alex Cobb (7.23). Only Cobb (2-8) and Baltimore's Andrew Cashner (2-8) have lost more games.

This cannot be fun for him. He's a wonderfully talented kid (turns 24 next month) who simply cannot consistently deliver pitches where he wants them to go. His velocity is fine (92.8-95.2 mph fastball, via baseballsavant.mlb.com), but his mechanics are betraying him. This has mainly been the case since March 31, Game 2 of the season, when he walked four Royals and threw 49 strikes in 89 pitches.

Giolito has twice walked seven batters and struggled again Monday in the Sox's 4-0 loss to the Indians. His 34-pitch fourth inning was painful to watch; he threw 18 balls and two of his 16 strikes got hit in a three-run inning.

As he walked off the mound, Giolito pressed his glove against his mouth as if he wanted to chew off a piece and spit it out.

"I thought my stuff was really good, probably up there with the best it's been this year," Giolito said. "But I had a lot of misfires and went deep into counts in the fourth inning and it kind of bit me. I walked two in a row and then (gave up a) base hit. I've just got to do a better job of just competing and throwing the ball over the plate."

The Sox shipped out Carson Fulmer after his eight starts produced an 8.07 ERA and 6.7 walks per nine innings. Giolito is averaging 5.8 walks per nine with his 7.09 ERA.

Fulmer, realistically, is viewed as a potential reliever in the Sox's rebuild. Giolito, the Sox hope, will be a front-line starter.

Said Sox general manager Rick Hahn: "We very much still view Carson as playing a role in our future. We're trying to accumulate as much potential front-of-the-rotation talent and ultimately there's probably not going to be room at the end (of the rotation) for everyone who is capable. It's possible Carson winds

up being a dominant reliever, but for now we're going to continue to give him opportunities to pitch in the rotation in (Triple-A) Charlotte. We'll see how it goes."

Giolito seems likely to stay in the big leagues, at least for now. I asked manager Rick Renteria if there has been discussion of sending him down.

His answer indicated that the topic came up at some point: "We haven't had any more discussion about that, not at all."

So is Giolito lucky that the rebuilding Sox can ride a starter with a 7.09 ERA? Or unlucky?

No one wants to get sent down but feeling uncomfortable on the mound against the world's best hitters is no one's definition of a good time.

Another wild ride with Lucas Giolito, another loss for the White Sox in 4-0 defeat to Indians

By Teddy Greenstein / Chicago Tribune / June 11, 2018

Catching Lucas Giolito must be exhausting.

Watching him certainly is, at least at times. And Monday night was one of those times.

Giolito continued his "Wild Thing" routine, reclaiming the American League lead in walked batters. He issued four free passes over five-plus innings in the White Sox's 4-0 home loss to the Indians.

"He was missing his spots," manager Rick Renteria said. "He was missing locations."

And it's not as if home-plate umpire Paul Nauert was an accessory. Giolito threw a pitch that sailed over catcher Kevan Smith's head and several more that almost did. He missed high, low, inside, outside. Of his 93 pitches, 46 went for strikes.

The game's best control pitchers throw strikes more than two-thirds of the time. The Sox drew only one walk Monday and managed two hits against four Indians pitchers.

"I didn't have a very good feel tonight," Giolito said. "A lot of misfires. I need to do a better job of staying relaxed and trusting my stuff."

Giolito (4-7) had shown progress in his previous two starts, walking just two batters over a combined 12 innings and throwing 61.1 percent strikes.

"His last start was a step forward and the one before that a modest one," Sox general manager Rick Hahn said before the game. "We all saw in spring training and at the end of last season what he's capable of doing. It's in there. Just a matter of getting it back out."

A 23-year-old Californian with an ideal 6-foot-6, 245-pound frame, Giolito teased the Sox when he posted a 2.38 ERA in seven starts last season from Aug. 22-Sept. 24. He averaged fewer than two walks per appearance.

But something has gone wrong with his delivery, and the result was a brutal fourth inning Monday.

With one out, he froze shortstop Francisco Lindor on a pitch that missed Smith's target but still caught the plate. Effectively wild.

But then he missed badly on a 3-2 fastball to first baseman Yonder Alonso, yelling to himself.

His first pitch to Melky Cabrera almost sailed to the backstop, and his 3-1 pitch missed by three feet. Wild.

He got unlucky on an inside fastball to right fielder Lonnie Chisenhall, who flared it into shallow center for a run-scoring single. Then catcher Yan Gomes lined a double into left, giving the Indians a 3-0 lead.

After Giolito induced an inning-ending groundout, he walked off the mound with his glove pressed against his mouth. He appeared to be muttering to himself.

Last month in Pittsburgh, Giolito said he would not be able to fix his mechanical issues during bullpen sessions between starts: "It's stuff I need to fix in the gym. Movement patterns. Rebuild athleticism that I've lost. I can work on my delivery all day outside but when you get in the heat of the moment, in the game, your body will go to default mode. For me it's getting in the gym, working on mobility and other things and then I don't have to worry about it when I'm throwing."

Giolito's ERA rose a tick, from 7.08 to 7.09, the third highest in the AL.

The Sox seem to believe it's best to keep Giolito in the big leagues, to let him vie for progress under the tutelage of pitching coach Don Cooper.

"When you're dealing with young players, you try to take the holistic approach with their development," Hahn said. "Fundamentally the first step is dealing with mechanical issues. You (also) need to make sure they're unclogged between the ears."

Michael Kopech and Eloy Jimenez ... coming soon to the White Sox? Don't bet on it

By Teddy Greenstein / Chicago Tribune / June 11, 2018

When a reporter asked when he would be able to see top prospects Michael Kopech and Eloy Jimenez, White Sox general manager Rick Hahn could not resist cracking wise.

"Well, they are available at Charlotte and Birmingham," he said.

Indeed, Chicago-area Sox fans won't see either, and perhaps for a little while, unless they go on a trip or subscribe to MiLB.TV.

"As thrilling as it would be to have one or both up here tonight," Hahn said, "perhaps to show some level of advancement in this rebuild, what happens here will have nothing to do with when these players arrive. It's going to be based strictly upon their own development and when they are ready for the challenges presented by the big-league level."

Jimenez has cooled off a bit at Double-A Birmingham, going 5-for-22 since June 3, but still leads the Southern League with a .576 slugging percentage. Jimenez will stop at Triple-A Charlotte before joining the big club, Hahn said.

As for Kopech, it's a bit more complicated.

He has had dominant starts, poor starts and everything in between. His last outing was a mixed bag — two earned runs over six innings, 10 strikeouts, five walks.

"He's certainly getting closer," Hahn said.

Lucas Giolito (7.08 ERA entering Monday) has been permitted to work out his issues in Chicago. Why not Kopech?

"There's no doubt these guys could come here and survive right now, especially if we wanted to drop (Kopech) in the 'pen and use him for one or two innings every so often," Hahn said. "That's not what we are trying to do."

"In Michael's instance, we're trying to develop a front-end starter. The difference between players who may not be having success up here is that they already have answered some of those questions at the minor-league level. They checked the boxes.

"There may come a point where you may have them go back for another finishing touch, take a half-step back (in the minors) to take two steps forward. But how any individual is doing in Chicago has zero impact on Michael Kopech's developmental plan or when Michael Kopech gets here. He's in control of that."

Feeling it: Avisail Garcia's strained right hamstring cost him a week of April, all of May and a nice chunk of June. But finally Garcia is ready to embark on a rehab assignment. He is slated to spend seven to 10 days in Charlotte, beginning Tuesday.

Said Hahn: "It's more getting into baseball shape at this point than anything physical with the hamstring."

Ready to roll: Right-hander Alec Hansen, the sixth-ranked prospect in the Sox's system, according to MLB.com, will make his season debut this weekend for Birmingham. Hansen, a second-round pick in the 2016 draft, has been sidelined by a forearm injury since spring training. Last season he struck out a combined 191 batters among three levels.

White Sox' top prospects remain in holding, developing pattern

By Daryl Van Schouwen / Sun-times / June 11, 2018

Patience, White Sox fans.

It's not something everyone wants to hear or exercise when it comes to outfielder Eloy Jimenez and right-hander Michael Kopech, the faces of the Sox' farm system.

Jimenez, 21, is the No. 3 prospect in baseball, according to MLB Pipeline, and he's hitting a ton at Class AA Birmingham. Kopech, 22, is the No. 8 prospect and has struck out 80 batters in 59 1/3 innings at Class AAA Charlotte.

They are the hottest things going, and everyone wants to see them. Like, now.

But general manager Rick Hahn and the rest of the Sox' brain trust want to be absolutely certain Kopech and Jimenez don't struggle when they get to the majors. Jimenez still has a stop to make — Charlotte — before he arrives, Hahn said.

Before the Sox opened a homestand with a 4-0 loss Monday to the Indians, Hahn was asked when fans will see them in Chicago.

"They are available at Charlotte and Birmingham," he said, cracking a grin.

Hahn said that Kopech and Jimenez have "various developmental matters" they are working on and that what happens on the field at the major-league level "is going to have nothing to do with when these players arrive."

Right-hander Lucas Giolito struggled through developmental matters of his own against the Indians, throwing only 46 of his 93 pitches for strikes and allowing four runs, four hits and four walks in five-plus innings. Giolito, who has walked 43 batters in 66 innings, has a 7.09 ERA after pitching to a 2.38 ERA in seven starts after being called up last season.

Giolito said his stuff was as good as it has been this season, but he had no feel for where the ball was going.

"I'm beating myself, 100 percent," he said. "I'm going out there walking a bunch of guys. Not going to have success that way."

Kopech has walked nine in eight innings in his last two starts, and the last thing the Sox want is to have him struggle like Giolito at the major-league level. He walked five in his most recent start, the latest indication he's not commanding the strike zone. He is 2-4 with a 4.70 ERA with 34 walks and seven hit batters.

"He's put together a few real good starts and had others that still show you the elements he needs improvement in," Hahn said.

Jimenez is batting .321/.373/.576 with 10 home runs, 13 doubles and two triples in 47 games. He hits with power to all fields, has a plan at the plate and sure looks ready, although his defense is behind his offense.

"It's going to be based strictly upon their own development and when they are ready for the next challenges presented by the big-league level," Hahn said.

Awaiting Jimenez in the majors are pitchers such as the Indians' Carlos Carrasco, who allowed two hits and struck out 11 in seven innings Monday.

"We all know that once they get here it's a different world, and they're going to have to deal with all the nuances of being at the major-league level," manager Rick Renteria said.

Kopech, who has a fastball that can touch 100 mph, is getting closer, but his changeup still needs work and his command of his fastball and slider isn't screaming "ready."

"You get here, these guys are going to study him," Renteria said. "They're going to try to take advantage of any weakness he has. And he's going to have to try to exploit them."

Injury updates from White Sox GM Rick Hahn

By Daryl Van Schouwen / Sun-Times / June 11, 2018

General manager Rick Hahn had a bevy of injury-related updates about current and future White Sox to share Monday, starting with right fielder Avisail Garcia.

Hahn confirmed Garcia, who has been out since April 23 with a strained right hamstring, was starting a rehab assignment Tuesday with Class AAA Charlotte. He also said super-utility man Leury Garcia (sprained left knee) is "not too far behind" in terms of a rehab assignment.

Hahn also addressed some top prospects dealing with or getting over health concerns:

- Right-hander Alec Hansen, who last was seen pitching for the Sox during spring training, will make his first start of the season this weekend for Class AA Birmingham. Hansen, the Sox' second-round pick in 2016, has been working at extended spring training after he was shut down with forearm soreness in March.
- Outfielder Micker Adolfo's follow-up MRI exam on the sprained ulnar collateral ligament in his right elbow was encouraging enough to get him on a throwing program with Class A Winston-Salem. Adolfo has been limited to designated-hitter duty this season.

"The goal is to get him back in the outfield and avoid surgery," Hahn said.

- Outfielder Luis Robert, who started late at Class A Kannapolis because of a thumb injury, will move up to Winston-Salem in seven to 10 days. Robert is batting .304 (7-for-23) with two doubles, six strikeouts and one walk in seven games.

Abreu's value

First baseman Jose Abreu entered play Monday with 25 doubles. That puts him on pace for 64, which would tie the Indians' George Burns (1926) and the Cardinals' Joe Medwick (1936) for second all-time.

An ongoing talking point about the Sox' rebuild is whether Abreu, 31, will be part of it after his contract expires after next season.

"If at that point — before that point — we haven't come to terms on an extension, we certainly will have time then to revisit that," Hahn said.

Abreu is in his fifth season with the Sox. He is not only their top player, but he has had a meaningful influence on the younger players, particularly fellow Cubans Yoan Moncada and Robert.

"We've made no secret about our affection for Jose, and it's not just based upon the contribution between the white lines; it's based on what he does in that clubhouse," Hahn said. "I don't think there's a finer representative for what it means to be a White Sox or what we hope for our players to be on and off the field."

High on Tim

Tim Anderson's 11 errors at shortstop — after he committed a major-league-high 28 last season — aren't enough to deter Hahn's faith in a player who will turn 25 on June 23.

"There will be a few inconsistencies in the field from time to time or a couple of at-bats that don't quite go the way you draw them up, but the improvements he's shown on a nightly basis both offensively and defensively have been fantastic," Hahn said. "He continues to develop along a path where you can very reasonably project him to be a shortstop on a championship club."

Former White Sox pitcher Mat Latos incites massive brawl in indy league game

By Jimmy Hascup / Sun-Times / June 11, 2018

Mat Latos played with an edge during his major league career, and on Saturday, he showed it has not subsided in the independent leagues when he incited a benches-clearing brawl.

After Latos' catcher was knocked over at the plate on a throw home from left field, Latos, now a pitcher for the New Jersey Jackals of the Canadian American Association of Professional Baseball, followed it up against the next Rockland Boulders batter with one pitch inside and one over the head.

Then, a few words were exchanged between Latos and several Boulders players and the benches cleared. Latos body-slammed an opposing player and several punches were thrown from various players during the brawl that calmed after about a minute.

Latos, 30, last pitched in the major leagues in April 2017 with the Toronto Blue Jays. He played nine years in the majors, debuting as a 21-year-old for the San Diego Padres in 2009. From 2010-14, he posted a 3.27 ERA, but he struggled to reach that level in the years following, accumulating a 5.05 ERA.

Now it seems he's trying to keep his baseball dreams alive in the independent leagues. With the Jackals, he has a 5.14 ERA in 21 innings.

Giolito wild again in Chicago White Sox's loss to Cleveland

By Scot Gregor / Daily Herald / June 11, 2018

Carlos Rodon is back in the White Sox's starting rotation after missing the first third of the season recovering from shoulder surgery.

With impressive showings in three of his last four outings, Dylan Covey is trying to stake his claim, and pitching prospect Michael Kopech should be in the starting five at some point in July.

After that, Dane Dunning, Alec Hansen, Dylan Cease and Spencer Adams represent the next wave of potential Sox starters.

For now, Lucas Giolito is in the rotation. But as the White Sox showed with Carson Fulmer, the No. 8 overall pick in the 2015 draft, they will demote starting pitchers who consistently fail to throw strikes.

Giolito is swimming in those treacherous waters, but he is still afloat.

"I'm very confident in myself as a pitcher," Giolito said after the Sox lost to the Indians 4-0 Monday night at Guaranteed Rate Field. "I'm confident in my stuff. I know if I throw the ball over the plate, command stuff, I'm going to get a lot of guys out."

Giolito showed he's capable of pitching for the Sox late last season when he was 3-2 with a 1.83 ERA over his final 6 starts. The 23-year-old righty has 5 quality starts this year, but a lack of command hurt Giolito again in the loss to Cleveland.

Giolito (4-7, 7.09 ERA) got the first two outs in the fourth inning of a scoreless game, but back-to-back walks to Yonder Alonso and Melky Cabrera proved costly.

Both runners scored and the Indians went on to defeat the White Sox for the 10th time in 11 games dating to last season. In 66 innings this year, Giolito has issued 43 walks.

"I just have to do a better job of staying within myself and letting my talent play out there," he said. "I'm beating myself, 100 percent. I'm going out there and walking a bunch of guys. I'm not going to have success that way."

Status quo:

General manager Rick Hahn has been asked since the beginning of May about when Class AAA Charlotte starting pitcher Michael Kopech and AA Birmingham outfielder Eloy Jimenez are going to join the White Sox, and that was the case again Monday.

Hahn has been consistent with his reply -- he's not sure.

"It's going to be based strictly upon their own development and when they are ready for the next challenges presented by the big-league level," Hahn said. "Eventually, they will tend to force that issue. I've said it before and I'll say it again, Eloy is going to stop in Charlotte."

"So those thinking his next stop is Chicago haven't been paying attention to what the developmental plan is for him."

"Kopech, he's put together a few real good starts and had others that still show you the elements he needs improvement in. But he's certainly getting closer."

Perfect pick:

Just over two weeks before the draft, Sox GM Rick Hahn traveled to Southern California to get a firsthand look at Nick Madrigal.

Suffice to say, Hahn was thrilled when the Sox used the No. 4 overall pick in last week's draft to select the Oregon State star.

"Very well-rounded baseball player," Hahn said. "Tremendous feel for the barrel. Does the little things well. Saw it the other day in the (NCAA) super regional, hitting behind the runner, pulling off the hit-and-run."

"Plus speed, defensively ability with very strong chance to be a premium defender up the middle, an important cog at the top of the lineup.

"It becomes a scouting cliché, but we want well-rounded baseball players, guys with the ability to beat you both offensively and defensively, and ability to beat you with their speed. Nick fits right into that mold."

At last, some good news on Chicago White Sox injury front

By Scot Gregor / Daily Herald / June 11, 2018

It has been tougher for the Chicago White Sox to sell hope this season with so many of the projected impact players of the future sidelined with injuries.

That made general manager Rick Hahn's mission so much easier when he met with the media Monday before the Sox played the Cleveland Indians at Guaranteed Rate Field.

"Positive news," Hahn said. "Lots of positive injury news."

Positive news on several fronts.

- All-star right fielder Avisail Garcia has been out since April 23 with a strained right hamstring.

On Tuesday, he will begin a rehab assignment with Class AAA Charlotte, but Garcia is likely going to need extra time before he's ready to rejoin the White Sox.

"We're going to be flexible," Hahn said. "He's going to need at least a week to 10 days of regular action to get his timing back. It's more getting into baseball shape at this point than anything physical with the hamstring."

Last season Garcia finished second in the American League with a .330 batting average. In 18 games this year he's batting .233.

With so many talented young outfielders in the system, there is a good chance Garcia gets traded at some point. His contract is under club control through 2019, so the Sox aren't in any rush to make a decision.

- Prized pitching prospect Alec Hansen has been in extended spring training for more than two months because of right-forearm soreness.

This weekend, the 6-foot-8 starter will make his debut for Class AA Birmingham.

Hansen, the White Sox's second-round draft pick in 2016, broke out big last season. The right-hander was a combined 11-8 with a 2.80 ERA in stops with low Class A Kannapolis, high A Winston-Salem and Birmingham.

In 141⅓ innings, Hansen had 191 strikeouts, the highest total in minor-league baseball since 2011.

- Like Hansen, top prospect Luis Robert went down with an injury (thumb) in spring training, and the 20-year-old outfielder missed nearly three months.

Robert joined Kannapolis last week and has showed little rust, batting .304 with 2 doubles and 6 RBI in six games.

Before hurting his thumb in a March 7 Cactus League game against the Cincinnati Reds, Robert was ticketed for Winston-Salem.

The 6-2, 210-pounder should be promoted from Kannapolis "in the next week or 10 days," according to Hahn.

"With him, it's just baseball timing and getting him back to playing on a regular basis," the White Sox's GM said. "Physically, he's fine. The acclimation process has been very smooth."

- Micker Adolfo is having a big offensive year at Winston-Salem, hitting .274/.367/.442 while ranking among Carolina League leaders with 34 RBI.

Diagnosed with a strained flexor tendon in his right elbow during spring training, Adolfo initially feared season-ending Tommy John surgery.

Swinging the bat does not bother the elbow, so Adolfo has been Winston-Salem's designated hitter this season.

The 21-year-old outfielder was in Chicago for a follow-up MRI last week, and he has been cleared to throw.

"The goal (is) hopefully get him back in the outfield at some point this season and hopefully avoid surgery," Hahn said. "We're not out of the woods. He's just beginning a throwing program."

"Not until at least probably 4-6 weeks will we know if he's able to progress and play regularly in the outfield. But at the very least right now things are trending in the right direction."

Five observations: Lucas Giolito undone by wildness as Carlos Carrasco dominates White Sox

By James Fegan / The Athletic / June 11, 2018

Lucas Giolito came into Monday night saying he felt great physically. He was happy with his recent work in the gym, his arm felt strong, and he was in a good head space for how he was approaching his curveball. And against a Cleveland team that seems to be moseying its way slowly toward grabbing an AL Central division that was handed to them last November, he hit 95 mph on the gun once with his four-seamer, threw at least one gorgeous overhand curve to José Ramírez for a strike, and held Cleveland without a hit for three innings.

Alas, Giolito's struggles are not over, but whatever was ailing Carlos Carrasco surely is. That starting pitching disparity was enough to snuff out all the positive vibes of a winning White Sox road trip in a 4-0 loss that seemed more lopsided due to Carrasco's dominance.

"He was missing his spots," manager Rick Renteria said of Giolito. "He threw an equal number of balls and strikes. He was missing locations. He was still more around the plate but not hitting his spots. Threw a couple of good changeups and breaking balls. Fastball decent velocity."

The Sox are now 22-42, which is better than the Royals. The little things are crucial in a rebuild.

1. Too many balls

Giolito's fourth-inning strikeout of Francisco Lindor presaged bad times ahead. He froze the All-Star shortstop with a fastball on the inside corner after his catcher Kevan Smith had set up on the opposite side of the plate. But the command issues caught up to Giolito as he walked the next two batters, sometimes missing wildly with both his fastball and curveball. Both walks scored after Lonnie Chisenhall hit a bloop single to center and Yan Gomes drilled a fastball that missed middle-in to the corner to essentially seal up the game in a three-run fourth inning.

"I'm beating myself, 100 percent," Giolito said. "My sinker was good today. My pitches felt good when I threw them right. It's just not doing it enough, not getting the ball over the plate. I'm going out there

walking a bunch of guys, I'm not going to have success that way. I need to kind of find that click or whatever that is to go out there be consistent, throw the ball over the plate."

2. Moncada's month-long search to get back in sync

Yoán Moncada's strikeout rate has not exploded during his prolonged slump since returning from the disabled list May 15. Even in striking out three times on 10 pitches against Carrasco, he only vaulted his strikeout rate during this 27-game stretch to 33.1 percent — high but not out of character for him. But the standout feature of his .200/.246/.309 line is the sudden disappearance of his walks. He's drawn free passes at just under a six percent rate in his last 118 plate appearances, sapping away a once pretty stable route to getting on base.

"He's trying to get his timing back," Renteria said. "I think he's not necessarily chasing pitches, except for second at-bat, might be swinging through some pitches.

"He will continue to develop as a hitter and be fine, get back in sync. And hopefully sooner rather than later."

3. Matt Davidson, also slumping

At one point, Davidson was the clear best hitter on the team, but his four-strikeout Monday followed a four-strikeout Sunday, and he's now 2-for-24 with 14 strikeouts in 29 plate appearances in the still very young month of June. Hot hitter of the moment Daniel Palka also struck out three times, as there was pretty much no one save for Smith and Yolmer Sánchez whose lunch Carrasco did not eat en route to striking out 11 through seven scoreless frames.

4. But Kevan Smith, though!

Smith going from trapped in Triple-A for two months to regularly batting in the middle of the Sox lineup and soaking up No. 1 catcher reps has been made less strange by the fact that he's batting .421 and has a hit in all five starts so far since getting called up. He already has personal catcher status with Giolito, was Michael Kopech's primary backstop in Charlotte, and even encroached on Omar Narváez's territory by catching Carlos Rodón on Saturday, so he's quickly making himself at home as a stable option since effectively replacing Welington Castillo.

5. A big relief

After spinning four more scoreless innings and striking out five Monday night, the White Sox bullpen has not been charged with a run since Tuesday in Minnesota, spanning 20 2/3 innings. Xavier Cedeño remains spotless since getting called up, Bruce Rondón was briefly checked on by Herm Schneider in the eighth but stayed in the game and has become a trusted medium-leverage option, and feel free to check Luis Avilán's season stat line and be surprised by how good it has gotten, which is to say nothing of the recent work of Jace Fry and Joakim Soria.

Alec Hansen's return, and more good news on the White Sox prospect front

By James Fegan / The Athletic / June 11, 2018

Alec Hansen was commonly tabbed as the White Sox's fourth-best prospect coming into this season, ranked no lower than the 60th-best prospect globally preseason by Baseball America, MLB Pipeline and Baseball Prospectus, and still cracked FanGraphs' list of the top 131 prospects in baseball Monday despite having yet to throw a pitch for an affiliate this season due to a right forearm muscular issue. His progress seems to be an issue central in the focus of most White Sox fans, but when an outlet develops a reputation for granular prospect coverage, it can be hard to shake.

"For James Fegan, Alec Hansen's next start will be with the Birmingham Barons this weekend," general manager Rick Hahn announced Monday.

Hansen had been making starts in extended spring training recently, and will now start one of the Barons' final games before the Southern League All-Star break. Missing half the season is a blow to Hansen's preseason ambitions to make the majors this season, but he struck out 35.4 percent of opposing hitters in his two starts for Birmingham in 2017, so it might not be a long struggle. Look for Birmingham to make some room for him in its rotation too.

Eloy Jiménez will have to spend some time in Triple-A Charlotte before reaching the majors, as Hahn reiterated again Monday. Jiménez entered Monday as a career .329/.379/.571 hitter at Double-A in 65 games, and has dropped his strikeout rate by more than 4.5 percentage points since last season, so it's a bit more difficult to pin down what he needs to round into shape before he goes to Charlotte. A wave of draft signings will probably serve to push him up either way, and the Barons host the Southern League All-Star Game a week from Tuesday. It includes a home run contest.

Luis Robert will make it to Winston-Salem in the next seven to 10 days. He was out of the Kannapolis lineup Sunday but has no issues, and has put up a .304/.360/.391 line in six games entering Monday despite being undeniably rusty as he works his way through this proto-rehab assignment.

"With him it's just again baseball timing and getting him back to playing on a regular basis," Hahn said. "Physically he's fine. The acclimation process has been very smooth and I look forward to him playing on a nightly basis."

Micker Adolfo is taking the first big step toward avoiding Tommy John surgery. Hahn called the results of a followup MRI Adolfo received recently as "quite positive," and Adolfo will now begin more actively building strength in his right throwing arm after a "pinhole tear" was discovered in his ulnar collateral ligament in spring training.

"He had been compliant with all the exercises and the rehab and everything's gone well, so we were optimistic when he came to Chicago that the followup exam was going to yield this," Hahn said. "Now again, we're not out of the woods. He's just beginning a throwing program. Not until at least probably four-to-six weeks will we know if he's able to progress and play regularly in the outfield."

A setback or an injury during the rehab process could still mean Tommy John surgery for Adolfo, but this was the biggest nerve-racking test looming over his whole season, and he seems to have passed it. He went more than 30 games without a home run before launching one Saturday but is still hitting .274/.367/.442 as a 21-year-old in High-A entering Monday.

Avisaíl García is headed to Charlotte for a rehab assignment Tuesday as he recovers from a right hamstring strain suffered April 23. He was running and jumping in left field without issue with trainer Allen Thomas in Boston this weekend, but now has to get back in sync at the plate after nearly seven weeks out of action. Hahn estimates he will need seven to 10 days with the Knights, and said Leury García is not far behind him. Leury García strained his left knee sliding into third base May 23.

Former first-round pick Zack Burdi is regularly throwing off a pitching mound as he recovers from undergoing Tommy John surgery last July. Hahn says there have been no issues in his recovery, but tamped down expectations that he'll pitch for an affiliate this season.

"When this initially happened my hope was we were all going to be in spring training of 2019 and he was going to be without restriction and we wouldn't have to really worry about the injury," Hahn said. "He's certainly very much on pace for that. It is conceivable that we have him pitching some time this fall if not potentially sooner, which would again reinforce that timeline. At this point let's just continue to let him build up arm strength and we'll see how it goes."

Hahn claims Michael Kopech being at Triple-A is not about service time. Considering publicly saying Kopech was held down for service time could potentially be grounds for a grievance, it's not a shocking answer. But given Kopech is running a 12.3 percent walk rate at Triple-A (lower than what he had during

his first half last season at Double-A), there is enough refinement left to avoid controversy, even if he has a credible shot of outperforming some current members of the big league rotation.

“It’s never been the arbitration three years from now,” Hahn said. “It’s been about baseball. Again, not getting too far down into Michael’s checklist of what we want to see him accomplish but he hasn’t checked them all off yet. He’s had some real good starts. He’s getting closer and it’s not going to surprise me seeing him here at some point in the not-too-distant future but he’s not there yet.”

A.J. Puckett threw a simulated game. Originally scheduled to be Hansen’s rotation mate in Birmingham, Puckett has been on the disabled list with soreness in his right elbow all season, and is still a ways away. A former second-round pick, Puckett came over from Kansas City in the Melky Cabrera trade. He’s a tall, athletic and projectable right-hander and has back-end rotation potential.

Finally, hard-throwing relief prospect Victor Diaz is playing catch again after being sidelined with a shoulder injury. Diaz is the fourth piece the White Sox received in the Chris Sale trade. Now that he’s throwing again and Dylan Covey outdueled Sale in Fenway on Friday, surely the White Sox have officially won the trade.

TA30: It’s a tight race at the top of the MLB power rankings — and even tighter at the bottom

By Levi Weaver / The Athletic / June 11, 2018

Welcome back to TA30. I’m your host, Levi Weaver, and I’ll be walking you through the majestic tapestry of Major League Baseball as it stands on June 11, 2018. I’ll start with the good stuff, a lavish feast of the finest that baseball has to offer. Then I’ll drone on a bit in the middle, once the cracks start to show, in hopes that you get bored before we get to the dark underbelly of the 2018 season, where a two-legged cat is fighting a sentient bucket of painkillers for the last morsel of week-old snakeskin jerky. Here we go!

1. Boston Red Sox (last week: 1)
44-22, Run Differential: +95

They’re only 5-5 in their last 10 games, but the Red Sox maintain their death grip on the No. 1 spot in the rankings, where they have resided for seven out of the eight weeks this column has existed. J.D. Martinez is cruising, and oh by the way: Terrifying eidolon Chris Sale has added triple-digit heat to his arsenal.

2. New York Yankees (last week: 3)
42-19, Run Differential: +89

They’re 8-2 in their last 10 games, and back atop the AL East by a half-game, but perhaps that is tempered by the fact that they were beating up on the hapless Mets, and the Happ-ful [Ed. note: ... sorry] Blue Jays. Masahiro Tanaka is the latest anecdotal evidence that the NL needs to adopt the DH rule, and there are other aches and pains, but long-term, the Yankees are in great shape.

3. Houston Astros (last week: 2)
42-25, Run Differential: +127

The rotation is dominant, despite Dallas Keuchel’s recent speed bumps. The bullpen is still an enigma, but so long as the Astros are willing to part with a few prospects, there are always back-end relievers available at the deadline. Meanwhile, the Astros made draft week a little more sentimental by drafting another Bregman and another Correa.

4. Chicago Cubs (last week: T-4)
37-25, Run Differential: +89

The Cubs have been on a roll, winning eight of their last 10. This is in spite of not getting a heck of a lot of production from their big free-agent acquisition Yu Darvish, who might not be back until the All-Star break.

They stick at the No. 4 spot in the rankings, even though they have spent a total of three days in (or tied for) first place in the NL Central.

5. Milwaukee Brewers (last week: 7)
39-26, Run Differential: +42

You know who has spent a lot of time in first place in the NL Central? These guys. They jump from No. 7 to No. 5 this week, and frankly, they should be higher, if for no other reason than this excellent video:

6. Atlanta Braves (last week: T-4)
37-28, Run Differential: +59

On the one hand, the Braves dropped two spots this week after two losing series against the Padres and Dodgers. On the other, they're still ranked ahead of the Nationals, with whom they are tied for first place in the NL East. The kids are getting the attention, but Freddie Freeman is a legit early favorite for NL MVP.

7. Seattle Mariners (last week: 8)
41-24, Run Differential: +20

The Mariners are tied for first in the AL West with the Astros, despite trailing the Astros 127-20 in the run differential column; Robinson Canó being on the shelf with an injury/suspension; and an entire franchise history that suggests not getting one's hopes up. If they pull off the improbable, it might be the most fun story of 2018.

8. Washington Nationals (last week: 6)
36-27, Run Differential: +53

The Capitals finally broke the D.C. curse. Will the Nats be able to follow suit? They're back in (a tie for) first place in the NL East, but Stephen Strasburg is on the DL with shoulder inflammation. Brandon Kintzler is there too, but Adam Eaton (finally) isn't, and Daniel Murphy might not be there for much longer. The talent is there in D.C., but health is going to be the big question.

9. Cleveland Indians (last week: 9)
34-29, Run Differential: +32

So, Corey Kluber has just decided to stop walking hitters. No, really. He hasn't walked anyone since May 8, a stretch that spans $35\frac{1}{3}$ innings.

T-10. Arizona Diamondbacks (last week: 13)
35-29, Run Differential: +36

The Diamondbacks seem to have plugged the hole in the ship's floor. They're back in first place in the NL West, Zack Godley seems to have found his best self, and the front office got a head start on the trade deadline by bringing in Jon Jay.

T-10. Los Angeles Angels (last week: 11)
37-29, Run Differential: +36

Well, crap.

12. St. Louis Cardinals (last week: 12)
35-28, Run Differential: +19

In lieu of a Cardinals blurb this week, I'll just ask you to go read Bernie Miklasz's beautiful tribute to Red Schoendienst, who passed away this week at the age of 95.

13. Los Angeles Dodgers (last week: 14)
33-32, Run Differential: +48

Banished a few weeks ago all the way down to No. 20 in the standings, the Dodgers have been slowly working their way back into the good graces of The Athletic's baseball writing staff. In completely unrelated news, Ross Stripling is literally their only fully healthy starting pitcher, so perhaps the Dodgers will kick off the trade season soon.

14. Philadelphia Phillies (last week: 10)
33-30, Run Differential: +12

Man, the Phillies are a weird team. They strike out an awful lot, but they're still only three games out of first place in the NL East, and the postseason isn't a pipe dream. Here's a fun debate: Who wins a championship first, the Sixers or the Phillies? Mark me down for the Sixers.

15. Oakland Athletics (last week: 15)
34-32, Run Differential: +10

I'm not sure "draft a quarterback" was the expected move this week, but you do you, Billy Beane. Here's a weird stat: the A's—who play on Rickey Henderson Field—are on pace to steal just 30 bases this season.

16. Colorado Rockies (last week: 16)
32-33, Run Differential: -42

The Rockies were tied for first place in the NL West as recently as June 6. They are now in fourth place, ahead of only the Padres. The bats are back, but now the pitching is struggling. Fortunately, the division is tightly packed; they're only 3.5 games back.

17. San Francisco Giants (last week: 21)
33-32, Run Differential: -27

Madison Bumgarner is back, which is good news for baseball but generally bad news for its hitters. The Giants are 8-2 in their last 10 games, and have crept back into a tie with the Dodgers for second place in the division. The voters are still keeping them in the bottom half of the league for now, but they do jump four spots. Also, this Julian McWilliams piece is worth your time.

18. Detroit Tigers (last week: 19)
31-36, Run Differential: -31

The Tigers finally have a lock-down reliever in Joe Jiménez. That's excellent news; once they nab their lock-down catcher, first baseman, second baseman, shortstop, third baseman (Jeimer Candelario is fine), right fielder, center fielder, left fielder, five lock-down starters, and a handful of other lock-down relievers, life is going to be reeeeeal nice in Detroit.

We're getting close to the cat-vs.-painkillers part, by the way. If you're wanting to avoid that, here's where you pull the ripcord.

19. Pittsburgh Pirates (last week: 17)
32-33, Run Differential: +7

The Pirates have a better record than a few of the teams ranked ahead of them, but the early-season pixie dust seems to have worn off, and things are decidedly not bangarang in Pittsburgh. Perhaps you're thinking to yourself: "Did he just use a movie reference that is older than Jamison Taillon?" Yes. I did, and I'm not sorry. It's a classic and I will stan for "Hook" until I die.

20. Minnesota Twins (last week: 23)
28-34, Run Differential: -11

Good: José Berrios.
Bad: Well, it's a lot.

21. Tampa Bay Rays (last week: 18)
29-35, Run Differential: -14

It's time to let the kids play. Speaking of kids, and uh... specifically the creation thereof, and the, ummm— look, I'm not sure how to say this, but Carlos Gómez and Jake Bauers probably both needed ice packs after this.

22. Toronto Blue Jays (last week: 22)
30-35, Run Differential: -19

They didn't call up Vlad Guerrero Jr. and now he's injured. Nobody is happy about this, but Canada has taken more than enough grief from this side of the border this week, so we will not pile on.

23. San Diego Padres (last week: 24)
31-36, Run Differential: -46

LOOK OUT RED SOX, the Padres have moved up a spot this week. Take a gander at our Padres coverage, and even if you didn't know the team's record, the number of articles about the draft and prospects would give you a pretty good clue how things are going. Read up: 2021 will be here before you know it.

24. New York Mets (last week: 20)
28-34, Run Differential: -35

The Mets were ranked fifth the first week we did these rankings. They've been on a bender ever since; their beard is in that weird in-between stage, and their collar is missing a button. That's not Pepsi in the paper bag they're wielding as they threaten a bodega operator, and what is that in their jacket pocket— oh no, it's the two-legged cat! Great. Here we go.

Here's the thing, though: their starting pitching has been great. They released Adrián González, and Jose Reyes might not be far behind.

25. Texas Rangers (last week: 25)
27-41, Run Differential: -70

The Rangers embarrassed the visiting Houston Astros this week... in a cow-milking contest. The Astros won all four baseball games, though.

26. Chicago White Sox (last week: 30)
22-41, Run Differential: -78

Reynaldo López is fun. So is Carlos Rodón. So are Yoán Moncada, Luis Basabe, and Daniel Palka. Add it up, and what do you get? Eh? Eh?

...A really, really bad baseball team, honestly. But again, 2021 is creepin' up on us.

27. Cincinnati Reds (last week: 26)
23-43, Run Differential: -75

The Reds don't even win in commercials.

28. Miami Marlins (last week: 29)
23-42, Run Differential: -108

The Marlins finally did something right. Unfortunately, it was temporary.

29. Kansas City Royals (last week: 27)
22-44, Run Differential: -110

The Royals have never been ranked higher than 26th in this poll, but have somehow thus far avoided spending even one week in the No. 30 Slot of Shame. Perhaps if they follow through on their current pace to allow more home runs than any pitching staff in AL history, they'll finally get there.

30. Baltimore Orioles (last week: 28)
19-45, Run Differential: -108

The Orioles have precisely one more win than Manny Machado has home runs. The Orioles have exactly as many losses as they have strikeouts from Alex Cobb and Chris Tillman, combined. That's either a lot of losses, or not very many strikeouts— [puts finger to ear] I'm sorry, I'm being told that it's both; both things are true.
