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#### **"Engel working to steady barrel in Year 2**

*White Sox center fielder focused on offense this offseason*

By Scott Merkin/ MLB.com/ Jan. 19, 2018

CHICAGO -- The chance to talk hitting with Jim Thome -- who should soon be elected to the Hall of Fame -- always rates as a beneficial move for young players.

But in the case of Adam Engel's interaction with the White Sox special assistant to the general manager, during the organization's hitters mini-camp this week, it was a conversation centered more on the center fielder's newfound confidence as opposed to what he needed to learn.

"I was telling Jim Thome, this is the most excited I've been from an offensive standpoint in my entire career," Engel said during a phone interview from Camelback Ranch. "If Spring Training started today, I would feel like I'm in a better spot than I've ever been, and I just believe in what I'm doing.

"Everything has a purpose. I fully understand why I'm doing what I'm doing, and it's going to give me an edge from a confidence standpoint. Obviously, mechanically I feel like I've definitely taken a huge step forward. I'm really excited."

Engel, 26, played Gold Glove-caliber defense after taking over in center field for the 2017 White Sox. He matched Mookie Betts' 16 outs above average, according to Statcast™, trailing only Byron Buxton (25) and Ender Inciarte (19).

His rookie numbers on offense weren't anywhere near elite, as Engel hit .166 with a .517 OPS, 39 OPS+ and 117 strikeouts against 19 walks over 336 plate appearances. Engel described his mechanics as "pretty inconsistent," and he had an early talk with White Sox hitting coach Todd Steverson concerning how those flaws would keep him from reaching full capabilities.

Engel made improved offense his offseason focus, after he started to implement changes on the fly in-season.

"My barrel was moving a lot last year, and in an inefficient way," Engel said. "So that's definitely been a huge focus this offseason, to try to quiet that down, and make sure if I'm moving my barrel, it's going to be beneficial rather than just kind of not helping me out."

"He's been working tirelessly to be able to make better contact, more contact, to make some things happen," said White Sox director of player development Chris Getz. "When he does reach first base, he has an opportunity now to impact the game on the basepaths because of speed that he brings to the table and the fear that he puts on the defense, and certainly on the pitchers."

Steverson and Engel talk at least once every two weeks and often once per week, with Engel sending video of what he's been doing and then discussing the next step. That progression can be difficult to explain by phone, making Engel's weeklong work at the mini-camp an important stretch.

"That's been my biggest goal, to really make use of this time," Engel said. "Get in front of [Steverson] and other instructors and show everyone where I'm at and getting everyone's take on the progress and what's next."

"Once Spring Training rolls around, I just get to come in and believe in what I'm doing, and every adjustment after that will be a small one, what I feel like I need to do as I go. It won't be quite as dramatic as what I was doing at the end of last year or what I was doing this offseason."

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### **White Sox seeking new flagship radio home**

*WLS-AM 890 also drops Bulls coverage in bankruptcy filing*

By Scott Merkin /MLB.com / Jan. 19, 2018

CHICAGO -- The White Sox and Chicago Bulls issued a joint statement on Friday regarding Cumulus Media and the future search for a new flagship station for both teams' radio broadcasts.

Cumulus announced plans to drop the multiyear deals to broadcast White Sox baseball and Bulls basketball on WLS-AM 890 in Chicago, according to numerous reports, as Cumulus tries to emerge from bankruptcy.

"As part of its bankruptcy filing, Cumulus Media informed us this week that it intends to reject its broadcasting rights agreements with both the Chicago White Sox and Chicago Bulls effective February 1, 2018," the statement read. "The Bulls, White Sox and Cumulus have worked to find an amicable solution that would provide broadcast continuity to our fans, while addressing Cumulus's financial issues, but these efforts have been unsuccessful."

"The teams remain confident in finding a radio broadcast solution for their fans, and together, the Bulls and White Sox are exploring all options for a new radio home. The teams will make announcements regarding future broadcast plans as updates are available."

WLS became the White Sox flagship in April 2016. The team is in its third year of a six-year deal with the station.

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### **Meet the Prospects: Evan Skoug**

By Vinnie Duber/NBC Sports Chicago/ Jan. 19, 2018

Skoug, the 22-year-old catcher, was a seventh-round pick of the White Sox in last summer's draft.

A Libertyville native, Skoug played his college ball at TCU, where he and the Horned Frogs made three consecutive College World Series appearances in the last three years. During his final season at TCU, Skoug slashed .272/.378/.544 with a whopping 20 homers and 71 RBIs.

After joining the White Sox organization, Skoug played 21 games with Class A Kannapolis, only picking up 10 hits — but two homers and two triples — in his 76 plate appearances.

As of their most recent rankings, MLB Pipeline had Skoug rated as the No. 24 prospect in the White Sox organization

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## **White Sox reportedly one of teams 'expressing interest' in Christian Yelich, but does a trade for Marlins star make sense?**

By Vinnie Duber/NBC Sports Chicago/ Jan. 19, 2018

A big offseason splash for the rebuilding White Sox?

After being rumored to potentially trade for Baltimore Orioles star Manny Machado last month during the Winter Meetings, the next name on many fans' offseason wish list is Miami Marlins outfielder Christian Yelich.

Yelich is an intriguing candidate for the obvious reason that he's really good, but he also has an uncommon amount of team control remaining on his contract, as many as five years, to be exact. It all adds up to him being a far better fit for a rebuilding team like the White Sox than the aforementioned Machado, who is slated to hit free agency after the upcoming 2018 season.

According to a Friday report from Jon Heyman, the White Sox are one of many teams "expressing interest" in Yelich, who figures to be on the trading block soon given the Marlins' activity this offseason. The Fish, now headed by Derek Jeter, have already traded away several All-Star players, with Giancarlo Stanton going to the New York Yankees, Marcell Ozuna going to the St. Louis Cardinals and Dee Gordon going to the Seattle Mariners. Yelich, who would figure to fetch a hefty return package, is speculated to be the next to go, along with catcher J.T. Realmuto. Yelich's agent told ESPN's Jerry Crasnick a couple days ago that Yelich's relationship with the Marlins is "irretrievably broken."

Joining the White Sox on Heyman's reported list are the Philadelphia Phillies, Texas Rangers, Los Angeles Angels, Toronto Blue Jays, Los Angeles Dodgers, Boston Red Sox, Arizona Diamondbacks and San Diego Padres.

That's obviously a lot of competition, but the White Sox and their stacked farm system would figure to line up well with any team looking to move a star major leaguer for a big package of prospects. With all the minor league talent general manager Rick Hahn has acquired over the past year-plus, there are more highly touted players than there are spots in the White Sox lineup and rotation of the future, meaning some of those players could eventually turn into trade candidates.

But the key word there is "eventually," and it might speak to why a Yelich trade doesn't quite make sense for the White Sox right this moment.

The White Sox aren't expected to contend for a championship in 2018, and that could very well be the case in 2019, as well. This year and perhaps the next will be dedicated to waiting for all these young players to develop, and when that process concludes, Hahn and his front office will have a far better idea of what they have and what holes they need to fill — be that through a big free-agent signing or a trade. But the team hasn't reached that point yet.

Of course, there's plenty to love about Yelich. The 26-year-old already has five big league seasons under his belt, with a collective .290/.369/.432 slash line and a combined 146 doubles in those years. Plus, the power numbers have spiked in the last two seasons, with 21 homers and 98 RBIs in 2016 and 18 homers and 81 RBIs last season. He's also a Gold Glove winner in the outfield and has that alluring contract that thanks to an option could keep him away from free agency until after the 2022 season, definitely past when the White Sox hope to be perennial contenders.

A hypothetical trade for Yelich makes much more sense than one for Machado, that's for sure. But the White Sox still have spent a lot of time and effort carefully laying rebuilding plans, and those plans would need to be drastically altered, one would assume, in order to land a Fish like Yelich. It makes far more sense for the White Sox to exercise the patience that Hahn preached at the Winter Meetings and wait to see exactly what they have — and where — with their mountain of prospects.

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### **Meet the Prospects: Blake Rutherford**

By Vinnie Duber,/NBC Sports Chicago/ Jan. 20, 2018

Rutherford, the 20-year-old outfielder, was the highest-rated piece of the return package that came back to the White Sox in the seven-player deal that sent Todd Frazier, David Robertson and Tommy Kahnle to the New York Yankees last summer.

A California native, Rutherford was the 18th overall pick in the 2016 draft. After only playing rookie ball post-draft in 2016, he played 71 games with Class A Charleston last year before the trade, slashing .281/.342/.391 with 20 doubles and 30 RBIs to go along with a pair of home runs. After the trade, Rutherford played in 30 games with Class A Kannapolis, slashing .213/.289/.254 with 26 hits and 13 walks.

As of their most recent rankings, MLB Pipeline had Rutherford rated as the No. 4 prospect in the White Sox organization.

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### **Meet the Prospects: A.J. Puckett**

By Vinnie Duber/NBC Sports Chicago/ Jan. 21, 2018

Puckett, the 22-year-old right-handed hurler, came over in one of Rick Hahn's lower-profile moves last summer. While trades with the Cubs and New York Yankees brought back high-profile prospects like Eloy Jimenez, Dylan Cease and Blake Rutherford, an under-the-radar July move that sent Melky Cabrera to the Kansas City Royals fetched Puckett and left-handed pitcher Andre Davis to bolster the rebuilding effort.

A California native, Puckett was a second-round pick of the Royals in the 2016 draft. He made 11 starts at Class A Lexington in 2016, posting a 3.66 ERA with 37 strikeouts in 51.2 innings of work. Prior to last summer's trade, Puckett made 20 starts for Class A Wilmington, turning in a 3.90 ERA to go with 98 strikeouts in 108.1 innings. After joining the White Sox organization, he made five starts at Class A Winston-Salem, where he had a 4.28 ERA with 21 strikeouts in 27.1 innings.

As of their most recent rankings, MLB Pipeline had Puckett rated as the No. 23 prospect in the White Sox organization.

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### **White Sox land five in Baseball America's top 100 prospects**

By Dan Santaromita /NBC Chicago Sports / Jan. 22, 2018

The White Sox went from having a pedestrian farm system to one of the best in baseball in the span of a year thanks to the rebuild that began before the 2017 season so it's no surprise to see White Sox prospects all over Baseball America's top 100 prospects.

The publication released its top 100 on Monday and five White Sox prospects made the list. Eloy Jimenez was the top White Sox prospect coming in at No. 4 behind Braves outfielder Ronald Acuna, Angels pitcher/potential hitter/unicorn Shohei Ohtani comes in at No. 2 and Blue Jays third baseman Vladimir Guerrero Jr. is the only other prospect ahead of Jimenez.

Michael Kopech is No. 11 on the list, giving the White Sox two very highly rated prospects. Only the Blue Jays and Astros also have two prospects in the top 15.

Also making the list for the White Sox are Alec Hansen (No. 57), Luis Robert (58) and Dane Dunning (82). All three are new to the top 100.

With five prospects on the list, the White Sox are in the upper tier in that regard. The Braves lead the way with eight prospects while the Brewers, Padres, Rays and Yankees all have six. Yoan Moncada, Reynaldo Lopez and Lucas Giolito were top 100 prospects before they graduated from prospect status by playing in the majors last season.

Of the five prospects the White Sox have on the list, three were acquired in trades, one (Hansen) was drafted by the Sox and Robert was an international signing. With the exception of Robert, who hasn't yet played in the U.S. since signing his deal, the other four are all expected to start in Double-A or higher in 2018, meaning they aren't expected to be far away from making their MLB debuts.

In news that won't excite White Sox fans, Fernando Tatis Jr., the unknown prospect at the time of the James Shields trade with San Diego, was ranked No. 9 after impressing in Single-A as an 18-year-old.

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### **5 questions facing the White Sox with spring training approaching**

By Chris Kuc /Chicago Tribune/ Jan. 22, 2018

White Sox players and management will gather in Chicago this weekend for SoxFest and will face plenty of questions about the 2018 season and beyond.

Here's a look at some issues facing the White Sox with spring training about a month away:

#### 1. Center field

There is no question that Adam Engel can track down a ball with the best in baseball and those highlight-reel catches make for some great TV, but there has to be some offensive production as well. Engel slashed .166/.235/.282 in 97 games in 2017 as he held down the center-field job for much of the second half. It had the feel that the Sox were seeing what they had in the in the 26-year-old and unless he improves his hitting — Engel has made that a focus during offseason training — an upgrade is needed.

There are some up-and-comers in the organization, including Blake Rutherford, Luis Robert, Charlie Tilson, Tito Polo and Luis Alexander Basabe, but it's likely too soon to hand the job over to a rookie. One option already on the 40-man roster is Leury Garcia, who made 51 of his 83 defensive appearances in '17 in center. The switch-hitting Garcia slashed .270/.316/.423 with nine home runs and 33 RBIs during a season in which he was limited to 325 plate appearances due to injuries to his finger and, later, his back.

It's also possible general manager Rick Hahn will scour the market for a veteran — possibly even the Marlins' Christian Yelich — to fill the center-field spot.

#### 2. Carlos Rodon

It appears very likely that Rodon, who underwent surgery on his left shoulder Sept. 27, will begin the season on the disabled list. At 25, Rodon is still looked upon as the ace of the staff and is expected to be a major part of the Sox's rebuild, but injury problems have begun to cast some doubt on that. The third-overall pick in the 2014 draft hasn't thrown more than 165 innings in a season while in the majors and sports a career record of 20-21 and 3.95 ERA.

With Rodon sidelined, the Sox will likely open the season with five right-handers in the rotation, including Reynaldo Lopez, Lucas Giolito, James Shields, Miguel Gonzalez and Carson Fulmer. It's too early in the rebuild to focus on balancing a rotation with hurlers pitching from both sides of the rubber, but teams with left-handed boppers in their lineups will be champing at the bit to face the Sox rotation. The Sox will be

patient with Rodon, so expect them to wait closer to the back half of the 6-to-8 month recovery timetable from the surgery.

### 3. Backup catcher

It was a surprise when Hahn signed veteran catcher Wellington Castillo to a two-year, \$15 million free-agent contract Dec. 1 to be the Sox's No. 1 catcher. The tandem of Kevan Smith and Omar Narvaez did an admirable job in handling the Sox's staff in '17 — especially with youngsters Lopez, Giolito and Fulmer making regular starts down the stretch — and had mixed results at the plate. Narvaez slashed .277/.373/.340 with two home runs and 14 RBIs in 253 at-bats while Smith posted a .283/.309/.388 with four homers and 30 RBIs in 276 ABs.

One of the two will emerge from the dust following a spring training battle for the backup job but there doesn't appear to be a clear-cut favorite heading into February.

### 4. Closer

A decimated bullpen was the result of Hahn's wheeling and dealing while acquiring prospects in '17. David Robertson was sent to the Yankees and that sent the Sox scrambling for a new closer. Juan Minaya picked up some of the slack, recording nine saves during his stint as closer and will be in the mix again in '18.

Veteran right-hander Joakim Soria is also a candidate. Acquired from the Royals in a Jan. 4 trade, Soria is a two-time All-Star with 204 career saves during his 10-season career. Due to injuries, Soria doesn't have the over-powering stuff he used to possess but experience could go a long way when manager Rick Renteria looks to the bullpen to close out games.

Another option will be Nate Jones, who is expected to be ready for spring training after undergoing nerve repositioning surgery on his right elbow in July. Jones had three saves for the Sox in '16.

### 5. Patience

No matter what they do in the standings, a running storyline for the season will be the youngsters lurking in the minors. Hahn will not rush the call-ups of flame-throwing right-hander Michael Kopech or slugging outfielder Eloy Jimenez. The GM showed patience with Yoan Moncada, Giolito and Lopez before calling them up in '17 and it will be more of the same in '18. While the temptation may be great, the focus remains on the future and Hahn isn't likely to alter the timetable.

So even if the Sox are desperate for pitching or have a massive hole to fill in the outfield, Kopech and Jimenez won't be in Chicago until the organization believes they are ready to make a more permanent leap to the majors.