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Giolito finds rhythm, but bullpen misstep costly

By Scott Merkin / MLB.com / September 10, 2018

KANSAS CITY -- On the first pitch thrown by Lucas Giolito Monday night at Kauffman Stadium, the White Sox right-hander found himself down one run.

But following that Whit Merrifield home run, Giolito grew awfully stingy over the next seven innings. He allowed three runs in total over seven, striking out three and walking two, in the Royals' 4-3 walk-off victory in 10 innings.

"Just tip my cap to Whit," said Giolito of the leadoff home run, which was followed by a walk to Adalberto Mondesi and an Alex Gordon double, but only one run scored in the first. "First pitch of the game, I pretty much always throw a fastball.

"I mislocated. I left it up over the middle of the plate and he did some damage to it. It happens. Like to have it back, get another shot at it, but it is what it is."

Kansas City (48-95) walked off with the win on a throwing error by Jeanmar Gomez off an Alcides Escobar sacrifice bunt to score Brian Goodwin. It was the sixth straight loss for the White Sox (56-88). Gomez might have had a play on Goodwin if he didn't hesitate, but then lofted the throw over Yolmer Sanchez.

"He did a nice job getting to it quickly," White Sox manager Rick Renteria said. "He saw the play, that it was designed for Sanchez to read and go back. Allow the pitcher to go ahead if he thought he had a play to go there. But that play just broke up by the errant throw, that was it."

Giolito has turned in six quality starts over his last eight trips to the mound and bounced back from a 1 1/3-inning effort in a loss to the Tigers, against whom he allowed five runs (four earned) on Tuesday. The right-hander didn't have his best stuff, calling it a grinder day, but recorded 12 ground-ball outs.

At 29 starts and 159 1/3 innings pitched during the 2018 season, Giolito still feels strong moving toward his final three starts.

"Physically, I feel good," Giolito said. "I feel like my innings aren't that high. I would like them to be higher, but earlier in the season wasn't very good. I actually feel better now physically than I did the first three months of the season, so that's a good indication.

"Fastball command was a little iffy. Definitely didn't have my changeup today. There were a few good ones, but not up to the standard it has been more recently. Grinded through it. Few mistakes. Got through seven innings so overall pretty solid."

The White Sox erased an early 2-0 deficit via a three-run outburst in the third off Royals starter Jakob Junis. Adam Engel homered to center field, his sixth of the season, and after Jose Abreu reached on a two-out infield hit, Daniel Palka pulled a drive just fair down the right-field line for his 22nd home run. Abreu had three hits in his first game played since Aug. 20, after recovering from surgery to relieve pain caused by testicular torsion.

That lead lasted until the sixth when Ryan O'Hearn connected for a game-tying solo home run with one out. Giolito topped out at 94.6 mph among his 106 pitches per Statcast™. He recorded seven swinging strikes, including four off the slider, but just one with the fastball.

"Like I said, I didn't have my best stuff or my best feel," Giolito said. "I don't think I'm going to go out there and strike out the world with what I had, but we were able to grind through."

SOUND SMART

Giolito put together his seventh straight quality start on the road, a stretch in which he's 4-1 with a 3.11 ERA and a .195 opponents average. It's tied for the third-longest streak in the Majors this season, trailing only Jacob deGrom (nine, active) and Justin Verlander (eight).

HE SAID IT

"I wasn't really good on first-pitch strikes and I fell behind a lot of guys. When runners were on base, I was able to flip it and get ahead of some guys and get some good outs."-- Giolito

MITEL REPLAY OF THE DAY

The Royals likely lost a run in the first when Mondesi's successful steal of second was overturned by video replay after Renteria challenged the call. Gordon followed with a long double to left-center field, which could have easily scored the fleet-footed Mondesi.

UP NEXT

Dylan Covey (5-12, 5.44) returns to the rotation to take the spot vacated by Michael Kopech, who figures to have Tommy John surgery to repair a significant tear of his ulnar collateral ligament. Covey starts Tuesday at Kauffman Stadium with a first pitch of 7:15 p.m. CT and Brad Keller is on the mound for the Royals. Covey is 4-10 with a 5.87 ERA over 17 starts and 1-2 with a 2.25 ERA over six relief appearances.

Abreu back, and looking to make some history

By Scott Merkin / MLB.com / September 10, 2018

KANSAS CITY -- Jose Abreu returned to the White Sox lineup Monday for the first time since Aug. 20 after recovering from surgery to relieve pain caused by testicular torsion. The White Sox first baseman called the extended absence bittersweet.

"The toughest part was not being with the team, not being with the guys in the clubhouse or on the field," said Abreu through interpreter Billy Russo. "At the same time, I had the opportunity to spend time with my wife and kid. I usually don't have that much time during the season and those 15 days were good."

Abreu needs three homers to become the ninth player in Major League history with at least 25 homers in his first five seasons. He was trying to join Joe DiMaggio and Albert Pujols as the only players to begin their careers with at least five consecutive seasons of 25 or more home runs and 100 or more RBIs, but the medical setback makes that RBI target nearly impossible.

When Abreu first felt the severe pain at home and found out about the surgery, it looked as if his 2018 season had come to a close. So now, he's simply happy to be back in action.

"Everybody knows I was feeling good with my offense before the injury happened," Abreu said. "Now I just want to think about the things I can do on a daily basis. We have 18 or 20 games left, and I want to take advantage of every single game."

"That was another test, another challenge in life. I had to face it. I did, and I feel stronger. I'm just grateful for all the people who helped me through that process, through the recovery and helped me to come back. I'm just glad."

Jones close to a return

Look for Nate Jones to return to the White Sox active roster sometime during this road trip and potentially during this series against the Royals. The right-hander, sidelined since June 12 with a pronator strain, threw one scoreless inning for Class A Advanced Winston-Salem during its playoff contest last Wednesday and then threw live batting practice to a group that included Abreu on Saturday.

The results were positive. And while there was soreness, Jones said it was nothing out of the ordinary.

"It's awesome to get guys in there and get back to the little adrenaline rush facing big league hitters and whatnot. It went well," Jones said. "I threw a lot of strikes with all the pitches. I even mixed some righty-on-righty changeups. I threw strikes, and everything is feeling good. I think we are getting close."

Jones said it was important to come back and help his team over the last few weeks of the season. But it also was important to show the White Sox or another team that he's healthy, back and can pitch.

Covey gets the nod

Dylan Covey returns to the White Sox starting rotation Tuesday night, taking the place of Michael Kopech, who was placed on the 60-day disabled list and figures to have Tommy John surgery to repair a significant tear in his ulnar collateral ligament. Covey has a 4-10 record with a 5.87 ERA over 17 starts this season, but he has a 2.25 ERA over six relief appearances.

Regardless of the role, Covey feels more comfortable in comparison to his 2017 rookie campaign, in which he finished 0-7 with a 7.71 ERA.

"This year it has still been a little bit of a struggle, but last year I was being thrown out there and it was just like trying to take a breath of air," said Covey during a recent interview. "This year I have the stuff, and I have the ability."

"It's just learning for me where I need to throw my stuff and in what situations. So I still feel really confident and really comfortable. I think that I need to do a better job of taking control of just how I attack hitters on the mound."

White Sox manager Rick Renteria indicated Covey would stay in the rotation for the remainder of September, although Hector Santiago also is available for that role.

Third to first

- Advanced Rookie Great Falls will face Grand Junction in the best-of-three Pioneer League championship series. Game 1 is set for Tuesday with a first pitch of 7:40 p.m. CT at Grand Junction.

Great Falls will host Game 2 on Thursday at 8 p.m. CT, and a winner-take-all Game 3 on Saturday at 8 p.m. CT. The Voyagers lost to Ogden in the 2017 championship series.

- Matt Davidson, who did not start Monday, is tied with Albert Belle (1998) and Jose Valentin (2003) with eight home runs in a season against the Royals. These three games mark the last '18 matchup between the two.

Is a late-season turnaround clearing room for Reynaldo Lopez in the White Sox rotation of the future?

By Vinnie Duber / NBC Sports Chicago / September 10, 2018

That crowded starting rotation of the future seems to be making room for Reynaldo Lopez.

The White Sox hurler in his first full season in the majors is having a late-season turnaround that has him pitching as well as he has all year — and is sparking hopes for a more consistent 2019.

Lopez has had plenty of good moments in 2018, most notably in the season's early going, when he started the year with a sub-2.00 ERA in April. But that number rose to nearly 4.00 by the end of May, stood around 4.50 at the end of a rough July and was pretty much the same at the close of business in August.

By mid August, Lopez's inconsistencies were enough to match those of Lucas Giolito, and the two young pitchers didn't seem to be doing much — other than going through the expected growing pains of developing players — to exactly lock down spots in a future rotation that could feature fierce competition from the likes of Carlos Rodon, Michael Kopech, Dylan Cease and a host of other young arms in the White Sox loaded farm system.

But as evidenced from Lopez's stellar outing against the Los Angeles Angels on Sunday afternoon, things have changed in the last few weeks. Lopez tossed six scoreless innings, matched a season best with 10 strikeouts, allowed just two hits and didn't let anyone get past first base.

"He had a really good fastball (Sunday). Really good life on the fastball," catcher Wellington Castillo said after the game. "Our game plan was to attack those hitters with fastballs, throw a couple good changes. That was the game plan and he executed well.

"The confidence he has on the fastball and on any pitch in any count, that's big for him. ... He's getting better life on the fastball and better angle on the fastball and the other pitches, too."

Sunday's effort was the third straight great one from Lopez, the fourth straight good one, and he's got a 1.40 ERA in those last four outings, with 29 strikeouts in 25.2 innings. He was one out on Aug. 24 in Detroit from making all four last at least six innings.

Lopez actually points to his late-August outing at Yankee Stadium as the moment of the turnaround. That was a weird-looking one at first, with Lopez's velocity way down at the start of the game. Manager Rick Renteria and the trainer checked on Lopez during the game to make sure he was OK physically. He was, it turned out, and he stayed in to complete seven innings of one-run ball and get the White Sox a win against one of baseball's best teams.

"I learned a lot from that outing against the Yankees because my fastball, the velocity on my fastball wasn't there in the beginning and then I had to rely on my secondary pitches. I was able to command and to be effective with those pitches before I could regain the velocity on my fastball. I learned a lot in that outing," Lopez said through a team translator last week.

"One of the things I learned in that outing, too, was to try to be effective at the same time that I'm not trying to do too much. Just keep it simple. That was one of the things that I brought to the game (Sept. 3

against the Detroit Tigers). Try to be effective, don't try to do too much, have confidence on all my pitches.

"Even when the fastball wasn't there, I was able to command my secondary pitches, and seeing that as a pitcher, you try to learn every day. You grow from outing to outing. It was a really nice experience for me in New York. I learned a lot, and that helped me. Right now I'm a better pitcher because I had that experience in New York and I experienced how to be effective and be successful when you don't have your best pitches ready."

Those learning moments, the times when the light bulbs go on, is what this season was always going to be about at the major league level for the rebuilding White Sox. Lopez and Giolito, as well as position players like Yoan Moncada and Tim Anderson, didn't start 2018 as finished products, and they likely won't start 2019 that way, either. But the development occurring at the big league level is as valuable as a thing can be in 2018, especially when it has huge ramifications for 2019, 2020, 2021 and so on.

Another evolution for Lopez appears to be the absence of the "lack of focus" that he used to describe some of his midseason woes. It was a common refrain while Lopez's ERA climbed during the summer months, but as the results have improved, that explanation has disappeared, and his teammates have seen it, too.

"I've caught his last two outings, and I don't see him lose focus pitch by pitch," Castillo said. "We talked before he came out, and he had a really good idea of what he wanted to do. I think his focus is there, and I believe in him. I believe in all my pitchers. When he can control his focus, I think he's going to be good."

At the beginning of the season, Lopez was keeping runs off the board at such a rate — and outshining the fellow members of the starting rotation — that we asked whether he wouldn't just be a part of that rotation of the future but perhaps be the ace of it. Midseason struggles, not to mention the ace-like pitching of Rodon, altered those expectations slightly. But here at season's end, Lopez is perhaps pitching as well as he has all season.

Those rising and falling expectations are the pitfall, obviously, of making judgments throughout a 162-game season. But with a strong finish, Lopez can go a long way in convincing 2020 roster projectors to stop penciling his name into that rotation and to start using pen.

"I am feeling good. I feel strong," he said. "My mindset in every outing is to go at least six. If I can go more, that's even better. Go at least six innings and try to finish strong."

White Sox could have six 20-homer guys, but who will lead team

By Vinnie Duber / NBC Sports Chicago / September 10, 2018

If you dig the long ball, here's some potentially unexpected drama for the final few weeks of the season.

The White Sox have an outside chance at boasting six members of the 20-homer club before time runs out on the 2018 campaign. And those six guys are all within six homers of each other.

With 18 left, will the White Sox reach a half dozen 20-homer seasons? And who will end up the team leader in dingers?

Daniel Palka is a name you wouldn't have picked for 2018 home run leader on Opening Day, mostly because he wasn't on the roster then, but his two-run blast in the third inning of Monday night's game against the Kansas City Royals was his 22nd dinger of the season, tying him with Jose Abreu for the team lead.

Abreu returned from the disabled list Monday and has to hit three more before season's end to make it a fifth straight campaign with at least 25 homers.

Also in the mix is Matt Davidson, he of the three-homer game on Opening Day in Kansas City. Davidson trails Palka and Abreu by just a pair of round-trippers with 20 on the season.

But the chase for six 20-homer seasons is perhaps more interesting, if only because it's even more surprising, what with the White Sox ranking in the bottom third in the game in runs scored. In addition to the three guys already there, Tim Anderson is two away at 18, Yoan Moncada three away at 17 and Avisail Garcia four away at 16.

Home run items of interest

— Shockingly, considering the win-now mode the White Sox were in prior to Rick Hahn launching the current rebuilding effort ahead of last season, should just one more player reach 20 homers, it'd make for the highest number of 20-homer White Sox since 2012, the last year the team reached the postseason. Abreu and Davidson were the only 20-homer guys in 2017, Abreu and Todd Frazier the only two in 2016, Abreu the only one in 2015, Abreu joining Adam Dunn and Dayan Viciedo in 2014, Dunn the lone achiever in 2013. In 2012, Dunn, Viciedo, Paul Konerko, A.J. Pierzynski and Alex Rios all hit at least 25 home runs.

— The fact that Abreu is even in position to make it five straight 25-homer seasons is impressive considering the extended slump he went through earlier in the year, when he hit just four homers over his final 45 games leading into the All-Star break. He also missed the last three weeks while recovering from surgery to relieve testicular torsion.

— Garcia, who had a breakout, All-Star campaign a season ago, is only two away from matching his 2017 total of 18 homers. In general, his 2018 season has been a disappointing follow-up, mostly because of persistent injuries. But the home-run numbers everyone was hoping to see last season could end up being bigger this time around in a little more than half the games.

— This one from NBC Sports Chicago stat pooh bah Chris Kamka: Palka's 22 home runs this season average a distance of 411 feet, a launch angle of 26 degrees and an exit velocity of 108.6 miles an hour. Dude can swing it. What a find by Hahn's front office that could have a lasting impact as the rebuild moves along.

— Anderson set a new career best with his 18th home run. He's also got career highs in doubles, RBIs, stolen bases and walks with 18 games to go.

White Sox lose on throwing error in 10th, fall to Royals 4-3; Jose Abreu gets 3 hits in return from DL

By David Smale / Chicago Tribune / September 10, 2018

A little bunt by Alcides Escobar paid off big for the Royals.

White Sox reliever Jeanmar Gomez threw away Escobar's bunt in the 10th inning Monday night, giving the Royals a 4-3 win.

Brian Goodwin led off the Kansas City 10th with a sharp double. Escobar followed with a sacrifice and Gomez (0-2) made a wild toss over third baseman Yolmer Sanchez, letting the speedy Goodwin score easily.

"Goodwin is a good runner, and he was safe anyway," Escobar said. "If (Gomez) made a good throw, he was safe anyway."

"I knew I needed to move the runner to third base, and I made a good bunt. The pitcher went to third base, and, game over."

White Sox manager Rich Renteria wasn't so sure Goodwin would have been safe with a good throw.

"It looked like he recognized the play was available to him and he just got a little flustered, probably a little excited and just didn't make a very good throw," he said.

Jake Newberry (2-0) pitched a perfect top of the 10th to notch the win.

Whit Merrifield homered on the first pitch from White Sox starter Lucas Giolito. Ryan O'Hearn hit a solo homer in the sixth that made it 3-all — he connected against the Sox in his big league debut on July 31, and now has 10 home runs in 30 games.

"I'm not thinking about numbers or anything like that," O'Hearn said. "I just go out there every day and try to have quality at-bats. The home runs keep piling up. Hopefully, I'll keep on going."

Adam Engel and Daniel Palka each homered in the third against Jakob Junis.

"They were throwing me heaters the first AB and start of the second and I think they noticed me diving over the plate a little bit and missing," Palka said of his drive just inside the foul pole. "I just kind of stayed back on the one I got. It was a pretty good pitch, just right where I was looking."

Jose Abreu, activated from the disabled list prior to the game, had three hits for the White Sox. He was put on the DL on Aug. 22 following surgery for testicular torsion.

Royals 4, White Sox 3 (10 inn.)

Photos from the White Sox-Royals game at Royals Stadium on Sept. 10, 2018.

Junis went eight innings, allowing seven hits. He faced the minimum after giving up Palka's homer, and has a 2.15 ERA in his last seven starts. He wasn't fazed by the rough third inning.

"We didn't really change our game plan," Junis said. "We stayed aggressive, kept pounding the strike zone. We got some quick outs that way."

Giolito pitched seven innings for his fifth quality start in his last six outings.

Merrifield hit his third leadoff homer this season and the Royals added another run in the second after a couple of unusual plays.

With a runner on second, Goodwin hit a slow dribbler up the third base line that appeared to be headed foul, but Sanchez touched the ball in fair territory and resulted in an infield hit. Escobar followed with a bloop to right field, and a run scored while Goodwin was thrown out at second.

TRAINER'S ROOM

White Sox: RHP Nate Jones is close to returning from the 60-day disabled list. He has been on the DL since June 24 with a muscle strain in his arm.

Royals: Manager Ned Yost said that RHP Ian Kennedy has only the "normal pitching soreness" following his first appearance since June 23. Kennedy went six innings Sunday in Minnesota. He gave up one run on four hits. ... OF Brett Phillips, out since Sept. 5 with a bruised shoulder, took 30 swings off the tee. He said he can swing without pain, but the follow-through causes him to tighten up. There is no timetable for his return.

Hard-throwing young relievers getting major-league work during the White Sox's rebuild

By Phil Rogers / Chicago Tribune / September 10, 2018

There's no formal timeline to the White Sox's rebuilding process, but some markers present themselves along the way.

One of those is the type of arms in the bullpen churn.

The Sox have used 35 relievers the last two seasons, thanks in part to a series of midseason trades involving established pitchers David Robertson, Anthony Swarzak, Tommy Kahnle and Joakim Soria, among others. They imported a minivan load of inexpensive veterans last July including Danny Farquhar, Chris Volstad and Al Albuquerque. This time they are using the end of the season to give auditions to potential members of future bullpens.

Left-hander Jace Fry, who has been around since early May, has been joined by fellow lefties Aaron Bummer and Caleb Frare and right-handers Thyago Vieira, Ryan Burr, Ian Hamilton and Jose Ruiz. All are 25 or younger and this season have thrown fastballs in the mid-90s, with Vieira, Hamilton and Ruiz flirting with triple digits.

“The young guys are throwing 95-plus and have good breaking balls,” the 25-year-old Fry said. “It just comes down to an execution game. How many times can you execute the pitch you need to?”

The Sox are likely to add some veterans arm in the offseason, although they may hold on to 30-year-olds Jeanmar Gomez and Hector Santiago. Nate Jones, 32, who has battled injuries since he joined the Sox in 2012, has a team option to return.

Fry points out the value of having experienced relievers alongside the promising young hurlers.

“They benefit highly from talking with (Jeanmar) Gomez and Hector (Santiago) because they’re throwing the ball well right now,” Fry said. “Especially Gomez. The last few outings, he’s been really sharp. You sit down and talk to a veteran like that about the ups and downs of the game and how to get hitters out, (you) can really learn from that.”

READ MORE: Paul Sullivan: Michael Kopech's devastating injury won't slow down White Sox rebuild »

Fry, a third-round pick in 2014 from Oregon State, is an outlier in this group. The others were either drafted in the 11th round or lower (Hamilton and Bummer), claimed on waivers (Ruiz, from the Padres) or acquired in trades for international signing money (Vieira from the Mariners, Burr from the Diamondbacks and Frare from the Yankees).

They appreciate the chance they’re getting to showcase their skills. They also know they must seize this moment, because many more talented arms are coming in the Sox farm system.

“Everybody wants to get on this train and kind of put their stamp on it, per se,” Burr said after being promoted from Triple-A Charlotte. “There’s so much talent, that’s the crazy part. ... I know everybody down there is just scrapping to try to get a chance.”

Inconsistency in almost always part of the process. The Sox saw that Sunday, when the Angels struck quickly against Hamilton and Frare after Reynaldo Lopez threw six shutout innings and exited with a scoreless tie. Then there was the 12-3 loss to the Angels on Saturday, when Fry and Vieira combined to allow six runs in the ninth.

Vieira couldn’t find catcher Kevan Smith’s mitt, throwing three wild pitches. He would have had a fourth, but one fastball to the screen caromed all the way back to Smith, who tagged the Angels’ Taylor Ward sliding into home plate.

Renteria cited a mechanical breakdown for Vieira but says he’ll keep using him as he tries to build toward 2019.

“We are trying to find windows to continue to allow him an opportunity to work,” Renteria said. “He’s had some good days and bad days. (He’s) still a work in progress.”

That's true for the entire bullpen, of course. But when you have young relievers with arms like these you have building blocks, not place-holders. That's a sign of progress.

White Sox lose in 10 after solid outing from Giolito

By Daryl Van Schouwen / Sun-Times / September 10, 2018

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — The White Sox' rebuild would like to thank Reynaldo Lopez and Lucas Giolito for their back-to-back starts Sunday and Monday, a much-needed ointment after a tough weekend for their future rotation.

After Michael Kopech went down Friday and Carlos Rodon had a second consecutive subpar outing on the same night, Lopez with six strong innings Sunday against the Angels and Giolito with seven good ones in the Sox' 4-3 loss in 10 innings to the Royals were welcome sights.

A not-so-pretty sight, though, was Sox reliever Jeanmar Gomez picking up Alcides Escobar's bunt with no outs in the 10th and attempting to throw out Brian Goodwin at third.

He flipped a weak toss over to third baseman Yolmer Sanchez, allowing Goodwin to score the winning run. Goodwin had doubled to lead off the inning.

Lucas Giolito throws during the first inning against the Kansas City Royals Monday, Sept. 10, 2018, in Kansas City, Mo. (AP Photo/Charlie Riedel)

"He just got a little flustered, a little excited and didn't make a very good throw," manager Rick Renteria said.

The Sox lost their sixth consecutive game, including four in a row since it was announced that Kopech, their top pitching prospect, needs Tommy John surgery.

Giolito gave up a homer to Whit Merrifield on his first pitch and served up another to Ryan O'Hearn, a game-tying shot in the sixth, but otherwise was good in bouncing back from a disaster in his previous outing against the Tigers in which he failed to finish the second inning.

Against the Royals, Giolito's sinker helped him get 12 groundouts. He struck out three, walked two and allowed three runs and six hits.

Daniel Palka belted a two-run homer and Adam Engel hit one over the center-field wall against Royals right-hander Jakob Junis.

The Sox (56-88) need to win seven of their last 18 to avoid the fourth 100-loss season in franchise history.

Palka power

Palka tied Jose Abreu for the team lead in homers with his 22nd, hooking one inside the right-field foul pole with Abreu on base in the third inning.

He also tied Pete Ward, who hit 22 in 1963, for the most homers by a left-handed-hitting Sox rookie.

Covey for Kopech

Right-hander Dylan Covey, 4-10 with a 5.98 ERA in 17 starts, is back in the rotation starting Tuesday, Renteria said.

The Sox needed a new starter to replace Kopech.

Covey has been pitching out of the bullpen, and Renteria said the Sox are “trying to discover” where he fits best. In six relief appearances, he’s 1-2 with a 2.25 ERA.

Any day now for Jones

Right-hander Nate Jones, out since June 12 with a pronator strain, likely will return on this trip and possibly in the next day or two. He threw a scoreless inning for Class A Winston-Salem on Wednesday and live batting practice Saturday to Abreu.

“He was nasty,” Abreu said.

Jose Abreu returns to White Sox lineup to face Royals

By Satchel Price / Sun-Times / September 10, 2018

The White Sox reinstated first baseman Jose Abreu from the 10-day disabled list and inserted him into the lineup for their game against the Royals on Monday night. No other accompanying move is needed because the club had room on its 40-man roster.

Abreu, the White Sox’ lone All-Star representative this year, missed the last three weeks after undergoing surgery to repair a testicular torsion issue. Over the weekend, he set Monday as his target date to return from the injury, and now he’s followed through on that with the team set to play Kansas City at 7:15 p.m.

The Sox lineup vs. Royals right-hander Jakob Junis: Yoan Moncada 2B, Yolmer Sanchez 3B, Abreu 1B, Daniel Palka RF, Omar Narvaez DH, Nicky Delmonico LF, Wellington Castillo C, Tim Anderson SS, Adam Engel CF, Lucas Giolito P.

It hasn’t been an ideal year for Abreu, even with his first All-Star appearance since 2014, as he’s on pace to miss reaching 25 homers and 100 RBI for the first time in his career. The missed time has cut into his counting stats, even though he’s still posting a solid batting line of .272/.331/.491 when he’s been in the lineup.

Those numbers stand out on the White Sox, but that’s not saying much for a team that’s struggled to consistently score runs. Reaching 100 RBI is unlikely with just 19 games remaining on the schedule, but he should have a good shot at topping 25 home runs for the fifth consecutive season to start his big league career..

How high? Lucas Giolito stabilized his arm slot and improved his velocity

By James Fegan / The Athletic / September 10, 2018

The past two starts from Lucas Giolito haven’t been perfect testimonies that everything is perfect and figured out for good.

After a disastrous night against Detroit last week where he was chased after four outs, he gritted through some rough command in the early innings Monday night to deliver seven innings of three-run ball in Kansas City. He gave up a couple of homers, his velocity wasn’t at its peak and the feel for his changeup seemed fleeting at time, but he threw some of his best overhand curves for strikes, got whiffs on his slider and got grounders off his heaters, so there’s always a sign of his talent to carry for five days.

But lacking the clear opportunity to do a “Giolito has perfected his delivery and will never need another tweak” story, we can do a story about what he’s doing differently right now, and why he feels better about it going forward. To start, here’s Giolito front-dooring a four-seam fastball to strike out Alex Gordon during his season debut on March 31 in Kansas City.

Coming out of spring training, Giolito was feeling good about how his better overall strength was allowing his torso to stay more upright in his delivery.

An upright torso naturally put his arm slot at his side, in a controlled and balanced three-quarters position, and gave him confidence he could throw all his pitches for strikes. Obviously with a 7.53 ERA and 37 walks in 55 innings over the first two months of the season, that did not happen. So now, things are different.

As you'll hopefully notice for comparison's sake, this is Giolito front-dooring a four-seam fastball to strike out Gordon again, but it's from Monday night. In both cases, his finish off to the first base side is pretty pronounced, which hints that he was still spinning off a bit with a lower slot, but he's higher up now. It's not dramatic, nor is it by intention, but the difference happened over time.

"The first point is I haven't consciously tried to raise my arm slot," Giolito said. "It doesn't really work like that for me. It don't think it really works like that for anybody. It's all about reps in practice and things like that. I think that my arm slot got back to where it's comfortable and where it's right for me based on cleaning up my throwing program, doing a better job of staying closed and throwing through the ball. It's kind of naturally over the course of the last few months, picked back up to where I get on top of the ball best and I can make the ball ride out of my hand best."

Scouts say Giolito's delivery looks more explosive and he has the uptick in velocity to show for it. He's still falling off to first base, but Giolito's strike-throwing has been so much better by comparison to the start of the season that it feels like nitpicking to raise future concerns about balance. Simply put, Giolito feels like he can access both sides of the plate again.

Moreover, he's just happy with the life on his pitches coming over the top, which has restored some of the ride he had last season. Giolito has adjusted to throwing his two-seam fastball low in the zone in equal measure with elevating his straight four-seamer and he's pleased with the action each pitch has out of his hand.

"What's been super beneficial with the arm slot thing is I'm better going to each side of the plate, more consistently able to get (arm) side of the plate with the fastball and (glove) side of the plate with the fastball," Giolito said. "My four-seamer is staying more true. My two-seamer has better late action because of that. Where when I was kind of messed up and down here, it was kind of like the two-seamer was like ehhhhhh, not really doing much and my four-seamer was not staying true, it was coming back over the plate, coming back over the plate, coming back over."

"Now that I can get on top of the ball, it's like I'm pulling it down and seeing it ride through the strike zone. The front hip two-seamer I throw to lefties is a lot better. I kind of found that pitch because of the adjustments I made: getting back to getting over everything."

This is not the end-all, be-all answer to every question about Giolito's command and delivery, but if you ever take another look at the stuff and life he had on his pitches against Boston, it makes plenty of sense why he's trying to ride that wave.
