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Cease impressing in ascent through farm system

By Max Gelman / MLB.com / July 31, 2018

CHICAGO -- Eloy Jimenez and Michael Kopech get all the attention, but a White Sox prospect who's succeeded mostly under the radar this season has been right-hander Dylan Cease.

Cease, whom the White Sox acquired with Jimenez for Jose Quintana last season, had yet to throw more than 93 1/3 innings in a professional season coming into the year. But the team's No. 5 prospect per MLB Pipeline has already surpassed that total before the end of July.

White Sox general manager Rick Hahn acknowledged Cease's consistency before Friday's game against Toronto, praising his ability to continue pitching well after a promotion to Double-A Birmingham.

"We really viewed him entering this year similar to how we viewed Kopech a year prior," Hahn said. "Kid with electric stuff, kid with a very high ceiling and someone who had yet to be able to physically take the ball every fifth day.

"So just as it was with Michael a year ago, we wanted Dylan to take the ball every fifth day, and we were pretty sure if he was going to do that, the performance was going to be good," Hahn added. "Similarly to Michael, Dylan has dominated early at a good placement level for his age and forced the issue and forced us to bring him to Double-A -- where he's continued to pitch as well, if not even better. That's great."

Cease has thrown 100 1/3 innings this season between Birmingham and Class A Advanced Winston-Salem. In five starts at Birmingham (28 2/3 innings), Cease owns a 2.83 ERA with 42 strikeouts and 11 walks. He threw seven scoreless innings of one-hit ball in his last start on Wednesday while fanning 12 batters.

Here is a rundown of other notable White Sox prospects:

Eloy Jimenez, OF, Triple-A Charlotte

Even though Jimenez has struggled at times to stay on the field, he continues to rake whenever he's in the lineup.

Now with 102 plate appearances under his belt with Charlotte, Jimenez looks like he's having no issue adjusting, hitting .383 with a 1.113 OPS and seven home runs. Jimenez also owns another impressive hit streak, hitting safely in his past nine games and in 15 of his past 16.

Additionally, Jimenez has four three-hit games over his last seven starts. Though he's missed time, Jimenez has slugged 17 home runs between Birmingham and Charlotte in 299 combined at-bats.

Steele Walker, OF, Rookie-level Great Falls

The White Sox second-round pick in 2018 is already finding success in his first professional go-around.

Walker slots in as the club's No. 12 prospect in his first appearance on MLB Pipeline's list, and he has hit in five of his first six games with the Great Falls Voyagers. He went deep in his first Pioneer League at-bat and owns a .250/.348/.450 slash line so far.

Walker spent a few days at the team's Arizona complex as well before being moved to Great Falls, going 5-for-11 in four games. In the summer of 2016, he led the Northwoods League in hitting with a .406 average, illustrating his comfort and experience with wooden bats.

Luis Robert, OF, Class A Advanced Winston-Salem

Robert has been sidelined with a left thumb injury since the end of June, but he could be nearing a rehab assignment. Hahn said Friday that Robert could participate in some rehab games at the club's Arizona facility and then return to Winston-Salem "in the not-too-distant future."

Monday's top prospect performers

By Mike Rosenbaum / MLB.com / July 30, 2018

Making his Twins organizational debut, Jhoan Duran was untouchable, firing seven hitless innings to help lead Class A Cedar Rapids over Quad Cities, 8-0.

Minnesota's No. 22 prospect struck out eight and issued one walk while throwing 59 of 92 pitches for strikes. He retired the first 12 batters he faced before permitting a leadoff walk in the fifth inning. He ultimately faced one over the minimum in the outing, which tied for the longest of his career.

Acquired from Arizona, along with Gabriel Masiel and Ernie De La Trinidad last Friday in exchange for Eduardo Escobar, Duran, 20, had pitched to a 4.73 ERA with 71 strikeouts in 64 2/3 innings (15 starts) with Class A Kane County before the trade. The 6-foot-5, 175-pound right-hander was originally signed by the D-backs for just \$65,000 back in December 2014.

Masiel, No. 17 on the Twins' Top 30, went 1-for-5 and scored two runs out of the leadoff spot of the Kernels, while Jose Miranda (No. 28) finished 3-for-5 with a homer, double and five RBIs. The 20-year-old infielder is hitting .279 on the season, with 12 homers, 22 doubles and 70 RBIs in 98 games.

- No. 3 overall prospect Eloy Jimenez (White Sox No. 1) homered for a second straight game and reached base in each of his four plate appearances in Triple-A Charlotte' 5-3 win over Norfolk. The 21-year-old slugger went 2-for-2 with two RBIs and also reached twice via walks as he recorded his seventh multi-hit performance during his current 10-game hitting streak. Jimenez is batting a robust .583 in that stretch and owns a .396/.443/.729 in 26 games at the Triple-A level. Altogether, he's produced a .342/.392/.611 line with 18 homers, 23 doubles and 59 RBIs in 79 games spanning two levels.

- No. 42 overall prospect Yordan Alvarez (Astros' No. 3) connected on his seventh home run in 19 games with Triple-A Fresno. The homer, a two-run shot in the third inning, was also his 16th of the year -- a total he's produced in 62 games between Fresno and Double-A Corpus Christi.

- No. 45 overall prospect Dylan Cease (White Sox No. 5) has not allowed a run in his last 17 innings after tossing six scoreless frames in a no-decision for Double-A Birmingham. He scattered five hits, walked a

pair and struck out seven. The 22-year-old has dominated in his past two turns, striking out 19 over 13 frames, and now owns a 2.34 ERA with 49 strikeouts over 34 2/3 innings (six starts) at the Double-A level.

- Astros No. 11 prospect Framber Valdez set a career high with 12 strikeouts as he tossed 7 2/3 scoreless frames to help lead Double-A Corpus Christi past San Antonio, 3-0. The 24-year-old southpaw allowed just two hits and threw 64 of his 98 pitches for strikes in the outing. Valdez has now racked up double-digit strikeouts in three of his last seven turns, giving him 116 strikeouts in 92 2/3 innings on the year.

- Marlins No. 20 prospect Thomas Jones did a little bit of everything in Class A Greensboro's 6-5 win over Rome, going 3-for-5 with a solo homer, a double and two stolen bases. Though he hasn't hit for much average in his first full season, the toolsy 20-year-old outfielder has totaled nine home runs and 16 steals in 75 games.

- Reds No. 5 prospect Tony Santillan matched his season high with 11 strikeouts as he recorded his fourth win in five starts since being promoted to Double-A Pensacola. Working 5 2/3 scoreless frames, the 21-year-old righty permitted four hits and two walks and threw 66 of his 97 pitches for strikes. He sports a 1.84 ERA with 32 strikeouts in 29 1/3 innings at the Double-A level. On the offensive side, Jose Siri (No. 17) stole three bases as part of a 3-for-5 performance that included a triple and three runs scored. The 23-year-old outfielder is slashing .248/.318/.547 with nine homers and eight steals through 37 games with Pensacola.

- Twins No. 27 prospect Kohl Stewart tossed seven scoreless frames in a no-decision for Triple-A Rochester. Facing four over the minimum in the outing, the 23-year-old right-hander mixed three hits with one walk and four strikeouts. He also recorded 10 ground-ball outs. Stewart has been sharp over his past four turns, posting a 1.50 ERA in 24 innings.

- Yankees No. 6 prospect Anthony Seigler connected on his first career home run, hitting a first-inning solo shot as part of a 1-for-4 showing for the Rookie-level Gulf Coast League Yankees West. Through 11 games, the 2018 first-rounder is batting .314/.415/.457.

- Yankees No. 13 prospect Chance Adams carried a no-hit bid into the seventh inning but ultimately took the loss as Triple-A Rochester walked off Scranton/Wilkes-Barre, 1-0, in eight innings. It was one of the better starts this season by the 23-year-old right-hander, who ultimately allowed two hits, walked four and fanned eight while completing a season-high 7 1/3 innings.

When They Were Prospects: Carlos Lee

By Chris Kamka / NBC Sports Chicago / July 30, 2018

With such a strong focus on current White Sox prospects, we thought it'd be fun to take a look back at statistics and scouting reports of other South Side stars on their journey to the MLB. Our Chris Kamka dug deep into the numbers.

"El Caballo" Carlos Lee ran wild on the South Side beginning with his Major League debut on May 7, 1999.

He homered in his first Major League at-bat.

Originally signed by the White Sox in February 1994, Lee started out as a third baseman.

"[Ron] Schueler likens Lee to Los Angeles' Bobby Bonilla. A notoriously poor defensive player who earns a spot in the lineup because of his stellar bat," Teddy Greenstein wrote in the Chicago Tribune as Lee built his resume as a prospect.

Offense, however, was never a problem.

He broke through in 1997 at Winston-Salem by hitting .317/.357/.516 with 17 HR & 82 RBI in 139 Games. He made his way up the prospect charts, ranking No. 43 according to Baseball America entering 1998, then rising to No. 28 entering 1999 after hitting .302/.350/.485 with 21 HR and 106 RBI in 138 games at Birmingham.

After raking for 25 games at Charlotte in 1999, it was time to make the jump.

A month and a half into his Major League career, Lee received high praise, as Frank Thomas was quoted in the Chicago Tribune (6/23/1999) saying:

“I see a young me in Carlos Lee. The way he goes through pitches and how he hits the ball to right field. I watch him hit and think: those are the things I used to do [at that age]. I think he’s the second coming.”

Lee acquitted himself well at the Major League level in his rookie year, hitting .293/.312/.463 with 16 HR and 84 RBI in 127 games. He was a model of consistency, hitting 24, 24, 26, 31 and 31 home runs in his five full seasons with the White Sox. Perhaps his most impressive number was 28, which was his franchise record hitting streak (which still stands) in 2004.

[MORE WHEN THEY WERE PROSPECTS: Ron Kittle, Magglio Ordonez, Harold Baines, Jose Abreu]

After that 2004 season, he was sent to the Brewers in a deal which netted the Sox a top-of-the-order catalyst for the eventual 2005 World Series champions, Scott Podsednik.

After making his way through Milwaukee, Texas, Houston & Miami (reunited with his former White Sox manager Ozzie Guillen), Lee hung it up following the 2012 season, with 358 career home runs (in the top 100 in MLB history) to go with 1,363 RBI.

White Sox exercising 'double patience' with top prospects

By Chuck Garfien / NBC Sports Chicago / July 30, 2018

When?

That’s the question being asked by just about every White Sox fan right now.

When will the dam break, and the White Sox finally call up Eloy Jimenez and Michael Kopech, their two best minor league prospects, from Triple-A?

Inquiring minds want to know.

“As I like to say there’s patience and then there’s patience. We’re exercising the double patience now,” White Sox executive vice-president Ken Williams said in an interview with NBC Sports Chicago.

Not too long ago when he was the White Sox general manager, the uber-aggressive Williams wouldn’t think about keeping such highly-touted prospects in the minors this long.

Ask Gordon Beckham and Chris Sale.

As number-one picks by the White Sox, they both raced through the minors at warp speed. Beckham played only 77 games before getting called up to the bigs in 2009. Most would agree that decision backfired. He needed more seasoning at the lower levels and never met the sky-high expectations that followed him. Sale? He pitched a grand total of 10.1 innings between Winston-Salem and Charlotte after being drafted in June of 2010. He was in the White Sox bullpen by August, dominated from the start and has become one of the best pitchers of his generation.

But as Williams put it, they were in “win-now” mode back then. In 2018, he has a different way of judging wins and losses in regards to the rebuild.

“I’ve communicated to all of our staff that we can only win by being more patient with all the kids development. The way we lose is if we’re impatient, we give in to what’s happening at the major league level right now and foresake that needed growth, that needed experience,” Williams said.

How much more experience do Jimenez and Kopech need?

“While Eloy Jimenez is hitting .370 in the minor leagues (up to .383 while writing this) and can compete at the major league level right now, there are some things we want him to experience defensively so that he’s more of a well-rounded player when he comes here. And the kids who are even below him or even with him like Michael Kopech,” Williams said.

Jimenez has played 378 games in the minor leagues, five times more than Beckham did before his call-up. This includes 25 in Triple-A where he’s slashing .383/.422/.691. In his last 10 games, he’s batting .500 with 4 HRs and 10 RBIs. There’s no question that his bat is ready for the majors. If it’s only his defense holding him back, you’d like to think he’ll be in Chicago sometime soon.

As for Kopech, he’s had some rocky moments this season, but he’s definitely trending in the right direction. In his last 4 starts, he’s given up only 4 earned runs with 24 strikeouts and 2 walks. But as they’re doing with many of their prospects, the White Sox are looking at more than just stats. They’re focusing on the nitty-gritty of today, hoping to avoid the major problems of tomorrow.

“Some of the things you see, let’s say in a Michael Kopech right now that where he’ll have a bad game here or there. We understand that he’s doing a few things that may not help him in that game on that day in Triple-A, but will help him battle the Cleveland Indians with all their left-handed hitters in another year, in another two years. So it’s not just the raw numbers we’re looking at, we’re looking at very specific things,” Williams said. “Usage of your change-up, where are you throwing your curveball vs. your slider and when you don’t have one or the other are you able to make that adjustment, and how are you able to make that adjustment and can you pitch backwards at a given time?”

If the White Sox were battling for a playoff spot, and had a winning core of players already in their clubhouse, Jimenez and Kopech might already be here to add to the mix. Same with a certain starting pitcher in Birmingham who has been raising eyebrows all season long.

“Dylan Cease, he could pitch in the big leagues right now, but what we want is people to be able to compete at a championship level when they get here, not have so much of a growth curve to get on,” Williams said.

And yet, that time is coming when the next batch of top White Sox prospects will be here. When exactly? That’s the big question. But even the currently patient Williams knows that they are inching closer to a certain tipping point.

“It’s tough because you’re competitive and you want to win every day. Even though in the structures of baseball and sports there are certain advantages to not winning, you reach a point where enough is enough and we really want to turn that around into a winning culture because I really believe you have to take those baby steps and to start winning games and to start winning close games for you to graduate to the next level and the level beyond that,” Williams said.

With so many young prospects eventually arriving in Chicago, the White Sox will need some veterans to help show them away. Does Williams see the White Sox adding some experienced players this winter to fill in some of the gaps?

“Yes, yes, but the conversation that Rick, Jerry and I have had is yes, in terms of those veterans, but we have to be very strategic about it and will those veterans fit into the next 2 or 3 year window and thereby

allow some of those youngsters we just talked about and some of them who have been derailed by injury even more time to get healthy and come up. You're on the money on that."

Speaking of money, the White Sox entered this season with a payroll of \$71 million, their lowest since 2004. They've been competitive in the free agent market in the recent past, giving big contracts to the likes of Adam Dunn, John Danks, David Robertson, Melky Cabrera and signing Jose Abreu out of Cuba. The free agent class this off-season is a big one. Will the White Sox be looking to take advantage of it?

"The answer to that question is yes, we have positioned ourselves, not only prospect wise but in a fiscally responsible way where we'll be able to compete in the open market, yes," Williams said.

At least that's the plan.

He continued, "Often times you start planning and plotting these things and you get to the winter and this guy re-signed with that club or all of a sudden that guy is going to go with that club and you have to be very careful not to sign guys just to sign them and block the opportunity of some of these kids to grow into part of the equation. And that's what we want to allow for with all the guys in the minor leagues, because the competition is cool to watch because they are fighting to win the games down there, but they are also fighting prospect to prospect. How's this guy doing, how's that guy doing? It's competitive as you want to get it."

You're seeing this from Kannapolis to Birmingham, rosters overflowing with talent. Some of these players came from the big rebuild trades, but Williams gives credit to the White Sox scouting staff that has stocked the system since Nick Hostetler took over as scouting director in 2015.

"The depth of some of these drafts and what that's starting to yield, especially some of the power arm pitching. It's not just top loaded. It is deep and I see that top 30 prospect list and I can come up with 10 more names," Williams said. "There are people down there that you can see this particular player being in the mix at some point. That's encouraging and that's hard work from our area scouts and scouting department and the trade front."

The pain of the White Sox rebuild can easily be found in the standings, as well as the Twitter feeds of the fan base which is aching for new blood from the minors. They see their favorite prospects knocking on the door, but instead of watching them play on the White Sox, they're stuck following box scores or watching graining video streams of minor league games on the computer. I know. I get it. This has been my life since April.

But if you take a step back and look at the world view of the White Sox rebuild, you'll see a front office that has quickly turned the franchise around, faster than they probably should have been able to. The 2012 Astros and the 2013 Cubs would be envious of what the White Sox have been able to accomplish so far.

You got an early taste of the future with the promotions last year of Yoan Moncada, Lucas Giolito and Reynaldo Lopez. We're approaching August and are still waiting for the next round of high-end prospects to arrive.

Williams is preaching patience, a word rarely used in his vocabulary.

How is he doing it? I'm actually not sure.

At some point, Jimenez and Kopech will be in Chicago and you'll forget this period of time when you waited for their arrivals.

In the meantime, keep following along with what's happening in Charlotte, Birmingham, Winston-Salem, etc. That talent will eventually make its way here.

"With where we started (the rebuild) and when we started it, I don't know that I could reasonably feel any better. You see the possibilities," Williams said. "It's going to be fun around the ballpark here in the next couple of years and for a long time."

Other thoughts from Williams on the White Sox youngsters:

On newly acquired left-handed pitcher Kodi Medeiros:

"I'm excited for this kid. That's just not the scouting from the last few months. We sent people to Hawaii and saw him in high school and followed him along the way with our professional scouts. The process has worked, we just need to continue to grind, not take anything for granted and cross our fingers health wise."

On first round pick Nick Madrigal:

"He had to grow on me a little bit because the first few times you're looking. He's undersized, is he strong enough, is he quick enough, is he enough? And everytime you walk out of the ballpark you go, 'That son of a gun did something today to help his team win.' It's not flashy, but he's coming to beat you every single day and you better be ready for him."

On Yoan Moncada:

"This guy's talent is off the board. It's been logged enough. Not everyone comes to the major leagues and just dominates from day one. It take some time generally. The good thing about it is, you see enough. You see that it's all there, offensively and defensively. There's been some defensive lapses, more attributable to concentration than talent. Exercise a double dose of patience. As long as he keeps coming out and working hard and grinding. The coaches communicate that to us then we'll stand by him. If he loses the coaches, then it's a different conversation that we have to have."

It's time: Michael Kopech and Eloy Jimenez need to take talents to White Sox

By Teddy Greenstein / Chicago Tribune/ July 30, 2018

If only the White Sox had a way to improve an outfield whose three Sunday starters have combined to hit 17 home runs.

Or boost a rotation with starters producing these ERAs: 6.26, 5.40, 4.57, 4.53 and 3.24.

If only the Sox had prospects crushing it in Triple A.

You know, an outfielder putting up Mike Trout-like numbers. Or a pitcher with a Noah Syndergaard-like arm who has walked just two batters in his last three starts while fanning 24.

If only ...

Oh, wait. They do.

Eloy Jimenez and Michael Kopech continue to punch the clock for Triple-A Charlotte. Perhaps this is helping the Knights stave off elimination in the International League South race, but I doubt it's doing much for the Sox, other than to confound a battered fan base that has watched its team stumble to 31 games below .500.

At the risk of venturing into the White Sox's business, I ask: Are Sox officials thinking this through? Or are they overthinking it?

General manager Rick Hahn, to his credit, has sat in the Sox dugout on several occasions this season and answered what has essentially become a one-word question: When?

In mid-June Hahn said it would be “based strictly upon their development and when they are ready for the next challenges presented by the big-league level.”

White Sox prospect Michael Kopech

Photos of the White Sox pitcher and the No. 10-ranked prospect by Baseball America.

OK, so the Sox are above trying to sell tickets, even with the Royals (32-73) in town starting Tuesday.

Last week, Hahn said: “The most important thing is that they’re in a position to have long-term success for us, that they’re in a position to succeed, not just survive.

“You can look at a box score and say, ‘This guy looks like he’s doing well, looks like he’s ready,’ (but) the checklist we want these guys to answer is a little more lengthy. And not until they’ve answered all those questions will we promote them.”

The truth is, no one has any earthly idea whether they will succeed after getting a call-up.

At 21, Albert Pujols essentially came up from Class A and never left. Trout got sent down after his rookie season.

It happens. And it raises the question: What, if anything, is Hahn not telling us? Are the Sox reluctant to start the clock on their service time? Are they tanking to try to get a better draft pick?

The only explanation that makes sense is that they’re waiting for Tuesday’s 3 p.m. non-waiver trade deadline. If you’re looking to move, say, starter James Shields and outfielder Avisail Garcia, then it makes no sense to fawn over Kopech and Jimenez and lose whatever leverage you have.

Hahn would not say what’s on the checklist.

“They know what’s on the list,” he said. “I’m not going to sit here and tell you things our players can’t do.”

Understandable. As was his decision Monday to decline to elaborate on his comments from last week.

Tougher to understand is why the Sox think their top two prospects can develop their skills better against minor-league players.

Sure, injuries have limited Jimenez to 78 games this season. And even though he rates his defense a “6 or 7” out of 10, it might be more accurate to give Burger King a Michelin star.

He also has 19 hits, including four homers, in his last 34 at-bats. He’s batting .383 in Charlotte with a .691 slugging percentage.

On that day in mid-June when Hahn talked about Jimenez and Kopech, he said: “Eventually they will tend to force that issue.”

Eventually has arrived. When will Kopech and Jimenez?

How White Sox pitchers Jace Fry, Lucas Giolito can learn from weekend outings

By Brian Sandalow / Chicago Sun Times / July 30, 2018

Every game gives a young member of the White Sox’ staff a chance to learn something. The lessons can be harsh and damaging to their statistics, but hopefully they’ll prove to be valuable as they move forward in their careers.

Over the weekend, reliever Jace Fry and starter Lucas Giolito took their educational turns.

Fry, who has been a surprising bright spot this season, entered the ninth inning of Sunday's game with the Sox leading 3-2. After the trade of Joakim Soria to the Brewers, Fry, who figures to get opportunities to close games, was called on to lock up a deserved win for Carlos Rodon.

But it didn't go well for the 25-year-old lefty. He allowed Teoscar Hernandez's game-tying home run, hit Kendrys Morales and allowed Aledmys Diaz's double before manager Rick Renteria removed him.

"I think that he's one of those kids that that's not going to affect him," Renteria said. "He's going to learn from [Sunday's] outing, knowing him. It was a good test for him, and it didn't work out. But he certainly has, I think, the stuff to be able to do it."

"You come in, you've got to command the zone," Renteria said. "You just can't come in and throw the ball. You pitch."

Fry, who was charged with three earned runs, saw his ERA jump from 3.66 to 4.50. His streak of five scoreless appearances was snapped, and the blown save was his first of the season. And to make matters worse, after the home run, Fry was unable to regain control in what turned into a five-run inning and 7-4 loss to the Blue Jays. Instead of keeping the game tied, he opened the door to a big inning by hitting Morales, something Renteria pointed to.

That experience won't be in vain if Fry takes advantage of more chances in the ninth, and does so after drawing something educational from the loss.

"Absolutely. I'm going to take advantage of it and keep moving forward," Fry said. "Like Ricky said, I'm going to learn from it and hopefully he keeps throwing me out there and keeps giving me opportunities because it's what we all want to do."

On Saturday, Giolito lasted only 4½ innings but threw 94 pitches. Unlike other outings that have been marred by wildness, Giolito handed out just one walk. The issue during his five-run, nine-hit outing was an inability to finish at-bats and retire Blue Jays hitters.

That's something he has to learn how to do.

"You have to figure out a way to end up being able to induce either the contact for the out or get a swing and miss," Renteria said. "I think that experience [Saturday], that's what you're facing, guys that grind out at-bats. You've got to figure out how to get them off of you, and I think [Saturday] was just a great experience for him to go through, to be honest, and let him continue to evolve."

Giolito also saw some educational value from his outing.

"I have confidence in all my pitches and throwing the ball over the plate," Giolito said. "It's just a few things here and there I need to clean up, especially pitch smarter. Getting a little too much of the plate, especially two strikes. Letting them work these kind of deep counts where I'm throwing eight- to-10-pitch at-bats. As a starting pitcher, I want to go six or more innings. I didn't do my job tonight, but a lot to learn from."

Will Chicago White Sox get right offers for Abreu, Avi Garcia?

By Scot Gregor/ Daily Herald / July 30, 2018

In advance of Tuesday's 3 p.m. nonwaiver trade deadline, Chicago White Sox general manager Rick Hahn has quietly addressed a need.

Lacking left-handed pitching prospects, the Sox added two.

Last Thursday, Hahn sent veteran reliever Joakim Soria to the Milwaukee Brewers for left-hander Kodi Medeiros and right-hander Wilber Perez.

The Brewers' first-round draft pick (No. 12 overall) in 2014, Medeiros was the key acquisition.

"He is someone we believe has a real chance to start in the long term," Hahn said.

Medeiros is expected to debut as a starting pitcher with Class AA Birmingham this week, but he could end up as a left-handed relief specialist down the road.

On Sunday, the White Sox added Caleb Frare from the Yankees' minor-league system. The Sox sent international signing bonus pool money to New York for a lefty reliever who was 4-1 with a 0.81 ERA and 5 saves in 32 appearances with Class AA Trenton and AAA Scranton/Wilkes-Barre.

Not bad, but Hahn is still looking to add higher premium young talent. If he gets the right offer for Jose Abreu and/or Avisail Garcia before the deadline, the Sox's farm system is going to be even more robust.

If Hahn does not get suitable offers, Abreu and Garcia will stay put. Both players are contractually under club control through the 2019 season.

"We're still engaged on a few different fronts," Hahn said Friday. "But there's really no urgency to consummate anything else over the next few days. If the right opportunity arises, we'll react."

There doesn't seem to be much of a trade market for Abreu or Garcia.

The Yankees have been mildly linked to both right-handed hitters, and there is a need with Aaron Judge out with a fractured wrist.

Abreu was mired in a slump that stretched almost two months before he rebounded with a seven-game hitting streak that included 3 home runs and 7 RBI.

Garcia has twice been on the disabled list with hamstring injuries this season, but the right fielder is hitting .333 with 8 homers and 17 RBI over his last 20 games.

"He's doing a lot of damage on pitches he can handle, which is great to see," Hahn said of Garcia. "He obviously got off to a slow start in April, but the brief stay on the DL over the course of the all-star break, both before and after that, he's putting up power numbers similar to what most in the game projected for him over the long term. It's good development."

Abreu and Garcia are established hitters who can help contending teams, but Hahn is not going to give them away.

If the duo remains with the White Sox, manager Rick Renteria will be happy.

"All these guys, I want them," Renteria said. "They're my guys and I want them to be here. If something happens along the way in which a move is made, at that point then we deal with that particular emotion and wish them the best."

Nick Madrigal stars in 'The Kid Who Doesn't Strike Out'

By James Fegan / The Athletic / July 31, 2018

KANNAPOLIS, N.C. — Coaching in the West Coast League, a summer league in the Pacific Northwest filled with incoming recruits at top-tier PAC-12 programs and upperclassman at local mid-majors, Mike Gange considered himself pretty astute about the top-tier talent in the area.

But when a rising freshman headed to Oregon State stepped into the box to lead off against his team, Gange saw his height and build, and shifted his left fielder in several steps in response.

Gange was willing to write off the first double Nick Madrigal ripped over his left fielder's head as a fluke, the product of what any hitter can do when they jump on a grooved fastball over the plate. When Madrigal did the exact same thing the next time up, only maybe a little further toward the left-center gap, it was a bit harder to dismiss.

A few years later, Gange, in his first year as the White Sox's northwest area scout, recommend the Sox take Madrigal fourth overall. Not a bad first impression from Madrigal.

"Bottom line is, I didn't have to hear the stories about this kid," Gange said. "I literally got to go into with it a clean slate, tried to put together an approach to get him out and obviously I failed. He went 4-for-5 in that game with a couple doubles."

How did Madrigal make that one out?

"It was probably a laser to short," Gange said. "It was probably a pretty loud out."

It definitely wasn't a strikeout.

Former Oregon State second baseman Nick Madrigal collects one of his three hits in a rout over Mississippi State in the College World Series. (Steven Branscombe/USA TODAY Sports)

Madrigal hit .367/.428/.511 with seven strikeouts in 42 games a college junior. A little over a month after winning the College World Series to cap his three years at Oregon State, Madrigal has played 16 games as a professional in the White Sox organization. He played five games in the Arizona League to get his feet wet, and now has 11 games in the South Atlantic League. In all, he's had 62 plate appearances, hit .321/.371/.377 and has yet to strike out.

Just for the sake of exercise, the lowest strikeout rate of any qualified hitter in the South Atlantic League going into Monday night belonged to 23-year-old Riley Delgado, who has struck out in just 8.8 percent of his plate appearances. Analyst Ethan Spalding designed a simulation in the programming language R that assumed a 600 plate-appearance season striking out at that rate. Simulating a million seasons, Spalding found that Delgado would manage to string together a streak of 62 plate appearances without a strikeout in just 15 percent of them. It's not perfect evidence, but long story short, there's significant reason to think the 21-year-old Madrigal has already shown he's the best contact hitter at his current level. And he can still drive doubles over the outfielders' heads.

"It's something you recognize the more you see him," said White Sox executive vice president Kenny Williams, who traveled to Kannapolis to see Madrigal earlier this month. "You hear about the bat-to-ball skills, but it's another thing to witness for yourself. It's not just about him making contact, it's hard contact. You hear that and think he's just pecking away, but he's trying to do some damage."

Those skills were refined in daily three-to-four hour practices with Madrigal's father Mike, and his twin brother Ty, who is now a lefty starting pitcher with St. Mary's College. Under the watchful eyes of his father, who played junior college ball and now coaches tournament teams of junior high kids, the Madrigal brothers would take grounders and batting practice, starting somewhere around ages seven or eight and they would never really stop.

It was there that Madrigal's father stressed "hitting the ball where it's pitched," spraying pitches away to right field, pulling his hands and taking inside pitches to left field, and anything else in-between. In doing that, Madrigal fashioned himself into a hitter that covered the whole zone and could barrel pitches in any part of it. Where things might differ from the normal prospect origin story a bit, is where he practiced on being able to barrel up everything outside the zone on the edges too. Any pitch that could ever go against him, he'd rather just punch it through the infield.

"You've got to watch the game a little bit to get a feel for [the umpire's] strike zone and sometimes if he's calling a ball off, you've got to have that in the back of your mind, so when you get down to two strikes, you've got to think, 'All right, I'm not going to leave it in his hands,' " Madrigal said. "That's been part of

my game throughout my life. I always think that's one of the most embarrassing things to do on a baseball field, is to strike out. That's something I always thought, walking back to the dugout is not a good feeling to me at all. So in practice, I try to work on hitting different pitches. I'm not trying to leave it up to the umpire."

There's a bit of a chicken-or-the-egg question with Madrigal's strikeout avoidance. For a small-statured, speedy player with top of the scale hand-eye coordination and elite bat-to-ball skills, a contact-oriented, all-fields approach seems like the best use of his skill set.

A bevy of questions to him about how he avoids throwing off his bat path by covering such a wide zone mostly produced answers how the solution is preparation and reading scouting reports — this is his solution to a lot of problems, it seems — and no indication that covering every inch of the plate, and a few inches more with hard contact was ever something he's actually struggled with.

But there's also an approach, an ethos that he's built his game around, that's led him to this strange level of perfection. Even though Oregon State and Kannapolis both have made a recent habit of putting him in the No. 3 hole, he fashions himself a leadoff man. His job is to get on base, his side responsibilities are seeing tons of pitches and extending at-bats, and strikeouts are antithetical to his goals.

He says his current whiff-less streak is as irrelevant to him as knowing his average launch angle. His game is shaped toward doing the job he's sketched out for his role more than it resembles a textbook entry for building an elite hitter. Or he was simply too good at hitting to ever need to change.

"I think if you gave a bat to a little leaguer and wanted him to hit, I'm not so sure that you add Nick Madrigal's variables to his swing to get this kid to succeed, this little leaguer," Gange said. "Nick is his best hitting coach and you hear that saying a lot from a lot of the best hitters, that you have to be your best hitting coach. Nick is truly that. I don't know if there's really any sort of adjustment made that's anyone that coached him. He's kind of one of those guys you don't touch in some capacity.

"Obviously I'm not saying he's uncoachable. He's probably one of the most coachable ones out there but in terms of how he sets up a little bit duck-footed, how he lifts the leg up really high and linear, that in his stride, the head drifts just a hair, all those things are not things that maybe you start with when you're trying to create your hitter. So I'm a believer that his approach is maybe one of the most advanced."

Assessing a hit tool is a bit more complicated than putting a timer on a player as he runs to first, or watching how far and easily his ball travels in batting practice. As Gange explained, it's about assessing whether the swing works now — which it clearly does — and how well it will translate to the higher levels. To that, the unusual, versatile nature of Madrigal's swing reads as a strength.

"His hit tool in my opinion really spoke volumes due to the fact of how consistent he was of being inconsistent with his patterns," Gange said. "There's not one pattern that he has in his hit tool. He's able to beat you line-to-line consistently."

Or as another scout summed up the lesson of Madrigal's atypical nature: hitter's aren't made, but born. Madrigal was simply born to hit. The Sox certainly did not draft a born hitter fourth overall to tinker with what he's doing. This early into his professional tenure, Madrigal and the Sox are still in the getting-to-know-you process with his routines and his methodology, but when the player is this advanced, it's even more pronounced.

"I'm just watching, ask him what time he wants to meet me in the cage and I'm there, and just talk to him about situations and what, and he just goes out there and plays," Kannapolis hitting coach Jamie Dismuke said. "He's come here and he didn't skip a beat. He's come here and boom, boom, just all fields. That's hard for young hitters to do at this stage of their careers. Usually they're pull-happy or rolling over, but man, his swing is really good."

There are not many periods in the last century of baseball where Madrigal's skill set wouldn't distinguish him, but he could never stand out in the game more than he does now. The major league strikeout rate is 22.2 percent, the highest ever and more than six percentage points higher than it was just 15 years ago. As much as its acceleration is partly due to teams more ready than ever to tolerate high whiff counts from hitters if there's production behind it, the next pivot in the game is always around the corner. When it comes, it could mean a day when intensely contact-oriented players like Madrigal become more valuable and coveted as a counter to rising pitching velocity and bullpen causing strikeouts to explode.

"I hope not, I hope everyone is content to do things the same way forever," Williams said. "That something Rick [Hahn] and I talk about it a lot, is having an offense that can beat you in a variety of ways."

Madrigal is thus in something looking like a decent spot for himself with the White Sox, even if Yoán Moncada and Tim Anderson are blocking the very end of his developmental path (Madrigal professed a willingness to play any infield position). That the Sox have an appreciation for an old school player who tries to hit everything on a line and producing the type of contact that produces high batting average is nice, but Madrigal's interest in their style is mostly rooted in their commitment not to change his.

"Baseball is a game where some teams have whole different philosophies than other teams and my style of play will fit right in with the Chicago White Sox," Madrigal said. "Wherever they need me, I'm ready for it. I'm not going to change my game at all no matter if baseball is going to more home runs and more strikeouts, I'm just going to focus on my game and try to perfect it as best I can."

And if he does perfect it, does that mean he really never will strike out?

"Yeah, he'll punch out, he'll punch out," Gange said with a laugh. "It might be the umpire's fault, it won't be his fault. It won't be him missing a pitch, it will be the umpire missing one."