



WHITE SOX HEADLINES OF JULY 10, 2018

"Inbox: What are White Sox plans for Deadline?"... Scott Merkin, MLB.com

"Column: Reunion of '93 White Sox brings memories of growing pains of the past" ... Paul Sullivan, Chicago Tribune

"Column: Fans aren't only ones making questionable All-Star selections"... Paul Sullivan, Chicago Tribune

"Series preview: Cardinals at White Sox" ... Paul Sullivan, Chicago Tribune

"Todd Frazier put on 10-day DL for 2nd time this season"... Mike Fitzpatrick, Sun-Times

"White Sox claim Twins outfielder Ryan LaMarre off waivers" ... Satchel Price, Sun-Times

"Daniel Palka packing some punch in White Sox' lineup" ... Daryl Van Schouwen, Sun-Times

"White Sox prospect Alex Call is interested in the right kind of numbers" ... James Fegan, The Athletic

"TA30: The MLB power rankings have the Cubs floating up — and a pileup in the basement" ... Levi Weaver, The Athletic

"Sox is singular: Have the White Sox hit rock bottom yet? Asking for some friends" ... Jim Margualus, The Athletic

"Rosenthal: The five biggest lies baseball people tell during trading season" ... Ken Rosenthal, The Athletic

Inbox: What are White Sox plans for Deadline?

Beat reporter Scott Merkin answers questions from fans

By Scott Merkin / MLB.com / July 9, 2018

I hear rumblings that Avisail Garcia may be on the trading block. I feel this would be a huge mistake. Avi may finally be paying dividends for years to come.

-- Sol, New York

Garcia becomes one of those interesting decisions for Rick Hahn and Ken Williams in that he's 27 and is loaded with talent, but the team only has one more year of contractual control over him after 2018. I agree with you, Sol, and would work out a contract extension with Garcia.

Garcia had a breakout All-Star campaign in 2017, and since returning from the DL, he has a 1.130 OPS, eight home runs and 13 extra-base hits in 17 games. It has clicked for him, not just physically but also mentally, and he can be a strong contributor on a winning team.

- Submit a question to the White Sox Inbox

What do you envision the White Sox starting lineup being in a few years, based solely on the current roster and players in the Sox system?

-- Scott, Ypsilanti, Mich.

This question would make for a good story, let alone an Inbox answer. But let's say 2021, just sticking with the position players, and go with Jose Abreu, Nick Madrigal, Tim Anderson and Yoan Moncada from first to third, Zack Collins at catcher, and Eloy Jimenez, Luis Robert and Garcia left to right, with Micker

Adolfo at DH. I could be very wrong, but in this context, that's a good thing. Numerous other candidates figure to arise with the White Sox developing such impressive depth during this rebuild.

Do you think the White Sox would make a package deal and send veteran players for a bundle of Minor League prospects? You mention Abreu and Avi could both bring in at least five prospects for the White Sox.

-- Rob

The White Sox certainly have been known to get creative in past dealings -- see the moves acquiring Todd Frazier from the Reds and then sending him to the Yankees as examples. But I really believe trades won't be as significant or quite as prevalent in 2018 as they were in '17 for the White Sox.

Sox aren't gonna trade Abreu, are they?

-- Julie, Flossmoor, Ill., @juliedawngordon

Chris Sale, one of the game's best pitchers under one of the game's best contracts, was traded by the White Sox. So there are no veteran untouchables during this rebuild, including Abreu. I'm still holding to my belief that the high value in which the White Sox hold Abreu won't be met by other teams potentially pursuing him.

Daniel Palka did great filling in for Avi when he was on the DL. Do you see him as an everyday player and somehow making room for him in the outfield?

-- Eddie F., Lake Hughes, Calif.

One thing is certain about Palka -- when he truly connects, the only question seems to be how far over 400 feet the ball is going to travel. As manager Rick Renteria mentioned, Palka was known as a power hitter when he joined the organization. To Palka's credit, he has worked tirelessly to develop his outfield play. He looks more comfortable in left field.

In a best-case scenario where Anderson, Moncada and Madrigal all result in above-average productive players, where does the odd man out play? Is Madrigal in the outfield an actual possibility? Moncada at 3rd?

-- Rick, @SportsByRick

Having roster versatility is not only a good thing for eventual contending teams but a necessity. As an example, Kris Bryant played at least one game at seven positions when the Cubs won in 2016. If Anderson, Moncada and Madrigal develop as the White Sox hope, there will be plenty of playing time for all three around the diamond. Anderson unequivocally wants to stay at shortstop but already has mentioned to me he could handle an outfield shift.

Column: Reunion of '93 White Sox brings memories of growing pains of the past

By Paul Sullivan / Chicago Tribune / July 9, 2018

The White Sox plan to celebrate the 25th anniversary of their 1993 American League West championship Saturday, with Frank Thomas, Tim Lincecum, Ozzie Guillen, Jack McDowell, Bo Jackson and manager Gene Lamont among those expected to attend.

It's a chance for Sox fans to reminisce about a team that had the talent to win it all but fell apart in the playoffs, spoiling one of the more memorable seasons in team history.

While the current Sox go through the growing pains of a rebuild, it's interesting to note the '93 team was the product of superb drafting by player personnel chief Al Goldis under general manager Larry Himes' watch.

Neither was around by the time the Sox finally made it to the postseason.

It started with the selection of McDowell out of Stanford with the fifth pick of the 1987 draft. Like Lucas Giolito, McDowell performed well when called up in September after only six minor-league appearances (five starts) but struggled through his first full season in '88, going 5-10 with a 3.97 ERA.

Oklahoma State third baseman Robin Ventura was the next big chip, selected with the 10th pick in '88.

Time marches on, but things don't change much. Just as young Sox fans eagerly await the arrival of Eloy Jimenez, their parents were clamoring for Ventura to be called up during his first full season of pro ball in the summer of '89.

"Hopefully, Ventura is the answer," Himes told the Tribune's Bill Jauss that July. "But when it comes to calling up a young player, I will not yield to the pressure of bringing the guy up too early."

By that time, the Sox had drafted Thomas, a first baseman from Auburn, with the No. 7 pick in '89. Thomas didn't come with a whole lot of hype, but when he was invited to old Comiskey Park that summer to meet some coaches in the organization, he cranked two prodigious shots into the upper deck during batting practice.

Like the 2018 Sox, the '89 edition was awful, which was good news for Thomas.

"I know they're having a rough year," he said that day. "You don't like to see that, but it's encouraging for me."

The next year the Sox selected pitcher Alex Fernandez — from Miami Dade Community College, where he had transferred from Miami to be eligible for that year's draft — with the No. 4 pick, then put him on a fast path to the majors. In the summer of '90, with the Sox surprisingly in contention with the A's for the AL West title, Thomas and Fernandez debuted the same day — Aug. 2 in Milwaukee — after being called up from Double-A Birmingham.

"We've been slow to pull the trigger on some of the young guys," Himes said.

You probably won't hear current Sox GM Rick Hahn echoing that comment, as he has shown incredible patience with the top prospects in spite of the major-league team's desperate need for a shot in the arm.

Fernandez started the first game of that Aug. 2 doubleheader at County Stadium with Ventura at third and Thomas at first. The average age of the Sox lineup was 23.7, and they pulled off their first doubleheader sweep in seven years.

No one called it a rebuild back then, but the foundation was suddenly in place.

The Sox won 94 games in '90, one of the most fun seasons I can recall. It was a perfect way to close out old Comiskey, which was making way for a new park across the street.

But the Sox couldn't catch the A's, and Chairman Jerry Reinsdorf fired Himes near the end of the season, explaining that Himes took them from "Point A to Point B," but they needed someone to take them to "Point C."

"If you're golfing and you're 15 feet from the hole, it's easier to get from 15 feet to 5 feet but it's tougher to sink the putt from 5 feet," Reinsdorf told the Tribune.

Goldis resigned instead of accepting a lesser role, and new GM Ron Schueler was brought in to run the show.

After an 87-win season in their first year at new Comiskey Park in '91, Schueler fired manager Jeff Torborg and brought in Lamont.

By the All-Star break in '93, the new ballpark smell was gone. Complaints about the steepness of the upper deck were widespread, and attendance was down by 94,760, causing McDowell to complain about the lack of "buzz" on the South Side.

"It's been kind of dead this year," he said.

But the Sox took off in the second half, going 49-27 after the break to win the West by eight games. Everyone believed this was the year.

Then it all came crashing down. The Sox lost the opening game of the AL Championship Series at home to the Blue Jays, and word quickly spread around the park that Bulls star Michael Jordan was retiring.

"That's the last thing I care about now," Steve Sax barked when asked about Jordan in the postgame clubhouse.

The Sox lost the next game at Comiskey as well, and the city's focus completely turned to Jordan. They wound up losing the series 4-2, but the same cast would be back, so no one was too worried.

Indeed, the Sox looked dominant again in '94 until the season ended in August with a players strike. Lamont was fired early in '95 and replaced with coach Terry Bevington, whose lack of leadership skills eventually sent the Sox into a free fall. In '97 Schueler executed the so-called "White Flag" trade, starting yet another rebuild.

So what was the lesson learned from the '93 Sox? Maybe that it takes more than mere talent to win a championship.

While the Sox farm system under Hahn is once again stocked, nothing is guaranteed in baseball.

Column: Fans aren't only ones making questionable All-Star selections

By Paul Sullivan / Chicago Tribune / July 9, 2018

We always hear about fans making bad decisions and leaving deserving players out of the All-Star Game, but now some players are chiming in about their own choices.

Rays starter Blake Snell was left off the American League squad despite leading the league in ERA (2.09) and being tied for second in wins (12).

He still might get in as players drop out for various reasons, but the snub bothered teammate Chris Archer, who asked on Twitter how it happened.

"I know how," he wrote. "Because we, as players (the ones who vote for the pitchers), didn't do our due diligence. We have to collectively take the time & effort to responsibility (sic) fill out our ballots. It's totally on us & I'm calling out everyone who didn't take the energy to determine who is most deserving to represent our game in the mid summer classic. This stuff matters. BLAKE SNELL IS AN ALL STAR, not an alternate, replacement or backup."

Astros ace Justin Verlander, who was voted in, replied to Archer's tweet by adding: "Also, because we vote waaay too early. Could easily punch in our votes on an iPad a couple days before instead of the old school envelopes weeks before."

Both are right.

Snell should've been an All-Star, and players should've been paying more attention to his season when they cast their votes. And the idea of players voting a few weeks ahead of the announcement is lame in this technological era.

It's easily fixable next year, but that could be too late for Snell.

Credit check

Yankees assistant to the general manager Jim Hendry was the Cubs general manager when they drafted Javier Baez and signed Willson Contreras, so he can take a bow for their inclusion in the All-Star Game.

Cubs President Theo Epstein has always given Hendry credit for those two players, even though they developed under Epstein's reign. And Hendry has credited former scouting director Tim Wilken for drafting Baez and former farm director Oneri Fleita for signing Contreras.

It goes to show no one person is directly responsible for a player's success.

Scouts, coaches and executives can all be proud Baez and Contreras not only have become great players, but also exude the kind of passion that's good for baseball.

Aguilar snubbed

Jesus Aguilar began the season as a backup first baseman but now is the center of the Brewers offense, hitting .306 with 22 home runs and 63 RBIs. His 1.001 OPS is the best in the National League.

It's no surprise fans didn't vote him in because few knew his name until recently. But again, the players could've done their homework but didn't. At least Aguilar is on the NL's Final Five ballot, so Brewers fans can log in and do the right thing.

"He's having an MVP season," Brewers manager Craig Counsell said.

The Brewers have three All-Stars in Lorenzo Cain, Christian Yelich and Josh Hader, but Aguilar deserves a spot as well. They are, after all, the best team in the league.

Anyway, his teammates have his back. Brewers players have been wearing T-shirts that read, "We Believe in Jesus."

No regrets

Former Cubs prospect Gleyber Torres, traded to the Yankees in the Aroldis Chapman deal in 2016, made the AL squad one year after season-ending Tommy John surgery on his left elbow.

The 21-year-old rookie second baseman is the fourth Yankee to be named to the AL team at 21 or younger, joining Joe DiMaggio (21 in 1936), Mickey Mantle (20 and 21 in 1952 and '53) and Willie Randolph (21 in 1976).

According to the New York Daily News, manager Aaron Boone called Torres into his office and broke the news by asking how his leg felt.

"You're probably going to have to get that right so when you go to D.C. next week you can tip your cap properly," Boone told Torres.

Usually trading a player like Torres would haunt a team for years. But the Cubs got their World Series ring with Chapman closing games, so there's little regret in Chicago.

Media matters

White Sox first baseman Jose Abreu was thanking fans, the organization and his family Sunday after being selected for his first start on the AL All-Star squad.

He surprisingly thanked the media as well.

"You guys have been a big factor too, just to be able to help me to show to the fans what I'm capable of doing," Abreu said.

Kudos to Abreu for recognizing media attention is crucial for players, which is why more of them need to make themselves available more often.

With bigger clubhouses and dwindling access time for reporters to talk to players, some of the bigger stars are rarely available. They know where to hide and exactly what time to stay out of the clubhouse to avoid talking to the media.

The end of batting practice once was a perfect time to get a player's thoughts, but now some of them can't wait to get back to the clubhouse. And the music is so loud on the field, you can't hear them anyway.

It's a disturbing trend and one every baseball media relations director should take note of. Fans want to hear from the players, but all too often it's only the manager's voice that gets heard.

Series preview: Cardinals at White Sox

By Paul Sullivan / Chicago Tribune / July 9, 2018

All games on WGN-AM 720

Tuesday: 7:10 p.m., WGN-9.

RH Miles Mikolas (9-3, 2.63) vs. RH Dylan Covey (3-4, 5.54).

Wednesday: 7:10 p.m., NBCSCH.

RH Luke Weaver (5-7, 4.92) vs LH Carlos Rodon (1-3, 4.29).

Todd Frazier put on 10-day DL for 2nd time this season

By Mike Fitzpatrick / Sun-Times / July 9, 2018

NEW YORK — Todd Frazier's frustrating first season with the New York Mets just hit another snag.

The affable third baseman was placed on the 10-day disabled list Monday with a strained muscle in his left rib cage. It's the second DL stint for Frazier since joining the struggling Mets. The 32-year-old slugger had never been on the disabled list before 2018.

Frazier said he felt some discomfort his first time up Sunday against Tampa Bay and it got progressively worse as the game went on. He had an MRI and received a cortisone shot, but it's unclear how long he'll be out.

"It's not fun at all. It's something I never thought would happen," Frazier said. "Maybe a DL stint, but, you know, the older I get I still feel like I'm in control of my body and then something like this happens. So it's unfortunate, it stinks, but there's nothing else I can do about it. Just keep on trying to get better and hopefully this isn't a long ordeal."

New York manager Mickey Callaway called Frazier's injury a mild strain.

A two-time All-Star, Frazier signed a \$17 million, two-year contract with the Mets as a free agent in February. He is batting .217 with 10 homers, 32 RBIs and a .685 OPS in 61 games. He was sidelined from May 8 to June 1 with a strained left hamstring.

"Just another little bump in the road," Frazier said.

Jose Reyes played third base in the first game of Monday's doubleheader against Philadelphia, with Ty Kelly set to start at the hot corner in the nightcap.

Beyond that, Callaway said the Mets were still figuring out how they plan to fill Frazier's spot. Wilmer Flores is another option.

Slogging their way through an extremely disappointing season, the Mets also are missing injured outfielders Yoenis Cespedes and Jay Bruce from their projected starting lineup, as well as catcher Travis d'Arnaud.

"I know everybody works out hard, myself included, and these things happen — but they're happening at a rapid pace," Frazier said. "So maybe I need to change up what I'm doing in the offseason, or maybe I have to work out a little earlier or a little later, just depends. It's something I'll have to talk to these guys about."

Right-hander Noah Syndergaard, sidelined since late May with a strained ligament in his index finger, could rejoin the rotation this weekend.

Left-hander Jason Vargas was scheduled to throw up to 80 pitches Monday night in a rehab outing for Class A Brooklyn and also could return to the big league rotation this weekend against Washington.

Right-hander Drew Gagnon will be called up from Triple-A Las Vegas to start Tuesday night against the Phillies, his major league debut. The 28-year-old Gagnon, who was in the Mets' clubhouse Monday, is 1-4 with a 4.67 ERA in 17 starts at Las Vegas.

New York made a flurry of roster moves Monday. In addition to recalling Kelly and left-hander P.J. Conlon from Las Vegas, the team brought up right-handed reliever Jacob Rhame as the 26th man for the doubleheader. Right-hander Chris Flexen was optioned to Triple-A.

Flexen started Sunday's 9-0 loss to the Rays and was tagged for five runs and five hits in three innings.

White Sox claim Twins outfielder Ryan LaMarre off waivers

By Satchel Price / Sun-Times / July 9, 2018

The White Sox added some outfield depth by claiming the Twins' Ryan LaMarre off waivers Monday.

LaMarre, 29, was designated for assignment by Minnesota on July 2 after splitting this season between the big leagues and Class AAA Rochester. He's also played for the Reds, Red Sox and Athletics over the last four years, although he's appeared in just 72 MLB games total during his career.

The White Sox now have six outfielders on their active roster. LaMarre is joined by Adam Engel, Avisail Garcia, Leury Garcia, Daniel Palka and Charlie Tilson. Nicky Delmonico has been on the disabled list since mid-May.

LaMarre batted .263 with a .321 on-base percentage and zero home runs in 109 plate appearances with the Twins this season. He also performed well, hitting .313, in a limited stint with Class AAA Rochester.

Those numbers are outliers of sorts, however. LaMarre's career MLB batting line is an ugly .206/.264/.243, and in over 1,000 plate appearances at the Class AAA level, he's batted .270 with a .338 on-base percentage.

The Reds selected LaMarre in the second round of the 2010 MLB Draft. He played his college ball at Michigan, the same school where White Sox director of player development Chris Getz suited up.

Daniel Palka packing some punch in White Sox' lineup

By Daryl Van Schouwen / Sun-Times

When White Sox slugger Daniel Palka hits the ball, he hits it hard. It's as though there is no other way for the leg-lifting, left-handed-hitting exit-velocity king.

In the old days, there were home-run kings. In an age of newfangled ways to measure outcomes on the field, much is made of velocity — from off the pitcher's hand to off the hitter's bat. When Palka barrels up a pitch, he can make baseballs travel at dangerously high speeds from foul pole to foul pole.

"He can hit a bullet to all parts of the ballpark," Sox hitting coach Todd Steverson said.

Palka launched a 432-foot homer Wednesday in Cincinnati, a day after lifting rockets of 448 and 428 feet there. He smacked a more modest 357-foot homer to the opposite field Saturday in Houston. He has 11 homers overall, a number that ranks third among American League rookies behind Yankees teammates Gleyber Torres and Miguel Andujar.

Palka, 26, has homered four times in his last five games and ranks among MLB Statcast leaders in average fly ball/line drive exit velocity (third, 99.6 mph) and hard-hit percentage (sixth, 53.6). His 118.4 mph exit velocity on one particular ball strike is the fourth-highest in the majors this season.

Claimed on waivers in October from the Twins after hitting 106 homers in five minor-league seasons, Palka made his major-league debut with the Sox on April 25 and made his mark by leaving marks on baseballs.

"Hitting has always been my forte, from tee ball on up," said Palka, a muscular 6-2, 220-pounder.

Exit velocity is a trendy stat in the information age, and that's good for a hitter such as Palka, who is trying to carve a niche for himself in the majors.

"It means you're seeing the ball good," said Palka, who is hitting .226 with a .277 on-base percentage and a .462 slugging percentage. "It doesn't tell you anything about what you're doing mechanically, but if you're hitting balls hard, there is not much to change. If that starts to dip, it means something is off with your mechanics or you're chasing pitches you shouldn't chase."

Called up from Class AAA Charlotte because of injuries to outfielders Avisail Garcia and Nicky Delmonico, Palka is making the most of his opportunity of getting semi-regular playing time with a rebuilding team. He isn't on the list of the Sox' top prospects, but that doesn't matter to him.

"I'm getting an opportunity to play somewhere," Palka said. "It might be one year, it could turn into 20 years. Same game plan. It comes down to putting in good at-bats and working on the defense. I just need more consistency, at the plate and on defense, to get me to that next step."

Palka has struggled defensively but seems to have cleaned that up a bit with the help of coach Daryl Boston. He was thrust into playing right field early on but has played left since Garcia returned from the disabled list. He said he sees the ball off the bat better in left, but he might be getting more time in right again after Garcia left a game with a tight hamstring Sunday.

More playing time also has built a scouting book on Palka, which will heighten the importance of plate discipline for him, Steverson said. His 33.8 percent strikeout rate and 6.6 percent walk rate demand improvement.

"He still needs to learn how to approach the at-bat, knowing [pitchers] know his strength and they're trying to pitch away from the strength," Steverson said.

"He can hit the ball out of all parts of the ballpark. Knowing when to use the other side of the field is going to be key. . . . That's the maturation process. He's going through it right now."

NOTE: A day after outfielder Avisail Garcia came out of a game with a tight right hamstring, the Sox claimed outfielder Ryan LaMarre off waivers from the Twins. LaMarre, 29, batted .263 with no homers and eight RBI in 43 games before being designated for assignment July 2.

An update on Garcia's status will come Tuesday. The Sox' 40-man roster is at 39.

On deck

CARDINALS AT SOX

Tuesday: Miles Mikolas (9-3, 2.63 ERA) vs. Dylan Covey (3-4, 5.54), 7:10 p.m., Ch. 9, 720-AM.

Wednesday: Luke Weaver (5-7, 4.92) vs. Carlos Rodon (1-3, 4.29), 7:10 p.m., NBCSCH, 720-AM.

White Sox prospect Alex Call is interested in the right kind of numbers

By James Fegan / The Athletic / July 9, 2018

If and when White Sox prospect Alex Call makes it to the major leagues, he might wind up as the type of guy who is firing up Baseball Savant on his phone after the game, checking exit velocity and launch angle to confirm how well he did at the plate that night.

"I definitely would be peeking because it's useful information to know," said Call, who was promoted to man the Double-A Birmingham outfield at midseason. "Especially when you hit a ball and you get out, you're like, if I can know what number I hit that ball at, because I hit it so good, at least it makes me feel like 'Man, I hit that ball 100-and-whatever, I hit that ball really well,' and you kind of hang your hat on that."

Unfortunately, Baseball Savant does not provide exit velocity, launch angle nor those sweet, sweet hit probability figures for the Southern League, at least not publicly for players to peruse at their will. Teams track it, of course, and the White Sox are no exception, but they tend to be pretty measured and reserved in how and when they expose players to it. It's a question of when it's useful to the work the player is doing, and not simply of who is most curious about it.

"Some guys don't know how to handle it," Call admits. "They don't always know how to put the information together. But I pay attention to baseball, I watch a ton of baseball, and I'm definitely in on the new generation."

Call — a first-team Academic All-American at Ball State in 2016 who keeps notes on all his plate appearances and opposing pitchers, and is repeatedly described as "articulate," by his hitting coaches — certainly doesn't come off as someone who would be overwhelmed by more data. But he also admits he doesn't need much help knowing when he's hit a ball flush.

One of the times the 23-year-old, former third-round pick says he was able to cajole some of his data from White Sox minor league hitting coordinator Mike Gellinger, he said he found the information a little misleading, or at least that it painted an incomplete picture. He was encouraged by his average exit velocity, but the ideal average launch angle he posted overstated his consistency in hitting his targets zone, and instead was the break-even point between frequent pop-ups and ground balls.

Neither figure was much help in addressing his primary vice of chasing high fastballs earlier this season. That was something he had to address and identify in the video room as he self-scouted his approach at the plate, but naturally Call is really into consuming that information too. After all, it was pretty much all he could do for much of last season.

"It was pretty scary last year the injury he had," said Charles Poe, Call's hitting coach when he was at Winston-Salem. "We didn't know if he was going to be able to bounce back. He's putting in outstanding work. He's one of the hardest workers in the organization. He knows his swing, he knows what he has to do and he's articulate about getting better."

The injury Poe refers to is an intercostal strain that for all intents and purposes torched any notion of progress for Call's development in 2017. He went two and a half months before returning to game action after suffering the injury in mid-April, and when he returned to the field, he was, as he put it, "terrible." Playing as a then-22 year old, former Mid-American Conference Player of the Year against very raw minor leaguers in complex league ball, Call recorded just three hits in 51 at-bats of a prolonged rehab stint in Glendale.

When he was sent to Low-A Kannapolis to get more playing time, rather than proving overqualified at a level where he thrived in 2016, Call hit .248/.333/.386 in 38 games before emerging as a dominant force in the South Atlantic League playoffs. But he never made it back to High-A Winston-Salem, where he had begun the season. He was a regular presence in instructional league and winter hitters' minicamp over this winter as he worked to make up for lost time, but there's only so much that can be done when you miss a season.

"That's a whole world of struggle that you never want to have to go through," Call said. "There were a lot of diagnoses, but once I kind of gave it enough time, I could feel like I was back. Then it was kind of getting back to playing ball and finding a way to barrel some pitches, which I didn't do at a high frequency when I came back. But then after making a little bit of an adjustment, everything came back strong."

Between Luis Basabe leading a loaded Dash outfield in OPS in the first half and making the Futures Game, and Joel Booker winning Carolina League All-Star Game MVP, Call's promotion to the Birmingham outfield was overshadowed a bit. Call hit .256/.368/.421 in the first half for Winston-Salem as the Dash won their division, and with a pair of homers over his 15 games in Birmingham, has set a career-high (seven) already. For someone who was touted for his hit tool coming out of the draft, Call says he's "not anywhere close to where I want to be," but was encouraged by what a 13.9 percent walk rate for the season means for his swing.

"It comes from trusting your swing and locking in on that perfect pitch down the middle, and when it's not there, you don't swing," Call said. "When you're out there and you don't have confidence in your swing, that's when you start going out of the zone because you're thinking maybe just a little bit about some kind of positioning, instead of 100 percent focused on the ball."

Call can and has played a little center field, but won't crack in there super regularly when his teammates are Booker and Basabe. He's not a slap hitter or anything, but doesn't have the raw power of an Eloy Jiménez or a Micker Adolfo that makes him an ideal middle-of-the-order option. He's walking a ton this year, but isn't a hyper-patient Zack Collins type. His selling point is a lack of glaring weaknesses across the board, and the smart and work ethic to make the whole package play up.

He's facing the same glut of competitors for outfield slots that everyone in the White Sox system not named Jiménez or Luis Robert has to worry about. And he's truthfully still finding his footing at Double-A (.222/.314/.400 so far) and still smarting from the hundreds of plate appearances he lost last year, but he certainly knows the formula for success, even without the specific numbers to plug into the equation.

"You put those two numbers together, exit velocity and launch angle, they do equate to slugging percentage and that's how you score runs," Call said. "I don't look at it because I don't have access to it, but you know when you hit a ball, when you square a ball up, when you absolutely crush it. Getting that percentage of at-bats that lead to hard hit balls, that's a lot of mumbo-jumbo, but that's what you want."

TA30: The MLB power rankings have the Cubs floating up — and a pileup in the basement

By Levi Weaver / The Athletic / July 9, 2018

Every week, we ask all of our baseball writers — both the local scribes and the national team, more than 30 writers in all — to rank the teams from first to worst. Here are the collective results.

We have All-Star Game rosters! Also, we've blown past the halfway point of the 2018 season, even for all those teams that got snowed out in April. That seems like a quaint memory now, doesn't it? Especially on

a week when temperatures hit 115° in Anaheim. In retrospect, the world made a terrible decision in choosing to follow Brickma's advice. Anyway, let's hop back into the rankings!

1. Boston Red Sox, 62-29 (last week: 1)

They haven't lost since last week's power rankings. That's a pretty good way to stay in the No. 1 spot. Almost every team could make the claim that they deserved more All-Stars, but the Red Sox especially might have a point. Also, here's an update on Rusney Castillo.

2. Houston Astros, 61-31 (last week: 2)

Also haven't lost since last week's rankings. The MLB Average ERA for starters is 4.34; the Houston Astros' starters, led by Justin Verlander, have a combined ERA of 3.01. Collin McHugh is a super-reliever now, and by the way, here comes Kyle Tucker. The only real problem they're facing is that Brian McCann had knee surgery, but even that isn't expected to make a big dent in their plans.

3. New York Yankees, 58-29 (last week: 3)

If you squint just right, you can see a crack in the pinstriped wall: Sonny Gray hasn't been living up to expectations (not his own, and not those of the team). And the two starting pitchers the Yankees have most been rumored to be interested in—Cole Hamels and J.A. Happ—have both struggled mightily of late.

Anyway, don't think too much about that. Here's a story about the time a Yankees outfielder challenged an ostrich to a spaghetti-eating contest.

4. Milwaukee Brewers, 54-36 (last week: 7)

The Brewers went from No. 4 two weeks ago to No. 7 last week, and are back at No. 4 this week. What hasn't changed: their position in the rankings that matter. The Brewers haven't been out of first place since June 11th, and even then only for a day. Before that, it was May 12th. The Cubs are 8-2 in their last ten, but the Brewers are still a game and a half up in the NL Central. Speaking of which...

5. Chicago Cubs, 51-36 (last week: 6)

The Cubs did their own faint-revive in the rankings, going 5-6-5 in the last three weeks. Things are mostly looking up on the North side, in spite of a few setbacks. Kris Bryant should be back soon, and the NL Central race is going to be one to watch for the rest of the season.

6. Atlanta Braves, 48-34 (last week: 4)

Nick Markakis is in the All-Star Game and John Smoltz is in the Senior U.S. Open. Which of these seemed most likely, say, six months ago? Joining Markakis will be Freddie Freeman, Ozzie Albies, and Mike Foltynewicz, the spelling of whose name I still have to double-check every time. (I just now got Marc Rzepczynski down pat, too.)

7. Arizona Diamondbacks, 50-41 (last week: 8)

Arizona is still in the driver's seat in the NL West, and has been the most oft-rumored destination for Manny Machado. That's great news for the Diamondbacks, which will hopefully offset the bad news they got this week about their first-round pick Matt McLain. Also, here's a great story about minor-leaguer Jazz Chisolm learning shortstop from his grandma.

8. Seattle Mariners, 57-34 (last week: 5)

I can't tell you what the Mariners did to precipitate a three-slot fall in the rankings this week; they have baseball's fourth-best record. Of course, they have the same run differential as the Athletics at +17 (by comparison, the Astros are at +188). If they can keep this up all season, they'll have... a game on the east coast against either Chris Sale or Luis Severino to look forward to.

9. Los Angeles Dodgers, 48-41 (last week: 9)

Max Muncy is hitting like an All-Star, but he wasn't on the first draft of the roster. He'll probably make it once all the injuries make themselves known, even if he doesn't win the fan vote for the final player. Traditional wisdom says the Dodgers will go after more pitching before the trade deadline, but Caleb Ferguson has made that less urgent, for now.

10. Cleveland Indians, 49-39 (last week: 10)

The Indians have a record of 49-39. That's a .557 winning percentage, which is much more than enough for first place in the AL Central. In fact, .449 would be good enough for first place. As the trade deadline approaches, a lot of teams have to be wondering if they could trade divisions with Cleveland. If they could, 19 of the 25 non-AL Central teams would find themselves in first place, including—and I'm not making this up—the Toronto Blue Jays and the Pittsburgh Pirates.

But hey, you play the hand you're dealt, and Cleveland has a lot of reasons to be happy.

Well, the baseball fans at least.

The 2018-19 basketball power rankings won't get started around here for awhile yet.

11. Philadelphia Phillies, 49-38 (last week: 11)

The Phillies are tied for first place with the Braves, and are 8-2 in their last 10 (as opposed to Atlanta's 5-5) but trail them by five spots in the power rankings. Why? It's a mystery, but Phillies fans should enjoy the ride as their young team really starts to find their identity (and then diverge from it when they need to).

12. Oakland Athletics, 50-40 (last week: 12)

The A's are one of a few teams who still haven't fallen off of either side of the buy/sell fence. But it sounds like they're leaning. If they do decide to take a swing at Seattle for a wild-card spot, here's who could be on the table. Meanwhile, Blake Treinen (not Jed Lowrie) is an All-Star.

13. Washington Nationals, 45-44 (last week: 13)

The real winners of the All-Star break will be the Nationals, who will get to see what Mike Trout looks like in a jersey that says "American" in colors that can be described as "vaguely Nationals-ish". Like when your parents bought you L.A. Gear for Christmas that one year, and you could almost imagine what your feet would look like in the Air Jordans you asked for.

14. St. Louis Cardinals, 46-43 (last week: 15)

It's not ideal how things are unfolding in St. Louis, but at least Dexter Fowler hitting well is the best possible outcome. Or not. At least Mike Mayers has been exciting?

15. Colorado Rockies, 46-44 (last week: 18)

The Rockies were hot this season, and then they were cold. And now they're hot again. The pitching has been a big reason why, and Adam Ottavino might have the NL's most legitimate gripe at being left off the All-Star team: he's sporting a 1.79 ERA with a WHIP of 0.917, and has struck out 63 hitters in 40⅓ innings.

16. San Francisco Giants, 47-45 (last week: 14)

Goodbye to Austin Jackson and Cory Gearrin, hello to Ray Black and Steven Duggar, who will finally get a chance at playing time in the Bay.

17. Los Angeles Angels, 46-45 (last week: 16)

Shohei Ohtani is back... at DH, not at pitcher. That means Albert Pujols is playing more first base. Mike Trout is still playing baseball at a higher level than any other human being on the planet, but as has been the case for most of his career, even Superman can't carry the whole team into the playoffs.

18. Tampa Bay Rays, 45-44 (last week: 17)

How in seven heck is Blake Snell not an All-Star? That's the big question in Tampa Bay this week, which is good news for Carlos Gómez, as he hopes to let the water cooler situation die down. Also, the Rays might be getting a new stadium soon, assuming Rob Manfred doesn't hoist the team onto his shoulders in a burlap sack and haul it to Vegas.

19. Toronto Blue Jays, 41-48 (last week: 19)

Okay, so here's something that's been bothering me. J.A. Happ pronounces his name "Jay". He plays for the only team in Canada, and he chooses to omit the "eh?" from his name? This is an outrage and also the dumbest joke I've ever told in this space. [Ed note: debatable.] Here's a first-half recap for the Ja— GUYS HAPP IS STILL A "JAY, EH?"

... anyway, he'll be traded soon.

20. Cincinnati Reds, 39-51 (last week: 21)

Okay, okay, guys. Let's tap the brakes. The Reds are still in last place in the NL Central, so maybe this is a bit high for them. But they have been playing well lately, and they have three All-Stars: Joey Votto, Eugenio Suárez, and Scooter Gennett. But Tyler Mahle's breakthrough might end up being the story of 2018 for Cincinnati.

21. Minnesota Twins, 39-48 (last week: 23)

The Twins are in 21st place in the power rankings, and 2nd place in the AL Central. Here's the story on their All-Star representation, and here's one about Bobby Hill Bobby Wilson, who had a ...family member(??) in the crowd this week.

22. Detroit Tigers, 40-52 (last week: 24)

Jordan Zimmermann is finally pitching like the Tigers expected him to when they signed him after the 2015 season. Unfortunately, nearly all the rest of that 2015 team is gone or soon-to-be gone, as Detroit dives head-first into a new rebuild.

23. Pittsburgh Pirates, 41-48 (last week: 20)

The Pirates are 1-5 since last week's rankings. They're going to be sellers, even if they haven't said as much, and as seems to be the case with losing teams around this time of year, there are some minor dramas starting to crop up.

24. Texas Rangers, 40-51 (last week: 22)

The Rangers started their trade-deadline-season movement this week by... adding Austin Jackson? Okay, not exactly. Weirdly, the duo of Austin Bibens-Dirkx and Bartolo Colon have been out-pitching Cole Hamels in the last couple of weeks, which isn't great news for a team looking to optimize their return for the southpaw. Oh, and Shin-Soo Choo is an All-Star for the first time in his career!

25. San Diego Padres, 39-53 (last week: 25)

The biggest question in Padres-land for the next few weeks will be—until it isn't—where will Brad Hand end up? Regardless of the ultimate answer, we know one future location: he'll be in D.C. for the All-Star Game.

26. New York Mets, 35-51 (last week: 26)

The Mets traded Matt Harvey, and he's got a winning record and a 3.79 ERA ever since. So expect second-half Jacob DeGrom to be the first pitcher with an ERA that defies mathematics and goes sub-zero.

27. Baltimore Orioles, 24-65 (last week: 29)

The Orioles haven't won a game since last week's power rankings, so I'm not sure what the team they jumped did to push them up in the rankings, but it must have been bad.

28. Miami Marlins, 37-55 (last week: 28)

The Marlins hold steady at "Not the Worst, But Just Barely"; they allowed Mark Reynolds—who is totally blind—to log 11 RBI over the four-game series over the weekend.

Ten of them came on Saturday night.

29. Kansas City Royals, 25-64 (last week: 30)

The Royals also haven't won since last week's rankings (despite breaking Alcides Escobar's streak), so whatever the last team did to dive below the Orioles and the Royals must have been really, really bad.

30. Chicago White Sox, 30-60 (last week: 27)

Yeah, it was pretty bad.

Sox is singular: Have the White Sox hit rock bottom yet? Asking for some friends

By Jim Margalus / The Athletic / July 9, 2018

A year-and-a-half into the White Sox rebuild, I've realized that if this process ever finds one true rock bottom, we won't be able to recognize it in real time.

It felt like the White Sox hit rock bottom when they started the season 9-27. It seemed like a new low when they dropped to 24-50 after losing their seventh and eighth consecutive games by a combined score of 23-2. Wellington Castillo broke new ground for the franchise by getting slapped with an 80-game suspension for blood doping.

The strictest definition of "rock bottom" means only one point can prevail as the lowest, but there's no way to tell one part of the Mariana Trench from another by walking it. There needs to be some separation from the abyss before we can detect degrees.

This came to mind while watching the White Sox (30-60) go 2-8 on the geographically inefficient Texas-Cincinnati-Houston road trip, putting them back on a 54-108 pace. Not only are they on track to set a franchise record for losses in a season, but they think they're required to win by two.

That alone feels rock bottomish, if only because the White Sox have never failed harder over the course of a 162-game season. But as the losses piled up over the last week, a whole bunch of other sad wrinkles came into view.

For instance:

The White Sox were outscored 29-6 during the eighth innings of the road trip. In one of the few games where the bullpen pitched a scoreless eighth, Joakim Soria blew the save in the ninth. The White Sox were outscored 29-14 over the four-game sweep at the hands of the Astros, and yet the Sox looked a whole lot more professional than the first time the two teams met. The Astros ran the table on the White Sox by taking all seven games. It's the first time in franchise history the Sox went winless against any team over the course of a season series lasting seven games or more. Avisail García, one of the few bright spots over the last two weeks, departed Sunday's game with a hamstring injury, and Eloy Jiménez isn't around to make lemonade out of lemons. Hell, the rebuild even tarnished the rare piece of good news. José Abreu became the first White Sox position player voted to start an All-Star Game since 1996, but the honor catches him right in the middle of a career-worst slump.

At least we know that last one isn't as bad as it gets. While Abreu might not deserve that particular honor at this particular time, a second All-Star appearance doesn't look out of line when assessing his career. Giving an accomplished pro like Abreu the nod beats rewarding the random decent first half.

During the aughts, the Royals sent guys like Ken Harvey, Mike MacDougal and Mark Redman to the All-Star Game to meet the one-player-per-team requirement. Royals catcher Sal Perez is heading to the All-Star Game with a .213/.255/.376 slash line. Between this and their 116-loss pace, the purpose of the 2018 Kansas City Royals is to show a team like the 2018 White Sox how things could be even worse.

The purpose of the 2018 Houston Astros is to show why teams rebuild. They're showing no effects of a World Series hangover with a 61-31 record after sweeping the White Sox, and they're not even entirely healthy.

This sustainable excellence is the whole idea behind tearing it down, and while it remains to be seen whether the White Sox can eventually imitate the Astros all the way into October, they're doing a spot-on impression of Year 2, right down to a few months of Xavier Cedeño.

If you haven't yet mined Houston's history to find company for your misery, allow me to catch you up: The Astros decided to kick their fringe-contending habit after the 2010 season. In their second season after the sell-off, they lost 107 games. 2012 was Jose Altuve's first full season in the big leagues, and he was adequate. It was also Dallas Keuchel's rookie season, and he was far from it. No other key Astros had yet to surface in the organization.

In fact, the Astros still hadn't assembled a core, although it started to take shape under the radar over the course of the season. They drafted Carlos Correa in the first round and Lance McCullers Jr. with a supplemental pick. They traded Brett Myers to the White Sox for a player to be named later, who turned out to be Chris Devenski. Prior to the June and July action, the Astros only had three top-100 prospects in their system, and George Springer was the only one who stuck (Jon Singleton and Jarred Cosart were the others).

As bad as they were in 2012, the Astros didn't reach their nadir until one more year. They lost 111 games in 2013. One White Sox reject (Lucas Harrell) led them in innings, and another White Sox reject (Philip Humber) went 0-8 with a 7.90 ERA. The on-field product was so poor, it cemented its own blooper GIF subgenre known as "Dammit, Astros."

The White Sox might be able to skip that step, because they have more intended future fixtures on their major league roster than the Astros did at the same point, and more top prospects already in the system.

Lucas Giolito, Reynaldo López and Yoán Moncada are taking their lumps now in an attempt to consolidate growing pains. If Michael Kopech and Jiménez can join the party before the end of the season, maybe they can vacuum pack two years of struggles into a smaller package.

Given how difficult it is to distinguish one rock bottom from another, it's even more difficult to sell the idea of the White Sox being ahead of schedule. The good and bad news? It's all the same at this point. One version has the White Sox competing in 2020, and the other one has the plan coming together in 2021. Until the upswing arrives, just be prepared to mutter "Dammit, White Sox" more than you already do.

Rosenthal: The five biggest lies baseball people tell during trading season

By Ken Rosenthal / The Athletic / July 9, 2018

Any moment now, some general manager will start complaining about trade rumors, the irresponsible media spreading them, the awful damage his organization is suffering as a result.

And, uh, he might have a point.

Everyone loses perspective as the July 31 non-waiver deadline approaches, reporters included. Our news-breaking fervor is grounds for extreme paranoia from the people we cover, so it is no surprise when they respond by acting, well, extremely paranoid.

I plead guilty to excessive texting, occasional badgering and a host of other July-related offenses, only some of which can be attributed to sleep deprivation. But truth be told, my reporting colleagues and I are not the only perpetrators of deadline madness. Baseball people play their only own little games — and an explanation of their July antics is long overdue.

Understand: Conflict is inevitable between reporters seeking information and executives trying to withhold it. Chicago White Sox executive vice-president Ken Williams once referred to my sources as "snitches and bitches." I shot back that they were honorable practitioners of democracy.

With the deadline nearing, Williams undoubtedly is preparing to continue his Ripken-esque streak of ignoring me, while his colleagues undoubtedly are plotting a fresh round of disinformation to distract reporters from their noble pursuit of truth, justice and the latest trade.

Consider this a pre-emptive strike, an attempt to set the record straight.

Without further ado, the five biggest lies baseball people tell reporters during trading season:

1. "We're not shopping Player X. We're just listening."

Ah, Semantics 101, as practiced by your favorite GM. Heaven forbid the GM admit trying to trade Player X. Why, the GM might compromise his leverage (as if it actually would change the course of a negotiation). He might even create an awkward situation with the player he is trying to move (as if his clubhouse isn't already awkward with his team facing playoff odds of 2.3 percent).

Teams will entertain trade offers for virtually everyone in the sport whose name isn't Mike Trout. Teams will ask for returns even crazier than those advocated by the pseudo-GMs on Twitter. And then teams will say they're not shopping, only listening.

If anyone wants to dispute my point, here is my answer:

I'm not writing, I'm only typing.

2. "It's normal coverage, nothing unusual."

This is the standard regurgitation reporters often get when they ask an executive why a certain scout is racing between a potential trade partner's High A, Double A and Triple A affiliates in July, trying to assemble as much information as possible on specific targets.

Normal coverage occurs in just about every month of the season, when scouts prepare reports for long-term consideration in trade and free-agent discussions. Normal coverage often does not occur in July, when teams are getting last looks at prospects they might acquire in trades.

Alas, as an increasing number of teams scout through data and video, the resourcefulness of reporters who find out which evaluators are “sitting on,” say, the Boston Red Sox’s Class A affiliate, is becoming almost obsolete.

My fantasy is to break into the Houston Astros’ nerd cave, Watergate-style, and install a camera pointing directly at the monitors employed by their video scouts in July.

Who, of course, would be engaging in normal coverage, nothing unusual.

3. “Money had nothing to do with it. This was just a good old-fashioned baseball trade.”

Ah, you rarely hear this bit of misdirection anymore, in part because most GMs know better than to utter such a blatant half-truth. Money almost always is a consideration, whether it’s due to payroll restraints, the luxury-tax threshold or the addictions of low-revenue teams to churning their rosters.

Think the Kansas City Royals weren’t eager to save an additional \$1.8 million by moving reliever Kelvin Herrera on June 18 rather than July 31? Think again. In baseball reporting as in crime reporting, it’s always a good idea to follow the money.

Funny story: The salary-swapping extravaganza between the Dodgers and Atlanta Braves last off-season — a deal driven solely by money — actually did turn into something of an old-fashioned baseball trade.

Outfielder Matt Kemp, whom the Dodgers wanted to dump from the moment the trade was announced, shockingly became an All-Star starter, while pitcher Brandon McCarthy and infielder Charlie Culberson made lesser, but not insignificant, contributions, to the Braves.

4. “Don’t report that, it’s only going to hurt the kid.”

Yes, for heaven’s sake, protect the children!

Baseball people often plead for reporters to withhold the name of some fuzzy-faced phenom while furiously peddling said youngster as the principal bait in trade discussions for Manny Machado or some other newsworthy star.

An erroneous report definitely can be harmful, potentially damaging a player’s relationship with his club. But the teams helped create this prospect-crazed environment, valuing prized minor leaguers beyond reason and promoting them to the majors faster than ever before. Even the youngest players understand they can get moved at any second. I’ll bet most are thrilled to see their names on MLBTradeRumors.com, and somehow avoid long-term psychological scars.

5. “I can’t say anything. I’ll get fired.”

I’ve saved the best for last. Nervous club officials have repeated that line to me countless times over the years, as if their family’s future was at stake over their off-the-record confirmation of a trade that in many cases will get announced minutes later.

To the best of my knowledge, not once has a baseball person lost his job for talking to me or any of my competitors under the promise of anonymity. It’s our job to protect the identities of sources; otherwise, they will cut off the supply of information. Revealing a source not only violates a trust, but a sacred principle in our industry.

So, to be perfectly clear:

NO, YOU ARE NOT GOING TO LOSE YOUR JOB!

Now don't get me wrong — I'm not trying to demean the importance of clubs guarding information; their reasons often are strategic and valid. But forgive my intolerance for deceitful shenanigans that result in a team parting with its No. 19 prospect instead of its No. 18, as if this is geopolitics.

Sorry, it's just trading season in baseball, and it's supposed to be fun.

Bring on the insanity! Bring on the lies! Snitches and bitches, come out to play!
