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'Hawk' doc shows 2 sides of famed broadcaster

By Scott Merkin / MLB.com / September 6, 2018

CHICAGO -- Two different personas live within iconic White Sox broadcaster Ken "Hawk" Harrelson, who has four broadcasts left before his 33-year career behind the mic on the South Side comes to a close.

There's Hawk, who made vogue catchphrases such as "He gone," "Mercy," and "You can put it on the board! Yes!" Then there's Ken, the more subdued, almost introverted man devoted to his family.

That point fell at the heart of the documentary "Hawk," co-produced by the White Sox and NBC Sports Chicago. It premiered on Thursday night at a movie theater in Chicago, with the expertly done production taking Harrelson from his roots in Savannah, Ga. to his playing days in Boston to his work in Chicago to his life in Orlando, Fla. and Granger, Ind.

Hawk was in attendance Thursday, with that personality shining through during the 15-minute Q&A session before the showing. Ken proudly sat with his wife, Aris, and his family during the moving piece of work.

"He's an incredible personality. He brings tremendous passion to the game. He's a good friend," said White Sox chairman Jerry Reinsdorf, who was one of the many in attendance at the premiere. "There really is a Hawk and a Kenny. Hawk is what you see and what you hear on the air.

"Kenny is just a family guy with the same problems everybody else has, the same joys everybody else has. Hawk is unique. Kenny is just an ordinary guy."

This documentary serves as a continuation of Hawk Harrelson Day last Sunday at the ballpark. It really has been a yearlong celebration of Harrelson's contributions to the organization, with his Sunday home broadcasts dotted with special guest analysts such as Frank Thomas, Bob Uecker, Paul Konerko and A.J. Pierzynski.

A common theme running through the year -- and especially prevalent Thursday -- was Harrelson deserving to be recognized by the Hall of Fame as a Ford Frick Award honoree.

"I don't know that we deserve anyone like him again," White Sox executive vice president Ken Williams said. "The shame of it for me is that he hasn't been elected to the Hall of Fame to date. Hopefully that will change, but I'm telling you, if you look at the body of work, how can he be denied? There shouldn't be a Hall of Fame if he's not in it."

"Put it his way: as a player, he was OK. As a GM, he was horrible. With broadcasting, Hall of Fame," former White Sox manager Ozzie Guillen said with a smile. "Great family guy. Cares about the organization. Cares about his players. Cares about the team. How many people go through the organization and Hawk is still there?"

Putting together this documentary was a pleasure for Harrelson because he had so much fun working with producers Ryan McGuffey, Matt Dahl and Brad Boron. It was enjoyable for both Hawk and Ken, who will be taking over soon as the consummate family man with the legendary broadcasting work behind him.

"He and I, we've been talking more together in the last couple of months than we've ever talked. Even when I'm driving in the car, and I know it sounds crazy," said Harrelson of the dichotomy of the personas. "I did it when I played and I'm doing it more now. He's eating this stuff up. He really is."

"Well, it's very satisfying. Mostly for his family," Reinsdorf said. "Whatever anybody achieves in life, it really doesn't mean as much to the person as it does to the family. This is so great for his family. He has a great wife, great kids and great grandchildren. They are going to live a lot longer than he's going to live, and they can remember this. They will have wonderful memories."

5 pressing questions in the AL Central

By Jeffrey Flanagan / MLB.com / September 6, 2018

There are less than four weeks to go in the regular season, and each team still has at least one or two burning questions they'd like answered.

So let's take a look at those questions as it pertains to the American League Central:

INDIANS

The question: Will the Tribe's sidelined stars be primed for October?

Shortly after the Indians acquired Josh Donaldson last Friday, the club announced that the 32-year-old former AL MVP Award winner will become the team's everyday third baseman, moving All-Star Jose Ramirez to second base and sliding Jason Kipnis into the outfield. Usually, a positional shuffle of that magnitude with less than a month left in the season would pose the most questions, but the Tribe is still waiting for Donaldson to return fully healthy from his Minor League rehab assignment, along with other key pieces returning from injury.

The Tribe is also missing right-hander Trevor Bauer, who's been out since Aug. 12, and was in the midst of an AL Cy Young Award-caliber season with a career-best 2.22 ERA and an fWAR of 6.0 (second in the AL), according to FanGraphs. Relief ace Andrew Miller (left shoulder impingement) has also been out since Aug. 27. Should Donaldson, Bauer and Miller return healthy and productive, it's not unreasonable to consider Cleveland as World Series contenders.

ROYALS

The question: Will rookie right-hander Jorge Lopez be a rotational candidate in 2019 or a bullpen piece?

The Royals know they have Danny Duffy, Jakob Junis, Brad Keller and Ian Kennedy in their rotation heading into Spring Training. And rookie right-hander Heath Fillmyer is making a strong case for a spot as well. So that leaves us with Lopez, who was acquired from Milwaukee as part of the Mike Moustakas deal right before the non-waiver Trade Deadline. Catcher Salvador Perez raves about Lopez's stuff -- his two-seam fastball, his slider, his curveball, his changeup. The question becomes where will that stuff be most effective. Lopez was an effective reliever for the Brewers this season, posting a 2.75 ERA in 10 outings. Kansas City wants to use the rest of September to see if Lopez can be even more valuable as a starter. Lopez showed flashes of his potential as a starter in his first three outings for the Royals. Then he seemed to put it all together last Sunday against the Orioles, going seven innings while giving up five hits and one run. Lopez walked none and struck out a career-high eight. He likely will get four or five more starts to show Kansas City he merits serious consideration for the rotation next season.

TIGERS

The question: Can Christin Stewart find a place in the Tigers' lineup?

While the Tigers have held off on promoting their power-hitting outfielder all summer, the former first-round pick is likely to get a September callup once Triple-A Toledo's playoff run ends. From there, team officials want to see not only how he handles Major League pitching, but how he plays defense, the long-running question in his profile. While reviews of Stewart's play in left field have been mixed, Detroit doesn't want to follow Victor Martinez's Tigers tenure with a 24-year-old full-time designated hitter, especially with a 36-year-old Miguel Cabrera likely to garner time at DH next season. Yet the Tigers' need for impact hitters from their farm system means they have to find a place for him somewhere in their lineup next year. A late-season trial similar to Nicholas Castellanos' shift to the outfield last September wouldn't be a surprise.

TWINS

The question: Can Miguel Sano finish strong?

Since returning in late July from a six-week stint in the Minor Leagues that also saw him work on his conditioning, Sano has remained inconsistent at the plate, but he has looked better defensively. Strikeouts are still his biggest problem, which is why his average has been in the low .200s before and after his time in the Minors. Sano has immense power, but he needs to improve his contact skills down the stretch to provide more optimism for next year. It's been a rough year for Sano, who was an All-Star just last season, but he at least has a chance to finish the year on a high note unlike fellow former top prospect Byron Buxton, who was not among Minnesota's September callups. Sano is dealing with a bruised left leg, but he is expected to return soon.

WHITE SOX

The question: How will the young relievers respond to their first Major League challenge?

Jace Fry has been with the big league team since early May and already has proven his considerable value to the White Sox as a back-end piece to the relief corps moving forward into 2019. But there are many young arms who figure to be in the White Sox future plans and will be gaining important September innings as they work toward playoff contention and a championship season. Ian Hamilton, an 11th-round Draft pick who could be the team's closer of the future, Jose Ruiz, Aaron Bummer, Ryan Burr and Caleb Frare make up that list. If these young arms provide initial hints of excellence, albeit in limited opportunities, it could dictate less spending on free-agent relievers.

Cease named Pipeline Pitcher of the Year

By Mike Rosenbaum / MLB.com / September 6, 2018

Dylan Cease made an indelible impression during the spring as he logged three scoreless starts for the White Sox in his first big league camp. The performance, as it would turn out, laid the groundwork for what would be the best season had by a pitching prospect in 2018.

Cease, whom the White Sox acquired with Eloy Jimenez from the Cubs for Jose Quintana two weeks ahead of the 2017 Trade Deadline, went 12-2 with a 2.40 ERA and a 1.06 WHIP over 124 innings in 2018, beginning the year with Class A Advanced Winston-Salem and then dominating after a midseason promotion to Double-A Birmingham en route to being named MLB Pipeline's Pitcher of the Year.

The White Sox No. 5 prospect (No. 44 overall) posted a 32.5 percent strikeout rate that was the fourth-best mark among qualified Minor League starters, and Cease also finished sixth in batting average against (.189), 12th in strikeouts (160) and tied for fourth in wins. He allowed fewer than three earned runs in 20 of his 23 starts.

Cease threw the ball particularly well after moving up to Double-A, posting a 0.94 ERA with 71 strikeouts in 47 2/3 innings over his final nine starts with the Barons before being shut down for the season Aug. 24.

Given annually to the top pitching prospect in baseball, the Pitcher of the Year award is voted on by the MLB Pipeline staff. Players must have spent at least half the season in the Minor Leagues to be considered.

- Vlad Jr. named Hitter of the Year

Cease, 22, faced stiff competition for this year's award, even from inside his own organization.

- Michael Kopech (White Sox No. 2) registered a 3.70 ERA and finished sixth in the Minors with 170 strikeouts before getting the call to the Major Leagues.

- Dean Kremer (O's No. 16 prospect) had a 2.88 ERA and led the Minors with 178 strikeouts despite going from the Dodgers to Baltimore at the non-waiver Trade Deadline in the Manny Machado blockbuster.

- Mike King (Yankees' No. 24) dominated across three levels including Triple-A and finished among the Minor League leaders with a 1.79 ERA (second), a 0.91 WHIP (tied, fourth) and 161 1/3 innings pitched (sixth).

- Touki Toussaint (Braves' No. 7) racked up 163 strikeouts and Josh James (Astros' No. 6) 171 as they finished fourth and ninth, respectively, among Minor League hurlers in that department.

- Chris Paddack (Padres' No. 5) led the Minors with a 0.82 WHIP and compiled an absurd 120-to-8 strikeout-to-walk ratio in 90 innings across two levels.

- Jesus Luzardo (A's No. 1) enjoyed a meteoric rise through the Minors, ascending from the California League to Triple-A in his first full season. The starting pitcher for the Word team in this year's SiriusXM All-Star Futures Game finished with a 2.88 ERA and 129 strikeouts in 109 1/3 innings.

Scouts viewed Cease as a probable first-round talent in 2014 up until the right-hander suffered an elbow injury that March. The Cubs, targeting Cease's electric fastball-curveball combo, still selected him in the sixth round, and then signed him for \$1.5 million despite knowing that he'd need Tommy John surgery. Chicago managed his comeback carefully before starting to take the reins off in '17.

Assigned to the Carolina League to open 2018, Cease took a loss in his season debut and at times struggled to find consistency. His second loss came on May 11, when he allowed eight runs (seven earned) on nine hits in two innings for the Dash in what would be his worst start of the year. It also marked an important turning point in Cease's season.

Over his next six starts for the Dash, Cease went 5-0 with a 2.17 ERA and a .160 opponents' average en route to a promotion to Birmingham on June 21.

Cease's Double-A debut, in which he allowed five earned runs on seven hits, was the only blemish during his 10 starts in the Southern League. He went on to record five scoreless starts in his final nine turns, and, at one point, tossed 24 consecutive scoreless frames (July 20 to Aug. 10). Cease's best start of the season came on July 25, when Cease carried no-hit bid for 6 2/3 innings and matched his career high with 12 strikeouts.

Cease's 13.4 strikeouts-per-nine with the Barons was his best mark at any stop in his career, and the same goes for his 38.6 percent strikeout rate. He also generated swinging strikes at a 16 percent clip. For context,

only Chris Sale (leader-15.9 percent), Max Scherzer, Patrick Corbin and Jacob deGrom have missed bats at a 15-percent-or-better clip in 2018.

Cease paired that uptick in whiffs with a 50 percent ground-ball rate -- a shade above his season average of 49 percent -- and did so while holding opposing hitters to a paltry .168/.257/.251 line.

Overall, Cease was equally effective against right-handed (.192/.289/.280) and left-handed (.185/.259/.272) hitters across two levels in 2018.

Behind an explosive fastball that sits in the upper 90s and reaches 100 mph, a sharp knee-buckling curveball and an improving changeup, Cease has firmly established himself as one of the Minor League's premier strikeout artists.

Across his first four seasons, the right-hander has totaled 377 strikeouts in 286 innings while sporting a 2.67 ERA. And while command does leave something to be desired, it's worth noting that Cease did make gains with his control in 2018, issuing 3.6 walks-per-nine after posting a 4.2 mark at the Class A level in 2017.

Scouts expect that Cease will make further improvements as a strike-thrower as he continues to refine his delivery, which, at times, he struggles to repeat, thus detracting from his control and command. Meanwhile, adding more strength to his somewhat undersized frame should help to assuage any lingering concerns about Cease's durability.

With Kopech now in the Majors Leagues headlining a young up-and-coming White Sox rotation, it's only fair to wonder when Cease might arrive. While he still has boxes to check in his development, such as building up a larger workload and refining his changeup, Cease showed during his breakout campaign that he has all the ingredients needs to make an impact at the highest level.

Dylan Cease named MLB Pipeline Pitcher of the Year

By Michael Walton / NBC Sports Chicago / September 6, 2018

Of course Eloy Jimenez was the central figure in the White Sox trade of Jose Quintana to the Cubs in 2017, but Dylan Cease was a highly-regarded prospect in his own right, and on Thursday he received more validation when he won the MLB's Pipeline Pitcher of the Year Award.

Cease was shut down by the White Sox organization due to reaching a pitch limit they had set for him, but his overall year showed tremendous growth. He pitched 124 innings, and went 12-2 with a stellar 2.40 ERA. Cease got stronger as the year went on, going 3-0 with an 1.72 ERA once he got called up to Double-A Birmingham.

The White Sox No. 5 overall prospect, Cease only allowed a batting average of .189 in his starts. He also racked up 160 strikeouts on the year, 34 more than the previous season. Cease wasn't included in the "will they, won't they call him up"-drama that surrounded the seasons of Eloy Jimenez and the (eventually) called-up Michael Kopech.

The MLB Pipeline Pitcher of the Year Award is voted on by the MLB Pipeline staff. And if their selection of Cease is any indication, he projects to be playing in meaningful big league games in 2019.

Michael Kopech's big-league education is a work in progress for the White Sox

By Phil Thompson / Chicago Tribune / September 6, 2018

Michael Kopech has four starts in the books and the White Sox phenom has looked at times like a future All-Star. But as evidenced during his first career loss, 10-2 on Wednesday night to the Tigers, he's not a finished product. With three rain-delay outings and an early Twitter controversy, he has gone through a lot in a short time.

It's time to take a look at what we have gleaned from this brief glimpse at a key piece of the Sox rebuild.

The Sox aren't going to treat Kopech with kid gloves, mentally or physically

People in the organization have noted how Kopech has weathered media scrutiny. He has handled hype over his triple-digit fastball and fielded more postgame questions than the average minor-league call-up would get. He also dealt with the reaction to offensive tweets from his past that resurfaced shortly after he had made his big-league debut. Kopech addressed the subject twice with the media, and there was no attempt by Sox officials to shield him or limit questions on the topic. General manager Rick Hahn said Kopech was "very upfront" while he apologized.

Kopech has had to cope with three rain delays and the Sox shut him down after the first two, which were deemed too long to send him back out. After the third stoppage on Wednesday, however, Renteria planned to give him a lot of leeway.

"It was a very short delay and he was still ready to go," he said. "We were going to give him an hour, to be honest, today to get back out here."

Before the delay in the bottom of the second inning, Kopech had given up just a leadoff homer. When play resumed, Kopech got through the third inning OK before the floodgates opened in the fourth. He gave up six hits to seven batters, including three more home runs and two doubles. He was charged with six earned runs as the Tigers extended their lead to 7-0. Renteria tried to let him battle through it because in his three previous starts, two of them abbreviated, he hadn't faced much adversity.

In his debut, it took him 12 pitches to get his first out, and whether it was the temperature or the pressure, he appeared to sweat through that inning. In Detroit, his longest outing to date at six innings, he served up back-to-back doubles and a single but limited the damage to a run. And against the Red Sox, he hit the first batter he faced and walked the second. But Mookie Betts was caught stealing to help him out of that threat.

On Wednesday night, Renteria's comments made it seem the setback was a necessary stage of Kopech's development to endure such situations.

"Mikey felt like he wasn't commanding or executing," Renteria said. "Just one of those days. You are not always going to be as sharp every single outing. He tried to work through it.

"(After the first home run), he went back out and continued to try to work. You could see he was still getting frustrated."

And Kopech sounded a bit frustrated as he answered questions about what went wrong. He didn't have any answers — on the mound or in the clubhouse afterward. But he was committed to taking his lumps and learning from them.

"I can't pinpoint it right now," he said. "But going into my next start, I'll make sure to get the work in I need to and try to evaluate myself properly."

Control is an issue

Control has been an issue for Kopech as he hit five batters in his first three starts. All season, at Triple-A Charlotte and since being called to the majors, he has worked a lot on correcting the location of his secondary pitches, such as his slider, but his fastball carries a lot movement, too. Pitches are going to get away from anyone on occasion, but especially so when you throw as hard as he does.

It's not that Kopech is erratic. Of his pitches, 68 percent have been for strikes. In comparison, Reynaldo Lopez, another young Sox arm, had a strike percentage of 65 in his first four career starts with the Nationals and is at 63 percent this season.

When Kopech's on, his stuff is electric. The pure velocity and tail on his fastballs mixed with the crispness of his breaking balls can make hitters look silly. And if they're not looking silly, they're just plain looking, as when Kopech blew a fastball past Joe Mauer for a called third strike in his debut. But because Kopech works the upper part of the zone so much, he's also a fly ball pitcher, so when he's off target or his velocity is down — or both, as was the case Wednesday — he can take a beating.

"Obviously I didn't have my best stuff, and aside from that I wasn't locating the ball either," he said after the loss to the Tigers Wednesday. "I missed a lot of spots and got taken advantage of, which is going to happen when I'm not throwing the way I need to. I was pitching like I was throwing 100, and I was throwing 93, 94. Can't miss spots with that kind of velocity, and aside from that, the stuff I had tonight as a whole wasn't great. So I got taken advantage of."

Renteria may want to put Kopech in the hands of a veteran catcher

In his first three starts, Kopech was caught by Omar Narvaez twice and once by Kevan Smith. Wednesday night, Renteria paired him with Wellington Castillo, the first opportunity they have had to work together since Castillo returned this week from an 80-game PED suspension.

"He brings a lot of experience," Renteria said. "There's some things you see him doing that stands out a little bit. We're glad to have him back."

The eight-year veteran scouts hitters well and just understands the nuances of the position, like how he sets up hitters, and passes that knowledge on not only to younger catchers but to the pitchers as well.

"There are a lot of catchers who are very insightful in how they approach, see swings and things of that nature," Renteria said. "They go through the reports, they understand the pitchers' strengths and weaknesses, and they're able to do things in certain situations. I think that comes with experience."

It will be interesting to see in the final weeks whom Kopech is matched up with.

Lucas Giolito works with Smith a lot because they're often on the same wavelength. The rapport there is undeniable. But Kopech hasn't been around the clubhouse long enough to have developed a favorite, so Renteria will go with whoever he feels is him handling him well when he's on the mound or providing the best guidance on and off the field.

Series preview: Angels at White Sox

By Chicago Tribune Staff / September 6, 2018

All games on WGN-AM 720.

Friday: 7:10 p.m., NBCSCH Plus.

RH Felix Pena (1-4, 4.19) vs. LH Carlos Rodon (6-4, 2.89).

Saturday: 6:10 p.m., NBCSCH.

RH Matt Shoemaker (1-0, 2.53) vs. RH James Shields (6-15, 4.39).

Sunday: 1:10 p.m., WGN-9.

TBA vs. RH Reynaldo Lopez (5-9, 4.37).

MLB Pipeline names White Sox prospect Dylan Cease Pitcher of Year

By Daryl Van Schouwen / Sun-Times / September 6, 2018

White Sox pitching prospect Dylan Cease, who went 12-2 with a 2.40 ERA and a 1.06 WHIP in 124 innings between Class A Winston-Salem and Class AA Birmingham, was named Pitcher of the Year by MLB Pipeline.

The 22-year-old right-hander, who was acquired by the Sox with outfielder Eloy Jimenez in a trade with the Cubs for left-hander Jose Quintana in July 2017, was fourth among minor-league starters in victories, fourth in strikeout rate (32.5 percent), sixth in batting average allowed (.189) and 12th in strikeouts (160).

He had a 0.94 ERA and 71 strikeouts in 47%^o innings in his final nine starts at Birmingham.

“We could not be more pleased with his development,” general manager Rick Hahn said this week. “Not only did Dylan take the ball every fifth day and answer the bell every time when we wanted him to start, but he dominated and seemingly got a little bit stronger as the season went on.”

Truth revealed: Ex-White Sox' Todd Frazier admits to fooling ump with fake ball

By Madeline Kenney / Sun-Times / September 6, 2018

Former White Sox infielder Todd Frazier admitted Wednesday to tricking an umpire into believing the Mets third baseman made a catch he didn't make.

During Monday's Mets game, Frazier dove into the crowd near the third base line at Dodgers Stadium to catch a foul ball off outfielder Alex Verdugo's bat. As he fell to the ground, Frazier lost sight of the real baseball and ended up grabbing a fan's rubber one by mistake. It wasn't until after third base umpire Mark Wegner called the out Frazier realized what had happened. He quickly disposed of the evidence by tossing the ball back into the crowd.

“It is Hollywood,” Frazier told ESPN on Wednesday. “Sometimes you've got to act out a little bit.”

SportsNet New York was the first to report Frazier's illusion. As the video shows, Frazier actually grabbed a fan's ball that was sitting on the ledge. After the fact, a fan tried to spoil Frazier's play by showing Wegner the real ball. However, the fan's attempt came up short.

Frazier was later seen during the broadcast telling his teammates in the dugout what had happened.

“I was trying to get out of there as quick as possible,” Frazier said. “I saw someone pointing at the right ball and I was like, ‘All right, I'm just going to have to play this off.’ I got in the dugout and was telling people I was flabbergasted that I even got away with it.”

The Mets went on to beat the Dodgers, 4-2.

Start Opening Day? ‘That would be pretty cool,’ White Sox' Carlos Rodon says

By Daryl Van Schouwen / Sun-Times / September 6, 2018

White Sox left-hander Carlos Rodon was pleasantly surprised to receive a prized memento the other day: a broken bat used by Sox nemesis Ryan Raburn on April 21, 2015.

This wasn't some random cracked bat, however. This one broke as a result of a fastball in on the hands of Raburn, the second batter Rodon faced while pitching in relief of starter Hector Noesi in his major-league debut.

Rodon entered with runners at the corners, walked Brandon Moss, then had to face a guy who is batting .296 with 20 home runs and 82 RBI in his career against the Sox — not exactly the easiest way to enter the big leagues.

Rodon made a good 3-2 pitch to Raburn, who dumped it into short left field for a two-run single.

“A duck snort, as Hawk [Harrelson] would say,” Rodon said.

Transforming Raburn’s lumber — which has been authenticated and will go into a trophy case, Rodon said — into trash was a moral victory Rodon had to settle for that night.

“It’s awesome when you break someone’s bat,” Rodon said this week. “You take pride in that.”

Rodon, the No. 3 overall pick in the draft in 2014, would be charged with two earned runs in 2, innings that night. He expected more proud moments and keepsakes to fill his trophy case than consolation prizes between then and now.

Rodon would make 23 starts and go 9-6 with a 3.75 ERA in a solid rookie season in 2015, then would pitch 165 innings in 28 starts with a 4.04 ERA in 2016. But injuries and arthroscopic shoulder surgery last September limited him to 12 starts in 2017, when he posted a 4.15 ERA. Now that he’s healthy, Rodon looks like he’s hitting his stride with a 6-4 record and 2.89 ERA entering his start Friday against the Angels at Guaranteed Rate Field.

At 25, Rodon has pitched like an ace and the favorite to be the Sox’ Opening Day starter March 28 in Kansas City. Now that would beat breaking a bat.

“That would be pretty cool; that definitely would be a goal of mine,” Rodon said. “Whoever it is next year, we’ll see. It will be a fun competition. You have to earn that. It’s not something that is just given to you.”

As for the “ace” title, Rodon said whoever is pitching that day is the ace.

“Whoever is pitching that day has to win,” he said. “But I’m cool with it.”

Despite allowing five runs against the Red Sox in his last outing, snapping a streak of nine quality starts, Rodon is 5-1 with a 2.19 ERA in his last 10 starts and has the lowest ERA in the American League since July 5.

“Carlos Rodon is blossoming into the pitcher we always projected he would be, health permitting,” general manager Rick Hahn said.

Rodon made his first start of the season June 9 and, if he pitches every fifth game, could make five more and log 130 to 140 innings.

“To finish out the season healthy is a big part for the transition into next year,” Rodon said. “The goal is to finish healthy and to pitch well.”

Rodon said he feels like he’s finishing each start strong.

“As the game goes on, I get strong,” he said. “I pride myself in that. At the end, I’m going to empty the tank in those last few innings. It’s something I like doing. I like carrying it at the end of the game, just having that little extra.

“I feel good. I’m getting to that year mark of the shoulder-surgery anniversary. That’s when the doctor says you feel pretty much back to normal. I feel pretty good. Just keep going.”

ANGELS AT SOX

Friday: Felix Pena (1-4, 4.19 ERA) vs. Carlos Rodon (6-4, 2.89), 7:10 p.m., NBCSCH+, 720-AM.

Saturday: Matt Shoemaker (1-0, 2.53) vs. James Shields (6-15, 4.39), 6:10 p.m., NBCSCH, 720-AM.

Sunday: TBA vs. Reynaldo Lopez (5-9, 4.37), 1:10 p.m., Ch. 9, 720-AM.

Chicago White Sox's Kopech blames poor preparation for rocky start

By Scot Gregor / Daily Herald / September 6, 2018

Besides being unable to control the weather, Michael Kopech had few flaws in his first 3 major-league starts with the Chicago White Sox.

From his vantage point in the dugout, manager Rick Renteria liked what he was seeing from the 22-year-old phenom.

"At eye level, if you're sitting here watching it, it's pretty explosive," Renteria said. "His delivery is really good. It comes out pretty easy. I can tell you as a former batter, if you have a guy who has some life on that fastball it plays a little higher than the velocity.

"He has one of those electric fastballs. He has electric stuff."

Kopech also had a 0.82 ERA before taking the mound against the Detroit Tigers on Wednesday night at Guaranteed Rate Field.

Just like his first two home outings, the right-hander had to wait out another rain delay. The latest one lasted just 29 minutes, so Kopech was able to stay in the game.

Before the skies opened, and after as well, Kopech was not sharp. Lasting just 3½ innings, he allowed 7 runs on 9 hits and 1 walk.

"I kind of knew going into it that not everything was going to be there," Kopech said. "Early on, I thought I was going to be able to kind of grind through it, and that was the game plan, to get through everything regardless of the kind of stuff I had.

"Unfortunately in that fourth inning, I left a lot of pitches up, and they got hit."

Kopech was far from phenomenal in the fourth, giving up 5 straight hits to open the inning, 3 of them home runs.

Renteria brushed off the sluggish start.

"You are not going to always be as sharp every single outing," the Sox's manager said. "He tried to work through it. One of those days. I told him, 'Hey there are a lot of better days ahead of you, so I wouldn't worry about this one.'"

Kopech isn't worried, but what about the noticeable dip in fastball velocity?

Big and strong at 6-feet-3, 205 pounds, Kopech regularly hit 97-98 mph in his first 3 starts. His fastball was 91-93 mph against the Tigers.

With 140 combined innings between Class AAA Charlotte and the White Sox, Kopech is 6 innings above the career-high 134 he pitched last season. Fatigue is a factor at this late stage of the season, especially for young pitchers.

Has Kopech hit the wall?

"I don't feel tired or anything like that," he said. "I just feel like going into the game, there are things that I need to do better that I didn't do. I didn't feel like I prepared myself well for (Wednesday), and it showed. Just better preparation."

Review: White Sox broadcaster Hawk Harrelson, man, myth, movie star?

By Lauren Comitor / The Athletic / September 6, 2018

It's difficult enough to make a documentary about one person. But one person who considers himself two very different people?

Mercy.

"Hawk," a documentary co-produced by the White Sox and NBC Sports Chicago, chronicles the life of Ken "Hawk" Harrelson, from his childhood in Savannah, Georgia to his final year as a broadcaster for the White Sox.

The approximately hour-long film is a who's who of Major League Baseball and White Sox royalty with various connections to Harrelson: Jerry Reinsdorf, Bud Selig, Bob Uecker, Ozzie Guillen, Bob Costas, Frank Thomas, Terry Francona, A.J. Pierzynski, Paul Konerko, White Sox broadcasters past and present...the list goes on.

And it's fitting for a man as larger-than-life as Harrelson, whose love for his family and the game he's spent his life playing and broadcasting seeps through everything he says and does. During the short panel discussion before Thursday night's premiere at Arclight Cinemas in Chicago, Harrelson veered from the current White Sox ("Ricky's boys don't quit!") to marriage advice ("If you ever get into an argument with your wife, don't win it").

Harrelson said he was drained after Sunday's "Hawk Day" festivities (he slept until noon the next day), and seemed relieved to put all the fanfare behind him after Thursday night. After after seeing all the physical and emotional effort that went into the film, you can't blame him.

Back in his hometown of Savannah, Harrelson walks the halls of his elementary school, recounting a story in which he jumped out a window to avoid punishment. But it's at his childhood home where we get a glimpse of "Ken," who stands outside the small, rundown blue house and talks about the day his father left, and the unbreakable bond he had with his mother, Jessie, who died from pancreatic cancer.

Then there was Boston, where Hawk became Hawk, and there he is, right where he stood 50 years ago in the batter's box at Fenway Park, except this time he's wearing white leather loafers and a White Sox cap, which is his uniform throughout the film. He roams in right field, where he misplayed a line drive in Game 7 of the 1967 World Series, and sits in the stands as Harry Caray's play-by-play plays over the shot. It's a poignant moment made all the more impactful by the classic backdrop of baseball's oldest park.

In the documentary, Hawk also takes us to the site of the old Daisy Buchanan's, a favorite Back Bay haunt of Boston athletes in those days. The building is now a Suitsupply, and Hawk goes into the modern, hip store and looks around a little awkwardly, a far cry from his old receptions at Daisy Buchanan's where Hawk says he was greeted like the celebrity he was whenever he came in.

"I was embarrassed, he [Hawk] wasn't," he says.

"There really is a Hawk and a Kenny," White Sox chairman Jerry Reinsdorf said. "Hawk is what you see and hear on the air. But Kenny's just a family guy, with the same problems everyone else has, and the same joys that everybody else has. Hawk is unique. Kenny's just an ordinary guy. Hawk is very unique."

In Chicago, Harrelson blossomed into the local broadcasting legend, both because of his unique style and in spite of it. There's a great sequence devoted to his call of Mark Buehrle's perfect game, and of course his less celebrated moments, from saying that umpire Joe West deserves a suspension and a "rest," to his railing against John Lackey during last year's Cubs-Sox series in July.

But as his replacement Jason Benetti correctly says in perhaps the line of the film: "'Hawk's best attribute is he doesn't give a fuck about anything. He doesn't give a fuck."

The production team — which included NBC Sports Chicago's Ryan McGuffey and the White Sox's Brad Boron, Matt Dahl, Blake Evaristo and JoVaughn Trammel — deserves credit for getting Harrelson's official

sendoff Sunday at Guaranteed Rate Field into the film. That moment dovetails nicely with the film's closing scenes in Granger, Indiana during a family barbecue, where Harrelson's wife, Aris, and children, Krista and Casey, tear up talking about the man who managed to give so much to their family while devoting the rest of his life to the sport.

Watching that, it's no surprise that the 77-year-old Harrelson decided it was time to step away and spend more time with his family. But Harrelson obviously isn't going away for good — Reinsdorf said he'll stay on with the team as an ambassador in order to achieve his goal of eight decades in baseball.

Harrelson recently published a second autobiography — the first was written in his 20s — and now he has a movie to serve as a time capsule. What did he think about the process of putting his life on film?

"If they [the production team] had not been as much fun to work with, I wouldn't have done this," Harrelson said. "If they would've been a bunch of assholes, I wouldn't have done it."

As always, let's give Hawk the last word.

Stark: Useless Info Dept., Hidden Ball Trick Edition

By Jayson Stark / The Athletic / September 6, 2018

When a guy gets thrown out stealing on a walk, when a hitter makes two home run trots in the same at-bat and when Shohei Ohtani does that famous Babe Ruth imitation again, you know it was another Useless Info kind of week.

But before we get to the wackiness portion of this program, we've got the craziest foul ball of the year to talk about!

HIDDEN BALL TRICK OF THE WEEK

He's the third baseman for the New York Mets. She's an executive assistant from Thousand Oaks, Calif., who was just excited to take her son, her daughter and her niece to a baseball game.

They'd never met. Technically, in fact, Todd Frazier and Erin Macone still haven't met. But what you're about to read is a story that reminds us again of the beauty of baseball.

It's a story about how a pop-up began floating into the L.A. night on a Monday evening. And before you knew it, a ballplayer, an innocent fan, a real major-league baseball and a rubber practice ball were all converging on one spot at Dodger Stadium ...

And what happened next was one of the craziest plays of the year. A play that gave new meaning to that old phrase, the hidden ball trick.

"I thought he caught the ball," Erin Macone told The Athletic. "I thought all night that he caught the ball."

"It's Hollywood," Frazier said afterward, grinning guiltily. "So sometimes you have to act out a little bit."

Act out? This dude deserves an Oscar for Best Actor in a Misleading Role.

He held up a ball he never caught. He held up a ball that wasn't even a baseball. And he gave such a commanding, realistic performance, he got a real "out" to show for it. Now that's acting. Take that, De Niro.

The brief synopsis of this play goes like this:

It's the bottom of the second inning. Alex Verdugo lifts a pop-up toward the stands behind third base. Frazier leaps into the first row... gets the baseball in his glove ... crashes into Macone (sitting in the first row for the first time in her life) ... disappears ... then finally lurches to his feet, shows umpire Mark Wegner the ball and waits for Wegner to give the official "out" sign.

Frazier then lobs the ball into the seats. And it appears to be just another highlight-reel play in a normal big-league baseball game, which continues onward from there as if nothing strange has just happened. But little did the world know ...

"The ball came out," Frazier admitted, two days later, after SNY's Steve Gelbs revealed exactly what happened in a Zapruder-film type breakdown in a segment that should easily earn him a Pulitzer Prize for baseball's foremost expose of 2018 – but will probably just have to settle for going viral on Twitter.

Thanks to Gelbs' reporting, we know that after the real baseball popped out of his glove, Frazier somehow found that rubber baseball rolling around the floor beneath Macone's seat. So it was that ball he grabbed, showed off and then fired off ASAP to dispose of the evidence.

That's the synopsis that now has been digested by the rest of the planet. But here's what really happened, according to the eyewitness account of the woman who still has the baseball Alex Verdugo hit – but didn't know herself that she had it until many hours later.

"We go to games all the time, but this was the first time we ever sat in the first row," Macone said. "So we were really excited. The kids were more excited to get autographs because that's the best place to get them. So that's why we brought a bag of balls to the game."

That bag was filled with baseballs to get signed. But Macone's 11-year-old son, Anderson, had inadvertently stuffed that rubber practice ball into the bag. So the kids got autographs on the real baseballs before the game. Then they put those balls into the now-legendary "green bag" as the game began.

What was left out of the green bag, sitting on a shelf at their seat, was the other ball. The rubber ball. The one that was about to get famous.

"That was the only one they didn't get signed," Macone said. "And that's why it was sitting out. All the others were tucked away in the bag."

Now here came Verdugo's pop-up and a scrambling third baseman heading her way. The kids had just left to go to the bathroom. Suddenly, this otherwise-innocent spot in the stadium had turned into a madhouse, with Frazier landing on Macone's lap, then tumbling to the floor, as Macone and a nearby fan wearing a Justin Turner shirt were trying to figure out what the heck was happening.

"I was trying to get his feet untangled," Macone said. "His feet were all tangled in the green bag. There were strings that keep the bag together, and he got caught in that. That's why it took so long [for Frazier to pop to his feet]. He was all tangled in the strings, and I was trying to get him out."

Finally, as Frazier staggered to his feet and showed the umpire the alleged ball he'd just "caught," the guy in the Justin Turner shirt found a baseball on the ground beneath his feet – and handed it to Macone.

"I said, 'Where'd that come from?'" she recalled. "He said, 'It fell out of his back pocket.' I said, 'Ballplayers don't usually carry balls in their pocket.' But I didn't really know [it was the ball Verdugo had hit] because I thought he caught the ball."

From there, a normal baseball game resumed. Nothing much unusual about it. Except that Erin Macone noticed something. Every now and then, Todd Frazier would look at them, make eye contact and smile.

"He kept turning around and giving us the thumbs up, like 'Do you believe that?'" she said. "He probably thought I saw it happen. But I didn't know until I got home that night."

It wasn't until they were packing up to leave the park that they realized the rubber ball was missing. They'd never noticed, because "it wasn't like a ball we cared about." But even then, they had no idea what role that rubber ball had played in this saga. Until ...

The truth began to emerge on social media later. Whereupon Erin Macone, amused by it all, decided to tweet at Frazier in jest:

And that was the point when her 15 minutes of fame kicked in. She watched the videos people sent her on Twitter and Facebook. She realized what had happened to her son's rubber ball. She figured out that baseball she'd brought home "was the baseball" that Verdugo hit. It all clicked into place. Sort of.

But trying to figure out what to make of what she'd just seen and the unwitting role she'd played – now that was the hard part. She didn't think what Frazier had done was "cheating" because "things happen in baseball." She'd accidentally caused the Dodgers to make an out they might not have made. But it wasn't as if it were a pivotal moment in the game.

"If it was a game-winning play or a really big thing in the game, that might have been different," Macone said. "I was just mad at myself that I didn't notice [what really happened]. But in my defense, I was really just trying to get his feet out of the bag."

It's an excellent excuse, actually. Especially for a fan who had never caught a baseball before, let alone a baseball player. There are lessons to be learned from every experience in life. But if you can deduce what the lesson is from this classic moment, you're smarter than us.

"I don't think it'll happen again," Erin Macone said. "But it was fun. I just know that I'm wearing helmets the next time I sit there."

THE OHTANI WATCH

The news that Shohei Ohtani is almost certainly headed for a visit to his friendly neighborhood Tommy John surgeon isn't what we'd call "shocking." But can we call now for a brief moment of silence, just because this does mark the end of all the two-way, Bambino-esque fun he's provided us Useless Info-maniacs all year? Thank you.

Many entertaining, mind-blowing tidbits came out of that two-way fun, you know. And guess what? He churned out two more classics just this week:

As recently as Wednesday, Ohtani fired off his second two-homer game of the season. And how cool is that? We'll tell you how cool.

That makes two multi-homer games at the plate and two double-figure strikeout games on the mound for Ohtani this year. You know how rare that is? So rare that only one other player in the expansion era has ever done that in the same season: Rick Wise, for the 1971 Phillies. Almost a half-century ago.

Oh. And then there's this: Two multi-homer games for Ohtani as a hitter but zero multi-homer games as a pitcher in the same season (minimum: 10 starts)? It's not like that has never happened. You just have to go back 99 years!

Yep. Of course Babe Ruth did it, in 1919, with three multi-homer games at the dish (in 130 games) – but no multi-homer games on the mound (in 17 appearances, 15 starts). Then again, this isn't a fair fight. Ruth gave up two home runs that whole season (to 570 hitters) and only 10 in his entire pitching career (in 163 trips to the mound).

But those were different times, my friends. And in these times, Shohei Ohtani is the most Babe-like figure we've got going for us. So we've never rooted harder for anyone to have successful Tommy John Surgery than we're rooting for this guy. We need these notes!

USELESS INFO OF THE WEEK

COLE MINING – Cole Hamels got traded to the Cubs in July. He won the Pitcher of the Month award in August. This is known in the baseball business as a "hell of a trade." But there's also this:

Only two other pitchers in the last 20 years got traded in July and won a Pitcher of the Month award in August – and just to put Hamels on notice, those other guys were so energized by their deals, they both won two of those awards in a row!

CC Sabathia – dealt early enough in July 2008 that he won the July and August Pitcher of the Month awards for the Brewers.

Randy Johnson – traded to the Astros before the deadline in 1998, then collected Pitcher of the Month trophies in August and September.

So Cole, no resting on your laurels!

REMEMBER WHEN THERE WERE NO-HITTERS? – Baseball set a weird and unfortunate record last week: Most pitchers exiting no-hitters in the sixth inning or later.

Once upon a time, if a guy had a no-hitter working in the sixth inning, he'd stick around to throw 148 pitches if he had to. Tim Lincecum could tell you all about it.

But we don't live in that world anymore, do we?

So when the Padres' Eric Lauer departed the team's latest ill-fated no-hit bid on Aug. 30, after five hitless innings (and a grueling 81 pitches), it marked the 13th time this season a pitcher had headed for the exit ramps after at least five no-hit innings.

The previous record: 12, back in 2015.

We can only assume we'll be up to 50 of these by, oh, 2022 – if there's even such a thing as "starting pitchers" by then.

(Addendum Dept.: Amazingly, we didn't even have to include hitless starts by "the opener" in these computations to break this hallowed record. But if you're curious, we're up to 32 hit-free "starts" if we include outings of any length to start a game.)

WAIT. THERE'S MORE HISTORY! – And now another record that was set in the last week: Most "cheapest saves of all time" in history!

Eddie Butler saved a dramatic 18-4 game Sunday for Texas. Incredibly, it was the fifth time this season a pitcher had "saved" a game his team won by 13 runs or more. There had been five saves like that in the previous nine seasons combined. That's in over 25,000 games, by the way.

But the #breakingnews here is that that's the most saves in blowouts that large in any season since the dawn of the modern save rule. The old record: four, in 1991 (in saves by Bill Swift, Storm Davis, Luis Aquino and Eric Gunderson). What a sport!

A STORY-BOOK EVENING – It may not have been the first three-homer game of 2018. In fact, Trevor Story's trifecta in Colorado on Wednesday was actually the 13th. But it's also an all-timer, because...

All three homers either tied the game or put the Rockies ahead.

Story actually fell down hitting the first of those homers.

All three homers came off the same pitcher – the Giants' Andrew Suárez. And as our friend, Doug "Kernels" Kern reports, it's the first time any Giants pitcher has served up three homers to the same hitter in the same game since Sal Maglie, to Andy Pafko, back on Aug. 2, 1950.

Home run No. 2 was estimated by Statcast at 505 feet. And if you believe home-run estimates, which is always a slight leap of faith, that would be the longest homer ever recorded by Statcast in its four seasons of life. (The old record, of 504, was also once set at Coors, by – who else? – Giancarlo Stanton.)

In fact, even back in the day of the late, great Home Run Tracker site, the longest home run that group ever recorded in its 12 seasons (2006-17) was a 504-foot Adam Dunn space shot off the center-field scoreboard in Arizona. So however long that Trevor Story blast traveled, it was a monster.

And finally, while we're talking long distance, Story's three home runs traveled a total of 1,380 feet (more than four football fields), according to Statcast. And that's the most combined feet, in anybody's three-homer game, in the Statcast era. The old record was 1,324, by good old Alex Rodriguez, on July 25, 2015. MYSTERY PITCHER UPDATE OF THE WEEK – Our count of position players traipsing to the mound is now up to 62 this year. And even though, sadly, that parade tends to drop off in September, you can always count on Chris Gimenez – now up to 11 career mystery-pitching appearances – to churn out some excellent fodder. Such as...

He has now pitched for two different teams this year – the Cubs and Twins. So ignore that attractive 36.00 ERA he has run up. The big news is, he's the first to take the mound for two teams in the same year since Erik Kratz did it for the Pirates and Astros in 2016.

We should have mentioned this earlier this season, but Gimenez can now say he has pitched for four different teams in his career – the Rangers, Indians, Twins and Cubs. And that's something only one other position player in the expansion era can claim. The other: Josh Wilson (Rays, Diamondbacks, Padres, Tigers).

But here's the big story. In his dramatic return to the mound Sunday in Texas, Gimenez served up two home runs – but then hit a home run himself. As an American League pitcher! So how many true position players in the live-ball era have given up two homers but also hit a homer in the same game? Exactly one. Yessir, Chris Gimenez.

STRANGEST BUT TRUEST FEATS OF THE WEEK

IF YOU'RE SCORING AT HOME – Trea Turner got thrown out trying to steal second base on a walk Tuesday. That's bizarre enough. But don't call it a "caught stealing." In fact, don't even try to score one of the Strangest But Truest plays of this or any year. First, you should just check out this goofy replay special from Tuesday's Nationals-Cardinals game.

Yep, this really happened. How can a guy get thrown out stealing – on a walk? (Because he overslid the bag.)

How can a guy get thrown out trying to steal but have it not be a "caught stealing?" (Because it wouldn't have been ruled a stolen base if he'd been safe, since it was ball four.)

And how can a guy get "picked off" a base he only occupied for about a tenth of a second? (Because the rules say they have to have some sort of explanation for this nutty play.)

So technically, we've answered all your questions. But you know what the real answer is?

Baseball!

DÉJÀ VU TROTTER OF THE WEEK – The White Sox' Daniel Palka did something Sunday that seems mathematically impossible: He made two home run trots – in the same at-bat!

So how'd that happen? Replay. Of course. You were expecting maybe he'd lost track of how many bases he'd circled?

Palka thought he'd curled a ball around the right-field foul pole in the fourth inning off Boston's William Cuevas. So he circled the bases, got back to the dugout ... and then had the whole extravaganza overturned by the replay gods.

So four pitches later, he pounded another home run to right field, kept this one fair and completed his second trot. Two trots. One at-bat.

Baseball!

SPEAKING OF DÉJÀ VU – The following is all 100 percent true...

Gio González has hit two batters this year – one Met, one Phillie. They were both José Bautista. Just with two different teams.

Until he messed up this note Wednesday with a leadoff homer against Michael Kopech, Detroit's Jeimer Candelario had hit two home runs leading off the first inning this year – one against the Blue Jays, one against the Yankees. The pitchers who gave them up were both named J.A. Happ. With two different teams. Remember Matt Adams? The Nationals definitely do. He has three multi-homer games this year. Two were for the Nationals. The third came Wednesday, against the Nationals. Only two other men in this century have ever had multi-homer games for and against the same team in the same season, according to baseball-reference.com: Steve Finley (for and against Arizona in 2004) and Rondell White (for and against the Cubs in 2000).

How can what goes around keep coming around? That's easy.

Baseball!

BRONX BOMBING – Love this strange-but-true classic from YES Network's Jeff Quagliata. Luke Voit just became the fifth different Yankee to homer in three consecutive games this season. Every one of them did it in a different month.

Voit in September....Giancarlo Stanton in August....Aaron Hicks in June....Gleyber Torres in May....Didi Gregorius in April.

Not pictured: Aaron Judge or Gary Sánchez, because ...

Baseball!

DODGE-BALL – Finally, thanks to “Brothers In Arms” author Jon Weisman for pointing us toward one of the Strangest But Truest games ever. On Aug. 29, the Dodgers won a game in Texas in which they got four hits.

Three of them were home runs. One of them was a triple.

None of them were singles. None of them were doubles.

So in the 100 seasons that comprise the live-ball era, how many other games have featured a team hitting three homers and a triple but forgetting to hit any singles or doubles? That would be none. And how is that possible?

Baseball!

How James Shields is leaving a lasting mark on the White Sox rotation

By James Fegan / The Athletic / September 6, 2018

Dylan Cease said something interesting the other day while talking about his dominant second-half run in Double-A Birmingham. Despite coming up as a prospect renowned for his wipeout curveball, Cease had altered his grip to that of a spike curve that he felt he could command better.

He had been shown the grip by fellow prospect Dane Dunning, whose strong start to the year had been helped in no small part by James Shields showing him a new curve grip in spring training.

“I wouldn't doubt that at all,” Cease said when asked if it was the same grip.

At this rate, it seems unlikely there will be any overlap between the White Sox tenures of Shields and Cease, or Dunning. But thanks to a little backfield spring training chatter in Glendale, there could be vestiges of what is now a 13-year career, with 401 starts — the first of which included striking out Javy Lopez for his first career punchout — extending all the way to the end of what could be long careers for Cease and

Dunning, or more likely those of the younger pitchers they show a spike curve grip to along the way, and so on.

“I guess I don’t really think about it too much, you know?” Shields said. “It’s always good to hear that guys are taking advice and changing part of their game to make them better. I’ve gotten grips from other guys, so I would imagine it’s a little more common than you think.”

Stories about pitches exchanged among teammates — or stolen from Pitching Ninja GIFs — tend to only make the rounds when a new pitch becomes a revelation, and even then grips change and are adjusted over time. An old Tampa Bay Rays legend that Shields taught Alex Cobb his changeup proved apocryphal — Cobb throws a split-change and Shield a circle-change — but of course they talked about how they each grip it, where they locate it and how they throw it.

In reality, the exchange of information between members of a pitching staff is much more constant, especially where Shields is involved. A grip doesn’t have to be handed over for a particularly outgoing Southern California native to relate how he plants his lead foot, feels the seams through the release, and what counts he likes to use a pitch in.

“We’ve talked about a changeup grip and working with me on a changeup grip,” Dylan Covey said. “I was trying it and it didn’t feel comfortable for me so he was like, ‘Alright, go back to your old one and keep doing that,’ but he would tell me a mechanical cue like, ‘Think this, this, and this and then at the last second do that.’ It was just things like that, where he’s been around a long time and he has a lot of feel about what you’re supposed to do out there and what you’re supposed to feel on the mound when the ball is coming out of your hand.”

As a 36-year-old starter in a White Sox rotation where the next-oldest member is the 25-year-old Carlos Rodón, and the next-oldest member of the 40-man roster is 32, Shields has been pegged as a mentoring presence since the start of last year. Some of that came from typecasting — a way to supplement his purpose on the team coming off the worst season of his career — but it was backed up by the fact that this is who Shields has always been at every big league stop.

His framed sign that reads “If you don’t like it, play better,” still hangs in the San Diego Padres clubhouse. He was overtly brought to Kansas City to provide leadership in their bid to contend. Just by way of being a 26-year-old who toiled in the minors for six years before he made his major league debut in 2006, Shields was the grizzled veteran of the 2008 Rays staff that went to the World Series behind him, Scott Kazmir, Matt Garza and Edwin Jackson, and they treated him as such.

“The day before my start, going over my head playing catch with him — he was like, ‘Man, when you’re going over your head, your pitches look nasty playing catch,’” Jackson said. “He was like, ‘You’re not going to do it in a game tomorrow.’ And I went and started the next day and went over my head and it kinda helped spark a nice little run. Just going over my head from the windup mechanically, and I went on a nice little run for a few years after that. Had it not been for him challenging me, I probably wouldn’t have done it and it helped me take off.”

Shields would say that’s just part of being teammates, and was something he has always depended on himself, during the multitude of adjustments he has made during his career.

“I would say one of the best pitching coaches I’ve ever had is the players that I’ve played with,” Shields said. “The players I’ve played catch with on a daily basis. My goal in Tampa was to help each other out as a starting pitching staff, as a unit, and if that means in-game, in between innings, talking to each other, just helping each other out and really feeding off each other. Edwin would look at me and say, ‘Hey, you’re doing this with your hands,’ or I’d look at him and say, ‘Hey, your rhythm is a little off, maybe go over your head a little bit.’ That was kind of one of those things where we always constantly talked to each other and always helped each other out and I think that translated into a winning formula over there.”

Leading the Rays rotation in his 20s reads as the formative experience of Shields' career. It's where he established himself as a 200-inning horse against AL East offenses, and where he forged relationships in which he both mentored and challenged guys like Jackson, Matt Garza, Cobb and David Price. As the senior member of the staff who had worked his way to the majors despite minimal prospect pedigree, a leadership role might have been typecast again for Shields, but it was just something that came naturally to him.

"That was who he was when I got there," Cobb said. "I didn't see that evolve into anything. Once I got up into the big leagues, he was one of the first ones to embrace you as a starting pitcher, as a rookie. And take you under his wing and kind of show you not only verbally, but show you by example, the way to do things, the way to take care of your business."

Asserting yourself as a leader, committing to outwork every one of your younger teammates and texting them before sunrise to both wake them up, and to tell them that you've already completed your morning workout and are on your way home to wake your children for school, are all effective ways to earn the respect of a clubhouse. But Shields' path to the majors did plenty of the lifting in proving he was someone worth listening to.

"He probably had the biggest impact on me as a teammate, as a person and a father over anybody else that I've ever been teammates with," Price said. "Just seeing his work ethic, hearing his story. Albeit, it's hearing it from him. Could be fabricated a little bit. He's a great storyteller. I love him to death, and I'd say that to his face, and he knows it, too."

The way the story goes is that Shields was a 16th-round pick out of high school, though not one of the late-round guys who quickly convinces everyone that he's going to transcend his draft stock. Spending the opening weeks of the season in extended spring training because there wasn't a rotation slot open for him became an annual ritual, and it came with some mention that the major leagues might not be in his future. Five years into his professional career, Shields was still fighting to get noticed by a franchise that was hungry for rotation mainstays.

"I remember in 2005 I was actually supposed to get released," Shields said. "I ended up not making a team out of spring training and they sent me to extended because they didn't have any room for me and the next year, in 2006, two months in, I was in the big leagues. For me it's been a long road, but again, I've just worked really hard to get to where I'm at today and I've always had that mentality."

So much of Shields' career has already begun to look like an anachronism over the course of his 13 years. The current league leader in complete games this year has just two, whereas Shields threw three in a row during one stretch of his 2011 season, which Price put on level with Chris Sale's 2017 campaign as the most impressive season he's witnessed from a teammate.

Shields has admitted that in the past he has probably pitched when it wasn't the best idea for him physically, and even with the self-awareness of a long career, it's doubtful anything less severe than last year's torn lat muscle would have been enough to end his career-long streak of avoiding the disabled list. His offseason work and start preparation is all centered around the idea that the best thing he can do for his team is stay healthy and soak up innings, and if there's something he wants to be remembered for, it's getting on the mound and posting up every five days, no matter what.

"I definitely took that from him," said Danny Duffy, who says Shields took him under his wing in Kansas City. "I try to apply that here. I haven't felt my best in all of the last four years at times, as everybody has, I do my best to stay off the DL. I obviously have spent a couple stints on the DL, but if my body's able, I'm going to try to get out there and get outs."

Every rotation has horses, but not everyone will impress upon others the keys to being one — diet, offseason programs, sleeping patterns, you name it — like Shields.

"I do my best to teach by example because it's not my place to teach them," Duffy said. "I'm my own player still and I still have a lot to learn. I try to leave it up to the coaches to do that and if anybody ever asks, and has an open ear, I'll obviously say what I'm going to say but it's not really in my personality. Shields is ... that's him. He'll let you know."

And accordingly, because he wasn't traded despite a renaissance season that will likely see him clear 200 innings for the 10th time in his career, Shields remains in the White Sox clubhouse, at least for the rest of the month until his contract ends and his 2019 option likely is declined. And Chicago's young pitching staff, which he so fervently and repeatedly insists is on the verge of greatness, well, he's letting them know.

"He always rents a car when we go to Detroit because our hotel is out in Birmingham," Lucas Giolito said. "It's further away from the stadium and he'll give guys rides to the field instead of taking the bus, whether it be early or after games back to the hotel, and every single time I'm always ready for a new story of a teammate, or something they did, or playoffs or whatever it may be. He's always got a story and for me that's always a time to listen and learn as a young player."

"We're always talking, he's telling me something insightful that obviously will help me with my career because, what is this? His 13th year?" Rodón said. "He's a pretty durable guy. What is he 37, 36 about to throw 200 innings? Doesn't happen very often. I don't know how many guys who are 36 years old. There are probably a handful who are throwing 200 innings. [Justin] Verlander's one, he's 36. Nolan Ryan, Randy Johnson, maybe Bartolo [Colón], and then probably all the guys from the friggin' 1940s who didn't care about their arms. Anything that he says is pretty insightful and something you instill in the back of your head."

Shields wants to keep pitching for a few years, for as long as his body allows him to keep feeling this strong. Some good luck with health could allow him another 200-inning season. Some fantastic luck would drag him toward 500 starts, but the end is easy enough to foresee, and baseball will get a fair bit more homogenous when he departs.

Pitching through discomfort is more often termed as poor management these days than revered as the mark of a competitor. Innings pitched is still a vital currency for determining pitcher value, but baseball has moved beyond demanding the lion's share of it come from 200-inning warriors stretched to their limits. And yet the league and his teammates will still mimic Shields, long after he's gone in a few years, if only because he was so willing to show them how.

"I don't really take pride in being a good teammate," Shields said. "Well, I do take pride in being a good teammate. But I just try to be myself every day. If that comes out to being a good teammate, that's great. One of the things from when I got called up was to be competitive, to work hard and to be a good teammate, but it's not something that I try to do. It's just something that naturally ... I hope that guys take me as a good teammate and hopefully by the end of my career everyone that I played with enjoyed playing with me."

Tannehill: 'Hawk' Doc Reveals True Identity Of Harrelson

By Chris Tannehill / 670 The Score / September 6, 2018

CHICAGO, Ill. (670 The Score) --The White Sox turned an off day from the field to a night on the big screen at ArcLight Cinemas on Chicago's North Side on Thursday.

The new Ken Harrelson documentary appropriately titled "Hawk" is a collaborative effort between NBC Sports Chicago and Sox TV, the White Sox's multimedia platform, and began production 18 months ago. The documentary takes us from Harrelson's humble beginnings growing up in Savannah, Georgia all the way to Granger, Indiana as a loving grandfather.

"Hawk" premiered Thursday to members of the media, White Sox staff and a select group of donors to White Sox Charities. Among those in attendance were owner Jerry Reinsdorf, executive vice president Ken Williams and former manager Ozzie Guillen. Prior to the screening, NBC Sports Chicago's Chuck Garfien

hosted a brief panel discussion featuring the film's producers in Ryan McGuffey, Matt Dahl and Brad Boron and also Hawk himself.

Harrelson entered the theater to cheers as he announced he "had to get a Smirnoff" for this event. He then immediately told a story about his night in a Venezuelan jail. The film offered rare access to the personal side of someone whom White Sox fans have felt acquainted with for more than 35 years in the television booth. During the panel discussion, McGuffey said that anyone can be more prone to open up while in their living room as opposed to their workplace, which in Harrelson's case is his perch above Guaranteed Rate Field. For one night, those in attendance had the opportunity to sit in Hawk's living room.

The film features cameos from some of the White Sox players whose accomplishments on the field set the stage for Hawk to take flight. A.J. Pierzynski, who first met Harrelson while in high school, reminisced on a "Mother Goose" type of atmosphere in the clubhouse in which White Sox legend Paul Konerko would read excerpts from Harrelson's 1969 autobiography to his fellow Sox teammates. Konerko said the book was similar to the Bible in that you can open "Hawk" to any page and find something poignant.

The one-hour film also features former MLB commissioner Bud Selig and broadcasting legends Bob Costas and Bob Uecker, who took exception to Harrelson being called "An institution." Baseball's king of one-liners suggested that Hawk should instead "be in an institution." The producers of the film also traveled to Boston, where "The Hawk" alter-ego was first celebrated as MLB's "mod" player, but it was in Chicago where Harrelson cemented his legacy as one of baseball's most unique characters.

The documentary's climax of Mark Buehrle's perfect game in 2009 was skillfully edited as the story of Harrelson's biggest moment as a broadcaster and was amplified by Steve Stone, the White Sox's television analyst since the 2009 season. Stone explained that just as Buehrle weaved his way through Tampa Bay's lineup on that July 23, 2009 day, Harrelson turned into "The Hawk" through the course of the game, crescendoing into Harrelson's famous "History!" call of baseball's 18th perfect game.

Defining the difference between Ken and "The Hawk" was a central theme of the film as White Sox fans finally get their chance to see the real Ken Harrelson. White Sox play-by-play man and Harrelson successor Jason Benetti said that Harrelson is a "loving soul with a Hawk exterior." "Hawk" concludes with touching interviews with Harrelson's wife and children, who proudly boast about a man who "loves his family more than anyone."

The only chapter remaining for Harrelson is whether his career will culminate with a spot in Cooperstown. Fellow Hall of Famers Frank Thomas and Uecker seem to agree that Harrelson is worthy of the Ford C. Frick award, which is presented annually by the Baseball Hall of Fame to a broadcaster for major contributions to the game. Harrelson's family wishes that if Hawk is inducted into the Hall of Fame that it happens while Harrelson is still around to enjoy the honor and able to get behind a microphone for one last time to deliver an acceptance speech to his adoring family and White Sox fans.

During the screening, Harrelson didn't mention the Hall of Fame, but he did reveal some of his wishes for his final resting place: "Here lies a man who adores his family and the Chicago White Sox. He Gone!"

"Hawk" airs at 7 p.m. CT next Thursday, Sept. 13 on NBC Sports Chicago.
