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Who was your favorite team's 2018 MVP?

MLB.com / September 27, 2018

From familiar faces like Mike Trout, Paul Goldschmidt and Jose Abreu to relative newcomers to the spotlight like Blake Snell, Aaron Nola and Kyle Freeland, there was certainly no shortage of star power to go around the league in 2018.

Whether they were fueling postseason pushes, serving as veteran leaders on young teams or captivating fans with breakout campaigns, these standouts provided baseball fans around the country with the most exciting storylines of the regular season.

Here's a look at every team's 2018 MVP, in the words of all 30 MLB.com beat writers:

AMERICAN LEAGUE EAST

Blue Jays: Justin Smoak

Smoak wasn't quite able to replicate his breakout 2017 campaign, but the veteran slugger has been the Blue Jays' most consistent hitter from start to finish. The 31-year-old entered play on Wednesday with the team lead in home runs (25), RBIs (77) and OPS (.814). He was at the heart of Toronto's lineup all year, and another solid season has all but officially guaranteed that his \$7 million option for next year will be picked up by the Blue Jays.

Orioles: Trey Mancini

On a team decimated by trades and searching for an identity, Mancini has provided a second-half lift. The second-year player -- who finished third in AL Rookie of the Year Award voting last year -- entered Wednesday batting .278 with 11 homers in 59 games since the All-Star break, one long ball shy of his total from the first half, which spanned 91 games.

Rays: Blake Snell

Snell has a chance to do something only five other pitchers have done in the live-ball era (since 1920): finish with 21 wins and a sub-2.00 ERA at age 25 or younger. He would join Dwight Gooden, Vida Blue, Denny McLain, Dave McNally and Hal Newhouser. The lefty has made 26 starts this season in which he has allowed two runs or fewer and 20 starts of one run or fewer -- both most in the Major Leagues, excluding "openers."

Red Sox: Mookie Betts

So much for those who thought Betts had reached his peak two years ago when he finished second in the AL MVP Award voting to Mike Trout. After a tick downward in 2017, Betts has raised his game to the highest level of his career and taken the Red Sox with him for the ride. He has impacted his team in every way possible, hitting for average and power, stealing bases, playing brilliant defense and becoming a young leader in the clubhouse. Betts is a shoo-in to win his first batting title and has already achieved a career high in homers. He trails only Trout in on-base percentage and OPS. Betts also leads MLB in FanGraphs WAR.

Yankees: Didi Gregorius

Championed as "the captain of the infield" by manager Aaron Boone, Gregorius has provided the Yankees with leadership as well as above-average play on both sides of the ball. He has hit a career-high 27 homers, shattering his own record for the most by a Yanks shortstop, while committing just five errors. Gregorius slumped in May (.149 average) after a sensational April (1.156 OPS), but his numbers steadily improved each month thereafter.

AL CENTRAL

Indians: Jose Ramirez

This designation could go to either Ramirez or Francisco Lindor, and both could wind up in the top five in voting for the AL Most Valuable Player Award for the second straight year. Ramirez joined Joe Carter (1987) and Grady Sizemore (2008) as the only 30/30 players in Indians history. He also joined Barry Bonds, Jeff Bagwell and Bobby Abreu as the only hitters in MLB history to have 100 walks, 100 RBIs and 100 runs to go along with the 30 homers and 30 steals. Ramirez has rated as baseball's top baserunner, and for the second year in a row, he has bounced between third base and second base defensively.

Royals: Whit Merrifield

Merrifield has emerged as one of the most dynamic offensive weapons in the league. He'll likely win his second straight stolen-base title, and he has a chance to lead the AL (maybe even the Majors) in hits. All that athleticism shows up defensively as well, as Merrifield has turned into a premier super-utility man, ranging from center field to second base to first base. He's a manager's dream because of his versatility.

Tigers: Nicholas Castellanos

Considering what was around him in the Tigers' lineup, Castellanos had one of the best seasons in a Detroit uniform since Miguel Cabrera's prime. He not only has career bests in average, slugging, on-base, OPS, hits and runs scored, but he's also put himself among the AL's top 10 in total bases, runs created, weighted on-base average, and nearly there in win probability added. Castellanos has taken Cabrera's seat as the center of Detroit's offense.

Twins: Eddie Rosario

Rosario had a breakout season offensively and was the Twins' best all-around player, hitting .288/.323/.479 with 24 homers, 31 doubles and 77 RBIs in 138 games before suffering a season-ending quad injury in mid-September. He was also a solid defender in left field, using his strong arm to rack up nine outfield assists. Rosario still has room to improve his plate discipline, but is among the best bad-ball hitters in baseball with a Major League-high 10 of his homers coming on pitches out of the zone, per Statcast™.

White Sox: Jose Abreu

For the first time in Abreu's five years with the White Sox, the first baseman failed to reach at least 25 home runs, 100 RBIs and a .290 average. Abreu lost all but six games after Aug. 20 due to surgery to relieve pain from testicular torsion and an infection in his right thigh, but he still was the most consistent force in the White Sox lineup. Abreu knocked out 22 homers and 36 doubles and drove in 78 runs to go along with a .473 slugging percentage and a .798 OPS.

AL WEST

Angels: Mike Trout

The best player in baseball keeps finding ways to get better. Trout, a two-time AL MVP Award winner, is having his best season to date, leading the Majors in on-base percentage, OPS and intentional walks, and ranking second in slugging percentage and WAR. Trout also made a concerted effort to improve his defense in center field and continues to be a burner on the basepaths. The 27-year-old star is a perennial AL MVP Award candidate, but his case this year will likely be hurt by the fact that the Angels are set to miss the playoffs for a fourth consecutive season.

Astros: Alex Bregman

With 2017 AL MVP Award winner Jose Altuve not able to duplicate his tremendous numbers from a year ago, Bregman emerged as the Astros' most dangerous offensive player with a historic season at the plate. He joined Lance Berkman as the only Houston players to reach 50 doubles, 100 RBIs and 100 runs in a season and is the first player in MLB history to have at least 50 doubles and 30 homers while playing the majority of his games at third base.

Athletics: Khris Davis

Davis no longer plays the field, but the impact he has on the A's lineup as designated hitter is invaluable. He's their main power source -- they went lifeless at the plate when he was on the DL this year, going 3-6 without him -- and he just so happens to be baseball's home run leader, making him worthy of AL MVP Award consideration. Davis, who has launched more long balls since the advent of 2016 than any other player, at least belongs in the conversation.

Mariners: Mitch Haniger

While a case certainly can be made for closer Edwin Diaz's value, given that he's saved two-thirds of the wins for a team that made a living on one-run victories for much of the year, Haniger emerged as Seattle's best everyday player with a breakout season. The first-time All-Star kicked his game up further with a strong stretch run both offensively and in right field, where he's tops in the Majors with 12 assists. The 27-year-old is the second Mariners outfielder with 35-plus doubles, 25-plus homers and 90-plus RBIs in a season, joining Ken Griffey Jr. (1992 and '93).

Rangers: Shin-Soo Choo

Choo was an All-Star for the first time in his career and the Rangers' only representative. His high on-base percentage and ability to hit anywhere in the order were big assets to Texas' lineup. Joey Gallo had big home run and RBI totals, but Choo set the tone for the Rangers' offense, played solid defense so that Adrian Beltre could DH and emerged as a strong clubhouse leader on a young team.

NATIONAL LEAGUE EAST

Braves: Freddie Freeman

As great as Ronald Acuna Jr. was in the second half, his six-week stretch of dominance did not trump the overall value of Freeman, who was arguably the leading NL MVP Award candidate before entering a three-week slump in mid-August. Freeman's power production dropped over the final few months, but his consistency maximized the value produced by Nick Markakis and Ozzie Albies, fellow All-Stars who also produced MVP-caliber production during the first half.

Marlins: J.T. Realmuto

The last remaining core player from an explosive 2017 lineup, Realmuto not only by default became the face of the franchise, but he's also made the case that he's the best catcher in the Majors. The 27-year-old

leads his position in many major statistical categories. Realmuto was named to his first All-Star Game this year, and playing on a last-place team, the Oklahoma native embraced a leadership role on a young squad.

Mets: Jacob deGrom

The likely NL Cy Young Award winner, deGrom will appear on many NL MVP Award ballots as well. He is on pace to lead the NL in ERA by more than half a run, after posting the most consecutive quality starts in a season in Major League history. No NL hitter is close to deGrom in either FanGraphs' or Baseball Reference's calculation of WAR.

Nationals: Max Scherzer

The Nationals have endured injuries and inconsistencies from so much of their roster, but Scherzer remained the one steady presence every fifth day. He is one of the front-runners for the NL Cy Young Award and, like deGrom, will appear on some NL MVP Award ballots after leading the NL in wins and strikeouts and becoming just the sixth pitcher since 1990 to record 300 strikeouts in a single season.

Phillies: Aaron Nola

The Phillies had the second-best record in the NL and held first place in the NL East as late as Aug. 11 mostly because of their starting pitching. Nola led the way, establishing himself not only as the Phils' ace, but as one of the best starting pitchers in baseball. Entering Wednesday, Nola's bWAR (9.4) was fifth in the Majors. Only Betts (10.7), Trout (10.1) Scherzer (9.7) and deGrom (9.6) had higher marks.

NL CENTRAL

Brewers: Christian Yelich

Traditional numbers, newer numbers or narrative -- by nearly any definition, Yelich is the guy, not just for the Brewers, but perhaps in the whole NL. He's had a career year at the plate, hitting for average, hitting for power and getting on base. He's also played strong defense, contributed as an exceptional baserunner and carried a contending team for stretches of the season.

Cardinals: Matt Carpenter

No player was more integral to the Cardinals' second-half surge than Carpenter, whose white-hot summer pulled them back into contention almost single-handedly. St. Louis' leadoff hitter rebounded from a horrible start to put himself squarely in the NL MVP Award conversation. Carpenter leads the NL in homers and ranks among the leaders in a slew of major categories, including runs, slugging, OPS, wRC+ and WAR.

Cubs: Javier Baez

Baez began this season batting eighth for the Cubs, quickly moved up and now finds himself one of the top NL MVP Award candidates. He has set career highs in nearly every offensive category, and has done so while moving around the infield. Manager Joe Maddon says Baez is the best second baseman in the NL -- and he may be the best shortstop, too. He is the Cubs' quarterback. "El Mago" has had a magical year.

Pirates: Jameson Taillon

The Pirates have their ace. After a few rough outings early in the season, Taillon has put together 21 straight starts of three earned runs or fewer, a stretch surpassed by only deGrom this season. The former No. 2 overall pick leads Pittsburgh with 4.3 bWAR, and his emergence -- along with the success of Trevor Williams -- gives the Bucs hope heading into next season.

Reds: Eugenio Suarez

Signed to a seven-year, \$66 million contract extension in March, Suarez backed it up with his biggest season yet, and is among the NL leaders in home runs and RBIs. In July, he tied a franchise record with home runs in five consecutive games. Besides having a career year at the plate, the 27-year-old was again exceptional defensively at third base and could make both the routine and superlative plays. Suarez's numbers might have been more robust had he not missed 16 games in April with a fractured thumb. He was certainly missed, as Cincinnati went 3-13 without his contributions.

NL WEST

D-backs: Paul Goldschmidt

You could have gotten really good odds on May 22 that Arizona's MVP would be anyone other than Goldschmidt, as the six-time All-Star was hitting .198 at the time. Since then, though, he's gone on a tear and will finish the year with his usual outstanding numbers. Beyond the offensive numbers, Goldschmidt brings Gold Glove defense at first base and is an adept baserunner.

Dodgers: Justin Turner

Turner missed the first six weeks with a broken wrist and wasn't whole for another six weeks. That said, since the All-Star break, he's been the real Justin Turner, the most consistent offensive bat and a leader in the clubhouse. On a team that platoons almost everywhere, he is one player manager Dave Roberts hates to leave out of the lineup.

Giants: Brandon Crawford

Though Crawford fell short of his peak offensive production, he was San Francisco's top hitter early in the season, before the club began to struggle at the plate collectively. Crawford was torrid in May (.412/.446/.618) and June (.326/.425/.584) to help the Giants finish 29-26 in that span. Left knee soreness hampered Crawford at the plate and in the field, though the three-time Gold Glove-winning shortstop continued to make captivating plays throughout the season.

Padres: Kirby Yates

The Padres' offense has been inconsistent, and the few hitters who have starred have done so in limited plate appearances. The rotation, meanwhile, has been in a state of flux with rookie after rookie debuting. Through it all, Yates has been the anchor to one of the league's best bullpens. He's upped his strikeout rate, lowered his walk rate and honed his splitter to the point where it's been nearly unhittable this season.

Rockies: Kyle Freeland

Yes, this one is outside the BBWAA box, but given the 26-season history of baseball at a mile high, it makes total sense. Reading Freeland's stats is like playing that game with the fortune cookie message. Read, then say either "for the Rockies" or "at Coors Field." Going into Friday night's final regular-season start against the Nationals, he had a 2.84 ERA (club record: Ubaldo Jimenez, 2.88 in 2010), a 2.36 home ERA and is 8-1 with a 2.45 ERA in 13 starts after the All-Star break. And how's this for picking up his teammates? Freeland hasn't given up an unearned run, meaning he doesn't let miscues become costly.

Remembering 'Blackout Game,' 10 years later

By Scott Merkin / MLB.com / September 27, 2018

CHICAGO -- Some of the most ardent White Sox fans consider their 1-0 victory over the Twins on Sept. 30, 2008, at the ballpark then known as U.S. Cellular Field as the most exciting single game in franchise history.

And that contest, known as the Blackout Game thanks to the White Sox fans who donned all black at the game, wasn't even playoff baseball by the letter of the law. The Twins and White Sox finished the regular season tied atop the American League Central, at 88-74, with a winner-take-all outcome on the line.

"There were so many great things to me about that game," said Jim Thome, currently a special assistant to White Sox general manager Rick Hahn, but the Hall of Famer was Chicago's designated hitter who delivered the game-winning home run in the Blackout Game.

"Definitely as far as my career and my playing days from my whole life, that's certainly not even a question the biggest and coolest game I ever pitched in in terms of atmosphere, what was on the line and just the way it went," said John Danks, the White Sox starting and winning pitcher on the evening in question.

"It was one of those games where pitchers on both sides just dominated the whole ballgame," said Tigers manager Ron Gardenhire, who was the Twins' manager in 2008. "It was a playoff atmosphere, it was so tense."

"I don't think I saw the people that excited at the World Series. It was a very unique game," said Ozzie Guillen, the White Sox manager in 2008. "Maybe one of the few games that I get excited when we win. We win a lot of games. We lose a lot of games, but I never get excited for one game and I did it that day."

"Well it's certainly in the top five or 10," White Sox chairman Jerry Reinsdorf said. "It was a fun game."

Here's a look at that contest, as told by some of the people involved.

The Leadup

On Sept. 23, the White Sox entered the Metrodome with a 2 1/2-game lead over the Twins. Three gut-wrenching losses later, the Twins held a half-game lead.

That White Sox season-finishing losing streak would reach five in total, although the Twins' division lead never grew. Chicago needed to beat Cleveland on Sunday in the regular-season finale and Detroit on a rainy Monday in Chicago as the makeup of a previous postponement to even force the extra game.

Hahn, the current White Sox general manager who was assistant general manager at the time: We knew initially we dug ourselves a little bit of a hole, and we were without [AL MVP Award candidate Carlos] Quentin at that time. We were going to have to fight through adversity, and the coaches and [manager] Ozzie [Guillen] did a great job of keeping [the team] focused on just [winning] tonight. It doesn't matter if we have to win three if we can't win tonight.

A coin flip decided who would host the respective tiebreaker games. Hahn called heads, attributing the decision to his eldest son, Jake, who was 5 at the time, and the deciding AL Central game went to Chicago on that Tuesday. The White Sox had an 8-2 record at home against the Twins in 2008, but they were 1-8 at the Metrodome. Head-to-head record would decide home-field advantage in future tiebreakers as a result of this contest.

Twins starting and losing pitcher Nick Blackburn: They changed the rule after that year. That's when it really set in that it was kind of a crappy deal on our end. Obviously if we were in the Metrodome, it changes things.

Hahn: It was a huge split, so who knows what happens in one game at their place. It's hard to predict the result of any single game.

Jake Hahn threw out a ceremonial first pitch before the ensuing first home playoff game against Tampa Bay in honor of the coin flip success.

Hahn: Jake changed baseball [laughs]. There's a picture of him throwing out the first pitch from the Tampa Bay series up in his bedroom, a picture of him and [Mark] Buehrle up in his bedroom from that day. He denies some of his quotes at the time now that he's 15 and probably too cool for some of the things he said as a 5-year-old. His claim at the time was, "When you flip a coin, it usually comes up heads, so let's pick heads."

Blackout atmosphere

There was very little time to spread the word of the blackout from the last pitch of the victory over Detroit on Monday to Danks' first pitch on Tuesday. But the White Sox made the time limit work in their favor.

Brooks Boyer, senior vice president, sale and marketing, who came up with the blackout idea: We had this release ready to go about it being a blackout, and as soon as the game [against the Tigers] ended, we released it. Just one release, calling for a blackout, and it just went nuts. It was on every radio, TV broadcast. It was on everything.

Reinsdorf: It was surreal. All that black, it was incredible. I've never seen anything quite like it at a sporting event. And there was no preparation time. This wasn't a matter of telling everyone, "Six games from now,

we have a blackout game." This all came together overnight. I was proud of Brooks for coming up with the idea and getting it implemented.

The 40,354 fans each received a black towel to go with their black attire, although the short turnaround prevented those towels from featuring the White Sox logo. Nonetheless, the crowd was intimidating and something to see.

Thome: I have a picture of that home run from the side [angle] in my weight room, and I have got to tell you, still to this day, I look at it and the crowd in all black with those towels, it was the coolest moment. I remember going out stretching, warming up, and it was like, it brought chills. It honestly brought chills up and down thinking our fans did this.

White Sox catcher A.J. Pierzynski: When I walked out from the bullpen I was like, "Oh, man, this is really cool." It was such a different atmosphere than what you are used to. Granted, it was a one-game [tiebreaker]. But just when you walked out and saw everybody in black in the whole stadium, it kind of took your breath away for a second. It was definitely intimidating.

Danks: What I remember is every pitch, every strike, there was a reaction. Every out, there was a reaction like it's the biggest play of the game. There were some big plays in that game, but even just the average groundout or the flyout would get a pretty good reaction.

Danks vs. Blackburn

Danks threw eight scoreless innings, striking out four, walking three and yielding two hits in what was the best outing of his career. He was forced into action on three days' rest because of the frenetic nature of the White Sox season close.

Danks: I was the only guy that was basically capable of pitching, I guess. But it's funny, maybe a little more than a week before, we went to Minnesota, and we got swept, I believe. I got skipped in that series because my numbers against the Twins were so atrocious. It's funny how it fell back on me, however, long later. I definitely didn't think it was going to be a 1-0 game, that's for sure.

Reinsdorf: Absolutely the best game he ever pitched.

Hahn: I'm guessing there might be an outing along the way with a higher game score, but that was the biggest outing in my mind. When I think of John Danks' highlights with the White Sox, it's at the top of the list.

White Sox executive vice president Ken Williams, who was general manager at the time: John had a lot of good games. Unfortunately, we didn't have a lot of big games during the time he was here, but when he was called upon, he stepped up and stepped up in grand fashion.

Blackburn had defeated the White Sox on Sept. 24 during the Twins' home sweep, leading Guillen to comment that the White Sox lost because they didn't get the clutch hit and not because anything special done by Blackburn. After Blackburn allowed one long Thome home run over 6 1/3 innings, Guillen was effusive in his praise for the right-hander.

It was year No. 2 for Danks in the White Sox rotation and the first year as a starter for Blackburn. Both acquitted themselves like seasoned veterans.

Blackburn: That's the thing: If I'm going to give up the home run, there's not too many better than Jim Thome to give it up to. But it was just a fun environment to be involved in. I wish it would have turned out the other way for us. It was a great experience and something I always will look back on and kind of enjoy even though it was a loss.

Danks: What a cool night it was. It's something when I think about I still get goosebumps. I guess you could say the highlight of my career.

Play at the plate

Michael Cuddyer gave the Twins a chance to break the scoreless tie in the fifth with a leadoff double. He moved to third on Delmon Young's flyout, which brought Brendan Harris to the plate.

Harris connected on a fly ball to center field, grabbed by future Hall of Famer Ken Griffey Jr., a Trade Deadline acquisition by Williams. Griffey fired a strike home to nail Cuddyer, with Pierzynski's grab completing the double play.

Reinsdorf: Game-saving throw by Griffey Jr. I still don't know how A.J. held on to the ball.

Williams: Typically, at that stage when you are trying to add veterans to the club here and there, you do so because they can add to the clubhouse, and they can give you a little lift here and there on the field and because they have been there and done that. That [Griffey] throw was indicative of that.

Danks: I threw a changeup that I didn't get down and away nearly enough. Grif camped under it, made a one-hop throw, maybe even a little short two-hop throw, but what I really remember about that is the play A.J. made.

Guillen: It's funny because one of the biggest home run hitters in the game hit a home run and one of the best center fielders in the game threw the guy out. Everything clicked for us that day. That was the coolest part.

The throw left Pierzynski's left arm and the left side of his body exposed to Cuddyer. But he held on to keep the game scoreless.

Danks: There [were] still no rules at the plate. It was fair game on a catcher, and he picked the ball on a short hop and had a big old guy in Michael Cuddyer bearing down on him and was able to hang on to it. A.J. was wide open and ready to get lit up. That's pretty much the only way to describe it. Somehow, he held on. A.J.'s a gamer. That's how I would always describe A.J. Definitely the guy you want on a play at the plate.

Pierzynski: Nowadays I don't know what would have happened. He would have had to go around me and probably would have been safe actually. It was a weird play. Griffey threw like a 12-hopper -- I was like, "Hurry up and get to me," because I knew Cuddy was going to come get me. It was clean, and he did nothing wrong. And then obviously the play at the plate, and just the excitement. It was a huge momentum swing and a huge boost for us.

Thome's homer

Prior to Thome's seventh-inning at-bat against Blackburn, the Hall of Famer was 0-for-2 with a strikeout.

Thome: He had been throwing me slider/cutter inside all day. And as that game unfolded, I said to myself, "I've got to sit changeup. And if I get a changeup out over the plate, I can do damage on it."

Blackburn: My thought process is, "He's looking in at this point, and if I leave one over the plate, he's going to hit one 600 feet to right." I hung a changeup, and he hit it about 520 to center. If I execute the pitch, I'm confident I get the out right there.

Danks: We knew right away he hit a homer. None bigger in my career than the one Jimmy hit.

Thome's home run, coming on a 2-2 changeup, was his 34th of the regular season. There's a plaque in center at Guaranteed Rate Field commemorating the memorable blast. When Blackburn and Thome became teammates on the Twins in 2010, they had a chance to discuss the game-changing pitch and became good friends.

Thome: What most pitchers think about hitters is, "I don't want to miss in." But in that case, for me, missing in was probably better for him because of the way his ball was moving. As that game unfolded, he threw me a couple of changeups I think I took because he had me so tied up inside.

I remember, not that I was looking changeup, 2-2, but I remember saying to myself, the way the changeup came out of his hand was much different than when he was throwing me slider/cutters inside. I thought, "Man, if I could get another changeup, I'm going to be aggressive to it."

Blackburn: The game plan can only carry you so far if you don't execute. That was the biggest part of it. I didn't execute on a changeup and, he certainly made me pay for it.

Gardenhire: They just had one more big swing, and that was Thome. That's why we picked him up [in 2010], so he couldn't do it to us again.

Celebration and aftermath

The final three outs were recorded by closer Bobby Jenks, picking up his 30th save in support of Danks' 12th victory. Center fielder and defensive replacement Brian Anderson made a diving catch on Alexi Casilla's line drive to center to make the White Sox AL Central champs.

Hahn: That was a fun celebration afterwards. In '05, we didn't [win] any [decisive games] at home. So that was a pretty special feeling. That wasn't too long after '05 so we still were able to appreciate the fact we are doing this at home in front of our fans.

Danks: We hung out at the ballpark for quite a while. It was a fun time for sure. It was a fun celebration. It was fun to be going into the playoffs. Relief is not the right word, because at that point we were feeling like the work is just getting started. Definitely it was a sense of: first goal is accomplished and now we move on to the next one.

There was no next one for the White Sox, who lost in four games to the Rays in the Division Series. They were without Quentin and didn't have their pitching set but still will have that one shining Blackout moment to remember.

Gardenhire: Frustrating for us, but they were a great team. We battled them all summer long, and it came down to one game. You know what, we did everything we could do.

Williams: Unfortunately, that game cost us with regards to being able to set our rotation the way we wanted to heading down to Tampa Bay. So looking back, I would have rather not played it and see what we could have done in the playoffs.

Pierzynski: I remember we were out on the field forever, it seemed like, which was awesome. I really liked that aspect of it, how long we were on the field and how much the fans seemed like they were a part of the celebration. It just seemed like they were a huge part because of the whole blackout thing and just the way that whole game went.

That team was like, "Oh, man, we made it. I don't know how the heck we did it, but we pulled it off. We pulled off some sort of a miracle."

Guillen: Win or lose that game, I know the fans appreciated our effort, the players' effort. Then the players went out and did a great thing. That's the greatest thing, to finish up that day and that season like that. It was outstanding.

Thome: To look back and have people still approach me to this day and say, "Oh my god, one of my favorite games is the White Sox with the Blackout Game. You hit the home run, Griffey throwing out Cuddyer, Danks' pitching performance." To me, there were so many guys that played integral parts of that game. Then obviously to get us into the playoffs was even more special.

3 things we learned from Rick Hahn's final state of the White Sox address

By Phil Thompson / Chicago Tribune / September 27, 2018

In some respects, the 2018 season was always about the future for the White Sox, but the big picture began to crystallize a bit more as general manager Rick Hahn and manager Rick Renteria addressed the state of the team's rebuild during separate sessions with reporters before Wednesday night's 10-2 loss to the Indians at Guaranteed Rate Field.

1. Renteria will get at least another season to develop players.

Hahn's evaluation of Renteria likely is slightly different than how a typical manager might be evaluated, given that he's shepherding an inexperienced team. But, as Renteria knows from managing in a similar situation for one season on the North Side in 2014, that distinction guarantees you nothing.

But Hahn sounded as if he realizes there's more "process" to go with a roster that's expected to add more rookies in 2019. He continues to trust Renteria with guiding it and plans to keep the rest of his staff intact. Historically, Chairman Jerry Reinsdorf teams, the Sox and Bulls, aren't quick to pull the rug on coaches.

"It's part of the reason Ricky was hired and the coaching staff is steeped with guys in player development," Hahn said. "We knew the early part of this process was a bit of a teaching and learning on the fly experience for these young players and Ricky has done a tremendous job articulating our priorities. Teach our players and hold them accountable.

"It's a difficult job. But this is Major League Baseball where you're evaluated on wins and losses. Given where we are in the process of this rebuild it's not entirely fair, so we're evaluating him on other things that are part of the rebuild succeeding."

Renteria pointed to the coaching staff's work developing pitchers such as Carlos Rodon, Reynaldo Lopez and Lucas Giolito, and the marked jump in Tim Anderson's play at shortstop, though Yoan Moncada's progress has been a mixed bag.

"We have worked extremely hard. All our coaches have put in a lot of time. ... And we do appreciate the front office recognizes that," he said.

But at some point even "youth" has to improve on 90-plus losses.

Hahn called talk of playoff contention "premature" but added that by the end of next season, what you see is what you have. And he'll judge their progress accordingly.

To help the younger players reach their next level, Renteria plans to introduce new drills and techniques for baserunning, hitting and other areas during spring training.

Translation: Cut down on mistakes. Moncada led baseball in strikeouts (212) as of Wednesday and Anderson added a 20th error in the field, which at the time tied for second most in MLB.

"At some point, you have to start transitioning," Renteria said. "You have to have the major core of your players performing and doing things a certain way."

2. The Sox have a plan for their rotation — and Dylan Cease is likely part of it

Carlos Rodon, Lucas Giolito and Reynaldo Lopez are givens, but the loss of Michael Kopech to Tommy John surgery and the possible departure of James Shields clouds the picture a bit.

Carson Fulmer and Dylan Covey were once in the plans, but Fulmer imploded in May and continued to struggle as a starter in Triple-A Charlotte. Kopech's elbow injury gave Covey another chance, and he has made the most of it, posting a 2.76 ERA over his previous three starts with 16 strikeouts and seven walks.

But he likely will have to show the Sox more during spring training, even for consideration as a reliever.

“From a pitching standpoint we are going to have some additions,” Hahn said. “Talk about those three fellows at the front with Lopez and Giolito and Rodon, and while Dylan Covey has done a very fine job as an option for us going forward, we are going to need some alternatives both in the rotation and the bullpen.”

Dylan Cease compiled a 2.89 ERA with 82 strikeouts and 28 walks in 71 2/3 innings for Single-A Winston Salem, and he actually improved on some of those numbers when he was promoted to Double-A Birmingham: a 1.72 ERA, 78 strikeouts and 22 walks over 52 1/3 innings.

Hahn said, “A year ago we were sitting here and saying, ‘If Dylan Cease does this and that he can be penciled into a championship rotation.’ ... He’s someone again who has answered a lot of questions and you can start writing his name in a little bit heavier ink perhaps on our future rosters.”

3. Jose Abreu’s and Avisail Garcia’s injuries present a conundrum for the Sox.

The Sox have another season of control for each of them, but team officials likely were hoping to figure out where they fit in the long-term picture.

Abreu will be 32 in January and is an All-Star on a young squad. He’s beloved in the clubhouse. He also had a testicular injury and a leg infection and was shut down for the remainder of the season Wednesday. Garcia is a year removed from an All-Star season and has been plagued all year by knee and hamstring problems.

Abreu, who led the team Wednesday with 36 doubles and 78 RBIs, said he wants to stay with the Sox for the rest of his career. Garcia is set for arthroscopic knee surgery to remove damaged tissue Oct. 2 in Chicago and is looking at least at a two-month recovery, though he said he was “100 percent” certain he would be ready for spring training.

“We don’t need to make long-term decisions on either just yet,” Hahn said. “We’ll go into this offseason and look at our options and talk through where each of them are from a performance and health standpoint and what we project going forward and act accordingly.”

After making strides this season, Tim Anderson won’t give up shortstop without a fight

By Phil Thompson / Chicago Tribune / September 27, 2018

Tim Anderson stared at the elephant in the room and didn’t blink.

For all the verbal pats on the back he has received for his growth at shortstop this season, there’s no escaping the fact the White Sox spent the No. 4 pick in this year’s draft on a middle infielder, Oregon State’s Nick Madrigal.

So did Madrigal’s selection in June light a fire under Anderson this summer?

“Hell no. Hell no. I motivate myself,” Anderson said. “He’s going to be a great player, but he’s going to have to work to take shortstop, if that’s the plan. I work too hard to just give it up.”

Here’s the bar Madrigal, now learning the position in instructional league after playing mostly second base in the minors this year and in college, will have to reach one day: Anderson became the first Sox shortstop to join the 20-20 club (home runs and stolen bases) when he homered off the Cubs’ Jon Lester in the City Series on Saturday.

Anderson ranks 20th among shortstops in defensive wins above replacement — he was tied for 77th last season. He has risen from a -11.0 SDI rating (Society for American Baseball Research Defensive Index) in 2017 to 1.6 this season through Aug. 19, seventh among Gold Glove qualifiers in the American League at shortstop.

FanGraphs.com rates Anderson at 8.4, 10th among shortstops, just ahead of the Red Sox's Xander Bogaerts (11th) and the Cubs' Addison Russell (12th).

When general manager Rick Hahn gave his state of the Sox address Wednesday, he was asked if he saw Anderson as the long-term solution at shortstop, and Hahn replied, "As we sit here today, yeah."

"Let's start with the defense because that's the thing that really jumps out the most in terms of significant progress he has made," Hahn said. "He has managed to capitalize on the athleticism we always have seen from him and convert that into being a potentially Gold Glove-caliber defensive shortstop."

"This is really a testament in the end to Tim Anderson's work ethic. He knew it was an area that he wanted to improve, whether it was because he wanted to (prove) people wrong or because he knew he wanted to make himself a stalwart at that position and eliminate the rumors about a position change."

Anderson thanked the media, with a bit of tongue-in-cheek attitude, for providing some added fuel.

"You guys said I couldn't play shortstop," he said. "So you guys motivated me to go out and be the best shortstop that I can be."

Manager Rick Renteria said Anderson's been doing a better job reading balls off the bat, focusing and throwing the ball well from every angle.

"He has played All-Star-type shortstop," Renteria said.

Renteria said he saw Anderson turn a corner during an Aug. 1 game against the Royals, when he backhanded the first ball put into play and wheeled around to gun it to first base.

"We all went, 'Wow. OK, that's a play we had been hoping he would be able to make,' " Renteria said. "That was really a play he had problems with earlier. He has been out here (working) early ... and he has taken a lot of pride in trying to get that play down."

Anderson said the work is paying off, but he admits he's not a finished product.

Hours before he committed his 20th error to tie the A's Marcus Semien for second among shortstops Wednesday, Anderson told reporters, "I still have a lot more cleaning up to do and keep figuring out my position."

On the offensive side, his batting average has slid from .283 in 2016 to .242 this season (over 52 more games), and his on-base percentage from .306 to .283.

He has had 26 steals but has been caught eight times. He also has struck out 149 times in 563 at-bats, though he's hardly the only Sox hitter with that problem.

Hahn recognizes there are "other elements of his offensive game where he knows he needs to improve."

However, Hahn said, "Seeing that commitment and work ethic on the defensive side and knowing that he's capable of doing that, I think bodes well for his future on the offensive side as well."

Series preview: White Sox at Twins

By Phil Thompson / Chicago Tribune / September 27, 2018

All games on WGN-AM 720.

Friday (Game 1): 1:10 p.m., WGN-9.

RH Reynaldo Lopez (7-9, 3.94) vs. RH Jose Berríos (11-11, 3.93).

Friday (Game 2): 7:10 p.m., NBCSCH.

RH Lucas Giolito (10-12, 5.81) vs. RH Chase De Jong (0-1, 3.86).

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

LH Carlos Rodon (6-7, 3.61) vs. RH Kyle Gibson (9-13, 3.68).

Sunday: 2:10 p.m., WGN-9.

RH Dylan Covey (5-13, 5.06) vs. RH Zack Littell (0-2, 7.04).

White Sox finish 2018 home slate on a low note with 10-2 loss to Indians

By Phil Thompson / Chicago Tribune / September 27, 2018

For 5 2/3 innings Wednesday, Indians starter Shane Bieber had a no-hitter in progress. For much of the game, the White Sox, on a bullpen day, looked like they had an all-hitter going in their 10-2 loss.

For the first six innings, Jace Fry and three other Sox relievers combined to give up 13 hits as the Indians built a 10-0 lead.

Bieber, meanwhile, had given up 11 runs over his previous two starts, but he had struck out five before Adam Engel walked in the third inning to put the first Sox runner on base.

In the fifth, Bieber had gotten Welington Castillo and Tim Anderson to ground out when Yoan Moncada hit a high chopper that seemed like it took an eternity to fall to the pitcher. But the time Bieber gloved it and turned to first, Moncada already was safely crossing the bag.

It was probably the most laughable way to break up a no-hitter. Replays showed both Bieber and Moncada smiling afterward.

Next batter, Engel struck out looking to end the inning.

Sox reliever Rob Scahill's eighth-inning fastball got away from him and drilled Indians shortstop Erik Gonzalez's in the side of the head. Gonzalez walked off with some help and was replaced by Rajai Davis.

In the ninth, Kevan Smith knocked an RBI single up the middle off Oliver Perez with two outs left and Tim Anderson walked to load the bases, but Perez struck out Yoan Moncada.

Adam Cimber gave up a left-field grounder to Adam Engel to plate another run, but the fun was over when Yolmer Sanchez flew out to center field.

The extra runs couldn't make the Sox's loss in their home finale look much prettier as they finished 30-51 at Guaranteed Rate Field.

Prospect Luis Robert's power will come, White Sox say

By Daryl Van Schouwen / Sun-Times / September 27, 2018

MINNEAPOLIS — White Sox minor-league outfielder Luis Robert didn't hit a home run this season, which, for a touted five-tool prospect from Cuba, might come as a surprise or a concern to some.

The Sox, who signed Robert last year for \$26 million and paid an additional \$26 million in tax penalties for the signing, say they're not concerned. Their talent evaluators have seen him clear fences with ease in batting practice, see his strength, speed and body type and say not to worry.

Perhaps the 6-3, 205-pound Robert will go deep in the Arizona Fall League, which begins Oct. 9, and will make up for lost playing time caused by his injury-plagued season.

A sprained left thumb suffered in spring training caused Robert to miss the first 10 weeks of his season at low Class A Kannapolis, where he batted .289/.360/.400 in 50 plate appearances. After a promotion to high Class A Winston-Salem, he injured the same thumb, missed more than a month and finished with a .244/.317/.309 hitting line in 140 plate appearances.

"We're still very excited about his ability," Sox director of player development Chris Getz said. "The thumb injury took some games and at-bats, which the Fall League will make up for. But this guy can do a little bit of everything on the field and impact a game in a lot of different ways, and that's a rarity.

"This year was great in terms of getting acclimated to the United States and the organization. He's getting more comfortable, and we look forward to seeing what he is able to do this fall and into a healthy 2019."

Don't suggest to Getz that Robert was a disappointment.

"Not in the slightest," he said. "Disappointment with the injury, but it certainly hasn't changed our view of him at all."

One view of Robert during batting practice alleviates any worry about his power potential. Scouts and prospect analysts aren't worried, nor is Sox manager Rick Renteria, who became a fan of Robert's multifaceted potential when he first saw him play last winter.

"He has a lot of strength, a lot of pop," Renteria said. "He has a lot of power. I'm not worried about that, and neither should anybody else."

Renteria also enjoyed the game-winning homer Robert launched after initially injuring the thumb on a slide in spring training. He said he envisions Robert's power blossoming after he becomes a major-leaguer.

"A lot of great players don't hit homers in the minor leagues," Renteria said. "But in the big leagues, they end up zoning in, getting a better idea about cheating in certain zones, sitting on certain pitches — things you're more apt to do because you're facing a lot of guys who are more consistent. And it gives you an opportunity to play that cat-and-mouse game."

The Sox have emphasized drafting and signing prospects who have bat-to-ball skills and can use the entire field.

"I think you become hitters first, and everything else evolves from that," Renteria said.

The Sox are hoping Robert is that kind of hitter — and one who can stay healthy next season. Knee and ankle injuries limited him to 28 games in the Dominican Summer League after the Sox signed him in 2017, so his development has been slowed by not being on the field.

When he's on it, he catches everyone's eye.

"Even a quick glimpse, he's one of those guys who will show you something very quickly," Getz said. "There are players you need to watch over time to appreciate what they bring to the table. You can just watch him warm up, and you're going to get excited."

Anderson erases all doubt -- he's sticking at shortstop with White Sox

By Scot Gregor / Daily Herald / September 27, 2018

As the White Sox's rebuild moves forward, much of the future roster -- the one projected to be playoff caliber -- is still TBA.

Many of the key cogs are still in the minor leagues, and Sox general manager Rick Hahn on Wednesday reaffirmed he'll add "finishing pieces" when the bulk of the roster is in place.

Hahn has a good idea who the White Sox's shortstop is going to be.

Tim Anderson.

"Let's start with the defense, because that's the thing that really jumps out the most in terms of significant progress he's made," Hahn said. "He's managed to capitalize on the athleticism we've always seen from him and convert that into being a potentially Gold Glove caliber defensive shortstop based on what we've seen over the last few months."

"Offensively, despite being a 20/20 player, there are other elements of his game where he knows he needs to improve. Seeing that commitment and work ethic on the defensive side and knowing that he's capable of doing that, I think bodes well for his future on the offensive side as well."

Since he was drafted by the Sox on the first round in 2013, Anderson's ability to play the demanding defensive position of shortstop has been questioned.

The doubt still stood through last season, when Anderson led the major leagues with 28 errors.

Anderson has quieted all of the critics this year.

"A whole lot better," he said. "You guys have seen it. Just from Day 1 to now, it's been amazing. All of the work I've been putting in, it's definitely showing. I feel a lot more comfortable at shortstop."

"It's been a case of just learning the position and kind of figuring out how to be a shortstop instead of being an athlete."

With four games left in the regular season, Anderson has not only cut the error total down to 20, he's been making one spectacular play after another for the better part of four months.

"I think it's just more focus and confidence," manager Rick Renteria said. "I think he knows he can throw the ball from every angle at short. I think there's a trust in everything he's able to do now. I think he's recognizing and reading balls off the bat much better, but that comes with experience, seeing more and more ground balls."

On the offensive side, Anderson is the first shortstop in White Sox history to hit 20 or more home runs and steal 20 or more bases in a season.

"It's a great accomplishment," he said. "It means a lot and it definitely leaves a mark. Hopefully I can continue to do that and maybe even pull off a 30/30."

As Hahn mentioned, there is still room for improvement in Anderson's offensive game. With 149 strikeouts and only 30 walks in 602 plate appearances this season, his on-base percentage stands at .283.

The .242 batting average can also go higher, and Anderson plans to be eventually become a tougher out while continuing to thrive at shortstop with the Sox.

"My overall game has more confidence," said Anderson, who is signed through the 2022 season with the White Sox holding club options for 2023 and '24. "I've been playing with great confidence and I'm not afraid to make mistakes. I've been working on my overall game and it's showing."

Scouting report: White Sox vs. Minnesota Twins at Target Field

By Scot Gregor / Daily Herald / September 27, 2018

TV:

WGN (Game 1) Friday; NBC Sports Chicago (Game 2) Friday; NBC Sports Chicago Saturday; WGN Sunday

Radio:

WGN 720-AM

Pitching matchups:

The Sox's Reynaldo Lopez (7-9) vs. Chase De Jong (0-1) in Game 1, Friday at 1:10 p.m.; Lucas Giolito (10-12) vs. Jose Berrios (11-11) in Game 2 at 7:10 p.m.; Carlos Rodon (6-7) vs. Kyle Gibson (9-13) Saturday at 6:10 p.m.; Dylan Covey (5-13) vs. Zack Littell (0-2) Sunday at 1:10 p.m.

At a glance:

The White Sox close out the season with four games against the Twins. The Sox (62-96) are going to finish with a losing record for the sixth straight year. Over his last 5 starts, Lopez has pitched 34 innings and allowed 3 runs (0.79 ERA). Giolito has lost his last two starts while allowing 9 runs in 12 $\frac{2}{3}$ innings. The White Sox are 7-8 vs. the Twins this season (3-3 at Target Field).

'You're not going to be in perpetual development': Higher expectations are coming to the White Sox rebuild

By James Fegan / The Athletic / September 27, 2018

Out of context, Rick Hahn could be twisted into sounding like an absolutist from a recently bygone era of sabermetrics, someone who would dismissively argue "an out is an out" when discussing how the current iteration of his White Sox are hurtling toward a historic, league-leading strikeout total.

"The concern about how much the 2018 team struck out is not great," Hahn said Wednesday. "I'm not concerned about the number of strikeouts, no. Yes we have struck out a ton as a club. It's up throughout baseball. If you look at the caliber of pitching right now it's no surprise strikeouts are up throughout the game.

He's not. He might not openly lament how the line drive has seemingly lost its place as the ideal result of any plate appearance like other White Sox luminaries, but with Eloy Jiménez, Nick Madrigal, Zack Collins, Luis Basabe and others developing, Hahn is hoping to build an offense that can have success by making contact, drawing walks, hitting for power — everything under the sun and anything that is called for to win on a specific day. But the personnel is not in place now. The part of their core that is in place is understandably not fully ready yet, and their current strikeout crisis and other shortcomings are not necessarily reflective of problems that will exist in 2020 and beyond.

Next year the White Sox need to get there, or be pretty clearly on their way by the end of the season. Even deeming 2018 "the most difficult year of the rebuild," just puts it on the 2019 White Sox to give truth to that claim, rather than establish a stagnant and dispiriting new normal.

It might have seemed like a trivial clickbait type of question to ask Rick Renteria to grade the first half back in July, but it turned into a telling moment. He gave his team a D, and explained that as encouraging and defensive as he can seem of his players while discussing their progress, he's very aware that the overall performance is unacceptable. And Renteria indicated Wednesday that the period when unacceptable results can be qualified as part of development will end, preferably soon, even though much of the core has not made its big league debuts yet.

"Ultimately, you're not going to be in perpetual development," Renteria said. "At some point, you've got to start transitioning. You have to have the major core of your players performing and doing things a certain way. Even veteran teams make mistakes, but they're minimal, they're few and far between. You make sure they're corrected and move on. We're still going to have a lot of young guys transitioning to the major league level, so I don't know that that's going to stop here in the near future."

Beyond Carson Fulmer, it's hard to think of major figures this year whose struggles brought the White Sox to the point of demoting them and eventually acknowledging their role needed to change. The lowest points of Lucas Giolito's first half came close, which is why he might have gotten name dropped as someone whose methodical climb back to competitiveness was a feature of an openly rebuilding season, as opposed to a bug in the coming more scrutinizing years.

"I don't want to say it was luxury, but we kind of had the situation in which right now where we have guys learning to pitch at the major league level," Renteria said. "We needed to have them and allowed them to experience certain things through either positive outcomes or negative outcomes. Lucas had situations early in this season and even a little bit later where he ran into trouble early. We left him out (there), he settled down and he ended up eating up six, seven innings at times. You probably wouldn't want to do that all of the time."

Players even more important to this effort than Giolito have yet to make their major league debuts yet. Jiménez's best season in the majors will not be 2019 unless things go horribly awry. Dylan Cease probably won't be up in the majors in time to make a significant impact on the win-loss total, and Madrigal and Luis Robert probably won't play in the majors at all.

Because of all that, Hahn has wisely pushed off declaring that the White Sox will be ready for contention next year, unless his team winds up identifying and acquiring a lot more of their long-term solutions than it is prudent to expect in one offseason. But the Sox are due to start entering a period where the roster gets very tight for players who bring major league skills to the table, but still don't have a regular role on a winning team, and the soft focus that has hung over the roughest stretches of the development of their core pieces is due to dissipate. That doesn't mean it's going to be time to panic about every Yoán Moncada strikeout, or every Tim Anderson cold streak at the plate, but every one might be more firmly taken into account when shaping a projection on how much of the offensive load they should expect to shoulder and how much support they will need to build the complete lineup the Sox envision.

"The contention question in '19 is premature to talk about," Hahn said of his expectations for next season. "But in terms of progress, absolutely. Even before you see the moves we will likely make in the course of the offseason. That progress will come from the further development of our young pitchers (Carlos) Rodón, (Reynaldo) López and Giolito. Tim Anderson and Moncada continue to take steps forward as well as the additional influx of these waves of young talent we've developed in the minor leagues. I suspect Eloy will be the first of that group to show up here but over the course of the 2019 season we foresee others as this thing begins to, probably by the end of the season starts coming together in terms of what we'll look like going forward."

The hardest part of the rebuild arrived as advertised. Now it's time for the hardest part to deliver.

Previewing the White Sox's offseason, with some clues from Rick Hahn

By James Fegan / The Athletic / September 27, 2018

The very advanced and extremely proprietary metrics here at The Athletic indicate that you readers out there seem to care a lot more about discussing potential players who might never put on a White Sox uniform, than you do about dissections of actual White Sox games.

To accommodate you lunatics, let's boil down Rick Hahn's end-of-season media session into an offseason preview.

Coaching staff

Barring someone getting hired away for a higher-level gig — bench coach Joe McEwing has been a managerial candidate in the past — everyone is coming back. Hahn said everyone is under contract for the 2019 season, and the front office has a favorable view of the work they have done, so table any aspirations

for Omar Vizquel in the Chicago dugout for now. Hahn had little concern that a franchise record for strikeouts was the product of something systemic with White Sox hitting instruction.

“Part of the reason Ricky (Renteria) was hired and the coaching staff is steeped with guys in player development,” Hahn said. “We knew the early part of this process was a bit of a teaching and learning on the fly experience for these young players and Ricky has done a tremendous job articulating our priorities. Teach our players and holding them accountable. It’s a difficult job. But this is major league baseball where you’re evaluated on wins and losses. Given where we are in the process of this rebuild it’s not entirely fair, so we’re evaluating him on other things that is part of the rebuild succeeding.”

Starting pitching

This is the leader for the most likely area to be addressed in free agency this year, and possibly quite aggressively. Hahn would not commit to anyone beyond Carlos Rodón, Reynaldo López and Lucas Giolito in the 2019 rotation, and with the injury attrition rate involved in pitching, they will not operate in the market with much fear of blocking any prospects, even though Michael Kopech is expected to return in 2020 and Dylan Cease could debut in the majors by 2019.

“From a pitching standpoint we are going to have some additions,” Hahn said. “Talk about those three fellows at the front with López and Giolito and Rodón, and while Dylan Covey has done a very fine job as an option for us going forward, we are going to need some alternatives both in the rotation and the bullpen.”

A repeat of an inexpensive, veteran innings-eater signing like Miguel González last year, or a short-term James Shields reunion is certainly easy to figure, especially with multiple rotation slots up for grabs. But the White Sox only have Wellington Castillo and Tim Anderson already under contract for next season, for less than \$9 million combined. There’s club options or buyouts for Shields and Nate Jones, José Abreu’s final year of arbitration is a near-certainty, but the point is, they absolutely have budget room for a long-term deal if they identify someone who can help the rotation — or any position — beyond 2019.

“While we are not yet in a position realistically to be adding so-called finishing pieces, we are in a position where we need to be opportunistic with regards to the free agent market,” Hahn said. “You can’t always control when certain players become available. You can say in 2020 or 2021 we expect to be this and we know we are going to need X. You can’t look at the projected free agent and say that player will be available much less that player will be a White Sox when the time comes. If we see long-term pieces that make sense, in addition to augmenting the pitching or filling certain needs for 2019, I think we have the flexibility to pursue them and we are going to be opportunistic and respond to the market accordingly.”

The best starter on the market will be 29-year-old left-hander Patrick Corbin, a former Tommy John recipient who saw a sudden uptick in performance (but also velocity loss) this past season, followed by 30-year-old Dallas Keuchel, who is sitting at his lowest strikeout rate in six years. That might not sound like the robust group that pushes the White Sox into the top of the market, but it’s a possibility for them.

Outfield

Hahn said Eloy Jiménez is expected to be in the majors “either at the start or for the majority of the season,” and Rick Renteria added that when Jiménez arrives, he’s not going to just sit. That knowledge, and a glut of other outfield prospects only starting to make their way to Double-A, hangs over the White Sox’s thinking on immediate improvements of an outfield that has a solid statistical case for the worst in baseball.

“We want to be smart about how we bridge whatever gap there may be between what we are doing now in 2018 or what our alternatives are currently in house for 2019 as well as what is likely coming,” Hahn said. “There’s going to be opportunities to improve but we want to do it in a smart way that doesn’t necessarily block anything we have coming in the future. Again, I hate to keep falling back on the word, but we are going to be opportunistic in that regard. We are not necessarily looking to make a huge splash in the outfield because of what we have coming, but at the same time, if the right player is available to make us better in the short term and the long term, we have to take it seriously.”

That would seem to rule out Bryce Harper, if you were still holding out hope. Jiménez will place a strong claim on left field almost immediately. Adam Engel doesn't have a ton of security, but the White Sox don't want to block their glut of future center-field options (Luis Robert, Luis Basabe, Luis González, someone else named Luis), and they need to decide how much they like Daniel Palka in right, and whether they want to issue Avisail García a raise on \$6.7 million on the hopes of returning to 2017 form. There's room in this group for an upgrade with a corner bat, but it's hard to look at the free agency pool and figure out whom that bat would be.

"We obviously have some decisions to make this offseason," said Hahn, when asked about assessing both García and Abreu after physically compromised seasons. "I think we know from the track record of performance what these players are capable of doing and can project with some level of certainty, given the health of each of them, what it's going to look like going forward. We don't need to make long-term decisions on either just yet. We'll go into this offseason and look at our options and talk through where each of them are from a performance and health standpoint and what we project going forward and act accordingly."

Infield

Hahn spoke passionately about Anderson's defensive improvements, even throwing out the phrase "Gold Glove-caliber" and dismissing position change discussion as "rumors."

While affirming Anderson as the White Sox shortstop of the future — even as Nick Madrigal practices there just in case — Hahn pointed to the work ethic that Anderson showed to improve his defense as a sign he'll be able to improve upon a .255 OBP in the second half.

"There are certain elements of his game where despite being a 20/20 player, which is the first one for a White Sox player at that position, there's other elements of his offensive game where he knows he needs to improve," Hahn said. "Seeing that commitment and work ethic on the defensive side and knowing that he's capable of doing that, I think bodes well for his future on the offensive side as well."

Speaking of Madrigal and position changes, Hahn seemed a lot more open-minded when it came to discussing Yoán Moncada and his potential to move to another part of the diamond.

"It's conceivable if we made a decision as an organization to try him elsewhere that we would do it as soon as this offseason or next spring training, you'd see it in action," Hahn said. "I do think he has made a great deal of progress at second base. I also think he has the athleticism also to be an above-average defender at other positions too. It's a subject for further conversation but as he sits here today, I am pleased with the progress and the pitch-to-pitch focus and the athleticism, the arm strength, and foot movement and his hands at second base."

With Jake Burger likely not returning to a minor league affiliate until June, and Yolmer Sánchez's slugging rate squarely under .400, a Moncada position change or a free agent addition would provide a long-term answer at third base where there currently isn't one.

Catcher

The White Sox just added a veteran catcher last offseason. It in no way worked out how they wanted, but between Wellington Castillo being signed through next year and Omar Narváez's great leap forward offensively, it's pretty clear the team will stand pat at the position.

"Narvy has made great strides in that regard," Hahn said. "He has also played through a finger issue, nothing that requires surgery but needs some rest. But he has done a very fine job handling the staff. There are elements of his game, especially from the defensive standpoint that need to get better to be part of a championship club. He's worked hard at it, made some adjustments and those continue in the offseason. Obviously Wely with that suspension not at all what we expected with his contribution and his role

developing the staff. Expect him back next year and expect him to assume that mantle of veteran catcher and make an impact.”

Kevan Smith needs offseason surgery on the right ankle that placed him on the disabled list at Triple-A Charlotte in May. His option situation is getting toward where the White Sox will probably lose him if he does not make the 2019 Opening Day roster, but he probably will need to show he’s fully recovered in spring training to attract interest from other teams.

Bullpen

They’re not at the point where they figure to shell out \$100 million on an elite closer, but they will sign relievers. Another trade where they absorb money for an expensive but still quality contributor like Joakim Soria would be very likely and makes the most sense between their payroll room but lack of desire to commit long-term to a reliever before they are ready to contend. Another wave of minor league free agent arms should also be expected in spring training.

Hahn expects the White Sox to be better in 2019, but it doesn’t seem like it’s time for short-term impact moves. So dream big for this winter, but only a specific type of big.
