



WHITE SOX HEADLINES OF MAY 16, 2018

"Lopez allows 6 early runs as White Sox fall"... Bob Cohn, MLB.com

"Moncada activated from DL, returns vs. Bucs" ...Bob Cohn, MLB.com

"Starter Reynaldo Lopez struggles as Pirates crush White Sox 7-0"... Teddy Greenstein, Chicago Tribune

"Column: Braves' rebuild is providing hope to tankers everywhere"....Paul Sullivan, Chicago Tribune

"Another bad first, another bad loss for White Sox"... Daryl Van Schouwen, Sun-Times

"White Sox notes: Yoan Moncada is back, Carson Fulmer pushed back"... Daryl Van Schouwen, Sun-Times

"White Sox reinstate Yoan Moncada from 10-day disabled list"... Madeline Kenney, Sun-Times

"Bowden: Fifteen position players you need to know ahead of the MLB draft"... Jim Bowden, The Athletic

"Five observations: White Sox fall behind early yet again"... James Fegan, The Athletic

"Pirates, Williams send White Sox to 12th loss in 14 games" ... Associated Press

"Slow start won't prompt Chicago White Sox to rush prospects" ... Scot Gregor, Daily Herald

"Lamantha, The Big Baby or Da Besss: the many identities of Eloy Jiménez" ... James Fegan, The Athletic

"Sox is singular: White Sox win a game, but (spoiler alert) they're still very bad" ... Jim Margalus, The Athletic

"Gammons: Rebuilding can be a painful process, something the White Sox and other teams know too well" ... Peter Gammons, The Athletic

Lopez allows 6 early runs as White Sox fall

By Bob Cohn / MLB.com / May 15, 2018

PITTSBURGH -- Reynaldo Lopez's first win of 2018 remains elusive. Even more disheartening for the White Sox right-hander, he endured his shortest start of the season.

It wasn't like that for most of his previous seven starts (five no-decisions, two losses) But facing the Pirates on Tuesday, there were no moral victories. The Bucs got to Lopez early and often as the White Sox fell, 7-0, at PNC Park.

Lopez lasted two-plus innings, his shortest start with the White Sox. He gave up six runs on seven hits. He walked two and had no strikeouts, as his ERA jumped from 2.44 to 3.50. In eight starts this season, he has received six runs of support.

"I think it's his youth, He didn't really feel comfortable in the beginning," White Sox manager Rick Renteria said. "Today was one of those days where he wasn't able to rebound and refocus."

Pittsburgh right-hander Trevor Williams stifled the White Sox over seven innings, scattering six hits while striking out six with no walks.

The 24-year-old Lopez has been the White Sox best starter so far this season. His ERA was 1.78 after five starts, and he's given up more than two earned runs just twice this season. His most recent start, against the Pirates last week, was a gem that saw him go 7 1/3 innings, allowing two runs on three hits with six strikeouts.

Facing the Pirates again, Lopez never got going. Adam Frazier hit his third home run of the season to start the bottom of the first. Gregory Polanco followed with a single, and then Starling Marte and Josh Bell each doubled. After seven pitches, Lopez and the Sox trailed, 3-0.

"You feel bad, you feel frustrated," Lopez said through an interpreter. "You just want to pitch good. Tonight was just a bad game."

Renteria's comment about "focus" issues was conveyed to Lopez. He did not agree.

"I felt good," he said. "I felt good at the beginning of the game. I don't know what happened. I was throwing strikes, I was feeling good. I don't have an answer. I feel like I didn't lose my focus. I don't know. I think it was a bad day."

If the White Sox could glean anything positive, it was the performance of reliever Chris Beck, who bounced back from a rough outing on Saturday that saw him allow three runs over two-thirds of an inning in a loss to the Cubs. Beck threw 3 2/3 scoreless innings against Pittsburgh, allowing only one baserunner.

"My job tonight was to just string some innings to save the bullpen," Beck said. "My main focus was to make sure nobody else came in the game till the sixth or seventh inning."

"Beck gave us solid innings," Renteria said. "Minimized everything he could possibly do."

MOMENTS THAT MATTERED

Frazier sets tempo for Bucs: Frazier homered on the second pitch Lopez threw on Wednesday to set the tempo for the rest of the Pirates' offense. Lopez insisted he was unaffected, despite what came afterward.

"Not at all," Lopez said. "I think I executed the pitch where I wanted it to be, and he did a good job. I tip my cap. He did what he had to do."

HE SAID IT

"Maybe you come in living on your laurels, so to speak. I don't know if that's what he did. I hope you write that. I don't think that's what he did. But it's something that when you come into every Major League game it does require a commitment to focus and to execute. That's also a mental and an emotional strength that you develop, I think guys can develop that. I think he's got the wherewithal to do that. And we're gonna do everything we can to see if we can get him to that point where it finally clicks." -- Renteria, on Lopez

UP NEXT

The White Sox close a two-game set Wednesday having lost seven of eight overall. The have been outscored, 45-21, in their last eight road games. Left-hander Hector Santiago, who has mostly pitched out of the bullpen, will make his third start of the season. His mound opponent for the 11:35 a.m. CT game at PNC Park will be right-hander Jameson Taillon.

Moncada activated from DL, returns vs. Bucs

Fulmer pushed back to Thursday vs. Rangers; Davidson sits in NL park

By Bob Cohn / MLB.com / May 15, 2018

PITTSBURGH -- Reinstated from the 10-day disabled list, second baseman Yoan Moncada was back in the lineup on Tuesday, giving the White Sox a needed boost as they opened a two-game series against the Pirates at PNC Park. He was activated off the disabled list and took the spot of infielder Jose Rondon, who was optioned to Triple-A Charlotte.

The 23-year-old Moncada went on DL May 5 with tightness in his left hamstring. With an .868 OPS through his first 29 games this season, Moncada has been a bright spot for a White Sox club that is tied for the slowest start after 37 games (10-27) in club history.

Moncada hit leadoff in his return, a 7-0 loss to the Pirates. He went 1-for-4 with an eighth-inning single.

"It's very good for us," White Sox manager Rick Renteria said. "Working through the hamstring spasms, through the rigors, he was able to do everything really well. So we're really happy to have him back. Just prior to going down, he was starting to pick it up and swing the bat very, very well. Getting him back in the lineup, it's a good thing for all of us."

In 17 games before the injury, Moncada had 5 home runs, 12 RBIs, nine walks and a 1.067 OPS. The 22-year-old said he made the most of his layoff.

"I was trying to pay attention," Moncada said through an interpreter. "I was in a different place and I had a chance to see the game in a different way. I was trying to learn different things. I was trying to realize how I could approach different situations. But I prefer to be in the game."

Fulmer moved back a day

Right-hander Carson Fulmer's scheduled start on Wednesday in Pittsburgh has been moved back to Thursday at home against the Rangers. Left-hander Hector Santiago will start against the Pirates instead.

"We basically wanted to give him another day of recovery," Renteria said of Fulmer, who lasted 1 2/3 innings against the Cubs on Friday, yielding three hits, four walks and five earned runs. Renteria said the move was "not necessarily" related to that start.

"It has more to do with us wanting to insert Hector here more than anything," Renteria said.

Davidson out in NL park

With 11 homers, 24 RBIs and a .974 OPS, Matt Davidson is off to a flying start in the South Siders' lineup.

But so far this season, Davidson has mostly been the designated hitter, which is not available in National League ballparks. Although Davidson has started six games at third base (as well as five at first), Renteria went with switch-hitting Yolmer Sanchez, the White Sox regular third baseman who has an .880 OPS and all of his 13 extra-base hits and 19 RBIs against right-handers. The Pirates started right-hander Trevor Williams, who started the regular season well.

"I think it gives us an opportunity for [Sanchez] to put his best side of the plate in the box," Renteria said. "Right now, honestly, its about trying to get the best matchup I can against [Williams]. Lefties seem to have a better chance of doing something."

Starter Reynaldo Lopez struggles as Pirates crush White Sox 7-0

By Teddy Greenstein / Chicago Tribune / May 15, 2018

After rallying to beat the Cubs on Sunday, the White Sox were flying high. The good vibes didn't last. They nosedived during their first night against the Pirates in Pittsburgh.

"Baseball has tremendous peaks and valleys," manager Rick Renteria said before Tuesday night's game. "We're trying to come out of the valley and start to level off. Get to 30,000 feet and ride for a few hours."

The smooth ride ended within minutes.

The Sox's best pitcher, Reynaldo Lopez, was shelled in the Sox's 7-0 loss, which dropped their major-league-worst record to 10-28.

Second baseman Adam Frazier deposited Lopez's second pitch into the right-field seats. Lopez then gave up a single and back-to-back doubles during a four-run inning.

Lopez recorded just six outs before getting yanked. He allowed six runs and seven hits, walking two with no strikeouts. This from a guy who entered the night with a 2.44 ERA.

"I don't think he came in very focused," Renteria said of the 24-year-old right-hander. "I think it's his youth. He really didn't feel comfortable in the beginning. He wasn't able to rebound and refocus."

Said Lopez: "I feel bad. I feel frustrated. I don't know what happened. ... I feel I didn't lose my focus, but it was a bad day. Everyone has a bad day."

Moncada's night: Yoan Moncada nearly jumped from the disabled list into the Allegheny River. He walloped a Trevor Williams pitch far enough to smack into a sign past the right-field seats that says PIRATES CHARITIES. A statistician in the press box noted that few balls reach that sign.

The sign, it should be mentioned, is in foul territory. So Moncada's glorious shot was only good for some ooohs and ahhs. He struck out on an offspeed pitch on the outside corner and went 1-for-4 on the night with a single to right-center.

The good news? His left hamstring held up as he showed good lateral agility going to his right. He did need Jose Abreu to bail him out on one off-kilter throw.

When box scores lie: Lopez pitched poorly — and the defense behind him was almost as leaky. Nicky Delmonico got caught in the spin cycle on a fly ball to left, immediately turning away from the ball before allowing it to sail over his head.

"He did a reverse pivot turn, thought he had a beat on the ball," Renteria said. "Ultimately he did not. He ended up doing another turn and the ball continued to carry. It was a miscalculation."

In center, Leury Garcia leaped for a fly ball but had it glance off his glove. Garcia had more room than he realized and could have taken another step to the wall.

Those blows were ruled as a double and a triple, as they should have been. But both were plays to be made.

Receiving push back? Carson Fulmer, originally slated to pitch Wednesday in Pittsburgh, will throw Friday at home against the Rangers. Renteria was a bit unclear in explaining the decision, saying it did "not necessarily" result from Fulmer's struggles Friday against the Cubs (five earned runs in 12/3 innings).

Renteria said the also Sox wanted to slot lefty Hector Santiago between right-handers Lopez and James Shields, who will start Thursday.

Extra innings: Only 11,847 Pirates fans showed up on a perfect night at the gorgeous PNC Park to watch a 23-17 (now 24-17) team. ... Abreu got lucky after a mental gaffe. With his team down 6-0, he nearly was picked off second base on Delmonico's liner to center. ... Has a team ever attempted a suicide squeeze while down six runs? The Sox unintentionally tried one with runners at first and third and relief pitcher Chris Beck at the plate. Garcia broke toward home, but Renteria said that he was not supposed to, calling it "a miscommunication." ... Beck, by the way, retired 11 batters without allowing a hit.

Column: Braves' rebuild is providing hope to tankers everywhere

By Paul Sullivan / Chicago Tribune / May 15, 2018

The Braves could have been one of those teams Tony Clark was alluding to when the players union chief lashed out against major-league owners allegedly competing in a "race to the bottom."

After all, there was no evidence the Braves would not tank again in 2018.

This is a franchise that has been in rebuilding mode for three years, with a new general manager and a general reputation for being frugal.

But as they begin a homestand Tuesday night with a three-game series against the Cubs, the Braves surprisingly have the best record in the National League at 25-15 and a growing confidence they have turned the corner.

So who saw this coming?

"I don't think anybody did," starting pitcher Brandon McCarthy said. "We've probably been pretty big surprises this year inside and outside of the clubhouse. It doesn't mean it's impossible. I just don't think a lot of people were seeing it come together this quick."

The Braves' success should provide inspiration to the rest of the rebuilding teams, including the White Sox, especially on the heels of the Cubs and Astros winning the World Series after much-publicized teardowns.

It's too early, of course, to say for sure the Baby Braves aren't just a mirage. Remember, the Brewers were last year's uber-rebuild, zooming to first place in the NL Central in the first half before the Cubs took control again after the All-Star break.

The Nationals still have the best lineup and pitching in the NL East, and the rebuilding Phillies are riding the Jake Arrieta wave to instant respectability. But this Braves bunch looks like the real thing.

"Contributions from everyone," catcher Tyler Flowers said. "It's not just one or two guys doing the bulk of the lifting. So that makes you think it's sustainable throughout the whole season."

Still, a market correction remains a distinct possibility, making this four-game stretch against the Cubs — including Monday's 6-5 Braves victory in a makeup game at Wrigley Field — a barometer of sorts.

"It's the second week of May; there's a lot of lying in the numbers and standings right now," McCarthy said. "You just kind of let things keep playing out. More respect doesn't do us any good."

"We have an idea of how we are, but it's a six-month season. This is just four games in the beginning of May. If it's September and you're getting ready for a playoff run and see another playoff team, it's like, all right, this is how we stack up against them. Worrying about a series like this? It's just too early for that."

The Braves have been a franchise with no real direction to speak of in recent years.

They shocked the league at the trade deadline in 2016, acquiring aging outfielder Matt Kemp from the Padres, a move that made little sense for a team 31 games below .500 and on its way to a 93-loss season.

Before the 2017 season, the Braves signed free-agent pitchers R.A. Dickey and Bartolo Colon, the kind of 40-something starters most rebuilding teams tend to dump instead of pay. They released Colon by July. Dickey is now out of baseball.

And it only got worse. After a 90-loss season in '17, GM John Coppolella was forced to resign in October — and later banned for life by MLB — for circumventing international signing rules.

Former Blue Jays GM Alex Anthopoulos was brought in to continue the rebuild, and his biggest offseason move was dumping Kemp on the Dodgers for a group of players, including McCarthy, to give the Braves more payroll flexibility.

Before the season, the Braves were 100-1 shots at the Westgate Superbook in Las Vegas to win the NL pennant, well behind the Dodgers (9-4), Nationals (7-2) and Cubs (3-1).

But they enter Tuesday's game with 11 victories in 15 games and aren't backing down. Veterans Freddie Freeman and Nick Markakis are still the straws stirring the drink, but a young, talented bunch of crazy straws are currently moving the arrow.

Left-hander Sean Newcomb, 24, has a 20-inning scoreless streak and became the only Braves pitcher in 110 years to allow two hits or fewer and no runs in three consecutive starts. Not even Hall of Famers Warren Spahn, Greg Maddux, Tom Glavine or John Smoltz could say they did that.

Shortstop Dansby Swanson, 24, finally started coming around before a stint on the disabled list. Second baseman Ozzie Albies, 21, is tied for the NL lead with 13 home runs and leads in doubles (14) and total bases (104). And outfielder Ronald Acuna, 20, the top-ranked prospect in baseball, already is establishing himself after being called up three weeks ago.

Acuna and Albies have energized the Braves lineup the same way call-ups Kris Bryant and Addison Russell did with the Cubs in 2015. Flowers said their skill sets are easily recognizable during batting and infield practice, when one can observe the "special sound and way they move and throw."

So far, Acuna and Albies are exceeding the hype.

"I think that (talent) allowed them to handle it a little better than the rest of us humans might handle it," Flowers said. "But there are a lot of good people around them also that have helped them transition and not put too much pressure on themselves."

If the Braves can sustain their early success and make the postseason in 2018, they're financially set up to take a big step in free agency in the offseason.

The team's organist raised some eyebrows last month by playing "Go, Cubs, Go" before a Bryce Harper at-bat, a nod to speculation the Nationals star will sign with the Cubs this winter. But now there's hope the Braves could enter the Harper sweepstakes.

Either way, the future looks exceedingly bright in Atlanta.

Perhaps the Braves are the latest example of baseball's new motto: "Tanking Pays." Despite the cries of the players union, tanking isn't always the wrong route to travel, is it?

"Only one team is going to get a World Series ring this year," McCarthy said in a warning to prospective tankers. "You see teams tank and do something and fall short, and then you've subjected your fans to a few years of tanking.

"We've seen there is going to be copycatting and people doing it, and there are times it makes sense. But you're also seeing too many full teardowns for the sake of ... it's somewhat of an easy lie, an easy situation to pass off to fans.

"We've seen it a ton. Like, if five years in a row you nail your top draft pick inside the top 10 picks, then you're probably going to be better. But it took five years in a row of your fans trudging out to games pretty much just to watch the other team play."

Another bad first, another bad loss for White Sox

By Daryl Van Schouwen / Sun-Times / May 15, 2018

PITTSBURGH — First of all ...

Those first innings are killing the White Sox.

Let's get the daily reminder out of the way: The Sox are bad and trending downward. They own the worst record in baseball (10-28)

after a 7-0 loss to the Pirates on Tuesday night at PNC Park.

Their latest trend — flat-bad starts by their starters fueling big first innings for their opponents — continued on a night they had their best pitcher going, so it seems no Sox pitcher is immune to these first-inning bashings, which are taking them out of games before their own cleanup batter comes up.

The Pirates clobbered Reynaldo Lopez, who entered with a 2.44 ERA, with four runs in the first, then tacked on two in the second to send the Sox to their 12th defeat in 14 games. And they did it in rapid-fire fashion, with a home run by Adam Frazier on Lopez's second pitch, followed by a single by Gregory Polanco, a double by Starling Marte and a two-run double by cleanup man Josh Bell.

The Sox now have allowed 41 runs in the first inning. Against the Cubs over the weekend, Carson Fulmer gave up five runs in the first, James Shields surrendered four and Lucas Giolito two. To Giolito's credit, he found a way to survive Sunday and help the Sox break a seven-game losing streak.

But Lopez, facing the Pirates for the second time in a week, couldn't and got hit hard. While Lopez disagreed with the assessment, manager Rick Renteria said Lopez "was grappling with his emotions and struggling to focus."

"I don't think he came in very focused," Renteria said. "When you come into your start . . . you come in ready to do what you need to do. That focus is vitally important."

Lopez said he felt bad and frustrated about the result, but said he felt like he was ready to pitch.

"You always want to pitch good, but tonight was just a bad game," he said.

"I felt good at the beginning of the game. I don't know what happened. I was throwing strikes and feeling good, but I don't have an answer. I feel I didn't lose my focus, but it was a bad day. Everyone has a bad day."

Lopez wasn't helped much by all three of his outfielders failing to make catches on balls that looked to be playable but were ruled hits. Left fielder Nicky Delmonico did a complete 360 under Colin Moran's liner over his head in the first, center fielder Leury Garcia jumped near the fence but watched Marte's high, deep drive pop out of his glove for a triple in the second, and right fielder Daniel Palka tried but couldn't glove Polanco's tough sinking liner in the first.

Lopez figured to halt the first-inning issues but could not, leaving with a 3.50 ERA after giving up two more hits in the second and failing to record an out in the third. Chris Beck followed with 3⅔ hitless innings, leaving in the sixth with the Sox still trailing 6-0.

Trevor Williams (5-2) held the Sox to six hits while striking out six over seven innings. He walked none.

Before the game, the talk around the clubhouse was mostly about what a bright star Lopez has been in the Sox' rebuild. In fact, Renteria praised his ability to control his emotions.

"Lopez's ability to manage those emotions is a big part of him being able to grind through those moments," Renteria said. "He's not an arrogant young man, but he's a confident young man who trusts what he has in his arm."

The only thing the Sox were feeling Tuesday was another loss. They'll try to get out of Pittsburgh with a win Wednesday; the game starts at 11:35 a.m. Here's to hoping left-handed starter Hector Santiago is a morning person.

"I wish I was that smart to know what is going on in those [first innings]," Renteria said. "It comes down to focus and execution. I wish I had something prophetic."

White Sox notes: Yoan Moncada is back, Carson Fulmer pushed back

By Daryl Van Schouwen / Sun-Times / May 15, 2018

PITTSBURGH — Sox second baseman Yoan Moncada was eager to make himself useful again after coming off the 10-day disabled list.

“It’s not easy to be out for 10 days,” Moncada said through an interpreter before leading off and playing second base against the Pirates on Tuesday night, going 1-for-4 with a single in the eighth. “You have to get in your routine again, and the things you were used to doing when you were playing. But I’m feeling 100 percent.”

Moncada, 21, had been on the DL since May 5 with a tight left hamstring. Before he went down, he was batting .263/.359/.509 with six homers, eight doubles, 15 RBI and four stolen bases in 29 games — finding a groove in what will be his first full season in the majors.

“I was getting better before the injury — feeling good and hitting the ball really hard,” he said. “I’m happy with my numbers, but there’s still plenty of season to go through.”

Part of playing a full season is doing what’s necessary to stay on the field. Moncada says he’s learning.

“You have to watch your diet, get rest and be consistent in all those aspects, not just on the field but off the field,” he said. “Those are important aspects if you want to be healthy all season.”

Rotation change

Right-hander Carson Fulmer, who had been scheduled to pitch Wednesday afternoon against the Pirates, was pushed back to a Friday home start against the Rangers. Left-hander Hector Santiago will instead make his third start Wednesday.

Fulmer (2-3, 6.23 ERA) allowed five runs, three hits and four walks while recording only five outs against the Cubs on Friday and would seem to be fighting to keep his place in the rotation.

For the Rangers series Thursday through Sunday, the Sox’ rotation will be James Shields, Fulmer, Lucas Giolito and Reynaldo Lopez. That gives Fulmer two days’ extra rest and Giolito one.

Manager Rick Renteria said plugging Santiago in has been in the works for a few days.

“The way it lines up right now, we like it,” Renteria said. “It separates a couple guys. We’ll see how it looks.”

Davidson on Belle-ringing pace

Matt Davidson, who belted his 11th homer Sunday, is on pace to hit 48, which would be the second-most in Sox history behind Albert Belle’s 49 in 1998.

But there was no room for Davidson, the Sox’ primary designated hitter, in an interleague game against Pirates right-hander Trevor Williams. Yolmer Sanchez, a stronger defensive option who was batting .296/.341/.437 with 19 RBI, started at third on Tuesday.

“I would say it also speaks more to Sanchez also having a nice season,” Renteria said. “We give Sanchez an opportunity to put his best [left] side of the plate in the box. It gives us an opportunity to use both his defensive ability and his bat with the matchup.”

“But Matty has played very, very good third base. I don’t think anybody should look at Matthew as a defender who has a deficit, because he’s a pretty good defender at first and third.”

Davidson was batting .261/.383/.591 with 24 RBI.

"I just look at the lineup every day, and what happens is what happens," Davidson said. "I think I'm a good third baseman. I think I've shown that, too, in a very limited time there."

Broadcast news

ESPN selected the White Sox' game at Cleveland on May 28 for a national broadcast as part of the network's Memorial Day schedule. The game will air on Ch. 9 in the Chicago area and be blacked out locally on ESPN.

White Sox reinstate Yoan Moncada from 10-day disabled list

By Madeline Kenney / Sun-Times / May 15, 2018

One of the White Sox most prized assets came off the 10-day disabled list on Tuesday.

Second baseman Yoan Moncada was reinstated before the White Sox' series opener against the Pittsburgh Pirates on Tuesday. He'll replace infielder Jose Rondon, who was optioned down to Class AAA Charlotte after Sunday's win against the Cubs.

Moncada, 22, was put on the disabled list on May 5 with left hamstring tightness, which caused him to miss one entire game and parts of two others.

The tightness, according to manager Rick Renteria, was something Moncada had not previously experienced.

Renteria recently said he's optimistic that this won't be a common problem for Moncada since the MRI came back clean. But it would help if Moncada could develop more flexibility and strength especially since he only has about 4 percent body fat, Renteria said.

Moncada is hitting .263 (30-114) with eight doubles, one triple, six home runs, 15 RBI, 17 walks and four stolen base this season. His on-base percent is a solid .359 on-base percentage in 29 games this season.

Rondon batted .231 with one double in six games this season with the White Sox.

Bowden: Fifteen position players you need to know ahead of the MLB draft

By Jim Bowden / The Athletic / May 15, 2018

Major League Baseball's amateur draft is less than a month away, and it's time to get to know the players who are expected to be drafted in the first round. On Monday, we looked at the consensus top 15 pitchers, and today we'll look at the top 15 position players, based on input from evaluators representing almost every major league scouting department.

Stats good through May 13.

1. Nick Madrigal, 2B, Oregon State

HT: 5-8 WT: 160 Bats: R Throws: R

Scouting Grades: Hit: 60 PWR: 40 ARM: 52 FLD: 55 RUN: 55

Statistics: .439/.478/.585, 2B: 4, HR: 2, RBI: 17

Comments: Following in the footsteps of the Astros' José Altuve and the Braves' Ozzie Albies, here comes Madrigal, another undersized second baseman with future All-Star potential. Madrigal can really hit, run and field, and don't be surprised if his power arrives once he gets to the major league level, just like it did for Altuve and Albies. He is one of the scouts' favorites in this draft because of his makeup,

character, high energy and enthusiasm. Analytics departments love him, too, because he works counts and spits on balls out of the strike zone, which leads to more walks than strikeouts.

2. Joey Bart, C, Georgia Tech

HT: 6-3 WT: 230 Bats: R Throws: R

Scouting Grades: Hit: 52 PWR: 55 ARM: 60 FLD: 55 RUN: 40

Statistics: .364/.473/.621, 2B: 11, HR: 13, RBI: 33

Comments: Bart will be the first catcher taken in this draft, following in the footsteps of former Georgia Tech catchers like Matt Wieters and Jason Varitek. There has never been a question about Bart's bat, which should produce a solid on-base percentage with 20-25 HR type power once he gets to the majors. However, it's his drastic improvement defensively that has been the difference maker, as he's gotten better over the last couple of years in almost every facet, including game calling, framing, blocking and accuracy with his above-average arm, which shuts down the opposing running game at close to a 40 percent clip. It's hard to find catching of this magnitude in the first round of any draft, which means he should be gone by the fifth pick of the first round.

3. Jonathan India, 3B, Florida

HT: 6-1 WT: 205 Bats: R Throws: R

Scouting Grades: Hit: 55 PWR: 52 ARM: 55 FLD: 60 RUN: 55

Statistics: .384/.525/.789 2B: 11 HR: 16 RBI: 40 SB: 11

Comments: India is the best college right-handed bat in this draft, according to some of the game's best hitting evaluators. He is extremely disciplined at the plate, knows how to work a count and has solid contact to all fields. India is a significantly above-average defender at third base with a strong arm, and he not only has above-average speed, but he's an extremely smart base runner too. He's a complete player and one could argue he offers the least risk of any position player in this draft.

4. Alec Bohm, 3B, Wichita State

HT: 6-5 WT: 240 Bats: R Throws: R

Scouting Grades: Hit: 60 PWR: 60 ARM: 52 FLD: 40 RUN: 35

Statistics: .339/.436/.582, 2B: 10, HR: 11, RBI: 45

Comments: Teams that prioritize bats over defense are going to pull the trigger early on Bohm. He can really hit, with legitimate power. He has a natural strong launch angle, hits the ball consistently hard and, without being able to actually measure it, is widely considered to be one of the leaders in exit velocity compared to other hitters who will be selected in this draft. The problem is that, despite working hard to improve his defense at third base, he has a slow first step, he lacks range, and his hands are below average. He could end up as a designated hitter or be moved to first base. I would guess that an American League team will draft him.

5. Connor Scott, OF, Plant HS (FL)

HT: 6-4 WT: 185 Bats: L Throws: L

Scouting Grades: Hit: 55 PWR: 55 ARM: 65 FLD: 52 RUN: 70

Comments: Scott is one of the few true five-tool outfielders in this draft; he's above average in everything. He's a center fielder with tremendous range in all directions and a strong arm. He has a good hit tool thanks to a short swing with consistent sweet-spot contact and loud noise. Although he doesn't show game power, once he gets his lower half involved more and gets his wrists and forearms stronger, it's easy to project 20 homer pop or more. His running speed is his best tool. Don't be surprised if he ends up being the best player in this draft in the long run.

6. Jarred Kelenic, OF, Waukesha West HS (WI)

HT: 6-1 WT: 197 Bats: L Throws: L

Scouting Grades: Hit: 60 PWR: 52 ARM: 60 FLD: 50 RUN: 55

Comments: Kelenick can really hit, with solid-average major league power and an explosive short swing that causes electricity at contact. He presently plays center field, and although many teams think he can stay there, others suggest he'll end up in right. If he does, he has a strong enough arm to play there too. He has above-average speed and is a smart baserunner who puts pressure on the defense. He's also had a long history of winning, including helping his U.S. National team win a gold medal a year ago.

7. Travis Swaggerty, CF, South Alabama

HT: 5-11 WT: 184 Bats: L Throws: L

Scouting Grades: Hit: 55 PWR: 52 ARM: 55 FLD: 55 RUN: 60

Statistics: .303/.484/.571 2B: 9 HR: 13 RBI: 38

Comments: Swaggerty profiles out to a future leadoff hitter with 20 home run and 25 stolen base potential, while playing an above-average center field with an above-average arm for the position. He's been compared to current major league players like Adam Eaton, Denard Span and Brett Gardner by major league scouts who have evaluated him this year. He has a short bat path and has loud sweet spot contact on a consistent basis. Swaggerty already has the ability to hit the other way, and his evolving power is from the pull side. He does occasionally have bad routes in the outfield, but that should be corrected with reps.

8. Brice Turang, SS, Santiago HS (CA)

HT: 6-1 WT: 175 Bats: L Throws: R

Scouting Grades: Hit: 55 PWR: 40 ARM: 55 FLD: 52 RUN: 55

Comments: Turang's hit and run tools are his best tools, both rating above average. He's also an above-average defender at shortstop with good range and a strong arm from the hole. In fact, his only below-average tool is his power. He didn't live up to the hype his senior year, but that won't detract teams who love his overall package and see huge upside as he matures both physically and mentally. He's succeeded against elite pitching, and the left-hander should be able to stay at shortstop. He profiles as a future No. 2-type hitter in a winning lineup.

9. Nolan Gorman, 3B, O'Connor HS (AZ)

HT: 6-1 WT: 212 Bats: L Throws: R

Scouting Grades: Hit: 45 PWR: 70 ARM: 50 FLD: 48 RUN: 45

Statistics: .419/.637/.905 2B: 6 HR: 10 RBI: 32

Comments: No doubt about it, Gorman is the best left-handed power hitter in the entire draft. Of course, power doesn't matter if he doesn't hit, and it's the evaluation of that tool that will decide how high he's drafted in the first round. Some teams think that between his special hand-eye coordination, great bat speed and hard contact, his consistency will improve as he gets more plate appearances. His ceiling might be too high to bet against the bat. Defensively, he's presently below average at third base, but will be adequate enough with the power he can provide.

10. Noah Naylor, C, St. Joan of Arc Catholic (Canada)

HT: 6-0 WT: 199 Bats: L Throws: R

Scouting Grades: Hit: 60 PWR: 52 ARM: 55 FLD: 40 RUN: 40

Comments: Naylor is the younger brother of Padres first baseman/left fielder Josh Naylor, and like his brother, he has the hit tool. He has a pure, level swing and does a great job of tracking the ball, with impressive hand-eye coordination and a short path to the ball. He should be able to stay at catcher, but will need to be drafted by an organization willing to put in the time in to help him defensively, because he has a lot of work to do. If not, a move to first or third base is reasonable. Naylor's power is average but should develop in time. The bat alone will get him drafted somewhere in the first round.

11. Trevor Larnach, OF, Oregon State

HT: 6-3 WT: 220 Bats: L Throws: R

Scouting Grades: Hit: 55 PWR: 50 ARM: 55 FLD: 52 RUN: 40

Statistics: .343/.467/.669, 2B: 13, HR: 14, RBI: 54

Comments: Larnach's hit tool reminds some scouts of a young Paul O'Neill because he loves to go the other way, and although he only shows average power, evaluators believe that — like it did for O'Neill — the power will come in time, when he learns to pull the ball. He's an average fielder who could play either corner but certainly has enough arm to play right field. His running speed is well below average, but the bat and overall instincts will make up for it.

12. Jordyn Adams, OF, Green Hope HS (NC)

HT: 6-2 WT: 190 Bats: R Throws: R

Scouting Grades: Hit: 50 PWR: 45 ARM: 48 FLD: 55 RUN: 70

Statistics: .453/.602/.640 2B: 5 3B: 3 HR: 1 SB: 31

Comments: Adams has blazing speed and tremendous athleticism, and is a two-sport athlete committed to playing both baseball and football at North Carolina. He has the strength and short, quick swing to develop into an average hitter with 15-20 HR power or more, and could end up stealing 50-60 bags. He's an above-average defender in center field and can run the ball down with the best of them. Signability will be the big question; if he doesn't commit to signing if drafted in the first round before June, teams won't take the gamble, particularly with football being such a viable option for him. In addition, Adams' father Deke is a defensive line coach at North Carolina, and he'd like nothing more than the opportunity to be one of his son's coaches at the collegiate level.

13. Jeremy Eierman, SS, Missouri State

HT: WT: 205 Bats: R Throws: R

Scouting Grades: Hit: 48 PWR: 50 ARM: 65 FLD: 50 RUN: 55

Statistics: .302/.389/.550 2B: 16 HR: 9 RBI: 44

Comments: Eierman is the best college shortstop in this draft, with average range that he makes up for with his positioning and first step quickness. He has soft hands with a difference-making strong arm. He throws above average at every arm angle you can imagine. Eierman does have a hole inside at the plate against good fastballs on his hands, but scouts think that has more to do with his stance and set-up than his inability to get to that pitch. Eierman plays with grit and intensity. He's the son of former Red Sox minor league outfielder John Eierman, and the brother of Johnny, a former Rays minor league outfielder.

14. Steele Walker, OF, Oklahoma

HT: 5-11 WT: 190 Bats: L Throws: L

Scouting Grades: Hit: 60 PWR: 48 ARM: 45 FLD: 50 RUN: 50

Statistics: .358/.452/.597 2B: 13 HR: 11 RBI: 48 SB: 7

Comments: Walker is a line-drive machine who hits the ball to all fields and gets tremendous backspin for his size, which should lead to close-to-average power in time. He has a professional approach at the plate, knows how to work the count and makes pitchers throw the ball in the zone because he's not chasing. Walker has solid baseball instincts and competitiveness and is fundamentally sound. He's one of those players whose bat will make scouts forget that most of his other tools are just average or below. Elite scouting departments won't hesitate to grab him late in the first round or early in the second round because of that hit tool and winning attitude.

15. Jameson Hannah, OF, Dallas Baptist

HT: 5-9 WT: 190 Bats: L Throws: L

Scouting Grades: Hit: 60 PWR: 50 ARM: 40 FLD: 55 RUN: 55

Statistics: .369/.450/.530 2B: 19 HR: 3 RBI: 33 SB: 8

Comments: Here's my sleeper pick for the first round. Hannah is a tremendous athlete and can really hit. He's a left-handed hitter with above-average bat speed and direction. His power profiles to 40 doubles and 15-20 home runs. His speed is usable in stealing bases, running the bases and tracking down balls in the outfield. He also has done well with wood bats, including finishing the 2017 Cape Cod League season

with a 20-game hitting streak. His one minus tool is his throwing arm, which could eventually land him in left field instead of center as it has for so many other major league outfielders, such as Gardner of the Yankees.

Five observations: White Sox fall behind early yet again

By James Fegan / The Athletic / May 15, 2018

If there's a nagging sense that the White Sox (10-28) have recently started every game in a hole, it's not just you. The four-spot the Pirates put on Reynaldo López's tab in the first of the only two innings he was able to provide Tuesday night was the fourth-straight deficit of two or more runs the Sox have been saddled with after the first inning.

After Sunday's stirring rally and hard-fought comeback win at Wrigley Field that had the visiting clubhouse buzzing, this one went more like how you'd expect, with a 7-0 loss stripped of any moment when the outcome was in doubt in a battle between a rebuilding Pirates club that's surprising people so far and a rebuilding White Sox team that is surprising people so far.

Yoán Moncada returned from the disabled list and got a hit.

Now that we're through with the highlights, let's discuss the rest of the game.

1. The best ERA in the starting rotation is not so great anymore.

López was due for regression at some point from that 2.43 ERA. Through rose-colored glasses, save for a leadoff home run from Adam Frazier and some ringing doubles, his outfield defense burned him on a selection of medium-hard contact to return the .202 BABIP he entered the night with back to normal. Through a less forgiving pair of lenses, López was objectively bad, missing the ability to spot his changeup and demonstrating the underwhelming command and extension on his fastball that dogged him last year. Even pitchers who get BABIP'd to high heaven tend to make it out of the third inning.

2. Outfield defense won the 2015 World Series for the Royals, but will not do the same for the White Sox.

Nicky Delmonico is a converted third baseman with slightly below-average speed and Daniel Palka is a hulking slugger whose 220-pound listing seems impossible, so both are the type whose primary fate will be determined by their ability to hit their way into the lineup. But between Palka being unable to track down a sinking liner from Gregory Polanco that would have been in range of many right fielders, and Delmonico getting completely lost on a routine fly ball to deep left from Colin Moran, they both worsened López's nightmare first, and heaped more scrutiny on offensive performances that are missing certain elements. Power production has been lacking from Delmonico, and patience is in short supply for Palka so far. Leury García failing to make a leaping catch at the wall in center looked perfectly fine compared to the problems at the corners.

3. A strange, but mostly irrelevant decision.

Chris Beck batted for himself in the top of the fifth inning. He had already thrown two innings in long relief of López, and given his pledge that he was willing to shine shoes to get back to the major leagues, he was surely up for more. But he was coming up with runners on first and third and no one out after back-to-back singles from García and Tim Anderson. The Sox were down 6-0 at the time, but it was their first real opportunity to mount a rally and climb back into the game. Beck bunted foul with two strikes after multiple attempts to squeeze García in from third, and the White Sox blew the opportunity and went scoreless, and the best hitter on the team this season — Matt Davidson — sat on the bench. They got hammered in this game, so it probably doesn't matter, and Beck breezed through another five outs, but it sure was strange.

4. Where are the whiffs?

López's total of two swinging strikes matched his season-low from when the Twins dinged him for five runs (four earned) in 6 2/3 innings on May 3, an outing with which he was also deeply unhappy. White Sox starters have the lowest swinging strike rate in the American League despite having a trio of youngsters who are lauded for their stuff, so these issues are a troubling mystery.

5. Losing nearly every series has produced a subpar team record.

By losing the first half of a two-game set, the White Sox have doomed themselves to only win two of their first 14 series of the year. Their rotation just really has not put them in any position to have so much as a hot weekend of winning games. At this point of the year, it's hard to find a new stat to demonstrate the White Sox's level of suffering, but this is the best (worst) available for today.

Pirates, Williams send White Sox to 12th loss in 14 games

By The Associated Press / May 15, 2018

PITTSBURGH -- Trevor Williams had a better outing against the struggling White Sox this time while facing them for the second straight start.

Williams scattered six hits and struck out six without a walk in seven innings and the Pittsburgh Pirates beat the White Sox 7-0 Tuesday night.

Four days earlier, he gave up four runs and seven hits -- including two home runs -- in five innings before the Pirates rallied for a 6-5 win in Chicago. Williams said he didn't make any drastic changes to his approach, and credited the pitcher-friendly PNC Park as an aid.

"I thought we did our homework well last time," he said. "I thought it was just two pitches that left the yard. If we were playing at their yard today, some would have left the yard, as well."

Chicago has lost eight of nine and 12 of 14, dropping to a major league-worst 10-28. The White Sox have matched the poorest 38-game start in team history.

Williams (5-2) was also helped by a Pirates offense that continued to roll. Pittsburgh scored four runs in the first inning and chased Chicago starter Reynaldo Lopez in the third.

Staked with an advantage, Williams pitched through the seventh inning for the first time this season.

"It was a really strong effort and a really good back-on-track outing for him," Pirates manager Clint Hurdle said.

Kyle Crick and Richard Rodriguez completed the seven-hitter for Pittsburgh's major league league-best seventh shutout.

The tables turned from the previous game on the other side of the ball, as well. The Pirates jumped all over Lopez (0-3) after he had held them to two runs in 7 1/3 innings the last time out.

Pittsburgh built its 4-0 first-inning lead on Adam Frazier's homer, Josh Bell's two-run double and Colin Moran's RBI double. Sean Rodriguez and Bell also had run-scoring hits in the second.

"Last time through, he was throwing a lot of off-speed early," Bell said of Lopez. "I feel like, for the most part, we were anticipating slower, earlier and it kind of just worked out for us."

Bell went 2 for 4 with 3 RBIs. Gregory Polanco, who also had two hits, added an RBI double in the sixth.

Lopez allowed six runs and seven hits while walking two and hitting one in his shortest outing of the year.

"I think he didn't really feel comfortable in the beginning," White Sox manager Rick Renteria said. "Today was one of those days where he wasn't able to rebound and refocus and get back into a particular zone."

The Pirates are now 9-2 in interleague play, including 3-0 against Chicago, while the White Sox are 1-7.

TRAINER'S ROOM

White Sox: 2B Yoan Moncada (left hamstring tightness) was activated from the disabled list and went 1 for 4. He had been out since May 4.

Pirates: CF Starling Marte left the game at the end of the first inning with discomfort in his right side. Marte doubled and scored in the bottom of the first. He was replaced by Rodriguez. ... C Francisco Cervelli left the game at the end of the third inning with right forearm discomfort. He was hit by a 93 mph fastball in the bottom of the inning by Lopez. Cervelli was replaced by Elias Diaz.

UP NEXT

White Sox: LHP Hector Santiago (0-1, 5.60 ERA) will make a spot start on Wednesday in the series finale. Santiago has made two starts this season. He'll be replacing RHP Carson Fulmer, whose scheduled start was pushed back to Saturday.

Pirates: RHP Jameson Taillon (2-3, 4.08 ERA) is expected to start on Wednesday. He left his previous start on May 11 after just three innings with a laceration on the middle finger of his right hand.

(Maybe) The Most Improved Hitter in Baseball

By Jeff Sullivan / Fangraphs / May 15, 2018

According to expected wOBA, which is not perfect, but which is pretty good, the most improved hitter in the major leagues is Mookie Betts. The second-most improved hitter is Leonys Martin, and the third-most improved hitter is Matt Davidson. Since xwOBA is only one measure, that means we can have a conversation. And that means there's an argument for each of those three players, along with some others. I'll lay out the case for Davidson here. It's every bit as simple as it is impressive.

At this writing, Davidson is tied for the seventh-highest xwOBA overall. He's right there with Kris Bryant. No one in baseball has a higher xwOBA on batted balls alone. If you prefer something a little more familiar, Davidson has bumped his wRC+ from 83 to 161, the second number being almost double the first. For anyone who knows anything about Davidson, the power has always been present. The improvement has taken place elsewhere. It's maybe the most difficult improvement to make, but the easiest one to explain.

Flash back to this past Sunday. Davidson batted against Kyle Hendricks in the top of the second, and he quickly fell behind 0-and-2. Davidson fouled off the third pitch, a cutter over the outer third. And then began a representative three-pitch sequence. The (second) pitch at 0-and-2:

The at-bat wound up with a home run, but as usual, it was in part a result of the sequence. Davidson only had the opportunity to go deep because he worked the count to 2-and-2 in the first place. He got there by taking a couple of very close pitches. And I'm struck by how confidently Davidson didn't swing, at either one. I know that, at 0-and-2, he checked a swing, but he was in control of the check. Davidson had those pitches read. And he had the 2-and-2 pitch read, as something he'd like to punish.

Matt Davidson made news this year for homering three times on opening day. That's remarkable for obvious reasons, but the performance didn't mean much on its own. Granted, all three homers were hit harder than anything Davidson hit throughout all of 2017. But, throughout all of 2017, Davidson struck out 37% of the time. He walked 4% of the time. Those are unplayable numbers, for any team that's trying to

win. Davidson needed to show he could hit with a better understanding of the strike zone. That was going to take more than one three-homer barrage.

Davidson has dropped his strikeout rate to just about 30%. Plenty of productive hitters strike out roughly that much. Far more importantly, however, Davidson has already drawn 22 walks. Last season, over 118 games, he drew all of 19 walks. No hitter has improved his walks and strikeouts as much as Davidson has over the first quarter of the year, and the gains are supported by a dramatic improvement in general approach:

This is so hard, and so easy. It's easy to understand what's going on, but it's hard for any hitter to actually pull off. What's one of the first rules anyone ever learns about hitting? Swing at strikes, and not at balls. That's just Baseball 101. What we know is that major-league pitchers are absurdly talented, and they're good at getting hitters to chase. If it were that easy to lay off of balls, more hitters would take more balls. Now, from last year to this year, Davidson has kept about the same in-zone swing rate. He's still swinging at almost two-thirds of strikes. But when it comes to chase rate, Davidson has gotten better by 12 percentage points. He's trimmed his chase rate by more than a third, which would be one of the biggest year-to-year improvements we have on record.

With any huge early improvement, you should expect to see a certain amount of regression. Hitters make changes, and then pitchers figure out new ways to successfully attack them. But Davidson looks like he's just seeing the ball better, and I'll tell you what I find the most encouraging. Maybe the truest test of discipline is how hitters swing with two strikes. In two-strike counts, Davidson's in-zone swing rate has gone up, by four points. And yet, also in two-strike counts, his out-of-zone swing rate has gone down, by 19 points. By 19 points! No hitter has shown that kind of improvement. There are 83 players who have seen at least 100 out-of-zone pitches this year in two-strike counts. Davidson owns the very lowest chase rate, lower even than Mike Trout himself. Even when Davidson has been pushed into swing mode, he's maintained his new discipline, which is no small feat. It's tempting to take defensive swings against anything close. Davidson has resisted the urge.

Mechanically, he doesn't look like a different hitter. But we know he's made changes, because his approach is so much better, and because his average launch angle has come down by eight degrees. If Davidson is indeed thinking about a flatter bat path, he wouldn't be alone. His swing is actually fairly compact, given how much power it can generate. You could say Davidson is just using it more judiciously. As he slumped and slumped further in 2017, he felt like he was always behind, and far too easy to pitch to. Now he's making more pitchers come to him. That's half of good hitting. For Davidson, the other half has never been a problem.

Coming into the year, Davidson looked like the White Sox' primary designated hitter. And, related to that, the White Sox were projected to be awful at designated hitter. Davidson was projected to be below replacement level, which didn't feel unfair, given that 2017 Davidson finished with a WAR of -0.9. When I looked at Chicago's DH situation, I saw an opportunity to buy a prospect. Mentally, I kept trying to figure out trades for Matt Kemp. I didn't believe in Davidson, because I figured he'd already failed his test.

Now the White Sox are being rewarded for their patience. Even though Davidson is 27 years old, he wouldn't be the game's first late bloomer. And while many young White Sox starting pitchers have run into trouble, Davidson is becoming a value the team didn't expect. Rebuilds succeed in part because quality prospects become quality players. And they succeed in part because other quality players seemingly emerge out of nowhere. Matt Davidson is blossoming into a force. And so the rebuild takes another step forward.
