



WHITE SOX HEADLINES OF APRIL 11, 2018

"Consistent Moncada staying optimistic at plate"... Scott Merkin, MLB.com

"Tuesday's best: Soto perfect at plate, drives in six"... William Boor, MLB.com

"Jimenez returns to action after injury"... Scott Merkin, MLB.com

"Chris Paul buys Class A Advanced Dash share".... Scott Merkin, MLB.com

"Castillo day to day with sore right knee"...Scott Merkin, MLB.com

"Fulmer struggles, walks six in loss to Rays"... Max Gelman, Mlb.com

"Fighting for spot in future Sox rotation, Carson Fulmer has eyes on eventual World Series: 'That's all we think about, that's all we want to do'"... Vinnie Duber, NBC Sports Chicago

"When They Were Prospects: Jose Abreu"...Vinnie Duber, NBC Sports Chicago

"Chris Paul is a new part-owner of a White Sox minor league affiliate"...Vinnie Duber, NBC Sports Chicago

"In thus-far winless homestand, we're seeing the growing pains of the White Sox rebuild"...Vinnie Duber, NBC Sports Chicago

"Michael Kopech off to fast start, but Rick Renteria is watching White Sox prospect's changeup"... Phil Thompson, Chicago Tribune

"Carson Fulmer struggles in White Sox's fifth straight home defeat in 6-5 loss to Rays"... Phil Thompson, Chicago Tribune

"White Sox manager praises Michael Kopech's Charlotte outing, preaches patience"...Cat Garcia, Chicago Sun Times

"Jose Abreu hits three-run HR in ninth, but Sox fall 6-5 to Rays"...Cat Garcia, Chicago Sun Times

"Sox' Nate Jones stays positive despite two serious surgeries in last four years"...Cat Garcia, Chicago Sun Times

"Tim Anderson's breakout on the basepaths is all about work, confidence, and maybe some more speed"...James Fegan, The Athletic

"White Sox knew committing to Carson Fulmer would bring days like this"...James Fegan, The Athletic

Consistent Moncada staying optimistic at plate

By Scott Merkin / MLB.com/ April 10, 2018

CHICAGO -- Yoan Moncada does not change.

Sure, the White Sox second baseman feels more comfortable with each game he plays at the Major League level. His approach at the plate continues to be refined.

But in terms of his demeanor, the 22-year-old stays even-keeled whether he's in a 10-for-20 hot streak or hitting .216 through nine games, as his average checked in before Tuesday's contest with the Rays.

"I'm always the same. I understand this is a game and you are going to have ups and downs," said Moncada through interpreter Billy Russo. "You are not going to take anything good if after a bad game you are going to change your mood or you are going to put your head down.

"You have to understand that probably you have a bad day today, tomorrow is another opportunity to have a good game. The only thing you have to do is keep working hard and keep grinding. You can't beat yourself."

Statcast™ numbers show Moncada's struggles might be the result of tough luck.

In the category of highest hard-hit rate, representing the percentage of batted balls with 95-plus mph exit velocity, Moncada leads baseball at 68.2 percent (based on a minimum 20 batted balls). Moncada also leads in highest average exit velocity at 97.2 mph, edging out Christian Yelich (97.1), Marcell Ozuna (96.7), Miguel Cabrera (95.7) and Robinson Cano (95.2).

Moncada is 7-for-15 on batted balls with an exit velocity greater than 95 mph, with his expected batting average (which determines how a player should fare based on batted balls with similar launch angles and exit velocities) is 57 points higher than his .216 actual average. It would be easy for Moncada to get frustrated with hard-hit grounders or fly balls finding opposing gloves, but that's not really his style.

"Sometimes you can get frustrated, but at the same time, you have to understand this is a game. And if you are hitting the ball hard, you know that you are doing what you are supposed to do," Moncada said. "Sooner rather than later, all those connections are going to find an empty space to fall in."

"I've been feeling good. The outcomes haven't been as good as everybody wants, but I know that if I keep my approach and my routine, the good results are going to come."

Kopech makes strong debut

Right-hander Michael Kopech, the No. 2 White Sox prospect per MLB Pipeline, fanned eight over four scoreless innings during his 2018 debut for Triple-A Charlotte on Monday at Norfolk. He allowed two hits and walked two.

Kopech is expected to pitch for the White Sox at some point this season. But manager Rick Renteria spoke Tuesday about Kopech focusing on fastball command, his changeup and getting his innings up.

"He's been doing much better with it. He's getting a better feel for it," said Renteria of Kopech's change. "Just continue to pitch and get innings under his belt. The reality is these guys still have to expand their innings. He's in a situation in which he's discovering what he continues to become and hopefully that's going to be a top line, quality big league pitcher."

Third to first

The White Sox took pregame batting practice for the first time on this homestand. The team tried earlier, but frozen ground due to the extreme spring cold prevented that from happening.

Tuesday's best: Soto perfect at plate, drives in six

By William Boor /MLB.com / April 11, 2018

Juan Soto is off to a fast start this season, and if Tuesday's performance is any indication, the No. 29 overall prospect isn't slowing down anytime soon.

Soto, the Nationals' No. 2 prospect, reached base in all five plate appearances and collected a career-high six RBIs as he led Class A Hagerstown to a 9-3 win over Columbia.

Soto set a career-high with four RBIs as part of a four-hit effort on Sunday, but that personal record only lasted two days. Soto walked in his first and fourth trips to the plate on Tuesday, but when he got pitches to hit, he didn't miss them.

The 19-year-old capped a three-run third with a two-RBI single, hit a two-run homer in the fifth and drove in two more runs with an eighth-inning double to cap a perfect day at the plate.

The big game brings Soto's average to .391 (9-for-23) through six games, but he's not just collecting hits, he's also showcasing some power.

Soto's fifth-inning homer was already his third this season, which matches his total from 2017 (32 games) and is approaching his career high of five, which he set over 51 contests in 2016.

Other top prospect performances from Tuesday's action:

- No. 2 overall prospect Ronald Acuna Jr. (Braves' No. 1) was going to break out eventually, and that moment finally came with Triple-A Gwinnett. After a Spring Training during which Acuna was unstoppable, the phenom went 0-for-12 to start the season. However, the skid stopped in the fourth inning when Acuna doubled to left. He later added another hit, finishing 2-for-4.

- No. 25 overall prospect Brendan McKay (Rays' No. 3) continues to make his case as a two-way player for Class A Bowling Green. McKay, who struck out four over two perfect innings on Monday, went 2-for-4 with an RBI at the plate on Tuesday. McKay has two or more hits in three straight games and is batting .538 through four games with the Hot Rods.

- No. 40 overall prospect Cal Quantrill (Padres' No. 4) made another strong start for Double-A San Antonio. The 2016 first-round pick gave up one run on three hits and struck out seven over six innings. Quantrill has made two starts this season and surrendered two runs over 9 2/3 innings.

- No. 68 overall prospect Fernando Romero (Twins' No. 2) was lights-out in his Triple-A debut while coming out of the bullpen for Rochester. Romero, who posted a 3.53 ERA over 24 games (23 starts) with Double-A Chattanooga in 2017, gave up a pair of unearned runs while scattering five hits across five innings.

- No. 82 overall prospect Christian Arroyo (Rays' No. 6) is starting to heat up for Triple-A Durham. The shortstop struggled early out of the gate, going 0-for-12 over his first three games, but has since caught fire. Arroyo went 3-for-4 at the plate and now has four hits in his past seven at-bats.

- Giants No. 24 prospect Ryan Howard put together his third straight multihit game, going 3-for-5 for Double-A Richmond. Howard, who is batting .360 through six games, also hit his first homer of the season, a solo blast in the third.

- Indians prospects Shane Bieber (No. 8) and Elijah Morgan (No. 28) put together impressive outings for Double-A Akron and Class A Lake County. Bieber picked up his first win of the year and extended his scoreless streak to 13 as he struck out eight and fired seven scoreless frames for Akron. Meanwhile, Morgan, who was stuck with a no-decision for Lake County, gave up one run over six innings and struck out nine.

- Pirates No. 11 prospect Taylor Hearn was nearly unhittable in his Double-A debut. The 23-year-old lefty gave up one hit -- a second-inning single -- over five one-run innings as Altoona topped Harrisburg. Hearn, who fired 46 of his 80 pitches for strikes, walked three, struck out four and retired nine of the final 11 batters he faced.

- Rockies No. 18 prospect Brian Mundell led the way with four hits, but he wasn't the only Rockies prospect to put together a solid performance. Mundell went 4-for-5 with two runs scored for Double-A Hartford, while his teammate Brendan Rodgers (Rockies' No. 1, No. 14 overall) hit his second homer of the season as part of a 1-for-5 performance. Out in the California League, Colton Welker (No. 4) boosted his average to .579 with another big day at the plate. Welker finished 3-for-4 and has two or more hits in four of his six games this season.

- A trio of Twins prospects led Class A Cedar Rapids to a win over Peoria as Alex Kirilloff (No. 6) and Ben Rortvedt (No. 24) combined to go 6-for-9 at the plate and Tyler Watson (No. 22) gave up one run on three hits over 5 1/3 innings on the mound. Rortvedt was a perfect 4-for-4 at the plate while Kirilloff went 2-for-5 with three RBIs.

- White Sox prospects Gavin Sheets (No. 11) and Luis Alexander Basabe (No. 13) continued to swing hot bats, lifting Class A Advanced Winston-Salem to a win over Myrtle Beach. Sheets, hitting .368 this

season, went 3-for-4 with an RBI, while Basabe, batting .350, went 3-for-4 with a triple and two RBIs.

Jimenez returns to action after injury

By Scott Merkin /MLB.com/ April 10, 2018

CHICAGO -- Eloy Jimenez, the No. 1 White Sox prospect per MLB Pipeline, returned to action during extended Spring Training in Arizona on Monday after suffering a mild strain to his left pectoral while working out at the White Sox complex at Camelback Ranch on March 31.

The team announced Jimenez finished 0-for-4 in Monday's contest against the Reds. Chris Getz, the White Sox director of player development, said Jimenez was scheduled to play five innings on Tuesday.

"At this point, he's getting pretty close," Getz said. "We want to get him some at-bats and get his legs underneath him and make sure he's in a good position to go out there to play without restriction when he gets back to [Double-A] Birmingham."

Jimenez, 21, missed close to two weeks during Spring Training due to left knee tendinitis, but he hit a pinch-hit home run against the Cubs upon his return.

Chris Paul buys Class A Advanced Dash share

By Scott Merkin /MLB.com / April 10, 2018

CHICAGO -- Chris Paul figures to be busy in the near future as the point guard for the Houston Rockets, the Western Conference's No. 1 seed in the NBA playoffs.

But when the basketball season comes to an end, the nine-time NBA All-Star and two-time Olympic gold medalist will get a first-hand look at the White Sox rebuild after becoming a part of the Dash's ownership group as announced Tuesday. Born in Winston-Salem, N.C., Paul graduated from West Forsyth High School in nearby Clemmons, N.C., and attended Wake Forest University.

C.J. Johnson, president of the Winston-Salem Dash, spoke to media earlier Tuesday at BB&T Ballpark and revealed that a new owner with strong roots in the community had joined the Dash family, according to a story from the Dash. A brief video then played on the center-field videoboard with Paul expressing his excitement regarding his involvement with his hometown team.

"I am excited to have the opportunity to become involved with a successful organization that has a positive impact on the community," Paul said. "What could be more fun than being part owner of a Minor League baseball team in your hometown?"

Following the video, Johnson was joined by longtime Dash chairman and managing partner Billy Prim and Paul's parents, Charles and Robin Paul.

"We are thrilled to welcome Chris Paul into the Winston-Salem Dash ownership group," said Prim. "He has used his incredible success on the basketball court as a platform to create the CP3 Foundation, and has done amazing work in our community. Our organizational goals of providing affordable family entertainment align perfectly with the objectives of the CP3 Foundation."

The Dash features top White Sox prospects such as right-handed pitchers Dylan Cease and Dane Dunning, first baseman Gavin Sheets and outfielders Blake Rutherford, Luis Alexander Basabe, Micker Adolfo and Luis Robert when he returns from a thumb injury. They are also managed by Omar Vizquel.

They have a record of 2-3 through five games. Their first home game of the 2018 regular season is on Thursday at 7 p.m. ET against the Carolina Mudcats.

Castillo day to day with sore right knee

By Scott Merkin/ Mlb.com / April 10, 2018

CHICAGO -- White Sox catcher Welington Castillo left Tuesday's 6-5 loss to the Rays at Guaranteed Rate Field in the bottom of the sixth inning with right knee soreness and is listed as day to day.

According to White Sox manager Rick Renteria, Castillo suffered the injury when his spike stuck in the ground while throwing out C.J. Cron stealing second for the second out in the top of the sixth. Omar Narvaez pinch-hit for Castillo and drew a walk in the bottom half of the frame, with Narvaez eventually lining out to right as the winning run at the plate in the ninth to end the White Sox fifth straight setback at home and overall.

"He kind of tweaked his knee, and he's day to day right now," Renteria said. "We'll see how he feels tomorrow. I don't anticipate honestly that it's anything of concern, long-term concern.

"If I have to give a day tomorrow, I'll give him a day tomorrow. But he should be fine."

Fulmer struggles, walks six in loss to Rays

By Max Gellman/ Mlb.com / April 10, 2018

CHICAGO -- Sometimes, during a rebuild, certain moments can provide a glimpse of the potential that's to come, much like Reynaldo Lopez's stellar outing Sunday against the Tigers. Other times, a team must endure growing pains while young talent develops.

For the White Sox, Tuesday's 6-5 loss to the Rays was one of those growing-pain days. Starter Carson Fulmer, the team's first-round Draft pick in 2015, struggled with command all afternoon, walking six Rays in 4 2/3 innings and hitting another two. He also threw a wild pitch and balked.

"The walks are a really big thing for me that I pride myself on a lot. Obviously, there were six of them. That can't happen," Fulmer said. "I was able to minimize, but the thing for me obviously I put our team in a bad place there."

Shaky defense compounded Fulmer's problems in the third. After Rays designated hitter Daniel Robertson led off with a walk, Fulmer attempted a pickoff and caught Robertson in between first and second.

But Tim Anderson dropped Jose Abreu's throw, allowing Robertson to escape a potential rundown and retreat to first. Robertson later scored on Joey Wendle's RBI single.

"We didn't help [Fulmer]," manager Rick Renteria said. "He was able to put himself in the position to possibly get out of a couple of those innings ... he worked very well to minimize the damage for the most part."

Despite Fulmer's wildness, the White Sox nearly mounted an impressive comeback in the ninth. Down 6-1, Anderson led off with a double, stole third and scored on Yolmer Sanchez's sacrifice fly. Then, with two outs, an error and a walk opened the door for Abreu's third home run of the season, cutting the deficit to 6-5.

"When [Abreu] hit that ball out of the ballpark, it puts a little charge in you," Renteria said. "Now [Matt Davidson] gets up, he has a nice at-bat and he gets on base. We had [Omar Narvaez] who smoked a line drive to right. You start to get that sense of confidence again."

Davidson, representing the tying run, worked a walk. But Narvaez lined out sharply to right field, ending the game.

Renteria praised his team's late-game fight, saying that even though the White Sox have now lost five straight, they've shown they don't take anything for granted.

"Any young Major League team, any veteran Major League team understands it, learns it, continues to live through it," he said. "We're no different than anybody else. We haven't had the outcomes we've wanted over the last five games but I assure you that there's no confidence being lost."

MOMENTS THAT MATTERED

Insurance run: Given that Rays starter Blake Snell was nearly as wild as Fulmer -- Snell walked five in six innings -- it seemed the White Sox had a decent shot to eventually come back and win. The Rays' ninth-inning score, however, ultimately proved the deciding run. Rays catcher Wilson Ramos came around to score their sixth run after Gregory Infante gave up an RBI single to Robertson. Aaron Bummer limited further damage, striking out the next two batters.

High-RISP situations: The White Sox didn't have many chances to drive in runs, but their best run-scoring opportunity outside Abreu's ninth-inning homer came in the sixth inning when Snell walked consecutive batters with two outs. Delmonico, who scored the White Sox first run in the fifth came to the plate, couldn't cash in though. The lefty worked the count to 2-2, but struck out on a foul tip.

QUOTABLE

"That's my best pitch. It's been my best pitch my whole career. You know, a pitcher has to have his fastball working regardless of how fast it is, I know mine is really effective. I get a lot of people out on my fastball and 3-2 count with two outs, bases loaded, that's the pitch I'm going to go to." -- Fulmer on his fastball

SOUND SMART WITH YOUR FRIENDS

So far this season, the White Sox are 17-for-95 (.179 average) with runners in scoring position. That includes a 3-for-37 stretch (.081) over their last four games.

WHAT'S NEXT

James Shields faces his former team in Wednesday's series finale at 1:10 p.m. CT, wrapping up the opening homestand. The White Sox begin a seven-game road trip Thursday in Minnesota.

Fighting for spot in future Sox rotation, Carson Fulmer has eyes on eventual World Series: 'That's all we think about, that's all we want to do'

By Vinnie Duber/ NBC Sports Chicago / April 10, 2018

It's not good for one's health or sanity to assess the White Sox young players on a daily basis.

And that's why pitching coach Don Cooper cranked up the emotion to suggest patience in regards to Carson Fulmer when the White Sox opened the 2018 season a couple weeks ago in Kansas City.

Fulmer's been a lightning rod for snap judgments, a high draft pick with shaky performances in his first few major league innings followed by a strong finish to the 2017 season then a rough spring training.

But if there is truth to the suggestion that each and every game is a building block, then Fulmer is getting 2018 started with a solid first step. He pitched real well against the Toronto Blue Jays last week, allowing three runs and striking out five batters in five innings. He didn't get the win, but he was very pleased with how things went.

"Great first start," Fulmer said Monday back in Chicago. "Was able to have some pretty good command, was able to locate my fastball pretty well. Got a lot of swing and misses on my changeup, which is a pitch I've been working on quite a bit. Cutter was pretty effective. I didn't throw too many breaking balls, which is my bread and butter when it comes to making an out pitch. But I was able to get through five strong innings, came out of the ballgame, kept momentum on our side, put our team in the best chance to win."

“So very, very happy with the first one. Obviously, take the positives out of that one and move on to the next one.”

The next one comes Tuesday afternoon against the Tampa Bay Rays as the future continues to roll on for the White Sox starting staff. Reynaldo Lopez has been the most impressive of the bunch with two strong outings to start his season. Lucas Giolito had his issues in his first two starts, but there’s plenty of confidence that he’ll straighten things out once he’s no longer pitching in arctic conditions. Michael Kopech was terrific in his debut at Triple-A Charlotte on Monday night, striking out eight hitters in four innings of work.

Fulmer is fighting for a spot in that crowded rotation of the future as he continues to develop at the major league level, a common theme among many of big league White Sox in 2018. The nature of baseball almost assures they won’t all be gems, and that’s fine. Fulmer will have every opportunity to prove he belongs not just in this rotation but in the rotations in 2019 and 2020 and beyond, when this rebuilding effort is planned to yield a perennial contender.

“I think that for us young guys, being thrown out there and getting innings under our belt and facing the best competition in the world, that’s the only way we’re going to get better,” Fulmer said. “We all have personal goals, but we have to set those aside and we have to look at the team goal. And the team goal is to be a part of winning a World Series. That’s all we think about. That’s all we want to do. And I think that being part of a staff that is going to push towards that eventually is really special.

“With the organization giving us the opportunity to go out there every fifth day, it’s definitely really special. We’re definitely fortunate to have the opportunity to do that.”

There will be plenty of fans who still aren’t sold on Fulmer as one of the future five after what he did in the spring. And while spring stats should always be taken with a hefty helping of salt, the numbers were not at all good for Fulmer. He finished with an 11.81 ERA in five outings, giving up seven home runs and walking 13 batters in 10.2 innings.

But Fulmer was still able to take plenty of positives from the spring, as was his manager.

“I got ahead of a lot of guys, which is real important for a pitcher and a starting pitcher. I wasn’t able to make that third pitch,” Fulmer said. “I’d get guys 0-2, 1-2, and would get through the hard part and had some difficulty with my breaking ball, which is my go-to. My changeup, was still trying to feel it out. But I felt great, I felt healthy, I made every one of my starts, I was able to go deep into ballgames. And regardless of the result, I was given the opportunity to make this club and ended up having a really good first start, which I think is one of the tougher outings, for guys to get off on a good start. I’m definitely ready to make a lot more starts this year and hopefully put us in a great chance to win.”

“Honestly, I wasn’t too concerned about the spring,” Rick Renteria said. “Everybody, rightfully so, looking at what the outcomes were about, but you’ve got to look beyond the outcomes, kind of see who that person is, what he’s done in the past, how he prepares his mindset. As it turns out, we’ve had one good outing out of him, hopefully we’ll get another one and we continue to build on it. You’re not always going to have good days, and the days that you don’t have your best stuff or best command is the day that you really work on trying to get through a ballgame and keep your team in it. And I think those are also great learning experiences for them, as well.”

As he showed in Toronto, Fulmer’s confidence was not shaken by a suboptimal spring. This is a guy who’s gone through both positives and negatives in his brief time as a pro. Remember, he was drafted fewer than three years ago. In all levels of the minor and major leagues, he’s yet to even tally 300 innings.

But Fulmer said his experiences — high-profile ones in the eyes of White Sox fans — have prepared him for this “prove it” season. And it could give him a leg up on Kopech, Alec Hansen, Dylan Cease, Dane Dunning and the rest of the pitching wave coming to the South Side.

"I think I've had a lot of experience now in regards to some ups and downs," Fulmer said. "Not to think too much about spring training, but I stayed healthy, was able to work on a lot of things. And I think continuing to have that mindset of going out there and making your pitch and slowing the game down when you need to, it used to be kind of hard for me, but now it's easy. Taking a deep breath, going out there and executing my pitch when I need to is really important, and I was able to have some success with it.

"I've gotten my feet wet, I feel comfortable being on this stage, and I'm just looking forward just to get some more experience."

When They Were Prospects: Jose Abreu

By Vinnie Duber/ NBC Sports Chicago / April 10, 2018

Before Jose Abreu became the MLB powerhouse that all South Side fans came to know and love, he was a slugging prospect playing in his native Cuba.

There were first reports of him leaving Cuba Aug. 11, 2013, and he signed with the White Sox just 79 days later on Oct. 29.

He turned heads that past March during the 2013 World Baseball Classic putting up a .360/.385/.760 line in 6 games, including 3 HR and 9 RBI's for Cuba.

Here's how he performed in his last four seasons playing for Cienfuegos in the Cuban National Series.

Last 4 seasons in Cuba (Cienfuegos):

	Games		HR
2009-10	89	.399/.555/.822	30
2010-11	66	.453/.597/.986	33
2011-12	87	.394/.542/.837	35
2012-13	77	.345/.481/.617	19

With these numbers, he earned the title of being Baseball America's #29 prospect entering the 2014 season.

"Signed to a Major League contract, Abreu has higher expectations than most on this list. The White Sox are counting on him to make the Majors and hit in the middle of their lineup," Baseball America quoted in their report.

Some memorable quotes about Abreu?

"He just might be the best hitter in the world. And you've probably never heard of him." - Grantland - Jonah Keri

"There are legitimate comparisons to Ryan Howard." - Oakland A's GM David Fors

Chris Paul is a new part-owner of a White Sox minor league affiliate

By Vinnie Duber/ NBC Sports Chicago / April 10, 2018

One of the biggest stars in the NBA now has a connection to the White Sox.

All-Star point guard Chris Paul was announced Tuesday as a new part-owner of the Winston-Salem Dash, a Class A affiliate of the White Sox.

Paul was born in Winston-Salem and played his college ball at Wake Forest, which is also in Winston-Salem.

"I am excited to have the opportunity to become involved with a successful organization that has a positive impact on the community," Paul said in the team's announcement. "What could be more fun than being part owner of a minor league baseball team in your hometown?"

This is just more attention for a Winston-Salem team that is loaded with highly ranked White Sox prospects this season. Luis Robert, Dylan Cease, Dane Dunning, Blake Rutherford, Micker Adolfo, Gavin Sheets and Luis Alexander Basabe are all playing for the Dash.

Perhaps Paul, a nine-time All Star and two-time Olympic gold medalist, can impart some secrets to success on the young White Sox of the future.

In thus-far winless homestand, we're seeing the growing pains of the White Sox rebuild

By Vinnie Duber/ NBC Sports Chicago / April 10, 2018

Just because the calendar turned from Year 1 to Year 2 in the White Sox rebuilding process doesn't mean that the rebuild is over quite yet.

The hardest part of the rebuild, general manager Rick Hahn said this offseason, might be the current part. After his front office stocked the farm system with an incredible amount of young talent, now it's time to play the waiting game as all those highly touted prospects continue to cook in the minor leagues.

But the waiting game is played at the same time as the real-life baseball games, and over the last five games at the major league level, South Side baseball fans have been witness to baseball that even eternal optimist Rick Renteria will readily admit isn't the best around.

"We certainly haven't played, in general, the best five games we've had in our time here," Renteria said Tuesday.

Yes, this homestand, the first of the 2018 campaign, has been an ugly one so far. The White Sox have dropped the first five games played at Guaranteed Rate Field this season and have done so with an offense that has been almost entirely unable to come up with a big hit in a big moment, a bullpen that's turned in a couple nasty outings and a starting pitching staff that is issuing a heck of a lot of walks.

It's hard to say Tuesday's 6-5 loss to the visiting Tampa Bay Rays encapsulated the struggles, considering all these games have been aesthetically displeasing. But just one run through the first eight innings, just one hit through the first four-plus innings, a 1-for-10 mark with runners in scoring position (Jose Abreu's three-run homer in the ninth) and nine runners left on base sufficiently sums up the offensive struggles.

Carson Fulmer, meanwhile, issued six walks in his 4.2 innings, also hitting two batters, throwing a wild pitch and getting charged with a balk. Hector Santiago issued two walks out of the bullpen, and Gregory Infante gave up three hits and walked two while facing only seven batters. His season ERA is 16.62.

All of this, of course, is not entirely surprising. The White Sox were a 95-loss team a season ago and figured once again to be out of contention early given their rebuilding status. These growing pains, these bumps in the road are no surprise while the organization waits for the wave of minor league talent to wash up on the South Side.

But at the same time, you can excuse fans' irritation. After all, this homestand has pitted the White Sox against the Rays and the Detroit Tigers before them, two teams expected to finish at or near the bottom of their respective division standings.

Added up, the numbers are frightening. In five home games this season, the White Sox are 7-for-50 with runners in scoring position. They've left 45 runners on base. White Sox pitchers — after walking a ridiculous 10 hitters Tuesday — have given out 28 free passes.

“Any young major league team, any veteran major league team understands it, learns it, continues to live through it. We're no different than anybody else,” Renteria said. “We haven't had the outcomes we've wanted over the last five games, but I assure you that there's no confidence being lost. There will be more conversations about our focus, making sure we're taking care of little things. There are still things we're cleaning up so we are a quality major league baseball team on a day in and day out basis.”

There are silver linings to be had. Ricky's boys didn't quit Tuesday, staging a ninth-inning rally against the Rays' bullpen that produced four runs. Matt Davidson continues to get on base and walked three times Tuesday to bring his season total to nine. Tim Anderson stole third base in that ninth inning, raising his swiped-bags total to six.

But the White Sox have still mustered just 11 runs in their last 40 innings.

There's a long way to go in this rebuilding season, and there will be more stretches like this one. But the win-loss total is independent of the development of players like Davidson and Anderson at the major league level and all those prospects down in the minors. The win-loss total is independent of the way

Hahn's front office wants to see Renteria get his players to play. The win-loss total is independent of when Michael Kopech and Eloy Jimenez might arrive in the big leagues.

It's been an ugly five days. But when the rebuild reaches its apex and the White Sox contention window opens, these five days will just go down as growing pains.

“I'll tell right now for anybody who's watching, if anybody believes I'm going to doubt or knock my team in any way, shape or form, that's not going to happen,” Renteria said. “This is a very positive group of men who are learning how to play this game. And even a veteran club continues to learn to play baseball.

“This is five days of which I wish we'd been able to give the fans a lot of victories over these last five days. We haven't. It's not for a lack of effort. These guys continue to play, they continue to work, they continue to study, they continue to do the things that are necessary to continue to help them to potentially put them in a position to have the successes that we are going to need and to become the organization that we want, which is a winning organization.”

Michael Kopech off to fast start, but Rick Renteria is watching White Sox prospect's changeup

By Phil Thompson/ Chicago Tribune / April 10, 2018

Michael Kopech struck out eight of the 17 Norfolk Tides batters he faced over four shutout innings for the Triple-A Charlotte Knights on Monday, throwing 51 of his 77 pitches for strikes.

So once again, the Michael Kopech Watch is on.

"I felt great out there," he said, according to milb.com. "No nerves or anything. "

In his last 26 starts at Double-A Birmingham and Triple-A Charlotte, including Monday's, Kopech has compiled a 2.80 ERA over 138.1 innings with 180 strikeouts.

But before White Sox fans start penciling him in on lineup cards for May, manager Rick Renteria is holding steady to his commitment to bring Kopech along slowly.

"For Michael, nobody's hiding that we're trying to work on his changeup, develop that pitch as a secondary pitch beyond his breaking ball," Renteria said before Tuesday 6-5 loss to the Rays.

"As you can see, when we get guys at the major-league level there are days when they don't have their best stuff, their best command, and they have to be able to deal with all those things and get through it. He's discovering who he continues to become and hopefully that's going to be a top-quality big-league pitcher."

'Mallexious' intent: Just mention speedy Rays outfielder Mallex Smith to Tim Anderson.

"What about him? Forget him!" Anderson said with a laugh.

Anderson has a friendly rivalry with Smith, who also is represented by Reynolds Sports Management, but he had to tip his cap after Smith gave the Sox all they could handle Monday: four hits and two stolen bases. Smith had another two hits Tuesday to raise his batting average to .475, though he was caught stealing second.

"He's a good dude," Anderson said before Tuesday's game. "He's fast (and) he can play."

Anderson said he and Smith have exchanged smack talk since their days playing against each other in the minors, and Monday was no different.

"I threw him out at the plate (when Smith tried to score on a fielder's choice in the fourth inning)," Anderson said. "He got back on third (later and) I was like, 'Hey, you're going to have to get a better jump next time.' I just kept telling him, 'You (are) slow,' messing around with him, (and I'd) tag him hard a few times."

Anderson gave Smith another playful shove Tuesday after Smith reached second base in the fourth inning, and Smith swiped back at Anderson's arm.

"This is actually the first time playing against him in a while, so it was good to play against him and pick on him a little bit," Anderson said.

Balk talk: Carson Fulmer stumbled off the mound for a first-inning balk.

No, he didn't just change his mind on his pitch midway through his windup. The problem was his plant foot.

"My back cleat just slipped," Fulmer said. "Early on in games, you try to prepare your footing on the rubber, get a good ground, and for me using my backside so much, I rely on the cleat sticking in."

"I caught too much of the rubber and just fell right out of it. But all's good, and I was able to get out of that inning and get us going further in the game."

Carson Fulmer struggles in White Sox's fifth straight home defeat in 6-5 loss to Rays

By Phil Thompson/ Chicago Tribune / April 10, 2018

One could point to a number of misadventures from Carson Fulmer's first loss of the season Tuesday that he would rather forget: a first-inning balk, a comebacker that hit him in the right calf in the fifth and two hit batsmen as he struggled at times to find the strike zone.

But it's the career-high six walks he issued that bugged Fulmer the most in the White Sox's 6-5 loss to the Rays, their fifth straight at home.

“One of the good things overall was (being) able to minimize (the damage) ... but the walks (are) a really big thing that I pride myself on (avoiding),” he said. “Obviously, there were six of them. That can't happen.

“The majority of walks are going to score. I know that and have to do a better job of attacking guys.”

Sox manager Rick Renteria said the team didn't provide enough offense to pick up Fulmer; it didn't score until Adam Engel's sacrifice drove in Nick Delmonico in the fifth. Jose Abreu blasted a three-run homer 411 feet off a 1-2 pitch from Alex Colome in the ninth to reduce the deficit to a run.

Still, the Sox are now 0-5 at Guaranteed Rate Field, their worst home start since 1975.

After leaving 12 men on base Monday, they stranded another nine Tuesday. Renteria's prescription? Just keep getting men on base and at “some point the worm will turn and we'll get those big hits again, those tack-on runs.”

“If anybody believes I'm going to doubt or knock my team in any way, shape or form, that's not going to happen,” Renteria said. “This is a very positive group that's learning how to play this game, and even a veteran club continues to learn to play baseball. I wish we had been able to give the fans a lot of victories over these last five games. We haven't, (but) it's not for a lack of effort.”

Renteria said the Sox didn't do enough to help Fulmer, though he talked before and after the game about Fulmer's consistency with his changeup.

“I thought Carson's changeup was below the zone a little bit today,” Renteria said. “(He) didn't get the chase swings he wanted.

“I thought he battled. I thought he was keeping us in the ballgame, (but) walks will get us a little bit (along with) hit batsmen. Those are all things we'll continue to try to work on and clean up.”

Fulmer loaded the bases in the fourth and struck out Carlos Gomez with a 92 mph fastball to get out of the jam.

“That's my best pitch,” Fulmer said. “It has been my best pitch my whole career. ... I get a lot of people out on my fastball, and (on a) 3-2 count with two outs, bases loaded, that's the pitch I'm going to go to. I'm going to go to my heater, and (I) was able to trust (Wellington Castillo) back there — he does a great job each and every time out. I was able to execute a fastball and luckily got it past Gomez.”

After giving up an RBI single to Wilson Ramos in the fifth, Fulmer loaded the bases again and his day was done. Hector Santiago relieved him after 4 2/3 innings and got Denard Span to strike out swinging.

Meanwhile, Castillo left in the sixth with right knee soreness and is day to day.

“When he threw to second, his spike stuck in the ground a little bit, so he kind of tweaked his knee,” Renteria said. “He should be fine.”

White Sox manager praises Michael Kopech's Charlotte outing, preaches patience

By Cat Garcia/ Chicago Sun Times / April 10, 2018

The anticipation for Michael Kopech's arrival on the South Side rises with every strike he throws, and during his first outing of the season for Class AAA Charlotte on Monday, Kopech threw quite a few.

Kopech pitched four strong innings at Harbor Park against the Orioles' Norfolk Tides, striking out eight and walking two. He allowed two hits in a scoreless 77-pitch outing.

“He threw well, it was a nice outing,” White Sox manager Rick Renteria said Tuesday. “He just threw four but everything, like the report said, looked very good.”

But just as eagerly as fans may be asking when Kopech will be making his Sox debut, Renteria is asking that everyone remains patient and trusts the process.

White Sox pitcher Michael Kopech participates in a drill at the team's spring training baseball facility Saturday, Feb. 17, 2018, in Glendale, Ariz. (AP Photo/Carlos Osorio)

"It's really important," Renteria said of Kopech continuing his development in the minor leagues. "It's about trying to get them innings, trying to make sure they feel comfortable with the pitches they are supposed to be trying to command."

Renteria has stressed that Kopech has good command of his fastball, that's certainly no issue for the hard-throwing righty, but building on his breaking ball and adding another secondary pitch is key to Kopech having a successful run in the majors.

"The changeup is a pitch we really need for him to continue to develop," Renteria said. "The more game time he has with it, the more usage he has with it, the more comfortable he is going to be,"

"Nobody's been hiding that we've been working on him trying to work on his changeup to develop the pitch as a secondary pitch beyond his breaking ball."

It's particularly refreshing to see Kopech have such success in his first outing with Charlotte after a rough spring training. In four Cactus League starts, Kopech had an 11.57 ERA in seven innings. Most of that damage came in his final two outings, after not allowing an earned run in 4.1 innings over his first two starts.

Jose Abreu hits three-run HR in ninth, but Sox fall 6-5 to Rays

By Cat Garcia/ Chicago Sun Times / April 10, 2018

It was a beautiful day for baseball Tuesday at Guaranteed Rate Field for everyone but White Sox right-hander Carson Fulmer.

In 4 2/3 innings, Fulmer walked six, hit two batters, threw a wild pitch, balked and was hit in the right shin by a comebacker off the bat of the Rays' Mallek Smith. He allowed four runs (three earned) and five hits and struck out four in the Sox' 6-5 loss, their fifth in a row.

"I mean, [I] definitely wanted better results," Fulmer said. "One of the kind of good things overall, I was able to minimize [damage]. I think that that's one of the positive things that I took out of it. But I fell behind some counts. [I] made a couple of good pitches, but you know the walks [are] a really big thing for me that I pride myself on a lot. Obviously, there were six of them. That can't happen."

Despite Fulmer's struggles, manager Rick Renteria said he was confident they are just growing pains.

"I thought he battled," Renteria said. "I thought he was keeping us in the ballgame. Walks will get us a little bit, hit batsmen. Those are all things we'll continue to try to work on and clean up."

Rays starter Blake Snell didn't allow a hit until Tyler Saladino's ground-rule double moved Nicky Delmonico (walk) to third with one out in the fifth. Adam Engel followed with an RBI grounder to account for the Sox' only run against Snell, who yielded only one hit, struck out 10 and walked five in six innings.

Trailing 6-1, the Sox rallied in the ninth. Tim Anderson led off with a double against Ryan Weber, stole third and scored on a sacrifice fly by pinch hitter Yolmer Sanchez. After Leury Garcia reached on an error by second baseman Joey Wendle and Yoan Moncada walked, closer Alex Colome came on to retire Avisail Garcia on a softly hit grounder to the mound before allowing a three-run home run to Jose Abreu

that pulled the Sox to 6-5. Colome then walked Matt Davidson before Omar Narvaez lined to right to end the game.

“When he hit that ball out of the ballpark, it puts a little charge in you,” Renteria said of Abreu’s homer. “You start to get that sense of confidence again.

“I wish we’d been able to give the fans a lot of victories over these last five days. We haven’t. It’s not for a lack of effort.”

Castillo day-to-day

Catcher Welington Castillo left the game with soreness in his right knee after falling in the batter’s box in the fourth inning and was replaced by Narvaez.

“His spike stuck in the ground a little bit,” Renteria said. “Tweaked his knee. He’s day-to-day. He should be fine.”

Eloy’s return

Top prospect Eloy Jimenez, who strained a chest muscle March 31, returned to action Monday.

He participated in an extended spring-training game in Arizona and went 0-for-4.

Sox’ Nate Jones stays positive despite two serious surgeries in last four years

By Cat Garcia/ Chicago Sun Times / April 10, 2018

Talking with White Sox reliever Nate Jones, you never would think he had been through two major surgeries on his right arm in the last four years. Jones doesn’t have a chip on his shoulder, only a desire to help the Sox win.

“The only thing I [have to] prove is just like everybody here — throw strikes and get guys out,” Jones said. “When I go out there, I want to have a clear mind. I don’t want to be worrying about how I’m feeling. I just want to go out there and give it 100 percent, and whatever happens, happens.”

Jones missed the entire 2014 season after having Tommy John surgery and returned in August 2015. But after putting together a strong season (5-3, 2.29 ERA) in 2016, Jones began to lose feeling in his right hand because of scar tissue forming around nerves in his elbow. He had nerve-repositioning surgery after only 11 appearances in 2017 and missed the rest of the season.

Talking with teammates who have been through similar situations has been important to the mental side of Jones’ rehabilitation.

“There’s a couple of guys who have had surgery and have come back from Tommy John,” Jones said. “There’s plenty of guys to look to. Especially just looking around in the bullpen when I had [Tommy John], there were four of us, I think. That was a big help.

“Some days you’re not feeling so good, and you talk to the guys, and they’re like, ‘Oh, yeah, you’ll have days like that.’ I kind of reached out and leaned on those guys to see what their experience was and what they were feeling through the process, which mentally helped me get through some of those tough days.”

Jones, who has allowed one run and four hits with three strikeouts and no walks in 3 1/3 innings so far this season, said he has been satisfied with his start.

“I’m happy with how I’m recuperating after each outing, and I’m happy with [my] command, throwing strikes and stuff like that,” Jones said.

Jones has been working hard to perfect his changeup, a pitch he's feeling more comfortable using.

"[My] main focus has always been developing the changeup more," Jones said. "That's always been something we've worked on in my career, but I think this year we've really taken a big step forward with it. [I'm] going to utilize it more."

Jones' changeup is something manager Rick Renteria said used to be a strength.

"From what I understand, when he was in the minor leagues, Nate had a really, really good changeup," Renteria said. "He's using it a little bit more. It's really good. I think if he decides to mix it in with his fastball, it can definitely get hitters off of it."

For Jones, staying positive is important. And it seems to come easily for him.

"Once you're around the guys on the team, all you want to do is stay upbeat and win every game," he said. "But me, personally, that's who I am. I always try to look at the positives and be thankful for those harder times that I went through. I always call them blessings in disguise."

"I just look back and am thankful that I was able to make it through it and make it back here with the team and try to help us win."

Tim Anderson's breakout on the basepaths is all about work, confidence, and maybe some more speed

By James Fegan / The Athletic / April 10, 2018

After Tim Anderson laced a one-out single to center field in the second inning of Sunday's 1-0 loss to the Tigers, starting pitcher Mike Fiers took an interventionist approach to the shortstop, who was already a perfect 4-for-4 stealing bases just seven games into the season.

Before throwing his first pitch to Yolmer Sánchez, Fiers fired over quickly to first base twice. Yet an undeterred Anderson trotted back out to his large lead, even extending it half a step, before diving back easily when Fiers fired over again on 0-1.

"Once I see that move, the best move they have, it kind of dictates to me how far I can get out," said Anderson, who easily stole his fifth base of the season two pitches later. "If they have a great one, or if they have good one, I can still get out a bit more and still get back easily. So that move over to first lets me know where I should be about in my lead."

Anderson's potential for being a dynamic stolen base threat has been present "from day one," as White Sox third base coach Nick Capra put it — from the day he was drafted with the 17th overall pick in 2013, to when he stole 49 bases at Double-A Birmingham in 2015, to when he ended last season by going 9-for-9 swiping bags in September. But while he entered this season with a gaudy 89.3 percent success rate stealing bases, the relatively tepid amount of attempts always reduced it to another area of untapped potential in Anderson's vast well of raw talent, on display in fits and starts.

If racing out to the league lead in stolen bases in the first two weeks — or a giddy Anderson hopping up and down on the third base line after his repeated feinted breaks towards home plate distracted Rays starter Chris Archer to step off the rubber in annoyance Monday — is any indication, he's all about tapping into it with purpose this year.

"You read about it, you know," Anderson said when asked about his confidence level on the basepaths. "It's at a high level. You know. Yeah man, I'm going to keep running and see what happens."

Anderson's confidence has permeated everything he's done this season so far. A year removed from horrible personal tragedy, a year older, and year further into a career that was always going to involve development and struggles at the major league level (which is something he readily mentioned even during his difficult 2017 campaign) has found him more confident in acting on his reads of pitchers. It's to the point where pitchers who flash their best move to try to reign him in are playing into his hands, and he's hoping they come after him more.

"That's what pitchers do," Anderson said. "They throw over a few times and that's kind of what I want to see. I want to see their best move and [Fiers] showed it to me and I was able to get that bag."

If they don't show it off in the game, Anderson has probably already seen it anyway. Before any series, Anderson and third base coach Nick Capra both study every pitcher on the opposing staff, excluding only whichever starter they are scheduled to miss. They'll look at everyone's different pick-off moves, their times to home plate, and figure out who can be targeted and when. Though in Anderson's case, the answer to "who?" is typically "everyone" and "when?" is "the moment they raise their leg."

"We keep notes," Capra said. "We see these guys and these teams several times per year, and in spring training. We take our notes and it makes it easier studying the next time around. We've got an idea of what we're looking for and if things have changed. If they've changed, and if they haven't changed."

"He's the only one who doesn't study," Capra said, gesturing to Omar Narváez, who had started to stick his head into the conversation. "Because he can't run."

"That's right," Narváez confirmed.

Despite Anderson's always latent ability, and the fact that seeing him and Capra sitting together in front of laptop peering at video was a common sight in the clubhouse even throughout last year, Capra says the difference this year comes from entering spring determined to improve specific aspects of his game.

"The leads probably weren't as good as they should have been last year," Capra said. "He really dedicated and prepared himself in spring training on working on that aspect of his game, and that's where it started from, his leads and jumps. Now we're in the video room studying pitchers and moves and having times and stuff like that obviously plays into the equation of what we're doing. We put in a lot of time into watching film."

The level of film study present now is not something Anderson had when he snagged 49 bases in Double-A, back when "we were just running." In the minor leagues it's a lot more common to just try to steal for the sake of practice and challenging your ability to get jumps, whereas in the majors, a steal attempt has to be justified by the game situation, the matchup, and the likely success rate. But now that Anderson is becoming a high-volume runner and his career success rate is 90.9 percent, there's more room to just run.

"He's going to get a lot of green lights," Capra said. "The game is going to dictate when we have to hold him up a little bit. But he has the reigns to do what he wants to do out there for the most part."

There's a lot of work and research and observation and confidence needed to lead the majors in stolen bases, which is why not every fast guy, even some faster than Anderson, racks up bags with ease. But for Anderson's breakout on the basepaths, there's another simple theory to go with too: he's faster.

"Nah, I've always been fast," said Anderson. "I'm just getting good jumps and I've been doing my homework and knowing what alerts me and how to pick these pitchers apart. It's just really kind of getting a good jump and knowing what to expect when I get on base."

That's true, but at same time, he put the evidence up himself.

That Statcast sprint speed score listed there is 31 feet per second. Anderson's maximum effort sprint average last season, per Baseball Savant, was 28.6 feet per second. The highest maximum effort sprint average in baseball last season was a tie between Byron Buxton and Billy Hamilton at 30.1 feet per second. Maybe when you average 28.6 feet per second on dead sprints, it means there are some 31s mixed in there along with some 26s, but seeing as 2.4 feet per second is roughly the difference between Anderson and Kevan Smith last year, it seems unlikely.

Just sayin'.

White Sox knew committing to Carson Fulmer would bring days like this

By James Fegan / The Athletic / April 11, 2018

“As much as people want to have everything go right,” White Sox pitching coach Don Cooper said of his patience for Carson Fulmer, “sometimes there’s some learning, there’s some knocks along the way, but if you’re tough enough you can get through it.”

Collecting optimistic quotes about the White Sox's commitment to giving Fulmer a rotation slot, even as they expected him to run into struggles on the way to progress, was a bit easier after his stuff mostly flourished across five innings in a 4-3 win in Toronto last Wednesday. But now comes the harder part after a 6-5 loss Tuesday to the last-place Tampa Bay Rays: standing by him as he tries to bounce back from a day that gave voice to some of the concerns about his ability to stick in a major league rotation.

“I was able to minimize, that was one of the positive things I took out of it, but I fell behind some counts,” Fulmer said. “Made a couple of good pitches but the walks are a really big thing for me that I pride myself on a lot. Obviously there were six of them and that can't happen. The majority of walks are going to score. I know that. I have to do a better job of attacking guys. I gave up a few hits. I was able to minimize. But the thing for me, obviously I put our team in a bad place there.”

Fulmer walked six, hit two batters and balked once while using 92 pitches to navigate 4 ²/₃ rocky innings, albeit while allowing just three earned runs. He had back-to-back 27-pitch frames in the third and fourth, and seemed to lose his delivery at times, but the latter inning wound up containing possibly his most cathartic and telling moment. With the bases loaded, and facing a full count to Carlos Gomez, Fulmer challenged Gomez with a center-cut fastball. Even at 92 mph, it had the life to get by Gomez and end a very long inning with only a run across.

“A pitcher has to have his fastball working regardless of how fast it is, I know mine is really effective,” Fulmer said. “I get a lot of people out on my fastball and 3-2 count with two outs, bases loaded, that's the pitch I'm going to go to. I'm going to go to my heater and was able to trust Welington Castillo back there that he does a great job each and every time out. I was able to execute a fastball and you know, luckily got it past Gomez.”

The moment harkened back to a comment Castillo made earlier in the day about counseling the White Sox's talented but very much still developing group of young starters when control problems arise. As counterintuitive as it may seem, with the natural life Fulmer has on his stuff, Castillo would rather see a heater over the heart of the plate than control issues, if only for the confidence and conviction it would indicate.

“That's the most important thing about pitching,” Castillo said. “It's not that I'm going to throw a changeup there or a slider in there, it's about the comfort and the trust, and the confidence you have in the pitch. Doesn't matter if the hitter is a fastball hitter, I'm going to throw my best fastball here down the middle. Let's see what's going to happen. It's my strength vs. the hitter's strength. Me as a catcher always I'm

going to go with the pitcher's strength, no matter if the hitter's strength is the pitch that we're going to call."

Spring training is far enough in the rearview mirror that Fulmer and Castillo will both concede confidence became an issue for the 24-year-old right-hander at points during his difficult Cactus League, but by and large, the issue with Fulmer is not a distrust of his stuff or the natural life on his pitches.

As Fulmer expands his arsenal to more readily incorporate his developing changeup, rely on the cutter he picked up before 2017 and eventually, hopefully, rediscover his college curveball — a necessary process to make turning the lineup over three times feasible — the hope is that he can more quickly fall back to confidently attacking the zone when that falters occasionally.

"I thought Carson's changeup was below the zone a little bit today, didn't get the chase swings he wanted to," manager Rick Renteria said. "It seemed like he was working the fringes a little bit. Some pitches that he thought he was hoping to get some calls. The reality is we had some situations there where we could have helped him out a little bit."

Tim Anderson whiffed on a throw during a rundown to spoil a would-be pickoff for Fulmer in the third inning, and Nicky Delmonico followed that up by completely missing Joey Wendle's single to left field as he charged, allowing an extra run to score as it rolled past him. There's probably a prettier version of this outing tucked away without those miscues added on top of an already walk-addled day. But overall, and even with the way his otherwise encouraging outing last week in Toronto quickly ended after five innings, Fulmer looked vulnerable.

But the Sox were prepared for that, and they're willing to endure rough patches this season as he works toward where they think he can be.

After general manager Rick Hahn pointed to himself and Renteria as two people who fought hard in meetings for Fulmer to have a spot in the starting rotation this season, Cooper summed up the approach to his development quite succinctly.

"Why not?" Cooper said. "Why not? Why not? When's going to be a better time? When's going to be a better time? He finished the year strong for us. People, again going by spring training. These are people that don't know. Spring training means nothing."

Having rebounded from his rough night against Minnesota last August with a strong September, and having answered his Cactus League struggles with a solid close to spring and an impressive start in Toronto, Fulmer says he has the foundation of success to root his confidence in as he moves to his next start, which he can rest comfortably knowing the Sox will give him.

"I'm ready to go out every five days," Fulmer said. "I feel really good, I feel strong, I feel healthy. I'm getting more experience, I'm putting myself in certain situations. Every time I'm out, I'm experiencing something new, which is gonna be crucial for me to have success in my career and later on in this season, so I'm ready to go back out there. I'll face Minnesota here in a couple days and get going back on the right foot."