



### **WHITE SOX HEADLINES OF JANUARY 18, 2018**

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### **Collins ranked MLB's No. 9 catching prospect**

Former first-round Draft pick focusing on swing, defense in offseason

By Scott Merkin / MLB.com / Jan. 17, 2018

CHICAGO -- Zack Collins ranks as the No. 9 catching prospect per the newest list released by MLB Pipeline on Thursday.

It shouldn't be too long before the left-handed hitter, taken in the first round of the 2016 Draft, emerges as the No. 1 catcher for the White Sox.

"He just continues to work hard and find ways to get better," said White Sox director of player development Chris Getz.

"He looks athletic, looks lean, looks strong and ready to go. He's been working really hard and fine-tuning his skillset."

#### Top 10 Prospects by Position

RHP - Breakdown | List

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1B - Friday

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Collins, who turns 23 on Feb. 6, hit .224 overall during 2017 stops with Class A Advanced Winston-Salem and 34 at-bats for Double-A Birmingham. While his average wasn't where he expected, Collins showed solid plate discipline with a .370 on-base percentage. He added 19 home runs, 20 doubles, 53 RBIs and an .816 OPS.

Posture and body position were a few of the things Collins worked on with Minor League hitting coordinator Mike Gellinger in regard to his swing during instructional league action in late September and October. It was much more of a swing refinement as opposed to an overhaul.

With an average pop time of 1.9 seconds, Collins threw out 47 baserunners during his first full season as he continues to make progress behind the plate as well.

"The biggest thing for me now is staying positive and taking in the next season and playing hard every day," said Collins during a recent interview. "And obviously working on stuff and getting better at every aspect."

"Being in Birmingham was definitely good for me, and I got to play with those guys toward the end of the season and get comfortable there. I feel good with where I'm at."

Cleveland's Francisco Mejia tops MLB Pipeline's catching prospects. He's followed by the Cardinals' Carson Kelly, Keibert Ruiz of the Dodgers, Oakland's Sean Murphy, the Tigers' Jake Rogers, the Phillies' Jorge Alfaro, Baltimore's Chance Sisco, Toronto's Danny Jansen, Collins and the Cubs' Victor Caratini.

Birmingham figures to be Collins' 2018 starting point. The White Sox brought in veteran catcher Welington Castillo via a two-year, \$15 million deal with an option for 2020, and already have Omar Narvaez and Kevan Smith in place, so there's plenty of time for Collins to develop as a necessity the White Sox have afforded to all of their top prospects.

Seby Zavala also has put his name in the future White Sox catching picture, after hitting 21 homers last season between Class A Kannapolis and Winston-Salem and following up that showing with an impressive offensive performance in the Arizona Fall League. But an ultra-fit Collins feels ready for the big leagues or whatever new challenge the White Sox envision.

"Physically he's in a good spot," Getz said. "He's in great shape."

"I'd like to be with them after Spring Training," Collins said. "I'm in no rush but whenever they need me up there, I'll be ready."

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### **With maturity comes lofty expectations for Eloy**

White Sox top prospect, 21, continues to hone skills, eager to be a building block

By Jesse Sanchez / MLB.com / Jan. 17, 2018

GLENDALE, Ariz. -- Eloy Jimenez was 15 years old when he made up his mind.

It was 2013, months before he would officially sign his \$2.8 million deal, and not long after the top international prospect in the class had endured 13 tryouts with 13 different teams in one week.

Chicago would be the city where he would play in the big leagues, the young Jimenez told himself after the 14th tryout. The teen would go on to turn down larger offers from the Rangers and the Astros to sign with the Cubs that August in part because he liked the Cubs' colors.

#### • Young White Sox hitters gather for mini-camp

"My favorite player was Sammy Sosa, and I liked home runs and all of that," Jimenez, 21, said in Spanish. "I was young, just a kid, but I knew I wanted to play in Chicago. As a player, you sign, and you think you will grow up with that team and make it to the big leagues with them, but God had a different plan for me. I'm still going to play in the big leagues in Chicago, so that part hasn't changed."

The triumphs and struggles the 6-foot-4, 205-pound Jimenez has experienced during his pro career have helped him mature. The club's top prospect is still growing physically, and like most players his age, is still honing his skills on offense and defense.

"These colors are good, too," Jimenez said as he tugged on a black and white White Sox T-shirt. "I really like what we are doing here. The White Sox are building something special, and they want me to be part of it, and that's a good thing."

This week, Jimenez joins a group of 30 players that includes Luis Robert, Yoan Moncada, Zack Collins, Jake Burger, Micker Adolfo, Matt Davidson and Nicky Delmonico at the club's fifth annual hitting camp at Camelback Ranch, the team's Spring Training facility. In addition to hitting on the field and in the cages, the players also meet with coaches and staff several times a day.

Jimenez was acquired as part of a five-player deal that sent Jose Quintana to the Cubs.

"This is an important camp for us simply from the standpoint of getting everyone in one place and getting everyone acclimated to our way of doing things," White Sox general manager Rick Hahn said. "A lot of what goes on here happens in the classroom in more of a chalk-talk environment. For some of these players, it's their first time at Camelback Ranch, and it gives them the opportunity to get comfortable with the surroundings and staff before Spring Training starts."

Jimenez is in Arizona to work on his swing. He hits towering home runs and puts on a show during batting practice, but there is still room for improvement.

Last season, he combined to hit .312 with 19 homers and 65 RBIs at Class A Advanced with the Cubs and White Sox and later at Double-A with the White Sox. He's also played in the last two MLB All-Star Futures Games. Jimenez was in Rookie ball in 2014 at age 17.

"Everything we heard about him was true," said Class A Advanced Winston-Salem hitting coach Charlie Poe, who worked with Jimenez last season. "The ceiling is high and the aptitude for the game is outstanding. He does not get beat on fastballs and stays on the breaking balls. He doesn't chase balls in the dirt. He has a good approach."

It's been a busy 12 months for Jimenez. He capped off 2017 with a successful stint with the Gigantes del Cibao in the Dominican Winter League late last year. Spring Training starts next month.

"To be honest, I think last season was my best because I faced good competition and I was able to stay calm and adjust, and that's what's going to help me get to the big leagues," Jimenez said. "I remember being in Rookie League and just getting so frustrated when I made outs. I was 17. That feels like a long time ago."

There's no doubting Jimenez's confidence, and he feels like he can play in the big leagues in 2018. The White Sox do not want to rush him. That said, his play will dictate where he starts and ends the season.

"I want them all to feel like they are all ready. We are going to have 60 guys in big league camp, and I want them all thinking they can force their way on the 25-man roster," Hahn said. "It's our job in the front office along with the coaches to try to take a little longer-term view in what we are trying to accomplish over an extended period of time and not try to rush anything to get short-term satisfaction."

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### **Meet the Prospects: Luis Alexander Basabe**

By Vinnie Duber / NBC Sports Chicago / Jan. 17, 2018

The White Sox rebuild is in full swing. While it might still be a year or two before the big league team is expected to start competing for championships, the minor leagues are stocked with highly touted talent fans will be eagerly following in 2018. With that in mind, it's time to Meet the Prospects and get to know the future of the South Side.

Luis Alexander Basabe

Basabe, the 21-year-old outfielder, flew under the radar in the trade that sent Chris Sale to the Boston Red Sox.

A native of Venezuela, Basabe was overshadowed by Yoan Moncada and Michael Kopech in that deal with the Red Sox, but he's a promising piece of the future, as well.

A year before joining the White Sox organization, Basabe slashed .264/.328/.452 with 66 runs scored, 53 RBIs and 25 stolen bases in 110 games with Boston's two Class A affiliates in Greenville and Salem.

Last season with Class A Winston-Salem, Basabe played in 107 games, slashing .221/.320/.320 with 52 runs scored, 36 RBIs and 17 stolen bases.

As of their most recent rankings, MLB Pipeline had Basabe rated as the No. 17 prospect in the White Sox organization.

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### **Is Luis Robert so good that he'll start the season at Double-A?**

By Vinnie Duber / NBC Sports Chicago / Jan. 17, 2018

Just how good is Luis Robert?

Well, that's the problem. Us on the outside, we don't know exactly.

The White Sox obviously love him, willing to give him big bucks to come play a starring role in the rebuild. Rick Renteria raved about Robert last month at the Winter Meetings, getting White Sox fans all excited by hyping Robert's speed, fielding skills and power.

But as good as the scouting reports sound, is Robert really so good that he'll go from never playing a game in the United States to the higher levels of minor league baseball right away?

That eyebrow-raising possibility was floated Tuesday.

Robert unsurprisingly has plenty of confidence in his own abilities and told The Athletic's James Fegan at the team's hitters' camp in Arizona that his goal is to make it to the big leagues sometime in 2018.

But perhaps the more interesting comment came from Chris Getz, the White Sox director of player development, who said Tuesday that Robert could potentially start the season at either of the White Sox two Class A affiliates, Kannapolis or Winston-Salem, or even at Double-A Birmingham.

Robert is just 20 years old, and he's yet to play a game of minor league baseball in the United States after spending his teenage years playing in Cuba. In fact, his only action since joining the White Sox has been 28 games in the Dominican Summer League. He did fare quite well in that handful of contests, slashing .310/.491/.536 with three homers, 14 RBIs, 12 stolen bases and a sparkling 22-to-23 walk-to-strikeout ratio. But that's not really the point.

The White Sox are in no rush with Robert, or any of their highly touted prospects, for that matter. Not expected to compete for a championship in 2018, there doesn't appear to be any reason to elevate Robert to the highest levels of the minors so quickly without first getting him some experience in the lower levels.

Of course, Getz even mentioning the possibility of Robert starting the season at Birmingham should also show just how good the team thinks Robert is right now. So maybe Robert's major league dream for 2018 isn't as crazy as it sounds?

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### **At White Sox hitters camp, Eloy Jimenez and Luis Robert providing plenty of smiles**

By David Haugh / Chicago Tribune / Jan. 17, 2018

Chicago's next baseball superstar thought it was funny the other day when he passed White Sox manager Rick Renteria in the hallway at Camelback Ranch.

"He saw me with my face down and said, 'What happened to you today, why aren't you smiling,'" Eloy Jimenez said after the second day of Sox hitters camp. "It was nothing. I usually will have a smile. I'm a happy guy, what can I say? I try to be happy all the time because good things happen when you're happy."

Baseball bliss looms as early as 2019 for the Sox thanks, in large part, to dangerous young hitters gathered here such as Luis Robert, Jake Burger, Zack Collins and Jimenez, the 6-foot-4-inch Dominican with a personality as lively as his bat. Jimenez derives much of his confidence from daily conversations with his father, Luis, a former professional basketball player in the Dominican Republic who urged his son to focus on baseball at age 9. Good decision, Dad.

"He just tells me every day to do what you do always and be who you are as a person," said Jimenez, 21.

Jimenez the person offers a firm handshake and makes eye contact, little signs that leave a big impression and suggest he understands leadership involves more than just hitting home runs. Luis and Adelaida Jimenez, a bioanalyst, clearly raised Eloy, an outfielder, and younger brother Cesar, a 17-year-old shortstop, to believe in themselves. For example, Jimenez felt comfortable enough to conduct our interview in English without the aid of an interpreter, which could help him connect quicker once the Sox promote him.

That could come as early as the middle of the 2018 season if Jimenez, who's likely to start at Double A, punishes pitchers like he did after the Cubs traded him last July for pitcher Jose Quintana. The domination continued in the Dominican Winter League where Jimenez posted a .368/.443/.676 slash line in 19 games.

"When God says I'm ready to go to the big leagues, I'll be ready," Jimenez said.

Whenever that happens, Jimenez's role seems obvious. In the Sox rebuilding project, he is a foreman.

"Sometimes I feel bad because there will be guys on any team who don't like you but I try to stay in my spot and think I can be a leader here one day," Jimenez said.

That natural inclination already led Jimenez to reach out to Robert, whom he met three weeks ago. The two hit it off and hit on different fields Wednesday, each demonstrating what has the Sox so stoked. Minutes after Jimenez drilled a line-drive home run that didn't rise more than 20 feet in the air, Robert ripped a laser over the center-field fence. In a winter when baseball's hot stove has gone on the fritz, Jimenez and Robert showing flashes of the future should warm a Sox fan's heart. It was reminiscent of being in Mesa, Ariz., several years ago and watching Cubs sluggers Kris Bryant and Anthony Rizzo take batting practice on the back fields.

One day, as Jimenez assured Robert, they could draw similar attention for hitting home runs off live pitching in full stadiums.

"I just told him, 'Hey, you know when you do get up, do what you know how to do and don't be scared and just play center field like you do,'" Jimenez said. "It's exciting."

For his part, Robert keeps his excitement more to himself but faces more of an adjustment than your average prospect. A Cuban defector in 2016, Robert fled to Dominican Republic before signing with the White Sox last May for a \$26 million bonus. His parents and two sisters just joined Robert in the Dominican, which felt better to the 20-year-old than ending a prolonged slump.

"Seven months without them for the first time was a challenge," Robert said through Sox interpreter Billy Russo.

More challenges will complicate Robert's assimilation to baseball in America, which figures to start at Class A Kannapolis. How Robert handles himself on the field is the least of the Sox's concerns.

"It's important for him to come here and get a sense of comfort," Renteria said. "He's outside his element."

Robert believes his biggest problems so far have been minor; feeling too chilly during Arizona mornings and finding too many vegetables on his plate.

"I don't like anything green," Robert said.

He does enjoy posting on Instagram, which he couldn't do in Cuba, and experiencing financial independence — but says he only splurged for a Chevy Tahoe. Sox second baseman Yoan Moncada, Robert's teammate on Cuba's U-18 team in 2013, has helped ease his transition in Arizona by driving Robert to the Sox complex and accompanying his countryman to dinner at a nearby Cuban restaurant. Robert referenced that connection to Moncada — and the Sox's tradition with Cuban players — as the biggest reason he chose the Sox.

"It's important for me just having him here," Robert said of Moncada. "But I'm so glad he tells me what I have to do."

What the Sox have to do is wait until Robert and Jimenez develop into the players so many expect them to be. And, then, look out.

"We have that dream of playing together," Robert said. "We have talked about that and how much we can accomplish for the White Sox. We believe in our future."

No wonder Jimenez can't stop smiling.

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### **While the rest of baseball plays the waiting game, Rick Hahn and the White Sox are sitting pretty**

By James Fegan / The Athletic / Jan. 17, 2018

GLENDALE, Ariz. — Amid a historically slow free agent market that has many wondering if this is a league-wide shift away from long-term contracts for veterans, the White Sox have stuck close to their plan for small, restrained moves that leave plenty of room for their young talent to get opportunities.

They haven't traded Jose Abreu or Avisail Garcia or even Yolmer Sanchez. As a result, trading for two relievers, bringing back Miguel Gonzalez and adding Welington Castillo to the top of the catching depth chart leaves the Sox looking like they could be done.

So are they? White Sox general manager Rick Hahn answered a few questions about what lies ahead for the team while the rest of the league remains strangely silent.

James Fegan: Obviously you're always looking for opportunities, but are you comfortable with the idea of going to camp with this current group?

Rick Hahn: It's hard to ever feel satisfied about the depth, especially from a pitching standpoint. So we're going to continue over the next few weeks, you'll probably see a few non-roster guys added in as we get closer to the camp and the market probably plays it way out to fruition. But if this is the group, which again I don't expect it to be, but if this is the group then we feel like we've got a solid bunch to pull the 25-man from and have enough depth to fill the inevitable needs that injuries will create over the course of the year.

JF: You've spoken about anticipating that you would make your moves after the holidays and in January, after the market shook itself out a bit. Is the market moving slower than you expected?

Hahn: It's been a little slower than in years past. February is the new January, it looks like around here. It's the middle of January now, this is about the time over the next week or two when you start seeing some of those players who are still out there in the market start agreeing to lower deals than you anticipated or signing non-roster deals. But there's such a high volume of them still available, there's still a handful of players at the top of the market still available, I think that's going to have to resolve itself before your start seeing that secondary market come together. So it may well be Feb. 1 or closer to when that report date starts kicking in when some of these guys agree to deals.

JF: Do you think this is a unique year because of next season's free agent class and teams are conserving resources to be active there, or this is a trend where every team is looking to slow play the market and wait for prices to fall?

Hahn: Hard to say, hard to say. Obviously you've got very intriguing players available and potentially available over the next couple of years and clubs wanting to put themselves in the best possible position from a flexibility standpoint, from perhaps a luxury standpoint, that's affecting their behavior this offseason. Additionally, players probably had pretty lofty expectations headed in which may have well turned certain clubs into different directions. But I don't think I'm ready to call it a trend yet just based upon one year. But I certainly think you've got some interesting dynamics between the future free agent classes and the supply of players currently available that's slowing down this market.

JF: Do you think everyone is — I mean, you're not the first team to rebuild and emphasize young players at all...

Hahn: We're not?

JF: Do you think every team is trying to get away from the free agent bonanzas that were more popular routes for building contenders maybe 10, 15 years ago?

Hahn: I think that people certainly learn some of the risks and pitfalls of long-term deals with certain players at later stages of their career that might be having a chilling effect on things. At the end, it's my responsibility to look at where we are as an organization and advocate for proper expenditures when it's time for us to be aggressive in the free agent market. We're not at that point right now. Looking at where the White Sox are, it makes sense for us to perhaps not be overly aggressive in the free agent market but that doesn't mean when the time comes we won't be.

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### **A new dynamic duo forms in Arizona as Yoan Moncada leads Luis Robert**

By James Fegan / The Athletic / Jan. 17, 2018

GLENDALE, Ariz. — White Sox catching prospect Zack Collins has a favorite story about the Luis Robert and Yoan Moncada pairing, and it doesn't have anything to do with the White Sox.

It involves the 2011 16-and-under World Baseball Championship gold medal game, particularly the part where the United States team trounced Cuba 9-0 to win the championship. A 16-year-old Collins won tournament MVP honors, but must have been calling a hell of a game for his pitching staff to shut out a Cuban offense featuring Moncada and a very young Robert.

"Amazing job behind the plate," Collins said with a chuckle. "I always mess with Moncada about it. When I get to know him a little bit better, I'll mess with Robert about it too."

The other rites of passage transferring from Moncada to Robert invoke less painful memories.

When Moncada was finally called up to the majors last July, he memorably asked Jose Abreu to pick him up from the airport. Not only was Abreu a teammate of Moncada on Cienfuegos in the Cuban National Series, but he was also someone Moncada idolized since he was 15 years old. While Robert is only two years younger than Moncada, he looked up to him in the same way when he joined the national team.

"He was already a big figure, he was a star," Robert said of Moncada through interpreter Billy Russo. "It was like 'Oh man, I'm playing with him!' in that moment. And just thinking about that moment and thinking about how that moment can be here when we finally play together, is something that is exciting."

And so, to complete the cycle, Moncada is chauffeuring Robert to the White Sox spring training facility every day during this week's hitters mini-camp, and that will probably continue during spring training. In a perfect, optimistic world, Moncada will pick Robert up from the airport this season. (And if not this season, then the next one for sure.)

How close are they? It would be easier to list out the elements of Robert's transition to the United States that Moncada is not overseeing.

“He’s the one who is picking me up in the morning, driving me to the ballpark, guiding me through the complex, during the workout,” Robert said through Russo. “If we have to hit, or if we have to go to the gym, or if we have to eat breakfast, he’s the one who is telling me what we have to do. When we’re driving, he’s always talking to me about things that I need to learn and I need to do during this experience here in the U.S. and during the season, my first one. Absolutely I’m just excited to ask them, not just Yoan but also Abreu for advice and just grasp whatever they have for me.”

He’s also setting balls up on a tee for Robert during hitting drills on top of that, throughout which their smiling chattering rarely stops.

“He’s a good listener,” Moncada said through Russo. “When you speak with him and tell him things he has to do, he does it. That’s good. That’s the kind of person that you like, people who are receptive, people who are willing to do things you have to do to be better.”

Despite an Instagram account that overshadows Moncada’s in terms of activity and selfies, and a distinctive hairstyle combed in a tall pompadour on top of his head, Robert is frequently described as shy and quiet. He is, after all, still 20 years old and in a new country and new workplace for the first time. He admitted to being a mixture of nervous and overly excited to be taking such a huge step toward what recently seemed like his distant dream of being a major leaguer.

It’s not unusual for a veteran to take care of his young countryman, but it’s interesting that it’s Moncada, who played the role of the improbably shy prodigy just a few months earlier in Chicago. But while Abreu is publicly viewed as a player whose value to the White Sox can be measured in mentorship, this is the role Moncada committed to last May when Robert was signed.

“It’s not a great surprise given what Jose did for Yoan, and Yoan saying at the time when we signed Luis that he wanted to play that kind of role with him, as Luis got comfortable in the organization,” White Sox general manager Rick Hahn said. “Yoan’s still very young and still establishing himself as a big leaguer, so the fact that he’s taking such care and consideration for one his younger teammates who is going through something that Yoan went through himself, I think speaks very highly about Yoan’s character.”

Moncada legitimately cracked up being asked why he cut his hair (he said he’s growing it back), but overall is still a bit reticent with the media. Translated interviews are inevitably stilted affairs for players, who get to watch reporters nod knowingly at their words while making eye contact with someone else. But Moncada’s teammates see him as someone removed of artifice, who is direct and purposeful when he chooses to speak.

“When he talks to you, you know that he’s telling you things to make you better, to help you,” outfielder Eloy Jimenez said through an interpreter. “You can’t find that in everybody. Sometimes there are people who speak to you but you can feel it’s not an honest conversation, it’s not pure there. With Yoan, it’s all honesty. He’s clear and you can feel it. You can feel that he’s trying to help you. He is trying to give you good advice.”

For helping Robert, Moncada is direct about his motivations: he’s a fellow Cuban, he feels it demands practically nothing of his time and energy to keep Robert close by his side and take him through his routine, and feels obligated after all the help he just received himself coming up into the league. But also he sees how the short and slight kid he liked for his humility back in 2011 has grown into a goliath, and knows with the right development, he can be great.

“That’s something you see and realize time flies,” Moncada said through an interpreter.

It doesn’t fly that fast, though. After a winter of scattered trade interest, the 22-year-old Moncada is still thrilled to have Abreu back as his mentor; a presence he called “very important” to have in the White Sox clubhouse. Moncada said he and Abreu plan on staying on top of Robert’s progress, and given how busy he’ll be with his own adjustments to the majors, he could use the extra help with his new pet pupil.

There’s going to be a time, and possibly soon, when Moncada won’t have a Cuban legend from his adolescence watching over his routine and will be expected to thrive in spite of it. The transfer of power and leadership has not begun, and the baton has not yet been passed. But when it moves, it’s easier to see where it might go: from Abreu to Moncada, and from Moncada to Robert.

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