



WHITE SOX HEADLINES OF July 4, 2018

Moncada caps comeback in extras vs. Reds

By Brian Rippee / MLB.com / July 3, 2018

CINCINNATI -- Yoan Moncada thinks things are starting to come around for him at the plate. It was his bases-clearing, three-RBI triple in the 12th inning, along with multi-home run games from Daniel Palka and Avisail Garcia, that helped lift the White Sox to a 12-8 win at Great American Ball Park on Tuesday.

The back-and-forth affair eclipsed the four-hour mark and reached the 12th inning in a game in which Chicago erased a 7-2 deficit and tied the game on two different occasions.

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A pair of Reds errors with a walk in between loaded the bases with no one out and set the stage for Moncada's game-winning hit down the right-field line. Tim Anderson reached to start the inning when Scooter Gennett botched a ground ball to second. Matt Davidson walked, then Adam Engel laid down a sacrifice bunt to advance them and was safe on a throwing error.

The Reds got an out when Omar Narvaez lined out to first base, then Moncada stepped to the plate. He worked a 3-1 count and got a fastball in on his hands but was able to shoot it down the right-field line to give the White Sox an 11-8 lead.

"It was a really tough pitch. Inside and up, and I put the barrel on the ball and tripled," Moncada said. "Just [tried] to keep my hands close to my body, get the bat out front and hit it with the barrel."

All four of the White Sox runs in the inning were unearned. The triple was Moncada's third hit of the night.

"Really happy for him," White Sox manager Rick Renteria said. "He was in situation where they weren't going to walk him. The guys were telling me how he kept that ball fair, they do not know. But he got something he could handle and did a really nice job."

It appeared the White Sox comeback bid may fall short when Cincinnati took an 8-7 lead in the bottom of the eighth, but Garcia clubbed his second home run of the night in the ninth inning on an elevated 1-0 fastball to extend the game. Garcia has six home runs in his last eight games and is hitting for power since being activated off the disabled list on June 22.

"He's just squaring the ball up," Renteria said. "He's getting good pitches to hit. He's seemingly getting balls he can handle and not missing them right now, which is good for him."

The five-run comeback from 7-2 was capped when Leury Garcia lined a two-out, pinch-hit RBI single over the head of Gennett in the eighth. Cincinnati quickly regained the lead in the bottom half of the inning Billy Hamilton led off with base hit, later stole third and scored on a close play at the plate.

Chicago fell behind early as starter Lucas Giolito found trouble quickly. Two balls left the yard before Giolito recorded an out. Jose Peraza led the game off with a triple, then Gennett sent a 1-1 curveball over the right-field wall for a two-run home run. After a walk to Joey Votto, Giolito ran a two-seamer in on Suarez, who turned on it for the Reds' second home run as Cincinnati jumped out to a quick 4-0 advantage.

"I felt like I was throwing the ball hard," Giolito said. "I'd say kind of what got me today was my offspeed pitches, especially the slider, did not have the break that I like to see it have."

Giolito held it together until the fifth. He retired 12 of the next 15 hitters he faced and put up zeros in each of the next three frames as the White Sox clawed back into the game. Palka's first home run of the game sliced the deficit in half, a towering two-run shot in the fourth inning.

Giolito fell victim to the long ball for a third and final time in the fifth inning. Suarez drew a one-out walk, and Jesse Winker followed with a base hit. The right-hander then hung a slider to Adam Duvall, who pulled it over the left-center-field wall for a three-run home run to put the Reds ahead 7-2. Giolito completed what would be his final inning soon after.

Garcia and Palka clubbed back-to-back solo shots and helped spark a four-run sixth inning that pulled the White Sox within one at 7-6.

"Unreal," Giolito said of the run support. "From my perspective, I didn't get the job done but the team was there to pick me up and it's an awesome feeling having those guys playing their hardest behind you."

Moments That Mattered

Multi-home run games: Garcia and Palka hit two home runs apiece and picked the Chicago offense up on a couple of instances when it appeared the game may get away from the White Sox. Palka's mammoth 448-foot shot in the fourth cut the deficit in half and got the White Sox back into the game.

"I missed the two heaters that they kinda gave me over the plate," Palka said. "He threw me a breaking ball that just kinda hung up there, and I got it."

The two went back-to-back to spark the four-run rally in the sixth. Garcia clubbed a hanging slider 412 feet into the upper deck, and Palka sent a fastball over the left-center wall at 114 mph, per Statcast™. It changed the momentum of the game and eventually ousted starter Anthony DeSclafani.

"It certainly changes your perspective and your outlook more than anything," Renteria said. "They got pitches they could handle, and [DeSclafani] was doing a nice job."

Of the four homers, perhaps none was bigger than Garcia's solo shot in the ninth that tied the game for the second time and kept the White Sox alive.

"We never gave up," Garcia said. "We did our best every at-bat in every inning. We show up every day."

MITEL REPLAY OF THE DAY

After Moncada's three-run double, Yolmer Sanchez nearly hit another home run for the White Sox, but Brandon Dixon was able to reach up over the right-field wall and knock it down to hold Sanchez to a double. Upon umpire review, the call of no home run was upheld.

UP NEXT

The White Sox finish up their three-game set against the Reds Wednesday with Dylan Covey (3-3, 4.82 ERA) on the mound for a 6:10 p.m. CT game at Great American Ball Park. The right-hander will look to rebound after getting roughed up in his last start, against the Rangers, who tagged him for eight runs on nine hits in just two innings. After stringing together a couple of quality starts around the beginning of June, Covey has failed to make it past the fifth inning in his last three outings. Sal Romano (4-8, 5.30 ERA) will be on the hill for Cincinnati.

Garcia, Palka hit back-to-back HRs vs. Reds

By Brian Rippee / MLB.com/ July 3, 2018

CINCINNATI -- The White Sox fell into a 7-2 hole in Tuesday's game against the Reds after starter Lucas Giolito surrendered a trio of home runs, but the offense did its best to counter in the sixth inning when Avisail Garcia and Daniel Palka crushed back-to-back solo home runs to trim the margin to 7-4. Chicago went on to win 12-8 in extra innings.

Garcia stepped to the plate with one out in the inning and pummeled a hanging 2-0 slider into the upper deck in left field. The ball came off the bat at 112 mph and went 414 feet, per Statcast™, for his sixth home run of the season.

Two pitches later, Palka hammered a fastball for a line-drive shot over the left-center-field wall near the White Sox bullpen for his second home run in two at-bats. The second had an exit velocity of 111 mph and traveled 428 feet.

Palka launched a towering 448-foot home run off the batter's eye in center field in the fourth inning for a two-run shot to put the White Sox on the board. The ball left the bat at 109 mph, and the two blasts were Palka's eighth and ninth home runs of the season.

The back-to-back home runs helped spark a four-run inning for the White Sox to pull within a run at 7-6 and spelled trouble for Reds' starter Anthony DeSclafani, who exited the game a batter later after a single by Kevan Smith kept the rally going.

In My Words: Yolmer Sanchez

By Yolmer Sanchez/ MLB.com / July 3, 2018

My family is a big reason for the way I am. I have a big, big family. My mom has 10 brothers and sisters. We have a lot of cousins, uncles, aunts.

My whole family has a lot of energy. They like to have fun all the time. I think I get it from them.

I worked so hard to get to the big leagues, and I really want to enjoy my time here. I play hard, really hard. Respect the game, but I also want to have fun every time I go out there.

When I get a base hit, I look to my teammates in the dugout, my wife, my son. I do the "Mickey Mouse ears" sign with my hands. My son, Noah, means everything to me. He loves to watch Mickey Mouse. It's something special for him.

When I get to know my other teammates, I let out my personality. I don't do it right away, especially here in the big leagues. When I first came up to the White Sox in 2014, I felt a little shy.

But after being here for a few years, now I have chemistry and good relationships with my teammates. I try to keep the team loose when I can. You have to wait for the right time. You're not going to play around with someone who just went 0-for-5. I know everyone here. I know when they're mad and when I can play around with them. That's why I never get in trouble.

I got a lot of attention for dumping the Gatorade bucket on my head after Trayce Thompson hit a walk-off homer to beat Minnesota in May. It was crazy. I remember we were tied in the bottom of the ninth. I got to the dugout. I don't know why, but I was 100 percent sure we were going to have a walk-off. I didn't know if it would be a homer or a hit. When I came to the dugout, I started to think, "What am I going to do celebrate? OK, let's dump the water on me."

Five seconds later, Trayce hit the homer. I took the water -- it was a little heavy -- and poured it on my head. I saw the reaction of the people. They said, "When are you going to do it again?" I don't like to do it every day. People will get tired of it. So I look for the right time.

Make no mistake, there's a serious side to me too. People don't see what I do to get ready to play. When I get to the ballpark, I work out. I hit in the cage. I take ground balls. It's a lot of work. I believe in the work I put in. I know if I do everything I practice, I'll get good results.

It's important to always be positive. If I have a bad game, I'll think about what I did wrong. Then I'll enjoy my family and come back the next day. This game is so hard. It's easy to get frustrated. Staying positive is the best thing you can do.

Playing in the big leagues was my dream since I was a little kid. I meet a lot of great people. I see a lot of kids smile. Oh man, this game brings a lot of happiness to my life. You never know how long this is going to last. I want to enjoy every second while I am here.

Fun with exit velocity: Daniel Palka and Avisail Garcia hit some huge homers

By Chris Kamka / NBC Sports Chicago / July 3, 2018

In the sixth inning Tuesday night at Cincinnati, Avisail Garcia and Daniel Palka hit back-to-back home runs off Reds starter Anthony DeSclafani.

Garcia's blast came off the bat at 112.5 mph, while Palka's traveled at 111.4 mph. (Check out the home runs in the video above)

Those two home runs rank in the top 13 in terms of exit velocity among all White Sox home runs this season. And they came in consecutive at-bats.

Garcia added a second home run in the ninth inning to knot the game at eight... and it sailed into the stands even faster (113.9 MPH)!

Highest Exit Velocity of White Sox home runs this season (via Statcast)

116.7: Avisail García, April 3

115.2: Daniel Palka, June 24

115.1: Matt Davidson, March 29

114.0: Matt Davidson, March 29

113.9: Avisail García, TUESDAY

113.9: Matt Davidson, March 29

112.8: Yoán Moncada, March 31

112.5: Avisail García. TUESDAY

112.5: Tim Anderson, March 29

112.4: Daniel Palka, May 3

112.1: Yoán Moncada, April 26

111.9: Yoán Moncada, April 23

111.4: Daniel Palka, TUESDAY

For García, it was his fifth and sixth home runs in his last eight games; as his hitting streak has now reached 13 games (.379 BA, .793 SLG during streak). His streak includes the last two games prior to his DL stint with a hamstring injury.

As for Palka, his sixth inning blast was his second of the night; good for his first career multi-home run game.

Since Palka made his major league debut on April 25, Palka's nine longballs are tied with Matt Davidson for second on the team behind Tim Anderson (10).

Palka and García's multi-homer performances are the 10th and 11th multi-HR games by White Sox hitters in National League parks (all-time). It's the third time in the last five seasons the Sox have had a pair of players hit a pair of home runs in the same game. Here are the others:

March 29, 2018 (opening day) at Kansas City – Matt Davidson (3 HR) and Tim Anderson

April 8, 2014 at Colorado - Avisail García and José Abreu. For Abreu, it was his first two career major league home runs.

White Sox set to have reunion for 1993 division-winning team

By Vince Lovergine / NBC Sports Chicago / July 3, 2018

The 1993 division winning White Sox team will be honored at Guaranteed Rate Field for a reunion on July 14 against the Royals.

The promotion comes with a big list of names who will be in attendance: Ozzie Guillen, Bo Jackson, Jack McDowell, Tim Raines, Frank Thomas and Wilson Alvarez.

@whitesox

Ozzie Guillen, Bo Jackson, Jack "Black Jack" McDowell, Tim Raines, Frank Thomas, Wilson Álvarez and more. The 1993 White Sox reunion on July 14 will be all that and a bag of chips!

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The 1993 White Sox won 92 games and the AL West before losing to the Blue Jays in six games in the ALCS.

That group includes two Hall of Famers (Raines and Thomas), a World Series-winning manager (Guillen), and a Cy Young winner (McDowell). They combined for 13 All Star appearances.

Bo Jackson's two-sport career included two years with the Sox. He hit .231 with 19 home runs with 59 RBIs.

"Black Jack" McDowell played seven seasons with the Sox and won 91 games, but his best season could have been in 1993. He won the Cy Young Award with a 3.37 ERA and a 22-10 record.

Alvarez played seven seasons with the Sox, but arguably his best year with the Sox was in '93. He won 15 games and had a 2.95 ERA.

To top it off, if you attend the game, the Sox are giving away a 1993 Commemorative pennant to the first 20,000 fans.

White Sox's Daniel Palka makes 'power' move up rookie home run board

By Phil Thompson / Chicago Tribune / July 4, 2018

It didn't immediately dawn on White Sox right fielder Daniel Palka that when he hit home runs in the fourth and sixth innings against the Reds during Tuesday's 12-8 win, it was the rookie's first career game with multiple homers.

"I didn't really think about it until my parents congratulated me on that. It was exciting," he said.

The homers were Palka's eighth and ninth homers of the season, and he's fifth in home runs among all rookies and third among American Leaguers entering Wednesday's games.

Palka's first dinger, a two-run moonshot to center field, put the Sox on the board. He fouled off Anthony DeSclafani's first two pitches. DeSclafani's next pitch, a curve, was supposed to break, but "kind of hung up there and I got it," Palka said.

Palka's second homer, going back-to-back with Avisail Garcia, brought the Sox within three runs after the Reds had padded their lead in the fifth.

White Sox manager Rick Renteria called Palka a "tremendously confident young hitter" earlier this season, it's just a question of getting pitches he can handle and taking a measured approach to his swing.

"He's had some at-bats where it looks like he's swinging over pitches and/or underneath," Renteria said. "As long as he gets pitches that he knows he can handle that are up out over the plate and he puts a good swing (on them), he's got some good power. He hit that first one pretty good. It's just keeping from getting too anxious."

Palka seemed more keyed up about the team's rally than the homers.

"It was awesome," he said. "I don't know how many hits we ended up with, I think it was like 16 (it was 15). I don't know, but it felt like everybody was out there every inning. It was a nice comeback win."

White Sox roar back from 5-run deficit to beat Reds 12-8 in 12 innings

By Phil Thompson / Chicago Tribune / July 4, 2018

Avisail Garcia and Daniel Palka flexed some serious muscle, but Yoan Moncada had biggest hit for the White Sox on a wild Tuesday night at Great American Ball Park.

Garcia and Palka each hit two home runs to help the Sox rally from a five-run deficit, and Moncada's three-run triple into the right-field corner put them ahead for the first time as they beat the Reds 12-8 in 12 innings.

"It was a really tough pitch — inside and up," Moncada said. "I put the barrel on the ball and tripled. I am happy it happened."

Yolmer Sanchez added another run in the 12th with an RBI triple that was headed into the seats, but right fielder Brandon Dixon stopped it by getting a glove on it before slamming to the wall, with the ball coming loose onto the field.

Tim Anderson led off the 12th by reaching first on second baseman Scooter Gennett's fielding error, then stole second. Matt Davidson walked, then Adam Engel laid down a sacrifice bunt and reached on a fielding error to load the bases to set the stage for Moncada.

Hector Santiago struck out the side to finish the game.

Jose Abreu was out of the starting lineup with a bruised left ankle, but he pinch hit in the 11th against reliever Dylan Floro. He hit a weak grounder to second, and with little chance of beating the throw ran gingerly toward first.

Moncada singled, stole second and reached third on an error in the 11th, but Garcia struck out swinging and Kevan Smith grounded out to end the threat.

Garcia extended his career-high hitting streak to 13 games and went deep back-to-back in the sixth with Palka, who had his first career multi-homer game. According to STATS, it's the first time in White Sox history the 3-4 hitters in the order have each had two or more homers in the same game.

"First AB I missed the two heaters that they kind of gave me over the plate," Palka said. "Threw me a breaking ball that just kind of hung up there and I got it. Second one, first pitch was heater away and second one was in the exact same spot and I was looking for a heater away right there, so I got my pitch."

Leury Garcia's pinch-hit RBI single tied the game 7-7 in the eighth, and Garcia's second homer in the ninth, a blast to left-center on a 1-0 pitch from Raisel Iglesias, sent the game into extra innings.

The Sox's rallies came after starter Lucas Giolito dug a hole. This is how his first inning went: triple, home run, walk, home run, double. Five batters into the game and already there was a conference on the mound.

"Yeah, the first inning for me has been pretty tough," Giolito said. "I felt good pretty much the whole game, especially in the first inning, I felt like I was throwing the ball hard. I'd say kind of what got me today was my off-speed pitches, especially the slider, did not have the break that I like to see it have."

He settled down and retired the next three batters, but Gennett's homer over the Reds bullpen in right field and Eugenio Suarez's blast to left had the Sox down 4-0.

It was somewhat surprising because Giolito had thrown better on the road (4.50 ERA entering Tuesday's game) than at Guaranteed Rate Field, where he has an 8.65 ERA.

The Sox first started drawing a bead on Reds starter Anthony DeSclafani in the fourth. Garcia hit a sharp grounder that deflected off shortstop Jose Peraza's glove into left field and then Palka smoked DeSclafani's 0-2 knuckle-curve 448 feet to center to score Garcia and pull the Sox within two runs.

But Giolito gave up Adam Duvall's three-run homer in the fifth, giving the Reds a 7-2 lead.

Giolito's night was done after five innings and 91 pitches. He allowed seven earned runs and three home runs on eight hits and three walks; he struck out three.

The Sox roared back in the sixth. Garcia jumped on DeSclafani's 2-0 slider and deposited it in the left-field stands. Then Palka launched another shot to center.

"The guys kept plugging away," manager Rick Renteria said. "You get down the way we did you'd think guys would lay down — they didn't."

Avisail Garcia stays hot, Moncada helps White Sox finish off Reds in 12

By Daryl Van Schouwen / Chicago Sun Times / July 4, 2018

CINCINNATI — Before the White Sox' 12-8 win over the Reds in 12 innings Tuesday night, manager Rick Renteria revealed that right fielder Avisail Garcia is playing through tightness in his left hamstring.

You wouldn't know it by the way Garcia, who has six homers in his last eight games, is mauling opposing pitchers.

Garcia extended his career-high hitting streak to 13 games on a night when he homered twice, including a tying shot in the ninth against right-hander Raisel Iglesias before the Sox scored four runs on back-to-back triples by Yoan Moncada and Yolmer Sanchez in the 12th.

Garcia also singled against Reds righty Anthony DeSclafani in the fourth before hitting his first homer in the sixth.

Avisail Garcia hit two home runs against the Reds Tuesday night. (AP)

“He’s grinding through this,” Renteria said. “He wants to stay in the lineup. He’s playing in the heat . . . staying hydrated. He gets treated, he gets ice, he gets stretched. He does everything that he can to make sure he’s capable of playing.”

Garcia helped the Sox battle back from 4-0 and 7-2 deficits, with Leury Garcia’s RBI single tying the game 7-7 in the eighth. The Reds then scored an exciting run to go back ahead in the bottom of the inning. Speedster Billy Hamilton singled, was bunted to second by Jose Peraza and stole third on Sox left-hander Jace Fry. With the infield playing in, Scooter Gennett rapped a sharp grounder at shortstop Tim Anderson, who threw to first baseman Matt Davidson for the out. But Hamilton sprinted for home and barely beat Davidson’s throw and catcher Kevan Smith’s tag.

With Jose Abreu not starting because of a bruised left ankle, the Sox needed the bat of Avisail Garcia, who took Abreu’s customary spot in the lineup. No. 4 hitter Daniel Palka belted a 448-foot homer to center after Garcia’s single in the fourth, and he followed Garcia’s 414-foot blast in the sixth with a 428-foot shot toward right-center.

According to STATS, Garcia and Palka are the first 3-4 Sox hitters to each homer twice in the same game.

“We never gave up,” Garcia said. “We show up every day.”

The back-to-back jacks more than jump-started a four-run sixth. Smith and Anderson singled, Davidson doubled in a run, and Adam Engel knocked in another run with grounder to third, putting the Sox back in a game they looked out of when right-hander Lucas Giolito gave up four runs in the first inning.

“I didn’t get the job done,” Giolito said. “But we had good defense and some really nice, timely hitting, and we won in extra innings.”

The first five Reds reached against Giolito, with four extra-base hits that included homers by Gennett and Eugenio Suarez. Giolito then retired 12 of 15 Reds. But in the fifth, Adam Duvall’s three-run homer put the Reds in front 7-2.

Moncada’s three-run triple in the 12th broke an 8-8 tie. He said the hit rivaled his homer and walk-off single against the Astros last season for career thrills.

“It means a lot for us because we have been battling the last couple of weeks,” Moncada said. “You win a game like today and you feel better. You feel like you’re doing things the right way. A big moment for us.”

Hector Santiago (3-3) had six strikeouts in the 11th and 12th.

Garcia’s streak is the longest active hitting streak in the majors and the longest by a White Sox player since Anderson’s 15-game streak last September.

Renteria, who demands all-out effort on running out ground balls and benched Garcia in spring training for not doing so, has told him to take care of the leg on the field.

“All I ask him to do, to be honest, is pull back on the reins a little bit when you’re coming out of the box,” Renteria said. “I don’t want you to hurt yourself.”

Avisaíl García’s power barrage continues in wild comeback victory

By James Fegan / The Athletic/ July 4, 2018

CINCINNATI — Avisaíl García had such a brilliant season last year ignoring every piece of advice ever prescribed for him from the outside. He didn’t hone in his approach, focus on squeezing his attack zone smaller and wait for pitches to drive out of the park with his massive 6-foot-4, 250-pound frame.

He swung at everything, sprayed flared singles to every part of the field and used his deceptive speed to leg out more infield hits than anyone in the American League not named Jose Altuve. Now, fresh off a two-month absence due to a

hamstring injury that interrupted one of the worst starts of his career, García has naturally come back hitting moonshots. His two-home run night keyed an insane White Sox comeback from a 7-2 deficit in Cincinnati, which was capped off by Yoán Moncada's three-run triple in the 12th inning of a 12-8 win.

García's sixth-inning skyscraper into the second deck of Great American Ballpark's left field porch and his screaming ninth-inning missile to tie the game at 8-8 were his second and third homers of the series and his fifth and sixth in the past eight games. Twice in his career — both last season — García managed five home runs over the course of an entire month. He has seven career multi-home run games, so he's had moments like Tuesday night before, but has never become this power-oriented for even weeks at a time — not even in the minors.

"I just thank God for that," said García, who seemed typically less than amazed by his surge. "I am just focused and working really hard. I am focused, not trying to do too much."

Most of his power in this stretch has come the way his most monstrous shots have always come. Feed him fastballs and his middle/middle-away line-drive approach stays true. Hang him something slow and unintentionally elevated and all of a sudden he's a golfer. But then again, he drilled a 91-mph fastball out to the opposite field Monday night and ripped a 96-mph Raisel Iglesias heater way out to left Tuesday, something he has not staked his reputation on doing.

Part of García's turgid start is that he was "swinging at bad pitches," as he put it. Through his first 128 plate appearances this season, he had yet to draw a walk, and that streak was only ended by four consecutive balls from Jackson Stephens in the 12th inning. Even with that large ape off his back, García's swing and chasing out of the zone rates are at career highs, and it's not because he's getting spammed with breaking balls to test his free-swinging ways. The roughly 58 percent fastballs he's seen this year is also his highest rate ever, and it's only gone up since he's come off the disabled list. Maybe now they're starting to get punished.

"He's just squaring the ball up," manager Rick Renteria said. "He's getting good pitches to hit. He's seemingly getting balls he can handle and not missing them right now. Which is good for him, I hope it continues."

In truth, it feels a bit silly to be sifting in the dirt for some secret rhyme or reason for why a 27-year-old with massive raw strength and power, who has hit moonshots in small bursts before, is now hitting them in larger bursts. It's certainly not as crazy as Max Muncy doing the exact same thing in Los Angeles, or García just up and becoming a .330 hitter last year.

If anything, it's been helpful in keeping him off his feet. García spoke after the game Tuesday with his right knee and both hamstrings wrapped, and has been given instructions from Renteria to avoid maximum effort acceleration when possible to manage the two ailments that kept him on the disabled list for two months. It doesn't hurt to trot around the bases.

"My knee is good, I just need to be careful and take care of it," García said. "A regular ground ball I am just going to jog. If it is out, it is out. If I have a chance to beat it out then I am going to try my best. That's the only way I can be careful with my hamstring."

What is a little crazy is how quickly this has all served to flip García's season from being frustrating, disappointing and injury-marred to newly compelling. Talk of García as a trade asset or a potential long-term solution went away quickly, and maybe it can wait until he takes another walk in 2018 before it really gets going. But by blasting himself back up to a 125 wRC+, he's a good guy to be giving at-bats to every night on a team that is mostly fielding auditions for future roles and purposes, and the White Sox outfield was not doing a great job of generating candidates until he returned.

Yoán Moncada is far from a complete player, but he is worth the wait victory

By James Fegan / The Athletic/ July 4, 2018

CINCINNATI — Tuesday was a nice little reminder of why Yoán Moncada is worth waiting on. Not because he reached base four times, or showed a special level of clutchitude by drilling a three-run triple in the 12th inning in a 12-8 comeback win. But in taking a 94 mph fastball at least three inches inside down the right field line, he did something neither his teammates nor manager were quite able to understand.

"I think the pitch might have been off a little bit that he hit to right field," manager Rick Renteria said. "How he kept it fair, guys were telling me how he kept it fair, they don't know. But he got something he could handle and still hit it."

Major leaguers do things that make most people gawk in awe on a regular basis, so a player turning the tables on his teammates is always special, especially when it seems so mundane and natural to Moncada.

"Just to keep my hands close to my body, get the bat out front of the ball and hit the ball with the barrel," Moncada said through team interpreter Billy Russo. "I think that's as simple as it is for me."

It also wasn't until that triple that Moncada dragged his OPS back over .700 for the season. Every big Moncada moment feels like an exhalation because there's been a world of struggle mixed in. Moncada has the fourth-most swinging strikeouts in all of baseball in 2018, despite having a 10-day disabled list stint mixed in. The 23-year-old has the 22nd-highest swinging strike rate out of 162 qualified hitters, and Brooks Baseball categorizes his likelihood to swing and miss against changeups and breaking balls between "above-average" and "disastrous."

All of these are ingredients for a high strikeout rate. Moncada's 35.1 percent is the fourth-highest mark in baseball, and his 120 total strikeouts have some fringe potential to contend for the single-season record, in the unlikely event that a young and very talented player doesn't improve over the final three months of the season. And while he certainly will improve, at no point will he wake up, look in the mirror and see the face of Williams Astudillo staring back at him — swing-and-miss will always be a part of his game.

But if you've agonized over Moncada adding to these issues by taking borderline strike three calls repeatedly, you're not without compatriots in the White Sox clubhouse: namely, Yoán Moncada, who has noted that he's getting burned on balls he's seeing as off the plate.

"Pitchers here are just better and they execute pitches on the edges," Moncada said through Russo, while discussing how he's tweaking his approach. "Just overall, being more aggressive. It can be up in the count or down in the count. It's just a matter of being more aggressive with the pitches."

Moncada's 39 strikeouts looking are tied with Aaron Judge for most in baseball. His hitting coach, Todd Steverson, who has coached Adam Dunn and Jack Cust, sees similarities with his youngest pupil's knowledge of the zone, and his accompanying tendency to get wrung up when umpire gives a borderline decision to the pitcher. Because of that, he figures Moncada will "probably" always strike out looking more than most, but still needs to do more to keep himself alive in at-bats, at least until he produces on the level that gives him more benefit of the doubt across the league.

"There are certain balls at certain times that you probably have got to fend off," Steverson said. "There are some times where a hitter has to expand a little bit just to stay fighting inside the at-bat and I think that's part of what he has to learn."

This is, without saying, infinitely easier said than done. Like any hitter, Moncada's conception of the strike zone and his response to it has to be near-instinctual to work within the split second he has to decide whether to pull the trigger. There are certain locations where he sees the ball and his response is to shut his swing down automatically. Learning to essentially undo that teaching on the margins of the zone does not figure to be a swift process, not that Steverson would put a timeline on it, because ultimately that's up to Moncada.

"I'm working on it," Moncada said through Russo. "I'm working on adding that to my approach. That's not something where you can just turn on the switch. You have to adjust but I'm working on it and that's going to make me a better hitter."

Making it tougher is that nobody actually wants to junk Moncada's approach. His plate discipline and batting eye are ultimately the saving grace of an offensive profile that will always include lower batting averages and higher strikeout rates. Steverson called the idea of Moncada just expanding his zone by a few inches regardless of situation as "dumb, asinine," and likely to result in more confusion for him.

Relatedly, the most distressing part of his slump since his disabled list stint is that his walk rate has dwindled down to 5.7 percent in his last 210 plate appearances. That's a disturbing bellwether during a year that has seen him show slow improvement on his ability to recognize and track off-speed, and with the amount of swing-and-miss in his game, he needs a stable route to getting on base through his down points.

"Every hitter needs the ability to take his walk," Steverson said. "Truth of the matter is you're not going to bang all year long. You're going to go through stretches where you're not so good. If you're able to take walks in between that, you don't hate 0-for-4s."

In the vein of Richard Dotson's quote about how getting your ass kicked opens your mind up, the White Sox are hoping that the struggles Moncada admits are unprecedented in his career will stoke the adjustment process. Failing at this level can ultimately be just as illuminating as a trip back to the minors, and Steverson said it's on Moncada to dig deep within himself to find a new level of performance.

While Moncada is much closer to the middle of the pack as far as aggressiveness within the zone, the best solution is to simply put himself in fewer counts where a pitcher can try to paint the corners on him with two strikes. He needs to be keyed on what he can handle, and whenever he sees his pitch, Steverson wants Moncada's at-bats to end there: not with a take to work the count, not with a foul because he wasn't geared up for a particular offering, but with a ball in play. Even

if it turns out Moncada's favorite pitch is something three inches inside and on his hands, Steverson wants him ready to drive if it comes, and able to keep himself alive while he waits.

"I am still looking for my rhythm," Moncada said through Russo. "It's not that I'm off but I don't feel right now that I'm myself at the plate. I'm working on it. I still need to keep working to get to the point where I was before the injury happened. I'm working, I'm close, but I don't feel like I'm there right now."