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Sunday's top prospect performers

By Mike Rosenbaum / MLB.com/ April 15, 2018

The Iowa Cubs received strong offensive contributions from a pair of top prospects, as Mark Zagunis and David Bote each collected three hits, including a home run, while combining for five RBIs and five runs in a 9-4 win over Memphis.

Zagunis, the Cubs' No. 13 prospect, singled in his first at-bat before connecting on a solo home run in the fourth inning. He would later add a two-run double to finish the game 3-for-5 with three RBIs and two runs. Zagunis' double and homer were both firsts this season for the 25-year-old outfielder, and he improved his average from .130 to .214 with the multi-hit performance (also a first).

Bote (No. 14) also posted a pair of extra-base hits in his three-hit game. He launched his second solo home run in as many days in the third inning, before pushing across a run in the ninth with a triple and finishing 3-for-5. The 25-year-old second baseman scuffled out of the gate, but has swung a hot bat of late, hitting .375 with two homers and five RBIs in his past four games.

- Making his 2018 debut, No. 26 overall prospect Sixto Sanchez (Phillies' No. 1) allowed four earned runs on seven hits in four innings in a no-decision for Class A Advanced Clearwater. While the 19-year-old struggled with his control in the outing as he issued four walks and threw just 46 of his 83 pitches for strikes, he still managed to register six strikeouts and routinely hit triple digits with his fastball.

- One night removed from hitting a game-tying home run in the eighth inning, No. 33 overall prospect Alex Verdugo (Dodgers' No. 2) one-upped himself with a walk-off, three-run blast that powered Triple-A Oklahoma City past New Orleans, 8-6, in 10 innings. Making the feat all the more impressive was that the

21-year-old outfielder had entered the game in the top of the frame as part of a double switch. He's hitting .324 on the season, with two homers, two doubles and eight runs in nine games.

- No. 57 overall prospect Jesus Sanchez (Rays' No. 4) homered for a second straight day, hitting a three-run shot that proved to be the difference in Class A Advanced Charlotte's 9-6 win over Lakeland. He finished the game 2-for-5 at the dish and has now hit in four straight for the Stone Crabs, including three multi-hit games. Shortstop Lucius Fox (No. 7) stayed hot with a 3-for-6 performance, his sixth multi-hit performance in 10 games this season, while Josh Lowe (No. 11) went 2-for-5 with a double and two RBIs.

- Yordan Alvarez's lone hit was a big one, as the Astros' No. 4 prospect belted a three-run, walk-off home run in the 11th inning of Double-A Corpus Christi's 10-7 win over Arkansas. The 20-year-old outfielder had struck out three times in his previous five at-bats before delivering the game-winning blast. Overall, Alvarez owns a .286 average through nine games, with two homers and 10 RBIs.

- Astros No. 10 prospect Corbin Martin carried a no-hit bid into the fifth inning and went on to complete six scoreless innings as Class A Advanced Buies Creek blanked Salem, 5-0. The 2017 second-rounder earned his first career win with the performance, as Martin allowed two hits and three walks with six strikeouts. He is yet to allow an earned run in two starts, during which he's permitted three hits while striking out 13 in 10 innings. At the plate, Ronnie Dawson (No. 15) paced the Astros' offense by hitting his first home run, a third-inning solo shot, as part of a 3-for-5 day. The 22-year-old outfielder had just four hits in 33 at-bats (.121) heading into the game.

- Braves No. 13 prospect Bryse Wilson extended his season-opening scoreless streak to 8 2/3 innings behind five dominant innings Sunday in Class A Advanced Florida's win over Palm Beach. The 20-year-old righty allowed just one hit, generated six ground-ball outs and struck out five for a second straight start. Wilson's five-inning, scoreless performance was the third in as many games for the Fire Frogs after Joey Wentz (No. 10) and Ian Anderson (No. 5, No. 51 overall) accomplished the feat on Friday and Saturday, respectively.

- Brewers No. 4 prospect Lucas Erceg, Corey Ray (No. 7) and Trent Grisham (No. 8) each tallied at least two hits and one run as Double-A Biloxi defeated Mississippi, 7-4, in game one of a doubleheader. Ray recorded the lone extra-base hit of a the trio, hitting a double in a 2-for-4 effort out of the leadoff spot, while Erceg lifted his average to .389 by going 2-for-3. Grisham, meanwhile, paced the Shuckers' lineup with two runs as he finished 2-for-3. Ray would later add two more hits in the nightcap, giving him multiple hits in four of his past five games.

- Make it three wins in as many starts for Brewers No. 10 prospect Freddy Peralta. Starting game one of Triple-A Colorado Springs' double-dip, the 21-year-old worked six strong frames, allowing two earned runs on seven hits and one walk with seven strikeouts. He's pitched to a 1.13 ERA in the early going this season, with 11 hits allowed and 20 strikeouts in 16 innings. Mauricio Dubon (No. 11) and Jacob Nottingham (No. 27) both entered the home-run column with solo shots to help lead the Sky Sox past Round Rock, 7-4.

- Dodgers No. 6 prospect DJ Peters smashed a solo home run and a double as he collected three hits for the second time in four games for Double-A Tulsa. The long ball, a third-inning solo shot, was Peters' third in 10 games this season. In 2017, the 6-foot-6, 225-pound outfielder hit 27 homers to finish third in the Class A Advanced California League.

- Dodgers No. 15 prospect Connor Wong recorded a career-high five RBIs behind a pair of home runs, the latter of which, a three-run shot in the eighth inning, proved to be the game-winner for Class A Advanced Rancho Cucamonga against Inland Empire. The 21-year-old second baseman, the Dodgers' second-round pick last June, finished the game 3-for-4 with a double and three runs. He's off to a red-hot start to begin his first full season, with a .361 average, five home runs, 11 RBIs and 13 runs through nine games.

- Padres No. 12 prospect Esteury Ruiz hit a two-run home run off of No. 25 overall prospect Brendan McKay (Rays' No. 3), though it wasn't enough to keep Class A Fort Wayne from falling to Bowling Green, 5-3. It was the first home run in 2018 for the 19-year-old second baseman, who garnered MVP honors last season after pacing the Rookie-level Arizona league in average (.350), hits (72), doubles (20), triples (10) and total bases (124) last season.
- Padres No. 13 prospect Eric Lauer matched his career high with 10 strikeouts as he posted six scoreless frames in Triple-A El Paso's rout of Las Vegas. He permitted three hits and walked two in the performance while throwing 59 of his 97 pitches for strikes. The 22-year-old lefty has completed exactly six innings in each of his three starts this season, his first at the Triple-A level.
- White Sox No. 10 prospect Micker Adolfo homered for a second straight day and was the lone Class A Advanced Winston-Salem player to collect multiple hits in a 6-3 loss against Carolina. The 21-year-old outfielder has opened the season on a tear and the 2-for-3 performance improved his slash line to .395/.435/.651 through 11 games. He's compiled seven extra-base hits and 10 RBIs in that span while striking out at an improved 17.4 percent clip.
- White Sox No. 16 prospect Ian Clarkin posted his third career complete game as he pitched Double-A Birmingham past Montgomery, 2-1, in game one of a doubleheader. Throwing just 93 pitches (61 strikeouts) in the outing, the 23-year-old southpaw allowed one earned run as he scattered five hits with six strikeouts in seven innings. Zack Collins (No. 9) supported Clarkin with a solo home run, his first extra-base hit in eight games this season.

White Sox games Saturday, Sunday postponed

By Scott Merkin /MLB.com / April 14, 2018

MINNEAPOLIS -- The White Sox were "swept" by the Twins this weekend at Target Field.

Of course, that sweep consisted of a 4-0 loss to Minnesota on Thursday night and then three consecutive postponements due to a spring blizzard not expected to end until early Monday morning. Sunday's game was postponed before dinner Saturday night, with the rescheduled games to be announced at a later date.

"Well, you know, they didn't miss on the forecast," White Sox manager Rick Renteria said on Saturday night. "Everybody knew it was coming."

Renteria could not remember a stretch where three straight games were postponed due to this sort of severe inclement weather, although he did bring up a Minor League Opening Day when he was managing in Portland, Maine, where they brought in helicopters and tried to use fuel to burn away the snow and play the game. Those options certainly weren't happening at the Major League level.

Reynaldo Lopez was scheduled to start Friday night's game for the White Sox, with Miguel Gonzalez set for Saturday's start. The White Sox announced Gonzalez as their starter for Saturday early in the morning, only to have the game postponed one hour later.

With the team hopefully moving on to Oakland Sunday for night games Monday and Tuesday and a day game Wednesday, it will return to its regular rotation with Lopez, Gonzalez and Carson Fulmer facing the A's in that order. The White Sox got their work in at the ballpark on Friday and Saturday, despite the weather, throwing necessary side sessions, hitting in the cages and doing their regular conditioning.

Renteria added Sunday will be used as an off-day/travel day, with the team leaving from the hotel and not going to the ballpark.

"I'm sure they are doing everything they can to make sure that they can get in and out safely and we can get in and out safely," Renteria said of flying out Sunday. "I'm not too concerned. Like I said, the storm was kind of forecast so it didn't hit us by surprise."

"Honestly we couldn't play in this. It's as cold as all get out, and it wouldn't be safe to do. That would be ridiculous. We got a blizzard in Minnesota and we'll deal with it."

Wellington Castillo's return on Monday in Oakland becomes one benefit of the three days off. The team's starting catcher, who has not played since April 10 due to right knee soreness, received extensive treatment and told Renteria he was ready to go Saturday.

Minnesota plays host to the White Sox from June 5-7 and Sept. 28-30, which are their last three games of the season. The two teams have a mutual off-day this Thursday, but the Twins are returning from Puerto Rico after a two-game set with the Indians and the White Sox will be returning from Oakland. They also have a mutual off-day on June 4, before that next series in Minnesota, and on June 25, Aug. 20, and on Sept. 6.

Some of the White Sox players tweeted pictures of the snow and sent live video via Instagram. But now the focus returns to actual baseball games.

"It's freezing out there," Renteria said. "Now it's just let's get on a plane and get to Oakland safely and get ready for that series."

UP NEXT

After a lost, snowy weekend in which three of four games against the Twins were postponed at Target Field, the White Sox go west to take on the A's with a first pitch of 9:05 p.m. CT Monday night. Lopez, who has not pitched since losing a 1-0 decision to Detroit on April 8, will get the White Sox start facing right-hander Daniel Mengden (1-2, 6.19 ERA). Catcher Castillo, bothered by a sore right knee and out of action since April 10, also is expected to return to the lineup.

Cold weather hasn't chilled Sox' Draft planning

By Scott Merkin /MLB.com/ April 15, 2018

MINNEAPOLIS -- Earlier this week, White Sox director of amateur scouting Nick Hostetler and national crosschecker Mike Shirley attended a game in Wisconsin as part of continued preparation for the 2018 Draft, which runs from June 4-6.

There was no snow at this particular contest, which put the duo one up on the White Sox, who had three straight games postponed due to blizzard-like conditions at Target Field this weekend. But that fact served as the high point weather-wise for Hostetler in Wisconsin.

"It was 32 degrees and the wind was blowing hard in," said Hostetler by phone from a warmer locale. "We luckily got the game in, but the amount of cancellations this year, even in the East, the Midwest.

"The West has been OK weather-wise, but it's been terrible. We've racked up a whole lot of expense money in flight changes this year. It's just been crazy."

Even with the persistent inclement weather, the White Sox have narrowed down their first-round selection field at No. 4 overall to eight to 10 player possibilities. Hostetler and his hard-working crew feel comfortable the team's initial pick will come from this group.

"Myself and our regional guys and our national guys are circling back on that group of eight to 10 and making sure we get as many looks as possible," Hostetler said. "We are making sure we get [general manager] Rick [Hahn] and [executive vice president] Kenny [Williams] and [assistant general manager] Jeremy [Haber] and [special assistant to Hahn and Hall of Famer] Jim Thome in to see the right guys as we get closer.

"We are putting those lists together. Then we are making sure we have it in the order we want come June 4."

Hostetler will stick to the overall plan set by Hahn back in 2015 by selecting players from an offensive standpoint who walk, get on base and have good strike zone judgement. For pitchers, the focus is on premium stuff so the White Sox can continue their strong tradition of pitching development.

Drafting for need won't happen, aside from special circumstances.

"Once we get to a point that we feel the talent maybe is equal, then we will lean to a need at that point," Hostetler said. "The talent is going to have to be equal and very rarely does that happen."

In the interim, Hostetler will try to stay ahead of the harsh April weather as the White Sox work toward another important rebuild step in June.

"We try to [cope with the weather] as much as we can, but the only thing that's probably wrong more than a baseball scout is a weatherman," said Hostetler with a laugh. "It's hard to follow that sometimes.

"But we'll run from the weather as much as we can just to get away from it. We have so many limited days to see these guys, and if I get rained out or snowed out or something like that, that can set me back a week just in scheduling."

Daily White Sox prospects update: Michael Kopech strong, Dash continue to mash

By Vinnie Duber /NBC Sports Chicago / April 15, 2018

Triple-A Charlotte

Michael Kopech made his second start of the season and turned in another strong outing. He allowed just one run in six innings, with his ERA at 0.90 after four shutout innings in his first start of the year. He gave up five hits and walked a pair, striking out three. He's still looking for his first win of the season. Ryan Cordell had two hits, including a double, and two RBIs. Daniel Palka homered in the Knights' 10-5 loss. It was a bad night for the bullpen, including Thyago Vieira, who gave up a run in his 1.1 innings and now has an ERA of 12.46.

Class A Winston-Salem

How much time do you have to go over the always-packed Winston-Salem box score? In Saturday's 6-5 win, Luis Alexander Basabe and Micker Adolfo kept on slugging, each hitting a home run. Basabe is hitting .410 after a two-hit night in which he also had two RBIs, a run scored and a walk. Adolfo is at .375 and had an RBI, a run scored and a walk. Blake Rutherford was 2-for-5 with a run scored. And Joel Booker — who had a walk-off steal of home the other night — had two hits including a homer and is hitting .400 on the season. The pitching was less impressive, with recently acquired Ricardo Pinto getting the start and giving up four runs in five innings.

Class A Kannapolis

Outfielder Luis Gonzalez walked three times and stole a base in Kannapolis' 4-3 win.

The Winston-Salem Dash just gave the White Sox their best week of baseball since the rebuild began

By Chuck Garfen/ NBC Sports Chicago / April 15, 2018

"Astonishing."

That's how White Sox Director of Scouting Nick Hostetler described the events coming from Winston-Salem, N.C., this past week.

They might be 700 miles away from Chicago, one-to-three years from making it to the big leagues, but what transpired on the field for the Winston-Salem Dash, the White Sox Class-A squad in the Carolina League should give White Sox fans a jolt of excitement — and plenty of hope, too.

Under new manager Omar Vizquel, the Dash won six games in a row with dominant pitching, clutch hitting and dramatic endings so off the charts you'd think their season was scripted by Disney.

"Omars in the Outfield," joked Hostetler.

The Dash might not be ready for Hollywood just yet, but they did accomplish something else:

They gave the White Sox franchise its best week of baseball since Rick Hahn and company started their rebuild.

True, this all happened on minor league fields nowhere near the bright lights of the majors, but in every game several important pieces of the rebuild took the field and together showed all the promise and potential the White Sox have been talking about.

Kopech, Giolito, Lopez, Moncada, Jimenez and Hansen have all had their individual moments.

But this was different.

This was all that talk coming through in action night after night after night.

"It's been a special week in Winston-Salem that we hope continues to grow this group together," said Director of Player Development Chris Getz. "It's a collection of some of our top players, and winning in the fashion that they have makes the development process more enjoyable for everyone. We've had very good pitching performances, clutch hitting, successful situational hitting and good defense. Needless to say, things have been clicking this past week."

The top prospects playing on the Dash are Dylan Cease (from the Jose Quintana trade), Luis Basabe (Chris Sale trade), Dane Dunning (Adam Eaton trade), Blake Rutherford (Todd Frazier/David Robertson/Tommy Kahnle trade), plus international signee Micker Adolfo and 2017 second round pick Gavin Sheets.

The White Sox like it when their minor league teams win, but what they really want to see is development.

Here's what is developing with the Dash through 11 games:

Adolfo: .395/.435/.651

Basabe: .372/.426/.605

Booker: .400/.471/.633

Rutherford: .333/.378/.424

Sheets: .324/.419/.432

Cease: 1-1, 1.69 ERA, 4 BB, 12 K

Dunning: 1-0, 0.79 ERA, 2 BB, 16 K

And still waiting to play his first game with the Dash is Luis Robert, the White Sox third-ranked prospect, who's out with a sprained thumb. He'll probably make his debut sometime in May.

Pray for the Carolina League.

So, what did the Dash exactly do this past week that has everyone all excited?

Monday

Tied at 4 in the top of the ninth inning against the Myrtle Beach Pelicans (the Cubs Class-A affiliate), Basabe drove in the go-ahead run on a single. He advanced to second on the throw, stole third base and scored on a sac fly by Rutherford. The Dash won 6-4.

Merely scoring the winning run in the top of the ninth inning was by far the least exciting day of the week for the Dash. Read on.

Tuesday

When the news came across, it didn't seem real. The Dash announced that nine-time NBA All-Star and Winston-Salem native Chris Paul bought a minority ownership of the Dash.

"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?"

That night, Basabe, Sheets and Joel Booker all had three hits, while starter Jimmy Lambert only gave up one unearned run on one hit in five innings. The Dash beat Myrtle Beach again 6-4. But wait. There's more. A whole lot more.

Wednesday

Dunning set White Sox Twitter ablaze when he took a no-hitter into the seventh inning against Myrtle Beach. The sixth-ranked White Sox prospect ended up going 6 1/3 innings, gave up only two hits, with no walks and eight strikeouts. He said afterwards that James Shields showed him a different grip to use for his curveball during spring training. "That's been a big plus for me so far," Dunning said. The Dash swept the Pelicans 9-0. Take that, Cubs. Basabe had 3 more hits. Of course, he did. "Basabe has been showing off everything he can do to help a team win a game," Getz said.

Thursday

In their home opener against Carolina, the Dash provided the kind of late-game fireworks you rarely see, or never do. Tied at 2 with two outs in the bottom of the 10th inning, Joel Booker was on third base. Rather than rely on someone else to drive him in, he took matters into his own hands, shocking everybody in the stadium, by safely stealing home. A walk-off steal to win a baseball game. That was the kind of week it was for the Dash. However, this was merely a dress rehearsal for what would come over the weekend.

Friday

Fifth-ranked prospect Dylan Cease got the start vs. Carolina and was basically unhittable. He retired the first 11 batters he faced before giving up a two-out single in the fourth. Cease finished with six scoreless innings on only two hits while striking out five. The Dash won easily 8-1. Guess who had three more hits? Basabe.

Saturday

Now to the craziest game of the week. It will probably be the wildest game of the season.

Not sure how you top this. The Dash trailed the Mudcats 5-0 in the bottom of the eighth inning. The game was seemingly over. Carolina went to the bullpen and the Dash made them pay. Did they ever. Winston-Salem hit FOUR HOME RUNS. Booker, Basabe (2-run shot), Adolfo and Yermin Mercedes did the damage. They scored five runs to tie the game.

They went to the 10th inning where the Dash won again. Not on another home run. That's too easy. This is a dynamic bunch that finds creative ways to beat you. How about a suicide squeeze bunt? Booker laid it down successfully, scoring Yeyson Yrizarri. The Dash won their sixth game in a row.

Oh yeah, Basabe went 2-for-4. His other hit was a bunt single. The dude has wheels. Did I mention he might be the best defensive outfielder in their minor league system?

Sunday

The Dash came back down to Earth. They finally lost a game, 6-2 to the Mudcats. But Adolfo homered, Rutherford stole 2 bags. Basabe went 0-for-4. He's human.

So, that's the week it was for the Winston-Salem Dash, a team loaded with talent. Who knows for how long? Double-A Birmingham will be calling soon for some of these guys. When will they reach Chicago? After weeks like this, maybe sooner than anyone thought..

Balmy 50-degree weather awaits White Sox in Oakland

By Colleen Kane/ Chicago Tribune / April 15, 2018

The forecast in Oakland, Calif., for Monday night is temperatures in the 50s with potential for a stray shower.

That's downright tropical compared with what the White Sox were leaving behind Sunday as they were set to depart Minneapolis, where a snowstorm continued into its third day.

The three-game series against the Athletics at Oakland Coliseum will be a welcome change of pace after a rough opening stretch that included four postponements and eight losses in 16 scheduled games.

After the first of three straight postponements Friday, Sox first baseman Jose Abreu said he is helping his younger teammates keep in perspective a start that has been cold both figuratively and literally.

"We all have to be thankful because we're able to do what we like to do, and that is playing baseball," Abreu said through a team interpreter. "We all know that in a long season, you are going to have ups and downs and the only way to get over it is to keep your mind positive and to have confidence in yourself and the guys that are around you. That has been my message for all the guys, and we're good."

Sox manager Rick Renteria tried to keep his players on a normal work schedule as much as possible, holding workouts Friday and Saturday before giving them the day off for travel Sunday.

Renteria said he never has had three games postponed in a row before this weekend, and it was also a first for the Twins since Target Field opened in 2010, according to the Minneapolis Star-Tribune. But he did recall one other memorable snowstorm that hindered play when he was a minor-league manager in Portland, Maine.

"They tried to clear the snow," Renteria said. "They brought in helicopters, put fuel out there and tried to burn it all off, tried to get it in. This is the big leagues. We don't do that here."

On the mend: One of the few positives of the postponed weekend was it allowed starting catcher Welington Castillo to recover from a sore right knee that kept him out of games Wednesday and Thursday. The Sox operated those days with infielder Tyler Saladino as their backup catcher.

Renteria said Castillo felt ready to play again Saturday and he expects him to be in the starting lineup Monday.

"If there was any silver lining, it's that he was able to get a couple of days of treatment so that thing calmed down," Renteria said.

Minors watch: While the Sox were off Saturday, fans still were able to watch the team's future on NBC Sports Chicago.

The network televised right-hander Michael Kopech's second start with Triple-A Charlotte on Saturday.

Kopech, the No. 2 Sox prospect, threw 88 pitches over six innings against Scranton/Wilkes-Barre, allowing one earned run on five hits with two walks and three strikeouts. He had thrown four scoreless innings with eight strikeouts in his first start.

Kopech made just three starts at Charlotte last year after spending the majority of the year at Double-A Birmingham.

For those looking to watch Kopech in person, a road trip next weekend might be in order. Charlotte plays at Indianapolis from Friday to Sunday, and as of now Kopech should be in line to start one of those games.

No. 42: Because of Sunday's postponement, the Sox missed out on Major League Baseball's day to honor Jackie Robinson. All MLB teams wear No. 42 on April 15 in recognition of the day Robinson broke baseball's color barrier in 1947.

"He deserves all of our respect," Abreu said. "He was able to open the path for a lot of players in this league, and we all have to be thankful for all of the things he did and all of the sacrifices he made."

Could free tickets be the wave of baseball's future?

By Paul Sullivan/ Chicago Tribune / April 16, 2018

Five thoughts from the third week of the baseball season:

1. Don't charge people for tickets

Here's an idea no one's thought of before:

Instead of charging \$30 for parking and anywhere from \$30 to \$120 for tickets, why not just open the doors and let in everyone free and watch them spend all their money on concessions?

Leave it to the Oakland A's, one of the game's least successful franchises, to do just that.

The A's have given away all their tickets for Tuesday's game against the White Sox in celebration of the 50th anniversary of their first game in Oakland. Parking is always free on Tuesdays, adding to the cheaper-than-cheap outing. (On Monday, when the Warriors play a playoff game next door at the same time as the A's-Sox game, parking was raised from \$30 to \$40.)

The A's received more than 300,000 ticket requests, and the park will be crammed with fans. "Mt. Davis," the upper-deck outfield seats named for late Raiders owner Al Davis that usually are closed for A's games, will be open for one night.

It could be an epic night, or it could be a nightmare, based on how inebriated and rowdy the Oakland "fans" are. The Indians had a disastrous "10-cent beer night" in 1974 that turned into a riot. The White Sox allowed fans in for 98 cents and a record on "Disco Demolition Night" in 1979, which led to a forfeiture of the game when fans (me among them) stormed the field.

The A's drew a crowd of 7,416 earlier this year, their lowest since 2003, so it's not exactly a hotbed for baseball. Expect some of the fans to just be there for the beer.

Both teams will wear throwback uniforms, with the Sox wearing their old baby blue road jerseys that were cool looking but didn't exactly catch on.

Maybe free tickets are the wave of the future.

2. Attendance woes

The Orioles announced a Kids Cheer Free program for 2018 in which adults purchasing upper-deck tickets can get two more free for children age 9 and under.

Meanwhile, the Marlins are having a difficult time drawing fans after their offseason fire sale, and had a franchise-low 6,150 show up last week for a Mets game while their Double-A team in Jacksonville drew 6,960 the same night,

"We have to win some more games," new CEO Derek Jeter told the Miami Herald. "I've heard people say Miami's a tough sports town. But I think that's every sports town. You put a winning product on the field and people come."

The three lowest-average attendances heading into Sunday were the Marlins (13,430), the A's (15,212) and the White Sox (15,325).

3. Conga fever

After being mesmerized by the rally cat last year, Cardinals fans have a new craze to dwell on. The Cardinals players have started doing a conga line after home runs, led, naturally, by the home run hitter.

"I'm mobbed by it," manager Mike Matheny told the St. Louis Post-Dispatch.

Not sure what that means, but I think he likes it.

No one is taking credit for the conga line, according to the Post-Dispatch, but backup catcher Francisco Pena is considered the originator.

4. Same as it ever was

In 1968, the American League batting average was .230 and Carl Yastrzemski's .301 average won the batting title. The National League batting average wasn't much higher at .241.

After the '68 season MLB opted to lower the mound from 15 to 10 inches and shrink the strike zone of hitters, making it from the top of the knees to the arm pits.

There have been numerous changes over the last 50 years, including the addition of the DH in the AL, rotations going from four to five starters, newer and smaller ballparks, improved weight training, drug-testing following the steroid era, and the latest trend of going to the bullpens in the fifth or sixth inning.

The major-league batting average was at .270 in 2000, but was down to .255 last year. Going into Sunday's game, the NL batting average was .240, while the AL average was .241.

Those averages are certain to rise when the weather heats up. But if you want to know what it was like to watch a game in 1968, when the pitching was so dominant they had to change the rules, this is probably as close as it gets.

5. Listening post

When there are only 974 people in the stands it's a lot easier to hear what everyone is saying.

According to the Tampa Bay Times, the lack of fans at Sox Park last Monday helped the Rays in an unusual way in a 5-4 win. With Jose Abreu on third base in the ninth inning of a one-run game, Rays third baseman Matt Duffy heard Sox third-base coach Nick Capra tell Abreu to go home only if the ball got through.

Tim Anderson hit the first pitch to Duffy, who calmly fired to first for the second out, knowing Abreu would stay put.

“You try to listen,” Duffy said.

Good ears paid off.

What age gap? White Sox TV teammates Jason Benetti, Steve Stone are best of pals

By Steve Greenberg/ Chicago Sun Times / April 15, 2018

MINNEAPOLIS — It took five minutes. In that time, Jason Benetti heard enough plays on words, clever turns of phrase and quick-witted cultural references from his dinner companion that he knew it in his bones: He wanted in.

In with the White Sox, the team he grew up in Homewood rooting for, as a TV play-by-play man. And in with Steve Stone as a partner in parlance, an ally in articulation — a bosom buddy, if you will, in baseball banter.

“I thought, Geez, not only do I want this job,” Benetti recalled, “but I really, really, really want to work with this guy because we can do something special.”

White Sox TV partners Jason Benetti and Steve Stone have bonded quickly. | WGN

They dined at Don & Charlie’s, a Scottsdale, Arizona, steak house with Chicago roots, in a meeting set up by Sox executives. When the meal was over, Benetti headed to the airport; he had a college football bowl game to call for ESPN. Stone reached out right away to Sox senior director of broadcasting and business development Bob Grim.

“Sign him immediately,” Stone urged.

Not quite 28 months later, Benetti, 34, and Stone, 70, grabbed a leisurely dinner together on a night when the Sox and Twins were snowed out. They didn’t have to hang out — cozy hotel rooms beckoned — but what else were they supposed to do? They’re more than broadcast partners. They’re kind of joined at the hip. They’re ... did we say bosom buddies already?

It’s the wrong 1980s sitcom reference, anyway.

“It’s basically like ‘Perfect Strangers,’ but we live in two separate apartments,” Benetti said. “And I don’t know which one of us is Balki.”

Yes, awhile back Benetti moved into the same River North building where Stone lives. Because they don’t spend enough time crammed into a broadcast booth together, right? A “carophile,” according to Benetti, Stone does the driving to and from Guaranteed Rate Field, most often in his Mercedes.

“He has a purchased Benz,” Benetti said. “I have a leased [Ford] Fusion.”

The stories about Benetti’s cerebral palsy have been written, and the only reason to bring his condition up here is to point out how little it has to do with this particular friendship. Stone doesn’t look at Benetti and

see a broadcaster with a disadvantage. He beholds a man with enormous ability — “the hardest-working person I’ve ever seen,” Stone called him — and the wit and wisdom of someone much older.

“There is nothing that he is unprepared for,” Stone said. “Plus, he’s off-the-charts intelligent. I can’t make any aside about anything as it pertains to history or movies or music, or any obscure references, without him knowing what I’m talking about.

“I am fond of everything Jason. We are traveling together. We go to the park together. We eat lunch and/or dinner together at home, and sometimes both. I never see cerebral palsy. What I see is Jason.”

And that has been the mark of, as Benetti put it, “the people who have been my best friends over the course of time.” They don’t have to tell him what they don’t see. Benetti can just tell that it’s true.

Besides, Benetti isn’t exactly warm and cuddly when it comes to being offered help. Nor is Stone. Propose to carry either man’s bag, for example, and you’ll likely find yourself on the business end of a snarl like the one Stone gave Benetti on the first road trip of the season. The older pal’s back was hurting. Benetti reached for the bag. Stone shot him a look and said, “No.” Benetti hoisted it anyway and had to laugh at the absurdity of it all.

Benetti is a crossword-puzzle fanatic, a lover of game shows and a Broadway enthusiast. Typical 34-year-old, right? He also digs pro wrestling and rewatches old seasons of “Survivor,” but nobody’s perfect.

Stone figures Benetti has the mind of a 60-year-old. Benetti insists Stone looks and comports himself like a man in his 50s. It can’t be quite accurate, because Benetti had to drag Stone to the mall a couple of weeks ago in Toronto and help him navigate the task of buying a new iPad.

“God love him, he’s not going to do it alone,” Benetti said. “There’s a language barrier.”

Benetti would love to see Stone and Ken “Hawk” Harrelson each win the highest recognition for career excellence. Harrelson, who is calling 20 Sox games in his final season, was a 2017 finalist for the Ford C. Frick Award, presented to a broadcaster each year by the National Baseball Hall of Fame.

But Stone believes it’s Benetti whose time is coming.

“Jason will win the Frick award,” he said. “Jerry [Reinsdorf, Sox chairman] won’t see it. I won’t see it. But sometime, oh, God, I don’t know, maybe 35 years down the road, I’ll be looking down — I hope — and smiling because I helped this guy get there.”

Not good enough?

“He’s talking about looking down on me? I don’t ever think he’s going to die,” Benetti said. “He’ll figure out a way to subtract years. He’s a mystical person to me. He’s one of the best who’s ever done it.”

And, best of all, a friend.

Paint It Black: The Rise Of The Chicago White Sox

By Robert Dean / Sports Mockery / April 7, 2018

For seven agonizing years, Chicago White Sox fans have had a front-row seat, 3D shades, and surround sound for a blue tsunami that crashed across northern Illinois, which ultimately secured the dreaded Cubs World Series win. Across town, they got “the lovable winners” Kris Bryant and Anthony Rizzo. Joe Madden is widely considered the best skipper in baseball. And until this offseason, they even had that ice-cold asshole with the beard, Jake Arrieta.

Theo Epstein strolled in and ripped apart the Cubs with the quest to build a winner. And that's exactly what he did, developing the system to win for the long term. And the Sox? We got to watch Paulie retire.

During those years the White Sox were lucky enough to enjoy trash heap phenoms like Tyler Flowers, hometown busts like Jeff Samardzija, and free agent toads like Alex Rios and Adam Dunn. Look, it's been nothing short of painful since 2006. Between signing the corpses of Ken Griffey Jr, Andruw Jones, Manny Ramirez, and Kevin Youkilis, and the world forgetting we exist outside of our cool logo, it's not been easy putting on the foil and enduring each long Chicago summer.

But things done changed and now we've got the bones. We've got our own kids to get pumped up about. Who are they? Luis Robert, Michael Kopech, Eloy Jimenez and Yoan Moncada to name a few.

We've even painted most of the stadium black because shit's getting real. We want revenge. Don't let anybody tell you otherwise, Chicago. We're out to make up for all of the garbage teams, the half-filled stadiums, the horror-show trips out west, all of it. We're tired of being a third tier team and forgotten fanbase.

Let's be honest, the Cubs fanbase is a bedtime story built on goodwill, good times, and hey, maybe the Cubbies'll get a win today, but we'll most definitely get some beers. It's an infectious outlook for casual dads, but that's not how White Sox fans roll. Sox fans ain't fuzzy and we don't wear Dockers. We're a blue-collar fan base. We count every dollar, and if we're going to pony up our hard-earned cash, we at least want to see our guys put up a fight.

Look, when you're from the south side of Chicago, you're born with the blues and the White Sox. These are our cultural touchstones. We grew up on Muddy Waters and Mark Buehrle, The Big Hurt and Howlin' Wolf. Our streets might be a little dirtier and we got glass in the gutters, but we've also got the best tacos in town and there's plenty of shamrocks hanging from the door year round. And the White Sox? The good guys are ours – even when we don't want to claim them.

When our boys are a bunch of bums, we endure it. We're not the best at showing the love when the times are tough, and we'll admit it. Why? Because we're a working-class community and one thing we can't abide is going down without a fight. That ain't worth more than a once-a-year pilgrimage to the ballpark to pay respects at the altar of Comiskey and Fisk.

When the team announced a full-scale teardown, baseball people who aren't fans of "tanking" threw a fit. But it had to be done. For the sake of the team, the culture and the White Sox's spot in the city of Chicago. Trading off Chris Sale and Adam Eaton cut deep but it was mandatory. It's how we got these kids and, believe this, Ricky's Boys will be a contender in the next year or two.

If the White Sox were tighter, they could have gone 5-1 on their opening road trip. The home opener...we're gonna need more Miller Lites to assess that. One thing this young squad is is not boring; they're going to get killed out there more than once. The bullpen is going to fall apart and the guys we expect to be tomorrow's All-Stars will need to grow into the players we know they can be ala Avi Garcia. It's going to be frustrating but, we believe in them because we can feel the potential.

Being a White Sox fan might seem rough when the world wants to know what celebrity's singing "Take Me Out to the Ballgame" or what fun "Cub thing" Bill Murray is up to now. But they can have that noise. We thrive on the world's neglect. We'll be down on 35th Street, taking back Chicago, block by block. We're gonna bring the trophy back to the south side. I only hope we'll get to do it against the Cubs. That would be the ultimate Chicago payback.

Forget the new study — the real change in the ball White Sox players see is from Triple-A to the majors

By James Fegan/ The Athletic / April 15, 2018

MINNEAPOLIS — On Thursday, word came down to The Athletic MLB that we were going to be privileged to run a new study from Rob Arthur about a noticeable shift in how the major league baseball was carrying early this season. The gist of it was this: the air resistance of the ball has increased, resulting in the lowest home run per fly ball rate since 2014. Yes, Arthur accounted for the fact that it's been cold.

As a beat reporter, it was an opportunity to take the research and get some anecdotal evidence to confirm or controvert it. James Shields provided some observations on changes in the ball last year, but this season's set of anecdotes certainly didn't have him buying into the idea that the playing field was shifting away from home runs.

"We hit six home runs Opening Day in Kansas City, so I don't know what they're talking about," Shields said with a laugh. "I've never seen that happen in my career, in that stadium, that early, or that cold."

Treating the Sox Opening Day home run barrage as evidence alone that there's been no increase in air resistance is said with a wink, but the main point was that Shields hadn't noticed anything, after he did mention a difference just last year. The man mostly responsible for that early home run barrage, Matt Davidson, also said there was nothing notable to report, though he has the sort of power that his philosophy on baseballs is fairly succinct.

"If you hit it good, it's going to go out; it's as simple as that," Davidson said. "It's been cold. I think the balls fly good all the time."

With a team full of guys, both prospects and veterans, who were very recently playing in the minors, the White Sox clubhouse is dealing with a prominent difference in the performance of the baseball. But it doesn't have anything to do with an apparent, near-imperceptible change in the big league ball.

"I'm not one of the guys that even noticed the difference between what was it, the All-Star break at '15? — that was the theory that they ended up changing it," said Danny Farquhar, who spent time in Triple-A last season. "I did notice that there's a big difference between major league balls and Triple-A balls. I think that's a big problem that needs to be fixed, especially if you're trying to get pitchers in Triple-A ready for the big leagues. That's a bigger difference. That's the biggest difference I've noticed."

Among the highly anecdotal sample of players I was able to ask about the ball on the only Thursday of open clubhouse the White Sox had during the Twins series (thanks to a massive snowstorm), all of them responded to questions about the major league ball in the same way. They denied noticing anything, and quickly pivoted, without prompting, about how undeniable the Triple-A-to-major league difference was.

"You notice the huge difference especially from the minor leagues to the major leagues," Davidson said. "You always hear about minor leaguers in their first big league camp or second big league camp or whatever, even that jump, the major league baseball flies better than the minor league baseball. I think everybody knows that."

When James Shields made rehab starts in Charlotte last season, he used major league balls rather than deal with the Triple-A adjustment. (Matt Marton/USA TODAY Sports)

It's telling that everyone brought it up, but this is not a revelation of any sort. In their earlier research on the topic, Arthur and Ben Lindbergh observed that minor league baseballs are made in completely separate parts of the world and have "distinctly different behavior characteristics." While there's always been more power in the majors than the minors, when home runs rocketed to record highs the last few years in the majors, it was simultaneously declining in Triple-A. The net effect of a widening gap in conditions seems to be a Triple-A game that dictates fundamental differences in approach compared to the major leagues.

“Oh yeah, huge difference,” Farquhar said. “Huge difference. Big league balls sink more. Let’s say you have a sinking changeup, like I do, or a sinker. Big league balls, I think they calculated it at an inch and a half more sink in the big leagues. But then the minor league balls break more, like on breaking balls or curveballs, they have more bite. It’s a completely different game from Triple-A to big leagues.

“I think the minor league balls probably have more [fastball] carry than the big league balls. Or maybe it was the hitters, but I noticed that my high fastball plays a lot in the minors, and my changeup doesn’t play as well, because I don’t think it has the drop that it has in the big leagues.”

Coincidentally, the White Sox have three young starters in Lucas Giolito, Reynaldo López and Carson Fulmer who are still searching for the consistency they had with their curveballs at points of the minor league career. López and Giolito specifically have found much more success with their changeups, despite it being their third pitch earlier in their career as prospects. Like with mentioning the cold weather, there’s a risk that bringing up that something might be a factor will be interpreted as an excuse, and none of those three would blame the ball for not having their curve every night. But it’s something to chew on during three days without White Sox baseball, and during what has been an unquestionably difficult start for a pitching staff struggling to establish itself in the majors.

After all, when James Shields hit the disabled list for the first time in his career last season, and had rehab starts in Charlotte to get through, he says they brought major league baseballs in for him to use, rather than have him deal with the adjustment.

Sox is singular: It’s probably not the Year of James Shields, but he’s showing he still has some value

By Jim Margalus/ The Athletic / April 16, 2018

Happy Opening Day, White Sox fans! Yes, the date everybody circles in their calendar has finally arrived! Turns in your mittens and bring out your mitts, because winter is finally giving way to the start of the baseball season! The South Siders aren’t expected to challenge for a wild card spot, but after a successful spring training, you shouldn’t let go of your spring optimism just yet! This team is...

...Hold up, I’m getting word that the White Sox have played 12 games already. Apparently they’re 4-8. Weird! The confusion may stem from the fact that multiple games are still getting snowed out just before Tax Day. My intern regrets the error.

My job is attempting to draw sensible conclusions from White Sox performances, which is difficult to do when nonsensical weather prevents the White Sox from performing. I’m keeping an eye on Yoan Moncada’s strikeouts, Avisail Garcia’s potential exploitability and Miguel Gonzalez’s inability to get swinging strikes, and I’ve written about the way they’re getting themselves out with runners in scoring position. I’m also noticing that the Indians are hitting .200 as a team and the Dodgers are in last place, so nothing about this season to date feels particularly valid.

When play resumes Monday night in Oakland – I suppose that should read “if” – I’ll be watching to see whether Welington Castillo starts without incident, because the White Sox haven’t had their usual level of success when it comes to managing injuries the last two seasons. Otherwise, given that they’re coming off the equivalent of an All-Star break in mid-April, it’s basically a clean slate.

OK, maybe not for James Shields. His White Sox career will never get the ol’ tabula rasa. It only took a few starts to cement his status as a bust, and Fernando Tatis Jr.’s ascent up the prospect lists has unloaded several of those still-handy salt trucks into the wound.

That said, one can only twist the knife so many times before it reaches the hilt. Tatis has already established himself as a universal top-10 prospect, but he’s hanging out in Double-A, so there’s no new pain he can provide until he reaches the majors.

Shields and the White Sox are making good use of that lull. Maybe the time for crisis PR passed long ago, but now there's an opening for some reputation repair.

"Do you want more?" White Sox starting pitcher James Shields was not a popular addition to the club in 2016, but he has proved valuable behind the scenes. (Rick Osentoski/USA TODAY Sports)

On the last Sox Machine Podcast before (the first) Opening Day, my bold prediction was that fans would warm up to Shields some by the end of the season. For one, my bold prediction for 2017 was that fans would warm up to Avisail Garcia, so I stuck with what had worked. Beyond that, once Shields lowered his arm slot and found a way to stabilize his decline, I ventured that he was going to contribute enough on the field to make it possible to hear about his impact away from it.

Sure enough, here's David Brown for this here Athletic, talking about Shields as a unifying presence whether in the clubhouse or on the golf course:

Shields isn't the manager, but he certainly carries himself like a pacesetter, and with an obligation to be inclusive and to set a good example. It's an authority he brings, but also one that other players have given him. [Carson] Fulmer, a recent first-round pick from Vanderbilt, likened the White Sox clubhouse attitude to that of a collegiate team, and Shields to something akin to a coach.

"A tremendous human being," [Carson] Fulmer said. "A guy that's helped us so much. One of the things was to make us feel comfortable. He's that veteran guy you always want to have around because he's there to guide you through. He's a personable guy. He is our leader and we all understand that. We just surround him as much as we can and soak in as much as we can."

Here's Dylan Cease, talking to 2080baseball.com about a new breaking ball Shields helped him develop during the spring:

Cease took advantage of the opportunity to learn from the bevy of talented pitchers in Chicago's system. Most of all, from 13-year MLB veteran James Shields. It was Shields who noticed that Cease was not always planting his lead foot during his delivery.

"Ever since he told me that, I've taken it into my starts, and it's helped me a lot," Cease told 2080. "Ever since he said that, I've been working on it, and I feel really confident spinning everything right now."

Here's Shields playing fungo golf with Fulmer for a Cespedes Family BBQ video.

And that's just from the last couple of weeks. You can go back further and find Shields getting credit for helping Lucas Giolito at Triple-A during his rehab stint, among other examples.

While I referred to this as a form of public relations, yes, it may be partially an attempt to save some face, but not in a way that's canny or orchestrated. Shields established himself as the archetypal Tampa Bay Rays pitcher, and after a trade sent him to the Royals, he was credited with changing the culture in Kansas City. This is by all indications who he is, and it makes sense for everybody on Shields' side — front office and teammates — to make everybody aware of his influence while fans are taking a breather from swapping out the words in "Big Game James."

Everything happens for a reason. When a door closes, a window opens. If the devil wrecks a bathroom, God lights a match. You've seen all these aphorisms stitched onto pillows because they're often true. David Wells' one year with the White Sox in 2001 was a disaster, but Mark Buehrle, who was then embarking on his first full MLB season, somehow soaked up the good parts of it.

Tatis isn't the Mike Sirotko of this trade — that was Erik Johnson — but here we have Shields overlapping with Giolito, Fulmer and Reynaldo Lopez at the same stage in their careers, with Michael Kopech on the horizon. It's in the Sox's interest to push this pro-Shields angle out of self-preservation and professional respect, but it's still feasible that one of these guys gets a boost from the veteran, if not a combination of them. This possibility allows a way for Shields to leave a mark, even if there's no way to prevent the deal

from leaving a dent.

Q&A Nick Hostetler on running the most important draft of his life to date: 'We're not going to get cute'

By James Fegan/ The Athletic / April 16, 2018

Three straight days without any White Sox games and a lot of minor league cancelations is a good way to get yourself thinking about the draft. While the first two weeks of the White Sox season have offered some promise of another high draft pick, amateur scouting director Nick Hostetler is less than two months from picking fourth overall in the 2018 draft. Hostetler took a brief break from scouting in California to talk to The Athletic about draft strategy, the depth of talent available and what's in his blood.

Some of Hostetler's answers have been edited for length.

James Fegan: Are you excited? Is there some sort of extra juice in having the highest pick you've had since becoming scouting director?

Nick Hostetler: A little bit. I think the anticipation of the year getting started, at that point I was probably a little bit more excited about it that that point, January, around that time.

You're sitting here at this point on April 15. I'm thinking to myself, man, where are we at with this? Who do we need to circle back on, who do we need to get more looks at, stuff like that. Then you have to pump the breaks a little and realize you still have a month and a half left to process all this. I'm excited about it like any draft, but definitely where we're at and what we're doing with the rebuild, picking this high, there's a little bit more emphasis on it.

JF: Kenny Williams says you have the worst job in the world...

Hostetler: [Laughs] Some days I'll agree with him on that one.

JF: But he also said that scouting is in your blood at this point and you can't help it.

Hostetler: It's funny. I'll say this and I'll be perfectly frank with you on this. I left the Monday after Easter and the next day I'm going to see my wife and kids is going to probably be the 29th of April. That part of it I don't like. That part is difficult. It's hard. My son had his first soccer game yesterday, missed his school stuff, missed the daddy-daughter dance Friday night with my 13-year-old. That stuff is hard.

When it comes to baseball, when it comes to scouting, it's great. It's in my blood. It's why I started this. It's why I worked for \$5,000 back in 2001 with the Braves just to hopefully one day have an opportunity to run a staff of my own. It's in my blood, I don't see it ever getting out of my blood. I think once you become a scout and an evaluator, as crazy as it sounds, I think once you do it once, it's ingrained in you. While there are parts of it I don't wish upon anybody, there are other parts of it where there are millions of people who would love to have the job that I have, so I feel lucky and blessed to have it.

JF: Does picking at No. 4 narrow the focus for what scenarios you have to prepare for?

Hostetler: Yeah. The one thing I learned the last two years picking in the same spot, kind of that 10 and 11 spot is you have to stay ready for kids falling that maybe you thought would be gone, and then also the opportunity to possibly cut a deal and give yourself some financial flexibility at the back end.

I think last year at this time we were probably in the 20-25 range of players. Right now as we talk today we're somewhere between eight and nine players that are still in the mix for what we're doing, that we're circling back on, and that the front office is going out and seeing as well.

It does give us a little bit better chance to focus in on the player, get more looks and right at the last week of April, will be probably the last time I'm running around seeing some lower guys. It's going to be all hands on deck at that point on pick No. 4 to make sure I get as many looks as I can.

JF: Do you worry less about getting your target sniped away from you?

Hostetler: A little bit, yeah. In the perfect world I hope we have four guys that we love, then we know that we're getting one of them. The biggest fear I have right now is that we go into this and say, 'Well, I really only love two or three of them,' then you're hoping and praying that one of them gets to you.

I will say of the eight or nine guys we're considering right now, I'd be very happy with any of those guys at No. 4 right now. They all have tools and talent that I think can really help this organization continue the momentum that we have in our system.

JF: Is there a possibility to get your top guy on the board?

Hostetler: There's a chance, yeah. One thing we've seen over the past couple of years once MLB put in the slotting system, that a lot of teams value the financial flexibility as much as they do the actual player. There's a chance we could see a guy that goes one, two or three that frankly we may not have had in our mix because that team just felt that he gave them more financial flexibility.

If you look at the [Carlos] Correa situation, obviously worked out with the best of both worlds for Houston. They got a superstar on top of some financial flexibility. You look at guys like Royce Lewis going No. 1, he was rumored to be up there and a lot of teams liked him as we did, at the same time, there were options there. We think this draft has options for clubs at No. 1, 2 and 3, so that does give us an opportunity to get our No. 1 guy.

The White Sox's first-round pick in 2014, Carlos Rodon, is currently on the 60-day DL as he recovers from shoulder surgery. (Photo by Quinn Harris/Icon Sportswire via Getty Images)

JF: You guys went overslot for Carlos Rodón a couple years ago, does that possibility re-emerge here with the kind of caliber of talent you can get at No. 4?

Hostetler: I don't want to say we'll ever shut our door on any opportunity to acquire a talent that we feel is impactful, but at the same time, I think a precedent has really been set here in the last couple of years, of what those picks pay, the type of player that gets paid there.

One thing that I'm lucky that I have that really makes my job easier going forward is that Jeremy [Haber] and Rick [Hahn] really handle all of the first-round picks as far as the negotiating part of it. I've maybe handled one and that one was a layup. Those two handle the rest of it, they get the financials locked down. I don't want to shut the door on anything but I highly doubt that we would ever go to a point where we're going over for a pick at pick No. 4.

JF: You've mentioned the front office getting involved with scouting, and I know Kenny gets out there, but with this high of a pick, is this a situation where Rick and Jeremy and everyone else goes out and gets looks at targets?

Hostetler: Yeah, Rick, Jeremy, Kenny will get out. Jim Thome is going to go out and see some players for us. Even [Chris Getz] and I were talking yesterday about him possibly mixing in when Kannapolis is somewhere or Winston-Salem, or something like that, where Getzy could see a player or two.

Some scouting directors have scoffed at that. They don't like the office input from it. Me personally, I like it. I want those guys to be able to see what I'm seeing. I want them to also see how difficult this is, just from a week-to-week standpoint, the difference in players, this year especially, has really been eye-opening. It's good for those guys to see how hard it is to do what we do when we're watching these 18-to-

21-year-olds. At the same time, I love to get their input because they are seeing major league games every single day, while my staff, the amateur staff, isn't.

JF: Looking for sympathy?

Hostetler: A little bit [laughs]. A little bit! I wouldn't mind a little bit of sympathy every now and then for some of the ones that don't work.

JF: The depth of this draft field has been touted for a while, but what do you like about it?

Hostetler: There's a really decent amount of college pitching. High school pitching, there's a ton of it. I was counting down the other day with our supervisors the amount of high school pitchers there are in this draft. That depth is there. Coming into the year I was asked the question about the lack of college position players and I think I made the comment that by the end of this, there will be college position players up there in the top 10, and as we see right now, there's about four or five college position players being rumored to be in the top 10. That's just is kind of how this draft works.

Rick Hahn, along with Kenny Williams, Chris Getz and Jim Thome will also go out to get looks at potential draft prospects. (AP Photo/Carlos Osorio)

JF: Rick Hahn enjoys recalling all the times the Sox have bucked expectations or done something people say they wouldn't...is having No. 4 put the Sox in a position to go back to take a high school talent or do something unexpected?

Hostetler: I never want to say never in this situation. We have in the past, if you want to look at our draft history, even if you want to go to the Chris Sale pick, that was kind of a little bit out there from where people thought things were going. We haven't shut the door on anything at this point.

But I'll say the other thing: we're not going to get cute. There's no reason to sit here and go away from stuff that has worked, but at the same time you've got to evaluate each player as that, just in a vacuum. Look at that player, try to grade him out and his fit for your system as well. There are things, whether it be some of these outfielders that we have at Winston-Salem, Kannapolis and even at Birmingham, that does jam it up for us with a high school or a college outfielder.

That stuff we need to look at, and there's different parts to this, but ultimately at the end of the day — and I've talked to Rick and Kenny about this just as much as this week — where they have just said over and over, 'We're taking the best guy.'

JF: Do you think about that kind of stuff, like how crowded Winston-Salem's outfield is, when you're picking?

Hostetler: Not early. As a matter of fact, it won't even cross my mind when I'm making the picks. And when I say early, I mean rounds one through 10. Once we cross the 10th round and we start filling the clubs, yeah, more or less that's Getzy standing next to me saying 'We don't need this' or 'We don't need that' or I'll say 'Hey we've got a toolsy outfielder who could go to Kannapolis, is he going to get at-bats?' Things like that. Him and I work hand-in-hand really after the 10th round to try to fill our clubs and get the best prospect at the same time.

There isn't much that I'm thinking about when we're making those picks one through 10, I'm so tunnel vision with what we're doing that guys laugh at me because I don't even know what's going on around me.

JF: You've spoken before about the team getting away from guys you have to dream on in terms of their level of polish. After two drafts are there any sort of profiles you're drifting away from or toward?

Hostetler: That's funny because I've been asked a little bit because of the way we've drafted the last two years if that's my belief or that's my philosophy; it's more of an organization thing. You can have your own individual biases, and as a scouting director, they do affect some of the things that you do but overall, my main job is to take the players that fit best with what our organizational philosophy is from an offensive and a pitching standpoint.

There does come a point in time where you can start to take a little bit more risk with guys once you have some depth in your system. There are times for that. We're always going to weigh both sides of it but at the same time, yeah, personally I would love to get some guys that have a bit more ceiling and take a run from it. I remember where I started with the Braves where that's all we took. One of the main jobs that I have is executing Rick's vision of what our system and organization needs to be.

JF: You've spoken in the past about giving room to analytics affecting your assessments; does that show up in a way beyond just giving more weight to college statistical performance?

Hostetler: The very simple way is to say you try to marry the two, make the two work together. It's hard to do. Some teams have computer systems that do that. Our computer system is in my head. I do try to use what information that the analytics team gives me and try to look at every angle of it. We'll break it down to a point where we'll even look, 'Ok, why is he here? What adjustments does it look like he made? Ok the guy has shown more power last year, why is that?' We'll reference our scouting reports, we'll call up our scouts and ask them at that point, 'Have you seen a swing change? A pitcher is throwing more strikes, have you see a mechanical change?'

So we'll break it down year-by-year, sometimes we'll do it in-season by doing half a season. There are some thing we do in that end more than just looking at the final college line and saying, 'Hey this is what it says, this is what the analytics say and boom, that's what it is.'

2014 second-round pick Spencer Adams is in his second season at Double-A Birmingham, where he posted a 4.42 ERA in 26 starts in 2017. (Photo by Ron Vesely/MLB Photos via Getty Images)

JF: Do we overlook the value of the second-round pick in this draft for you? When you picked third in 2014, the Sox got Spencer Adams, who had first-round grades on him. Do you expect to get someone you have a first-round grade on with that pick?

Hostetler: Yeah, yeah we absolutely do. We pick fourth every round. I think in the third round we even pick third, because I think Philly lost their pick in the [Jake] Arrieta signing.

The second-round pick is just as important as our first-round pick from an impact standpoint. The grades that we're going to have on that player...we had first-round grades on Gavin Sheets last year, there were two scouts that did. Especially with as deep as this draft is, I 100 percent expect that we're going to get what we feel is a first-round talent in the second round. I don't want to go out crazy and say some crazy stuff, but even our third-round pick, we're going to get a very talented kid. This is an extremely, extremely deep draft this year.

JF: You've mentioned the college relief scout the White Sox have; when I mention that to other scouts in other organizations, they've been surprised at that or turn their noses up at it. What do you feel the conventional thinking is missing out on that this coverage gives you?

Hostetler: Like in a lot of things with scouts, scouts are one, extremely opinionated, and two, there's a lot of ego in scouting. There's a lot of guys you'll never hear admit when they're wrong. We don't feel like we have room for those guys.

One of the things that we looked back on was the fact that the amount of money that these big league relievers are getting, a lot of these colleges are starting to use their bullpens very similar to big leagues. Florida does it, Louisville does it. These bigger programs, they use their bullpens like a major league

manager would. We look at that and thought to ourselves, 'Why not have a guy evaluate just that? Compare all of these relievers.'

And teams do this, they have a pitching crosschecker, they have a hitting crosschecker. This is no different than that. This is just taking a group in a certain demographic and having one guy strictly evaluate that group, put that group in the order he feels is best. And we'll have other scouts that obviously will see those players because they're either going to see that player or they're seeing somebody else playing, but all of that is very similar in the evaluation process. It's an added look and it's somebody who's going to be able for me to tell when we get into whatever round and I'm comparing three guys that happened to be all relievers, 'You tell me which one is best, I may not have seen them all.'

It's no different from a hitting crosschecker, pitching crosschecker, anything like that, it's just a specialized area.

JF: Is Dane Dunning an example of someone who might have gotten undervalued for working out of the bullpen?

Hostetler: The only scouting way to go was that if they're in the bullpen, there's probably a reason for it. The college coach is telling us everything we need to know, there's a reason for it. No, the college coach might just be telling you he wants that guy to throw two games per series and lock down those games. There's guys where we see the ability they might have to start.

Now Lincoln Hensman is a perfect example. He's a guy that we felt was going to be a starter. Our college relief crosschecker saw him and said, 'Yeah I believe this guy can start.' We sent him out and the first couple starts have been really good for Lincoln. So those types of things are what we're trying to look for. We're not just going into it and saying to ourselves, 'Let's go for the guy who throws the hardest and give me the guy that pitches the ninth inning,' we're trying to look for little things that make us say we can stretch this guy out.

Or what if that kid, Dane Dunning, let's say, what if we went to a school other than Florida that didn't have the wealth of pitching? He probably would have been their Friday night starter. So those are the types of things we have our relief pitching crosschecker focus on and mostly it's been very helpful.

JF: I know you pay close attention to your guys in the organization; how difficult has it been to watch both Zack [Burdick] and Jake [Burger] go down with major injuries?

Hostetler: It's been hard. The human element comes into it. Unfortunately I was there when it happened to Jake and I can't even describe the sinking feeling my stomach I had. Rick and Jeremy and Kenny will tell you they were around me when it happened. I probably turned as white as a ghost and I actually walked down in the clubhouse to see him. That was hard. I say it a lot but these guys are like my children. You're interested in them, you care about them. Not only from a professional standpoint but you do care about the person. To see a 21-year-old kid that his whole life has worked for something, and then have that time on that stage and that happened, it's hard.

The same thing with Zack. I've been extremely encouraged reading our health reports on him that come out. He's throwing, he's rehabbing, things have been great. It was great seeing him in spring training. But when it happens, you have that helpless feeling and it's hard, and it really, really does take a toll on you. Actually when it happened with Jake, Garrett Guest, our midwest guy, he called me and said, 'Hey look I'm going to send a message out to the rest of the guys to kind of give you the day to be alone.' And that helps, those things help because I didn't really feel like talking to anyone at the time. It was difficult but it does seem like both of their rehabs are going really well.

JF: To pick you back up, most importantly is your draft day playlist coming together yet?

Hostetler: It's coming together well. It's coming together really well. My 13-year-old daughter is starting to send me some of her music. I'm not so sure that I'm on the same musical wavelength Kayla is so I'm not

sure I'm going to be using her advice just yet. But it's coming well. I was actually thinking about it the other day. I'm kind of ready to get in there and start hashing out these players and talking with our guys and making sure we're getting everything lined up, and then take my little hour sabbatical from the room and listen to some music and get after it.