



WHITE SOX HEADLINES OF APRIL 7, 2018

"Hard-hitting White Sox off to historic slugging start"... Mike Petriello, MLB.com

"Time changed for Rays-White Sox on Monday"... Bill Chastain, MLB.com

"Inbox: How high is the ceiling for Giolito?"... Scott Merkin, MLB.com

"Daily White Sox prospects update: Dane Dunning strikes out eight in opener".... Vinnie Duber, NBC Sports Chicago

"Dealing with raised expectations also part of White Sox learning process"...Paul Sullivan, Chicago Tribune

"White Sox change game time Monday to 1:10 p.m."... Daryl Van Schouwen, Chicago Sun Times

"Three up, three down: A mix of early good, not so good for White Sox"... Daryl Van Schouwen, Chicago Sun Times

Hard-hitting White Sox off to historic slugging start

By Mike Petriello / MLB.com/ April 6, 2018

The 2018 White Sox are in what's well-understood to be something of a rebuilding year, but there's also an expectation that the hard work of the teardown is done. Many of the best young prospects acquired in recent trades are in the big leagues, and more are on the way. That's especially true on offense, where the Sox currently have the youngest lineup in the American League, averaging 26.9 years old.

They also have the most powerful offense in baseball, at least so far. While pretty much every early-April article has to be loaded with reasonable caveats about small sample size and not projecting it out for the entire season ahead, that doesn't mean you can't at least take a look at what's happened. What's happened, so far, is a ton of crushed baseballs -- in ways we've rarely seen over the last few years.

It's been so overwhelming that really, the best way to do this is to simply list all the things the White Sox rank well in on offense. Get a coffee. There's a lot.

They're first in slugging, at .538, with three players in the Top 20 and four in the Top 30. Last year, they were 22nd, at .417. Actually, saying they lead the Majors in slugging undersells it a little. Between 1908 and 2017, there were 2,370 team seasons. Only 40 of those team seasons, or about one percent, had a higher slugging percentage through six games (excluding strike years). Of those 40 great slugging starts, 26 ended up with winning seasons (65 percent), and 10 ended up in the World Series. It doesn't guarantee success, but it's sure a good sign.

They're first in home runs, with 14. (Last year, they were 24th.) The Royals, by comparison, have 12 runs. Not home runs. Runs. (They've played just four games, to be fair.)

They lead baseball in exit velocity (92.9 MPH, where the league average is 88.2 MPH) by just an enormous amount. They're the only team with a hard-hit rate above 50 percent (51.7 percent). That makes them first. They have 25 barrels, the perfect combination of exit velocity and launch angle, at a time when no other team has more than 20.

In the first week of 2017, White Sox batters have been hitting harder than any other club.

As you'd expect, they have five of the top 24 qualified hitters in exit velocity, including two of the top three.

2018 Hitting Exit Velocity Leaders, Min 10 balls in play

98.2 MPH -- Jose Abreu, White Sox
97.9 MPH -- Miguel Sano, Twins
97.8 MPH -- Yoan Moncada, White Sox
97.4 MPH -- Jason Heyward, Cubs
97.1 MPH -- Christian Yelich, Brewers

They have four of the 10 longest home runs of the season, including the longest home run that Statcast™ has ever tracked by a White Sox player, Avisail Garcia's 481-ft blast in Toronto. They also have the second-longest average team home run distance in the game.

Now, as you are almost certainly pointing out: It's April 6. It's so, so early. It's unlikely that this team is going to be baseball's hardest-hitting crew all year. If this was a random six-game stretch in mid-August rather than to kick off the year, no one would have ever noticed, right? Maybe. Maybe not.

The thing is, there's a way around that. We can look back at every rolling six-game stretch of every team since the start of 2015, when Statcast™ came online. We're talking about just over 14,000 different six-game spans, all told. In all of those many, many thousands of six-packs, the 2018 White Sox hard-hit rate is second.

Highest team hard-hit rate, six-game stretches, 2015-18

52.3 percent -- 2015 Indians (Sept. 22 - Sept. 27)
51.7 percent -- 2018 White Sox (March 29 - April 5)
51.3 percent -- 2015 Indians (Sept. 20 - Sept. 26)
49.6 percent -- 2016 Blue Jays (Apr. 29 - May 4)
49.4 percent -- 2016 Mariners (Sept. 6 - Sept. 11)
(Of 14,171 six-game stretches)

So it's not just about being at the start of the season, though that certainly helps; this is a stretch that stands out no matter when it happens. Those other teams were good, too, or about to be. Those late-season 2015 Indians had called up Francisco Lindor and would head to the World Series the next year. The 2016 Blue Jays ended up winning 102 games. The 2016 Mariners were 86-76 and in the race until the end.

They stand out, really, no matter how you look at it. Don't like rolling six-game stretches? How about first week (defined as "seven days") in a season? In this year's first week, the White Sox had a 99.9 MPH average exit velocity on line drives and fly balls -- you know, the kind of balls where exit velocity matters the most. It's not just the best in 2018; it's the best of any week since 2015.

These are the same White Sox who outscored only seven other teams last year... except in a lot of ways, they aren't. Last year's Opening Day lineup included Tyler Saladino, Cody Asche, Melky Cabrera, and Todd Frazier. Omar Narvaez was the primary catcher. Some of those names are still around, but they're not focal points.

Instead, shortstop Tim Anderson (24 years old), who upped his slugging percentage from .369 in the first half last year to .440 in the second half, is off to a .304/.385/.696 start -- even if it's still notable when he draws a walk. The reliable Abreu is off to a great start. Matt Davidson, still just 27, smashed three homers on Opening Day and has a .909 slugging percentage. So are Yolmer Sanchez (.800 slugging) and Welington Castillo (.500), even if Yoan Moncada is off to a slow start and Nicky Delmonico hasn't yet repeated his 2017 heroics.

It's young talent, and it's small samples, and it's also strong plate discipline. Only one team, has seen fewer pitches in the strike zone than Chicago has, but also only one team has put a swing on a higher percentage of pitches in the zone. Find strikes, and crush them.

This won't last like this, because it can't. A group this young is going to have ups and downs. But in the early part of the 2018 season, the young White Sox are showing a bit of the promise of the future. They're crushing baseballs, even while waiting on the arrival of Eloy Jimenez. They're giving South Side fans hope. So far, so good.

Time changed for Rays-White Sox on Monday

By Bill Chastain /MLB.com / April 6, 2018

Monday's Rays-White Sox game in Chicago has been moved from an 8:10 p.m. ET/7:10 p.m. CT start to 2:10 p.m./1:10 p.m. start because of anticipated cold weather.

The White Sox announced that fans holding used or unused tickets and parking coupons for the game on Monday can redeem those tickets and coupons for a comparable ticket to any future White Sox game, excluding the Cubs series, and based on availability. Tickets to the Monday game can be redeemed at the Guaranteed Rate Field box office beginning at 10 a.m. CT on Tuesday.

In Chicago, WGN-TV, WGN Radio AM-720 and WRTO-AM 1200/Univision Radio will broadcast Monday's game vs. the Rays.

In the Tampa Bay market, the game will still be broadcast live on FOX Sports Sun, WDAE 620 AM and 95.3 FM. WGES 680 AM (Spanish) will no longer carry the game.

Inbox: How high is the ceiling for Giolito?

By Scott Merkin /MLB.com/ April 6, 2018

CHICAGO -- Let's take a look at some White Sox questions after one week of the 2018 season.

Can Lucas Giolito be even better than Chris Sale when it's said and done for the South Siders?
-- David, Oak Park, Ill., @WritingDavid

Giolito should be allowed to become the best version of himself and make a full year's worth of starts before comparisons begin with one of the best pitchers in the game. Giolito certainly seems to have turned a corner, something White Sox pitching coach Don Cooper has noticed since Giolito arrived in the Majors last season.

"The mental guy was choking the physical guy and not letting the physical guy have his best attributes come out to play," Cooper said. "Now it's just about pitching."

Will the White Sox be legitimate players for big-time free agents this offseason?
-- Daniel, Lansing, Ill., @LittleCheddars

I'm not predicting who they go after or who they get, but that next step makes sense with the development stage of the rebuild this year. The White Sox should have a better idea of where they will need to supplement the young talent in order to move closer to finishing the rebuild.

What position will the White Sox look to fill in the 2018 Draft and in free agency in the offseason?
-- Eddie, Houston, @JH_Santiago21

It's too early to say on free agency, being one week into the 2018 season. As far as Draft, the strategy is to go with the tried but true best player available and of course manage the bonus pool money in what is

considered by the White Sox a deep Draft. But director of amateur scouting Nick Hostetler certainly is in contact with general manager Rick Hahn in terms of player need as the Draft progresses.

Will Yolmer Sanchez be the primary third baseman or will Matt Davidson play at the position? What date can we bring up Michael Kopech and Eloy Jimenez and retain their rights longer? Can we win 85 games this season?

-- Michael, Lake in the Hills, Ill., @Michaeltennis16

Sanchez will be the primary third baseman, but Davidson will get games at third and first. Both are off to great starts. Kopech and Jimenez will reach the Majors when they've checked off all the Minor League challenges, much like Giolito, Yoan Moncada and Reynaldo Lopez last year. And as I wrote after the opener, there are concrete reasons to believe this team can be better than expected.

Do you think that the White Sox are done trading away impact players or do you think there is more to come?

-- Henry, Lockport, Ill., @henryfcichowski

Hahn mentioned talent acquisition will slow over the course of the next six months. But the White Sox still do have some accomplished veteran players who can bring back prospect returns if they decide to go in that direction.

Where do you see Blake Rutherford fitting into the rebuild? With Luis Robert and Jimenez looking like the top outfield prospects along with Avisail Garcia and Nicky Delmonico filling the third spot, do you see Rutherford as a prospect who could be flipped down the road?

-- Billy, Schererville, Ind., @b_hinton1322

Some of these prospects will end up not making it or included as parts of bigger trades, much like the ones bringing some of them to the White Sox. It's part of the rebuild process.

That fact makes this development period of the rebuild mentioned above so important. Rutherford struggled in his first year with the White Sox and has not hit for much power, but at 20 years old, he has plenty of time to grow. His confidence is there.

Dealing with raised expectations also part of White Sox learning process

By Paul Sullivan /Chicago Tribune / April 6, 2018

ours before the bullpen implosion on Snow Day at White Sox Park, general manager Rick Hahn was discussing the need to balance the long-term goal of developing prospects with the daily goal of winning ballgames.

Because of those parallel tracks, the Sox basically are asking their fans to watch a game differently, taking satisfaction wherever they can whether the team wins or loses.

"There are going to be signs of encouragement for the future," Hahn said. "There are going to be signs of progress. Whether it's (Tim Anderson) or (Lucas) Giolito or (Reynaldo) Lopez, (Yoan) Moncada or any of the other young guys who are establishing themselves for the future, there are going to be small victories along the way."

There also are going to be days like Thursday, when closer Joakim Soria coughed up a three-run lead with two outs in the ninth and the Tigers won 9-7 in 10 innings.

It was a gut punch for this young bunch, especially coming in the home opener before a festive crowd that seemed to relish the snow flurries, at least until the game turned into an old-fashioned nightmare.

The Sox may be in rebuild mode, but if you believe the messages from Hahn and manager Rick Renteria, they're not trying to lose 90 to 100 games to get a higher draft pick in 2019. That thinking is so 2017.

Competing is part of the process in Year 2, so tough losses are tough losses, rebuild or not.

As has been written extensively, Hahn already has collected an impressive arsenal of young talent. The Sox have the No. 4 pick in this year's draft. And they potentially could flip Avisail Garcia and Jose Abreu at the trade deadline for a half-dozen more prospects.

There is no need to tank.

So let's assume they're trying to win on a daily basis, while also accepting some of the struggles normally associated with trying to succeed while developing youth.

Is it OK then to question any of the decision-making, such as choosing Soria over Nate Jones as closer or making Matt Davidson the designated hitter instead of Abreu?

It's tricky when covering a rebuild, especially one in which the manager refuses to address the word in public.

"I have nothing else to compare it to other than my previous experience, but we're being as honest as we possibly can be with everybody in terms of where we're at," Renteria said. "I think the players don't see themselves in (a rebuild). They won't even use the word."

Renteria said he doesn't use the "r-word" either.

"No, because these guys are going out there trying to win a game, do their job every single day," he said. "So I don't use that word."

That's fine.

But if the Sox are not in a full rebuild, they need to put themselves in the best position to win every day. And that means Carson Fulmer needs to put together several consistent outings — not just one — to keep his spot in the rotation.

The Sox handed Fulmer a starting spot, despite a 5.79 ERA last year at Triple-A Charlotte, based on his performance over his final four starts with the Sox, in which he posted a 1.56 ERA. Fulmer had no real competition this spring, as Michael Kopech and Dylan Cease, who started Cactus League games, were slated for the minors.

But when Fulmer was battered around in a few spring starts, it added to the scrutiny over his place among the pitching core. Would he ever live up to his billing as the No. 8 pick in the 2015 draft? Would Kopech and Alec Hansen pass him by?

Last week in Kansas City, pitching coach Don Cooper railed — in "Cooperesque" fashion — at fans and media members expecting Fulmer to develop at a quicker pace.

"When he first came to the big leagues (in 2016), we put him in the bullpen," Cooper said. "He had a couple of good outings and a couple of lemons. But everybody was writing Carson Fulmer off: 'Can he do this? Can't do this, can't do that.' All of that negative crap.

"Then he had a start against Minnesota and couldn't get out of the first. 'Oh, Carson can't do this and can't do that. He sucks.' After one freaking outing. Come on. That's not even fair to anybody.

"Then he had some really good starts for us. So again, (we're) looking to pick up where we left off with him. But to write a guy off after a couple (of starts), you have to have a little patience. I'm not patient for a

lot of things in life, but with pitching I find myself more patient because it doesn't happen overnight. It's a process."

While embellishing the number of detractors, Cooper was correct about the need for patience. But Fulmer is 24, went to Vanderbilt and is smart enough to understand the way this works.

Every top draft pick has added pressure on him. That's why they get bigger bonuses. Javier Baez endured the same criticism when he struck out 95 times in 213 at-bats as a rookie in 2014, and now he's one of the Cubs' most popular players.

Fulmer and the other young Sox players will go through some growing pains, and they're learning how to handle the heat at the same time.

It's all part of the process of a ... uh, well, you know the word.

Monday time change: The opener of a three-game series with the Rays on Monday at Guaranteed Rate Field has been moved up to 1:10 p.m. from 7:10 p.m. because of cold weather in the forecast.

White Sox change game time Monday to 1:10 p.m.

By Daryl Van Schouwen/Chicago Sun Times / April 6, 2018

Anticipating cold weather, the White Sox moved the start time for their game against the Rays on Monday from the evening to the afternoon.

Originally scheduled for 7:10 p.m., the game will now begin at 1:10. Parking lots will open to the general public at 11 a.m., and gates to the ballpark will open at noon. Monday's forecast looks bleak, with a high of 39 and a chance of snow and rain.

Beginning at 10 a.m. Tuesday, fans holding used or unused tickets and parking coupons for the game can redeem them at the Guaranteed Rate Field box office for a comparable ticket to any future Sox game, excluding the Cubs series, depending upon ticket availability.

Three up, three down: A mix of early good, not so good for White Sox

By Daryl Van Schouwen/ Chicago Sun Times / April 6, 2018

As the 3-3 White Sox thaw out after a harsh 9-7 loss to the Tigers in 10 innings Thursday in their home opener, let's split their half-dozen games this season in half with a three-up, three-down overview.

To review, the Sox opened the season with two wins against the Royals in Kansas City, lost two of the next three to the Blue Jays in Toronto and were on the cusp of a nice 4-2 start before blowing a four-run lead against the Tigers.

Three up

1. The Sox are scoring runs. Through Thursday, they were first in the majors in homers with 2.33 per game and second in runs with 6.0 per game.

Tim Anderson (rights) puts his arm around Yoan Moncada during a pitching change during a game against the Blue Jays Tuesday. (Tom Szczerbowski/Getty Images)

The key factors?

- Tim Anderson (an explosive 1.080 OPS with three walks after he drew 13 all last season).
- Matt Davidson (in the cleanup spot with a 1.354 OPS, four homers, eight RBI, nine runs, four walks after he drew 19 last year).
- Yolmer Sanchez (1.300 OPS, .400 batting average, seven RBI).
- Jose Abreu (.320 batting average, .970 OPS, two homers).
- Avisail Garcia (team-high nine hits, including the longest Sox homer — 481 feet — since Statcast began measuring in 2015).

2. It's early, but in spring training, Anderson looked like a player ready to have a breakout season, and he raised it another notch in the first six games with three homers, a 4-for-4 effort in stolen bases and seven runs scored. He's still striking out a lot (nine), but the walks are a healthy sign.

3. This season is about development, and the starting rotation gets a collective passing grade for its first time through. Lucas Giolito was acceptable, Reynaldo Lopez very good and Carson Fulmer encouraging. Against the Royals, Giolito battled through four walks to log a quality six-inning start by the definition of the stat, despite being "out of sync" and not having his best stuff. Lopez and Fulmer both had their good stuff for the Jays, with Lopez allowing a run and two hits and striking out six and Fulmer leaving in the sixth inning with a 3-1 lead and five strikeouts against one walk.

Three down

1. The bullpen has been bad, with 20 runs allowed in 20 innings. The only reliever who hasn't allowed a run is lefty Aaron Bummer, who might be the only one in the long-term picture.

2. Yoan Moncada hit a 433-foot homer against the Royals but only has three other hits (and four walks) in 30 plate appearances as the leadoff man. He has a .154 average and 11 strikeouts, including four in an 0-for-6 game against the Tigers. Before you jump off a cliff, keep in mind that Moncada's performance in 2017 trended upward late, he's embarking on his first full season at 21, and he's experiencing cold weather for the first time. Also, on the plus side, Moncada doesn't chase pitches out of the strike zone, and he has a good eye and considerable talent, which figures to win the day over time. But how he handles breaking pitches this year bears watching.

3. After leading the majors in errors in his first full season in 2017, Anderson has one error, plus two mishandled ground balls scored as hits, and was spared a throwing error on a routine throw when Abreu made a swipe tag. This is a key development year for the 24-year-old, and he knows the importance of his glove at a premium position. "It's going to get better," he said this week. "I trust in my work and trust what I do. I just have to keep working."

Getting better is what 2018 is all about. One hundred fifty-six games to go.