



WHITE SOX HEADLINES OF AUGUST 9, 2018

"Yoan seeking to regain comfort, aggressiveness" ... Scott Merkin, MLB.com

"Abreu a bright spot in finale loss to Yankees" ... Scott Merkin, MLB.com

"Wednesday's top prospect performers" ... Manny Randhawa, MLB.com

"Yoan Moncada snared Neil Walker's line drive, but the ball got stuck in his glove ... and wouldn't come out" ... Andrew Mearns, MLB.com

"Plan is for rebuild to close gap between White Sox and Yankees, who just swept their way out of Chicago" ... Vinnie Duber, NBC Sports Chicago

"Yes, Yoan Moncada is striking out a lot, but Rick Renteria sees a silver lining: 'In the long run, I think it's going to help him'" ... Vinnie Duber, NBC Sports Chicago

"An umpire pulled a moth out of his ear during the White Sox-Yankees game" ... NBC Sports Chicago

"Column: A White Sox rebuild question: Will Yoan Moncada ever learn how to learn at this level?" ... Steve Rosenbloom, Chicago Tribune

"Robbing home runs in consecutive games 'surreal' for Adam Engel" ... Phil Rogers, Chicago Tribune

"Yoan Moncada's slump drags on as Yankees sweep White Sox with 7-3 victory" ... Phil Rogers, Chicago Tribune

"Lucas Giolito roughed up early; Yankees complete sweep of White Sox" ... Daryl Van Schouwen, Sun-Times

"Renteria says it's time for White Sox' Yoan Moncada to be aggressive" ... Daryl Van Schouwen, Sun-Times

"Yankees defeat White Sox in 13 innings" ... Daryl Van Schouwen, Sun-Times

"Giolito hits another wall as Yankees sweep Chicago White Sox" ... Scot Gregor, Daily Herald

"Moncada's growing pains continue with Chicago White Sox" ... Scot Gregor, Daily Herald

"Even with a depleted bullpen, Rick Renteria doesn't mind making that long walk to the mound" ... James Fegan, The Athletic

"On pace to set MLB strikeout record, Yoán Moncada knows he has to adjust his approach" ... James Fegan, The Athletic

Yoan seeking to regain comfort, aggressiveness

By Scott Merkin / MLB.com / August 7, 2018

CHICAGO -- Second baseman Yoan Moncada entered Wednesday's series finale against the Yankees hitless in his last 16 at-bats and 1 for his last 25.

Seemed like a good time for a break, but manager Rick Renteria had Moncada back at the top of his lineup. Moncada went 1-for-4 in the 7-3 loss, his lone hit a single off New York starter Luis Severino.

"He hasn't expressed a desire nor a need [to rest]," Renteria said. "I'm sure we'll give him one, but he needs to keep going through this and experience it and see if he can battle through it a little bit."

"I'm not feeling as good as I was feeling probably a couple of weeks ago," said Moncada through interpreter Billy Russo. "I'm just trying to be more aggressive, especially with two strikes, try to defend a little better. I'm not feeling as good with my approach at home plate. That's probably one of the reasons that I've been striking out more than I want."

Moncada's strikeout total has reached a Major League-worst 163 to go with his .218 average. He has spoken to MLB.com about a 2019 goal of lowering his strikeout total, as well as a desire to be a bit more aggressive attacking within the zone while not losing his keen eye at the plate.

Moncada's even-keeled demeanor doesn't change in good times or bad, which will help him handle this downturn and others in the future. Presently, he's fighting to regain that comfortable fit at the plate.

"It's more like a feeling. I don't have that feeling right now. I have to keep working to regain that feeling again, to feel comfortable," he said. "There was a time a few weeks ago I was being aggressive, and I got good results. I lost that aggressiveness.

"Now that is what I'm fighting through. I'm trying to regain that aggressiveness again and to start producing at the level I know I can produce."

Reinsdorf makes special presentation

When the White Sox won the 2005 World Series, the entire grounds crew received watches. On Wednesday team chairman Jerry Reinsdorf presented one of those watches to Nevest Coleman, who returned to the team this season after being wrongly incarcerated for 23 years before DNA evidence exonerated him and led to his release on Dec. 1, 2017. Prior to his arrest, Coleman was a hard-working member of the grounds crew at what was then Comiskey Park.

"You should have been with us in 2005 when we won the World Series, but you were someplace else," Reinsdorf said. "Had you been here, there's something you would have gotten as a member of the grounds crew. So I wanted to give you that something right now. We don't want you to be cheated.

"That's something you should have had, and now you have it. Nice to have you back."

Sanchez takes part in National PLAY Campaign event

Third baseman Yolmer Sanchez joined the White Sox athletic training staff, the Ruderman Family Foundation, the Taylor Hooton Foundation and the Henry Schein Cares Foundation for the 2018 National PLAY Campaign's stop at Guaranteed Rate Field on Wednesday. The event was aimed at educating area youth about the importance of living a healthy and active lifestyle.

Created in 2004 by the Professional Baseball Athletic Trainers Society, the PLAY (Promoting a Lifetime of Activity for Youth) campaign was formed to raise awareness about children's health issues and the obesity epidemic in the United States.

Third to first

- Eloy Jimenez, the No. 1 White Sox prospect and No. 3 in all of baseball per MLB Pipeline, returned to Triple-A Charlotte's lineup on Wednesday and hit his ninth home run. He had missed two games due to flu-like symptoms.
- The White Sox will honor Jim Thome this Saturday for his induction into the National Baseball Hall of Fame. Fellow White Sox great Mark Buehrle will be among the guests attending the pregame ceremony

Abreu a bright spot in finale loss to Yankees

By Scott Merkin / MLB.com / August 8, 2018

CHICAGO -- Remember when Jose Abreu was hitting a pedestrian .250? It was just a few weeks ago, July 22 to be exact, but with his return to the norm, it's hard to even imagine those extended struggles.

With his double, single and walk in the White Sox 7-3 loss to the Yankees on Wednesday, Abreu raised his average to .269 and his OPS to .817. He picked up his 67th RBI with a run-scoring double in the first against

Luis Severino, giving him a viable opportunity for a fifth straight season with 100 RBIs to start his big league career. This work comes one night after Abreu knocked out his 20th home run, giving him five straight years with at least that many.

He looks different as a hitter and has a different feel at the plate compared with where he was one month ago.

"I feel completely different," said Abreu through interpreter Billy Russo after raising his average to .373 with 15 RBIs over his last 17 games. "I work hard just to try to overcome that rough moment that I was passing through. I have the support of a lot of people around me, and that's important.

"I learned a lot during that moment. I proved to myself right now that I'm able to overcome those situations, and now I'm just happy and I'm just trying to enjoy this moment. But at the same time, I'm trying to keep moving forward. I want to finish the season strong."

Abreu is getting these results despite not having ironclad support from the lineup. Yoan Moncada broke an 0-for-18 funk with a single in the fifth, and although Daniel Palka has hit 17 homers and Avisail Garcia has hit 13, there hasn't been a consistent presence in front of or behind Abreu all season. The question now is whether he will still be in the middle of that lineup when the White Sox rebuild moves into its contention phase.

Manager Rick Renteria isn't worried about a future slowdown for Abreu, who turned 31 on Jan. 29, and over whom the White Sox have contractual control through the 2019 season. Renteria also never had a doubt that Abreu would get things right offensively.

"No, because that wasn't a physical factor. It wasn't even an emotional or mental factor, it's just baseball," Renteria said. "He understood that he was going to come out of it. He just kept working. He did his routine the same.

"Everything was going along. He had some at-bats during the down time where he was actually hitting some balls well, not getting a whole lot out of it. And he had some at-bats where you could see he was chasing, trying to do too much, which is what occurs when you fall out of the zone a little bit. So he fell out of it a little longer than you might normally be seeing out of him the few years you've had him here. But there was no doubt that he was going to get out of it."

- Moncada catches liner, gets ball stuck in glove

Abreu couldn't do enough on Wednesday for the White Sox, who lost a third straight to the Yankees and dropped to 41-73. Starter Lucas Giolito was staked to a 2-0 lead in the first but gave up six runs in the second, a rally punctuated by Giancarlo Stanton's grand slam down the right-field line. Giolito worked through five innings and 103 pitches, allowing seven runs on six hits and three walks, with seven strikeouts.

"I've had a few outings similar to this one. It always sucks," Giolito said. "But I felt really good, physically, it was just one really bad inning. All I can do is flush it and move on to the next one. My body feels good, stuff feels really good. Just keep grinding."

- An umpire had a moth pulled out of his ear

MOMENT THAT MATTERED

Close, but not quite: The White Sox put two runners on with two outs against Chad Green in the eighth. Garcia worked the count full, with Nicky Delmonico waiting on deck as the potential tying run, but Garcia took a called third strike for the inning's final out. The pitch was close, but home-plate umpire Mike Estabrook had been calling the ball slightly up in the zone all game.

SOUND SMART

Giolito dropped to 3-5 with an 8.18 ERA over 12 starts at home this season.

HE SAID IT

"What matters the most is we are moving forward in this process of teaching the guys, developing the guys. We are on the right path. [We have to] keep grinding, keep learning and keep moving forward and push forward the new guys to try to do their best. We have a lot of talent, and I think it's going to be exciting to see this team play in the future." -- Abreu

UP NEXT

Lefty Carlos Rodon (3-3, 2.94) makes his 11th start of the season and fifth at home in the series opener against the Indians on Friday, with a first pitch of 7:10 p.m. CT at Guaranteed Rate Field. Shane Bieber gets the call for the American League Central leaders.

Wednesday's top prospect performers

By Manny Randhawa / MLB.com / August 8, 2018

Here's MLB Pipeline's roundup of the top prospect performances in the Minor Leagues on Wednesday.

It was a milestone moment in a monumental season for Vladimir Guerrero Jr., the No. 1 prospect in baseball according to MLB Pipeline, as the 19-year-old third baseman went 3-for-4 with a double and his first Triple-A home run in Buffalo's 6-1 victory over Gwinnett.

Guerrero has hit at every level in the Blue Jays system, and in eight games since his promotion to Triple-A, he's batting .455 (10-for-22) with two doubles and the home run he hit Wednesday. The son of newly-inducted Hall of Famer Vladimir Guerrero, he leads a very talented crop of prospects in Toronto's system, many of whom are sons of former big leaguers.

One of those prospects is Cavan Biggio, son of Hall of Famer Craig Biggio. The 23-year-old second baseman, ranked as Toronto's No. 9 prospect, launched a solo homer for his 24th of the season in Double-A New Hampshire's 13-6 loss to Bowie. Biggio is slashing .260/.403/.537 in 106 games this season.

Blue Jays No. 2 prospect Bo Bichette, son of former MLB outfielder Dante Bichette and the No. 9 prospect overall, added two singles in a 2-for-5 effort.

Other top prospect performances Wednesday

- White Sox top prospect and No. 3 overall in baseball, Eloy Jimenez, launched his 19th homer of the season, and ninth in 30 games with Triple-A Charlotte, during the club's rain-suspended game against Syracuse. Entering the game, he was hitting .376/.425/.679 since his promotion to Triple-A.

- A trio of Nationals prospects turned in strong performances Wednesday. No. 1 prospect Victor Robles (No. 5 overall) was 2-for-2 with a double and a steal in Triple-A Syracuse's rain-suspended game vs. Charlotte. Entering the contest, Robles was hitting .263 (15-for-57) with a double, homer and eight steals in 15 Triple-A games.

No. 3 prospect Luis Garcia -- the No. 92 overall prospect -- was 2-for-3 with a solo homer in Class A Advanced Potomac's 7-2 win over Frederick. The 18-year-old third baseman is eight for his last 13, and is hitting .322/.352/.470 with three homers in 27 games since being promoted to Potomac earlier this season.

And at Double-A Harrisburg, Daniel Johnson (Washington's No. 8 prospect) turned in a 2-for-4 performance with a solo homer in a 5-2 loss to Hartford. The 23-year-old center fielder is slashing .281/.341/.399 with 18 steals in 65 Double-A games.

- The Giants also had a trio of prospects with solid performances Wednesday. No. 11 prospect Heath Quinn went 2-for-4 with a three-run homer in Class A Advanced San Jose's 8-4 victory over Rancho Cucamonga. On the season, the left fielder is hitting .297/.378/.482 with 11 home runs in 75 games.

In the same game, Giants No. 24 prospect Jalen Miller was 3-for-4 with his 13th homer of the season, a solo shot in the seventh inning. The second baseman is slashing .276/.321/.445 in 104 games for San Jose this season.

San Francisco's No. 25 prospect, middle infielder Ryan Howard, went 3-for-4 with a double and a triple in Double-A Richmond's 5-1 win over Binghamton. Howard is hitting .272/.340/.389 in 93 games this season.

- Phillies No. 24 prospect Connor Seabold tossed seven strong innings during Double-A Reading's 6-1 victory over Akron, yielding one run on four hits, walking two and fanning eight. The 22-year-old right-hander has given up three runs in 18 innings over his past three outings (1.50 ERA) following a rough start to the year -- he had an 8.74 ERA as of July 20.

- A pair of Reds prospects shined Wednesday, as TJ Friedl (No. 15) went 2-for-4 with a solo homer for Double-A Pensacola, and Alfredo Rodriguez (No. 23) went 3-for-4 with a homer and four RBIs for Class A Advanced Daytona.

Since being promoted to Double-A, Friedl is slashing .292/.383/.392 in 44 games. Over his last four games, the 22-year-old left fielder is 6-for-16 (.375). Meanwhile, Rodriguez, a 24-year-old shortstop, is hitting .222/.288/.389 with two homers in 14 games since being promoted to Pensacola.

- Red Sox No. 28 prospect Pedro Castellanos had a big night for Class A Greenville, going 4-for-4 with his first homer of the season, a two-run shot in a 7-1 win over Columbia. Over his last eight games, the 20-year-old first baseman is batting .516 (16-for-31). On the season, he's slashing .300/.332/.387.

- Tigers No. 8 prospect Daz Cameron had a huge game for Double-A Erie, going 4-for-6 with three doubles and four RBIs in an 18-1 rout of Portland. The 21-year-old center fielder is slashing .316/.393/.523 with five homers and 12 steals in 46 Double-A games since his promotion from Class A Advanced Lakeland.

- Erik Swanson, the Yankees' No. 23 prospect, tossed seven scoreless innings in Triple-A Scranton/Wilkes-Barre's 1-0 loss to Norfolk. The right-hander gave up five hits, walked one and struck out seven. In 10 appearances (nine starts) at Triple-A this season, Swanson has a 4.41 ERA, though outside a rough start on Aug. 1, in which he surrendered six runs over 4 1/3 innings, his ERA is 3.62.

Yoan Moncada snared Neil Walker's line drive, but the ball got stuck in his glove ... and wouldn't come out

By Andrew Mearns / MLB.com / August 8, 2018

The White Sox were in a jam during the fifth inning of Wednesday night's game against the Yankees. Gleyber Torres and Miguel Andujar were on first and second with one out and Lucas Giolito was trying to work out of the threat.

Giolito's next pitch wound up in the middle of the plate and Neil Walker smoked it ... right at second baseman Yoan Moncada. It was a gift that looked like it could turn into an easy double play to escape the inning, as both runners were off their respective bags.

Unfortunately, Walker's smash was placed so well that Moncada couldn't get it out of his glove:

That was even after the play had effectively ended, as well. It took a full 10 seconds for Moncada to dislodge it.

The stroke of bad luck did not cost the White Sox, as Giolito retired Austin Romine to end the frame.

Teammates look out for each other.

Plan is for rebuild to close gap between White Sox and Yankees, who just swept their way out of Chicago

By Vinnie Duber / NBC Sports Chicago / August 8, 2018

The rebuilding White Sox, owners of baseball's third-worst record, haven't often looked across the diamond this season and seen a team in the same spot as they are.

In this week's sweep at the hands of the visiting New York Yankees, the gap between the developing team and the team competing for a world championship looked particularly big.

The South Siders believe they competed well with the Bronx Bombers, and in typical "Ricky's boys don't quit" fashion, no one was questioning the effort. Jose Abreu's game-tying homer in extra innings Tuesday was as big a "never give up, never surrender" moment as the team has had this season.

But the White Sox were outscored 18-6 in the three games.

Of course, there's a good reason the gap is as big as it is. The White Sox are in the process of developing a perennial contender, a process these Yankees underwent at a rapid pace in recent seasons. The so-called "Baby Bombers" are now one of baseball's best teams, powered by a new generation of home-grown heroes like Aaron Judge, Gleyber Torres, Luis Severino, Gary Sanchez and Miguel Andujar. And, in true Yankee fashion, that group has had its own superstar additions from outside the organization like Giancarlo Stanton and Aroldis Chapman.

The Yankees will always be a unique case, thanks to their championship history and big-budget ways, but that's a pretty good rebuilding template to follow. The White Sox are hoping to soon amass a similar list of talented players called up from the minors to power a championship-caliber club, meaning it could be just a matter of time until that gap is closed.

"They are a very good organization," Abreu said through a team translator after Wednesday's game. "They have a very good system. Right now, we have a very good system and have a lot of young guys just like them. It's a matter for us to wait for the right moment to all the effort and all the progress those guys are doing to come to fruition. We are going to be in a very good position as soon as that happens."

Every rebuild has its own story, so no one should expect the White Sox next couple years to be a carbon copy of what the Yankees — who underwent a sort of "soft rebuild" — or Cubs or Houston Astros have accomplished. But the end goal is the same for the White Sox as it was and remains for all those teams.

And so while the White Sox, 32 games below .500 after this series, don't have much to play for in terms of a place in the standings or a spot in the playoffs over the season's final month and a half, what will happen before fans' eyes is the development of some of the rebuild's biggest stars.

Bon Scott once sang it: It's a long way to the top if you want to rock n roll. The White Sox most definitely want to rock n roll, and that journey is an ongoing one that will continue to play out over the season's final 48 games.

"What matters the most is we are moving forward in this process of teaching the guys, developing the guys. We are on the right path," Abreu said. "It's just a matter to keep grinding, keep learning and to keep moving forward and push forward the new guys to try to do their best. We have a lot of talent, and I think it's going to be exciting to see this team play in the future."

That's the plan, for the White Sox to go from waiting for the future to watching it happen on a nightly basis. And once all these highly touted prospects — Eloy Jimenez, Michael Kopech, Dylan Cease, Luis Robert, Dane Dunning and the rest — reach the South Side, then this team can become the "Baby Pale Hose" and finally the annually contending White Sox.

Then a sweep at the hands of these Yankees will seem a lot less likely.

“The thing that they have to learn is that execution is really, really important,” manager Rick Renteria said. “We are of the mind that at some point in time we’re going to be on the same side of that coin as well in the near future, and we’re going to be able to compete.”

Yes, Yoan Moncada is striking out a lot, but Rick Renteria sees a silver lining: 'In the long run, I think it's going to help him'

By Vinnie Duber / NBC Sports Chicago / August 8, 2018

Box scores don't always tell the entire story, and there are parts of players' development that can be hard to see, even for those who watch on a daily basis.

One thing that has not escaped White Sox fans and observers: Yoan Moncada strikes out, and he strikes out a lot. The 23-year-old second baseman leads baseball in the category with a whopping 161 of them, putting him on pace to strike out 236 times this season, or 13 more than baseball's single-season record.

Moncada came in as one of the 2018 White Sox biggest faces after earning the title of No. 1 prospect in baseball last year, but it's important to remember that he's only in his first full season in the big leagues. He's not a finished product, and what he does as a 23-year-old in 2018 won't be what he does years down the line, when the White Sox rebuild is hoped to yield a perennial contender. All these strikeouts are almost certainly part of the developmental process for this young player.

But he's striking out a lot.

The White Sox are taking steps to try to cut down on the number of “Ks,” be they swinging or looking. It's the strikeouts looking that have generated the most attention, and the White Sox are asking Moncada to be more aggressive. It's a delicate balance, of course, because Moncada's eye and his understanding of the strike zone are part of what make him such a promising young player. But pitchers seem to be taking advantage of that, and their ability to paint the corners in two-strike counts have Moncada striking out looking often.

Lately, he's been striking out in big numbers, with five games with at least three strikeouts in his last eight.

Moncada, batting .114 since the All-Star break, knows he's in a slump.

“I think right now I'm not feeling as good as I was feeling probably a couple of weeks ago,” he said through a team translator Wednesday. “I'm just trying to be more aggressive, especially with two strikes, try to defend a little better, have more good at-bats. Right now I'm not feeling as good with my approach at home plate. That's probably one of the reasons that I've been striking out more than I want to.”

While White Sox fans, understandably, are looking at all these strikeouts and believing them to be a bad thing, manager Rick Renteria believes this is a stretch that will have positive effects on Moncada in the long term. This season is all about development, more so than it is about where the White Sox will finish in the standings. If growing pains come now for these young players, the lessons learned could pay off down the road. That's what Renteria — who's said on numerous occasions that he and the team would like Moncada to be more aggressive at the plate — is predicting for his second baseman.

“At some point you hit a point of frustration where you say, ‘Man, I have to pull the trigger on particular pitches.’ I think he's finally reached that point,” Renteria said after Moncada's four-strikeout night against the New York Yankees on Tuesday. “So now it's about getting over that and seeing himself defend and battle and put balls in play and fight pitches. He has a great eye on balls for everything in the zone. Now it's about battling tough pitches in certain situation.

“To be honest, this is good for him. He's going to start to understand there is another phase to hitting beyond having a good eye.”

Tuesday night, Renteria was asked if Moncada has been hesitant to change his approach from patient to aggressive, and the manager answered that Moncada has been. But Moncada is, at least in his comments to reporters, buying in to a more aggressive approach and even attributed a hot streak to close out the first half (a .356 batting average over the final 12 games prior to the All-Star break) to being more aggressive.

He said Wednesday he's got to get back to being more aggressive.

"There was a time a few weeks ago I was being aggressive and I got good results. I lost that aggressiveness," he said. "Now that is what I'm fighting through, to regain that aggressiveness again and to start producing at the level I know I can produce."

Moncada has certainly had his flashes of brilliance this season and has experienced stretches of the kind of success that generated huge preseason expectations in the first place. But the strikeouts have been glaring at times. Right now is one of those times.

Plenty of All-Star players have had their own early-career troubles with strikeouts and turned it around. Kris Bryant led baseball in strikeouts during his rookie season and has seen those numbers go down each year since. So suggesting that Moncada will have these issues for the remainder of his career is a stretch at this point.

Not that Moncada is hearing anyone outside the organization suggest that — or anything else.

"I don't focus on that," he said. "My focus is on the game. Just to come here and do my best. I don't know what people on the outside are saying."

Moncada's numbers so far this season have not been what fans expected after he arrived on the South Side with much fanfare last summer. He carried a .217/.300/.391 slash line into Wednesday's game. But the White Sox rebuilding effort has provided these young players, especially the ones already at the major league level, with plenty of time to develop into the kinds of players they'll be when the games mean a whole lot more, when championships are in reach.

Perhaps all these strikeouts are just a side effect of Moncada's personal development process.

"In the long run," Renteria said, "I think it's going to help him."

An umpire pulled a moth out of his ear during the White Sox-Yankees game

By NBC Sports Chicago / August 8, 2018

What you're about to see, you won't be able to unsee.

In the ninth inning of Wednesday night's White Sox-Yankees game at Guaranteed Rate Field, there was a brief delay as one of the umpires appeared to be dealing with an ear issue.

Turns out, there was a moth in his ear. A live one.

Check it out:

MY GOODNESS. Poor Bruce Dreckman

Column: A White Sox rebuild question: Will Yoan Moncada ever learn how to learn at this level?

By Steve Rosenbloom / Chicago Tribune / August 8, 2018

Amid a wave of criticism for continuing to play the deeply disappointing Yoan Moncada, White Sox manager Rick Renteria showed confidence in his young second baseman by batting him leadoff and saying he doesn't look like he needs a rest.

And Moncada promptly responded by following a four-strikeout game Tuesday that raised his dubious league lead to 161 with a game in which he struck out only twice.

Only.

Hey, everybody! Progress!

There's nothing wrong with playing Moncada at this level in a season the Sox gave away last year. There's everything wrong with his lack of improvement.

That's the only thing this season has been about: Individual improvement of players expected to be here if the Sox ever contend again. We hear about improvement all over the Sox farm system. We hear about it with pitchers Michael Kopech and Dylan Cease and outfielder Eloy Jimenez. Man, do we hear it about Jimenez.

But rarely do we hear it about Moncada. At the major-league level, where they play the best baseball, Moncada, the position-player jewel of the Chris Sale trade, has proved unreliable and sometimes sleepy in the field while showing almost no consistency at the plate.

Not to pick on the kid, but look, Moncada was the first hood ornament of hope the Sox brought to the majors as part of their rebuild. Fair or not, the organization put that label on Moncada. The care and feeding of a top-rated prospect, then, is on the organization. The prospect also must show he's worth it.

We knew progress wouldn't be linear, and it hasn't been. But progress has been hard to find when a guy shows improvement one month and goes bad for two. Hope is hard to grasp when a leadoff man gets some rest during the All-Star break and comes out of it with a .250 on-base percentage.

Young players regularly display inconsistency. Whatever Moncada calls "that feeling" has been elusive. He apparently hasn't learned how to be aggressive regularly and how to stack good at-bats. That's just to get started, because remember, if he ever lives up to the hype, teams will adjust, and then he'll have to learn how to deal with that.

Will Moncada ever learn how to learn at the major-league level? That's his job.

Can the Sox teach him? That's their job.

Moncada and the franchise have about seven weeks to show they understand that an important part of the foundation of the rebuild depends on it.

Sox center fielder Adam Engel made spectacular leaping catches above the fence to rob the Yankees of homers Monday and Tuesday, but if he was going to do it again Wednesday on Giancarlo Stanton's grand slam, Engel would've needed to be bartender in the Craft Kave.

Cubs manager Joe Maddon was optimistic after a simulated game in which Yu Darvish threw 33 pitches, or pretty much Jose Quintana's second inning.

Quintana with control problems against the miserable and embarrassing Royals followed by Tyler Chatwood. Why do the Cubs hate us?

Yeah, Cubs fans, Joe West calls balls and strikes as if nobody bought his country music CD, but Royals starter Heath Fillmyer didn't seem to have trouble getting outs.

Maybe it's just me, but getting shut out by the dreadful Royals is not the best way to begin a stretch against the Nationals, Brewers and Pirates, all of whom are over .500.

Said Anthony Rizzo: "It's a matter of staying focused, playing one game at a time and staying in that moment."

Who knows if this offense and starting staff can show any stinkin' consistency at the same time after losing three of seven to the dog-breath Padres and Royals, but Rizzo has made sure nobody in the bigs can match the Cubs' cliché game.

It appears the NHL hacked the NBA offices because the Christmas Day basketball schedule features some Eastern Conference games.

Email from Rob S.: "Riddle me this Bearsman: Can a GM with a 14-34 record who's now had 4 top 10 picks (2 as yet unproven, and 1 bust) REALLY afford to blow up his 4th top 10 pick with a contract stalemate? And be the ONLY nfl GM that can't get his pick signed in the process???"

Regarding Bears titular GM Ryan Pace, as Otter told Boon while Bluto was screaming about the Germans bombing Pearl Harbor in "Animal House," forget it, he's rolling.

What's up, Matt Stairs?

Robbing home runs in consecutive games 'surreal' for Adam Engel

By Phil Rogers / Chicago Tribune / August 8, 2018

Adam Engel feels touched by the baseball gods to have been able to rob Yankee hitters of home runs in consecutive games, as the White Sox center fielder did to Greg Bird on Monday and Kyle Higashioka on Tuesday at Guaranteed Rate Field.

"It just felt kind of surreal to do it again," said Engel, whose Twitter handle is ManofSteal_15. "I can't believe I had another opportunity to make another play like that. It was just a crazy coincidence it happened on back-to-back nights, but anytime you make a nice play for your pitcher it's always fun."

The two catches were almost identical, with the ball high above the center-field wall when Engel went up to get it.

"They came down at similar angles," he said. "I just had to jump up and bring (the ball) back. It was really kind of spooky how similar both of those plays were."

Reynaldo Lopez hadn't allowed a hit when Engel robbed Higashioka in the fifth inning.

"I just wanted to take off my glove and go out there and kiss him," Lopez said.

"He gave me a hug," Engel said, laughing.

Sweet dreams: When Lopez is on his game, as he was while holding the Yankees to one run in seven innings, he can be dominating. The right-hander is 4-9 with a 4.30 ERA, but his potential intrigues manager Rick Renteria.

"(He) started off right from the get-go," Renteria said. "I think he was hitting 98 (mph) out of the chute, good angle, was attacking the strike zone, was executing and did everything you ask of a guy that's going to be a top-end starter on a major-league club, on a championship team."

Extra innings: Eloy Jimenez returned to Triple-A Charlotte's lineup after missing two games with flu-like symptoms and hit a homer in his second at-bat. ... The Sox will miss Corey Kluber when the Indians are in town this weekend. They'll face Shane Bieber, Trevor Bauer and Carlos Carrasco. ... The Yankees entered Wednesday's game on pace for 259 homers, five short of the record set by the 1997 Mariners. It's possible that Engel's two thefts could keep them from breaking the record.

Yoan Moncada's slump drags on as Yankees sweep White Sox with 7-3 victory

By Phil Rogers / Chicago Tribune / August 8, 2018

Sometimes you just have to wear it.

Yoan Moncada is in that sad place in life, having lost the plot in his approach at the plate. Yet he carries himself in dignified fashion, making his slump easier to watch than if he were attacking Gatorade coolers and breaking bats over his knee.

It's how the White Sox roll. They were overmatched by the Yankees in three games at Guaranteed Rate Field but played hard and didn't get flustered by their plight in a 7-3 loss Wednesday night.

Giancarlo Stanton's grand slam off Lucas Giolito put the Yankees in control and Luis Severino took it from there as the Yankees completed the three-game sweep. In the second year of their rebuilding process, the Sox believe they'll grow into the team that can consistently defeat weaker opponents.

"We are of a mind that at some point in time we are going to be on the (right) side of that coin, we're going to be able to compete," Sox manager Rick Renteria said. "We battled. We may not have come out with any victories but we kept battling against these guys."

No one would have blinked if Renteria had given Moncada the night off, as he entered the game mired in a slump that has him on pace to break Mark Reynolds' major-league strikeout record of 223 in 2009.

But Renteria believes there is something to be learned from everything, including a 19-game, 9-for-74 slump with 33 strikeouts.

"You're probably looking at all his at-bats and thinking, 'He sure could use (a night off),' " Renteria said. "I've spoken to him many times, and he hasn't expressed a desire nor a need. ... It's more an opportunity for us to allow him to continue to experience and go through this process right now. In the long run, I think it's going to help him."

Moncada lined a 3-1 fastball from Severino for an opposite-field single in the fifth. Even though he was caught stealing to end the inning, it was at least a ray of daylight in his 1-for-4 night.

Moncada swung through a tight slider from Severino for a first-inning strikeout, then swung and missed a high two-strike fastball from Shane Greene in the eighth, raising his strikeout total to 163. He's on pace to finish with 232, which would top Reynolds' nine-year-old record by nine.

"Right now I'm not feeling as good with my approach at home plate," Moncada said before the game. "That's probably one of the reasons that I've been striking out more than I want to."

Moncada is searching for it, whatever it is.

"I can't just pick out one thing," he said. "It's more like a feeling. I don't have that feeling right now. I have to keep working to regain that feeling again, to feel comfortable."

Moncada admitted he'll be quicker to choke up on the bat and to try to fight off tough two-strike pitches going forward. But says he isn't overly concerned about the strikeouts.

"I know the strikeout is an out," Moncada said. "It doesn't matter if it is looking or swinging. It bothers you, of course, because you are competing. But it's not something I overthink about."

Renteria understands his leadoff hitter is getting thrown into baseball's deep end as a 23-year-old. He's right about it being a learning process, and if Moncada is as mentally tough as he seems, there's no reason to overreact.

Lucas Giolito roughed up early; Yankees complete sweep of White Sox

By Daryl Van Schouwen / Sun-Times / August 8, 2018

Just when Lucas Giolito was starting to come around, inconsistency reared its ugly head again.

The 6-6 right-hander, who entered the White Sox' 7-3 loss to the Yankees with a 3.19 ERA in his previous five starts, was strafed for six runs in the second inning Wednesday night, a heap of damage too formidable to overcome against All-Star righty Luis Severino and New York's stout bullpen.

Staked to a 2-0 lead, Giolito (7-9, 6.23 ERA) opened the second with his second walk, and it was downhill from there. Three consecutive singles, a 1-2 curveball that hit Brett Gardner on the toe and a grand slam by Giancarlo Stanton followed, and it was 6-2.

It was Stanton's 27th homer, an opposite-field poke inside the right-field pole.

"I lost all my rhythm, lost all my tempo," Giolito said. "Four-pitch walk, uncompetitive pitches to open the inning. Kind of just spiraled from there."

Giolito fared better the next time through the order, retiring eight of nine in one stretch before Aaron Hicks hit an elevated curve over the right-field fence in the fifth inning for his 19th homer. Giolito's stuff was good — he struck out seven — but he walked three, hit Gardner and needed 103 pitches (64 strikes) to get through five innings of six-hit ball.

"I feel good, and my stuff was good," Giolito said. "But it definitely sucks a lot to have an outing like this when I feel like I'm starting to get over that hump and starting to pitch a lot better than I have been."

Tim Anderson hit his 15th homer, an opposite-field shot, against Severino in the fifth to make it 7-3. Nicky Delmonico led off the seventh with a double against Severino but was thrown out on a fundamentally unsound attempt to advance to third on a grounder to short with no outs.

The result completed a three-game sweep for the Yankees.

Abreu in select company

Jose Abreu's tying home run in the 10th inning Tuesday made him the 18th player in major-league history to hit 20 or more homers in his first five seasons and the first in Sox history.

Pete Incaviglia (1986-90), Eddie Murray (1977-81), Tony Conigliaro (1964-69), Ted Williams (1939-42, 1946) and Joe DiMaggio (1936-40) are the only players to accomplish the feat exclusively in the American League.

Abreu's name continues to surface all over Sox record material. With 33 doubles — he lined one into the gap against Severino to drive in a run in the first inning — Abreu and Magglio Ordonez (1999-2003) are the only Sox players to hit 30-plus doubles five consecutive years. Abreu and Matt Carpenter of the Cardinals are the only players with 30 or more doubles in each of the last five seasons.

Abreu was 2-for-3 and is hitting .381 with seven homers, six doubles and 15 RBI in his last 16 games.

This and that

Second-base umpire Bruce Dreckman went to the Yankees' dugout during the ninth inning to remove a large moth from inside his ear.

◆ The Sox will honor Jim Thome on his induction into the Hall of Fame during a pregame ceremony Saturday. Mark Buehrle will be among the special guests.

◆ Sox chairman Jerry Reinsdorf presented Nevest Coleman, the wrongly imprisoned groundskeeper who's back on the team's workforce, with a World Series ring before the gates opened at Guaranteed Rate Field.

Renteria says it's time for White Sox' Yoan Moncada to be aggressive

By Daryl Van Schouwen / Sun-Times / August 8, 2018

At some point, switch-hitting second baseman Yoan Moncada is going to have to start swinging the bat.

With numbers that metrics proponents like and with an abundance of called third strikes that only opponents enjoy, Moncada, 23, continues to take a lot of pitches with what looks to be a seasoned batting eye.

A lot of those strikes are good, hittable pitches early in counts. A lot are borderline offerings on the edge of the strike zone with two strikes.

Moncada has been encouraged by his manager, coaches and at least one teammate — Jose Abreu — to be more aggressive. And he has gone through stretches where he has been aggressive, but lately it has been too much take, take, take for manager Rick Renteria's liking.

"At some point, you hit a point of frustration where you say, 'Man, I have to pull the trigger on particular pitches,'" Renteria said after Moncada went 0-for-5 with four strikeouts, two of them looking, Tuesday. "I think he's finally reached that point. So now it's about getting over that and seeing himself defend and battle and put balls in play and fight pitches. He has a great eye on balls for everything in the zone. Now it's about battling tough pitches in certain situations."

Moncada, who has batted 2-for-29 with 18 strikeouts in his last seven games after going 1-for-4 with two whiffs in the White Sox' 7-3 loss Wednesday night against the Yankees, seems to know what he needs to do.

"I'm just trying to be more aggressive, especially with two strikes," he said. "Try to defend [the plate] a little better, have more good at-bats. But now I'm not feeling as good with my approach at home plate."

With 163 strikeouts, Moncada is on pace to break a record he doesn't want, the season mark for whiffs held by the Rockies' Mark Reynolds, who struck out 223 times in 2009. Reynolds, 25 at the time, batted .260/.349/.543 with 44 homers and 102 RBI that year. Adam Dunn, who struck out 222 times in 2012 with the Sox, belted 41 homers.

Moncada has 14 home runs, but he isn't swinging for the fences as he trends toward Reynolds and Dunn territory. He's batting .218/.300/.390 with 20 doubles, five triples, 45 RBI and 11 stolen bases.

He said he's still confident and that the strikeout numbers aren't bothering him.

"I know the strikeout is an out," Moncada said. "It doesn't matter if it's looking or swinging. It bothers you because you're competing, but it's not something I overthink about."

Approaching the last two months of his first full season, Moncada has two "golden sombreros," the term for four strikeouts, in his last seven games. He has five this season and 14 games with three strikeouts.

"To be honest, this is good for him," Renteria said. "He's going to start to understand there is another phase to hitting beyond just having a good eye."

Appearing relaxed before a sizable group of reporters at his locker, Moncada said the struggle has not "been difficult at all" to deal with.

"A few weeks ago, I was being aggressive, and I got good results," he said. "I lost that aggressiveness. Now that is what I'm fighting through, to regain that aggressiveness again and to start producing at the level I know I can produce."

Moncada is a key player in the Sox' rebuild. He was ranked as the No. 1 prospect in baseball when the Sox acquired him, Michael Kopech, Luis Basabe and Victor Diaz for Chris Sale.

Renteria said Moncada has been hesitant to flip the get-aggressive switch "because he has such a good eye. [But you want] to get to a point where you take it out of the umpire's hands."

It's that time.

"At some point, you understand that you either fight some off and keep yourself alive" or go back to the dugout with yet another unproductive at-bat, Renteria said.

Yankees defeat White Sox in 13 innings

By Daryl Van Schouwen / Sun-Times / August 8, 2018

For the second start in a row, White Sox right-hander Reynaldo Lopez was excellent.

For the second night in a row, center fielder Adam Engel was spectacular.

That was well before Jose Abreu and the Yankees' Giancarlo Stanton were dramatic with the long ball, Stanton cracking a two-run homer against Tyler Danish to break a 1-1 tie in the top of the 10th inning and Abreu blasting a two-run homer against lefty Zach Britton in the bottom of the frame.

The Yankees (70-42) ended up winning 4-3 in 13 innings when Miguel Andujar, who homered back in the seventh inning to tie it against Lopez, hit a grounder through the left side against lefty Luis Avilan that scored Didi Gregorius.

Abreu, who hit his 20th homer, became the first player in baseball this season to hit a tying homer with two outs in an extra inning, and the first Sox to do so since A.J. Pierzynski in 2011 against the Nationals. It was Abreu's first career homer in extra innings.

"Tough game tonight against a really good ballclub," manager Rick Renteria said. "The guys kept battling. Hopefully we'll come back and keep fighting."

A no-hitter Lopez took into the sixth inning of the game was kept alive when Engel leaped high to take a home run away from the Yankees' Kyle Higashioka in the fifth. On Monday, Engel also jumped above the yellow line atop the outfield wall to steal a homer from the Yankees' Greg Bird.

Yankees lefty CC Sabathia, reaching double digits in strikeouts for the 39th time in his career, allowed a sacrifice fly to Abreu in the third inning. The lead held until Andujar's leadoff homer in the seventh inning against Lopez. Sabathia struck out 12 in 5th innings of one-run ball.

Lopez went seven innings against the Yankees, allowing a run on four hits and two walks. He struck out six and lowered his ERA to 4.30.

Yoan Moncada went 0-for-5 with four strikeouts, raising his season total to 161 and dropping his average to .217. He was called out on strikes two times.

"At some point you hit a point of frustration where you say, 'I have to start swinging at pitches,'" Renteria said. "I think he's finally reached that point."

Abreu on the defense

Abreu, not Gold Glove caliber but playing a solid first base of late, thanked bench coach Joe McEwing for working with him on pre-pitch positioning and keeping his feet moving and ready to field. He set a goal after last season to be better defensively.

"I heard a lot of people saying my defense wasn't good enough, and I said, 'You know what? I don't think that's true. I'm going to work hard to prove that they are wrong and I can be a very good defender at first base.'"

Eloy watch

Top outfield prospect Eloy Jimenez sat out Class AAA Charlotte's game Tuesday with flu-like symptoms. Jimenez also missed Saturday's game for the same reason. Charlotte was idle Monday.

Giolito hits another wall as Yankees sweep Chicago White Sox

By Scot Gregor / Daily Herald / August 8, 2018

Just when it looked like Lucas Giolito was turning the corner, he hit another wall.

Heading into Wednesday night's start against the New York Yankees at Guaranteed Rate Field, Giolito still had the highest ERA (5.97) in the major leagues.

The Chicago White Sox's right-hander was encouraged by his last 5 starts (2-1, 3.19 ERA) and hoped to continue rolling in the same direction.

"I can't go back and change some of my poor outings earlier this year," Giolito said. "All I can do is learn from those and try to give it my best these last 10 starts, or whatever I might have. At the end of the year, my baseball card stats are a little messed up from the early part of the season.

"But it's all in the past. All I can do is control what I do each day to improve and hopefully do a really good job in my starts."

Facing one of the better offensive teams in baseball Wednesday, Giolito's ERA took another hit.

In the White Sox's 7-3 loss to the Yankees, who completed a three-game sweep, Giolito gave up 7 runs on 6 hits and 3 walks in 5 innings.

Jose Abreu's RBI double and Daniel Palka's run-scoring single put the Sox in front in the first inning, but New York put up 6 runs on Giolito in the second. Giancarlo Stanton provided the big blow with a grand slam.

Lopez steps up:

Like Lucas Giolito, Reynaldo Lopez is another Sox starter going through ups and downs in his first full big-league season.

Starting against the Yankees on Tuesday night, Lopez pitched 7 innings and allowed 1 run on 4 hits to go with 6 strikeouts.

Lopez had a no-hitter going until Aaron Hicks led off the sixth inning with a double.

"I think he was hitting 98 (mph) out of the chute, good angle, was attacking the strike zone, was executing," manager Rick Renteria said. "He did everything you ask of a guy that's going to be a top-end starter on a major-league club, on a championship team.

"Let's face it, we're facing a team that's competing over there for playoff position with some pretty good batsmen, and you had a young man out there who's continuing to evolve as a starting pitcher, and he did an excellent job."

Jimenez sighting:

After missing two games with flu-like symptoms, Eloy Jimenez was back in Class AAA Charlotte's lineup Wednesday night at Syracuse.

The White Sox's top prospect homered in the fourth inning before the game was suspended by rain.

Moncada's growing pains continue with Chicago White Sox

By Scot Gregor / Daily Herald / August 8, 2018

Chicago White Sox fans not fully up to speed with rebuilds might be envisioning a string of World Series championships once top prospects such as Eloy Jimenez, Michael Kopech, Luis Robert, Dylan Cease and Nick Madrigal arrive.

There's nothing wrong with daring to dream, but Yoan Moncada is living proof that success is never guaranteed, and is most often slowed in the early stages.

The first blue chip prospect to join the Sox -- Moncada was added to the roster midway through the 2017 season -- his bar was set at instant stardom.

The 23-year-old second baseman might one day rise to that height, but Moncada is really struggling in his first full major-league season.

"Some pluses and minuses, obviously," said White Sox manager Rick Renteria. "On one end, he's been very effective hitting all balls in the strike zone. Doing very, very well. It's borderline pitches and things of that nature that he seems to be having a problem with, both sides of the plate."

More often than not, Moncada has been taking close pitches for strike three and quietly walking back to the dugout.

The switch hitter currently seems to be caught in between. In Tuesday's 4-3 loss to the Yankees in 13 innings, Moncada was 0-for-5 with 4 strikeouts. That raised his major-league leading total to 161, and a 1-for-25 (16 strikeouts) slump dropped his batting average to .217 heading into Wednesday's game against New York.

Two of Tuesday's strikeouts were looking. Two were swinging.

He rarely shows frustration and keeps a tight lid on his temper, but Moncada realizes something is way off.

"Right now, I'm not feeling as good with my approach at home plate," he said through Sox translator Billy Russo. "That's probably one of the reasons that I've been striking out more than I want to. I can't just pick out one thing. It's more like a feeling. I don't have that feeling right now. I have to keep working to regain that feeling again, to feel comfortable."

Moncada does have a very good batting eye, which is rare for such a young player. He consistently works deep counts, but the key is being more aggressive swinging the bat when it's 3-2 and 2-2.

"At some point you hit a point of frustration where you say, 'Man, I have to pull the trigger on particular pitches,'" Renteria said. "I think he's finally reached that point. So now it's about getting over that and seeing him defend and battle and put balls in play and fight pitches. He has a great eye on balls for everything in the zone.

"Now it's about battling tough pitches in certain situations. To be honest, this is good for him. He's going to start to understand there is another phase to hitting beyond having a good eye."

While he has been a strikeout machine, Moncada does rank third on the White Sox with 20 doubles and 45 RBI and fourth with 14 home runs.

"I think my confidence level is high," Moncada said. "It's there. Hopefully, I'll be a more successful player from this point forward. There was a time a few weeks ago I was being aggressive and I got good results.

"I lost that aggressive. Now that is what I'm fighting through, to regain that aggressiveness and to start producing at the level I know I can produce."

Even with a depleted bullpen, Rick Renteria doesn't mind making that long walk to the mound

By James Fegan / The Athletic / August 8, 2018

Back when his opening day bullpen included Joakim Soria (since traded) and Nate Jones (disabled list), White Sox manager Rick Renteria often discussed his ability and his intention to be flexible with the ninth inning and other high-leverage opportunities.

He had plenty of leeway to shift away from Soria when he struggled at the beginning of the season without needing to make a big announcement about his role. And that attitude made it a relative non-issue when Renteria shifted back as Soria started rolling again in mid-May. It wasn't a surprise over the weekend when Renteria locked up wins in Tampa by giving Thyago Vieira (currently the owner of a 10.38 ERA) his first career save or when he gave Héctor Santiago (typically a long reliever who has struggled with his control) the ninth inning on the next night. The Tampa series came a week after an unsuccessful attempt to trot out Jace Fry for his second career save, before shifting the oft-electric, recently struggling rookie back to lefty specialist work.

As you might have noticed if you're still watching the late innings of White Sox games, Renteria isn't shy about making pitching changes.

"Obviously we've used different guys over the last four or five games in different situations to close out or even win games late, and we'll continue to do that," Renteria said. "It's not the inning that we think about so much as the outs that we need in a particular inning. We also know that there are times, there are guys, they get into situations in the eighth or the ninth and they're considered high-leverage situations and it takes a special person to understand where they're at. The reality is that an out's an out, whether you get it in the first or the ninth. The ninth just happens to have the finality to a ballgame."

Probably more prominent than a rotating cast of characters for save situations in the ninth — which obviously only comes along every so often for a team with a .360 winning percentage — is a rotating cast of characters within innings. Four pitchers within a single frame has not been a rare sight at the end of close Sox games. The combination of young starters getting sent out for extra innings near the end of their outings, where they are essentially getting pulled at the very first sign of trouble, followed by the Sox switching through different relievers batter-to-batter can see a huge chunk of the relief corps deployed to solve one tricky inning for a team with 41 wins on Aug. 9.

While using three relievers in an inning looks like a plan falling apart, Renteria has decided he would rather run out of matchup options than lose with any of them left unused. This practice, along with Matt Davidson's professional mound efforts, have helped warm a seemingly reluctant Renteria to position players eating the occasional inning.

As for his less-famous options in the bullpen, Juan Minaya (2.49 ERA, 28.6 percent strikeout rate) has been better than probably anyone has realized since he was recalled in mid-June. Luis Avilán and Xavier Cedeño have both missed bats at a similar rate despite finesse lefty arsenals. Fry's peripherals remain exceptional even as some command mistakes have burned him. But despite their usefulness, and because of the paucity of effective right-handers in his group, Renteria is likely to continue to avoid exposing his less-established right-handers to any key plate appearances where they lack the platoon advantage. He uses the phrase "outs not innings" when talking about bullpen usage a lot, and his meaning becomes a lot easier to parse when he lacks experienced shutdown right-handers to claim the eighth and ninth like Jones and Soria did coming out of spring.

"We've done the best we can to get through particular innings," Renteria said. "We've been using all our guys a lot. We're trying to keep ourselves in games."

The end product obviously isn't gorgeous. No one is paying to see pitching changes if it can be helped. But handing over entire innings to a reliever, more or less regardless of results, is something for the minor leagues. A season that has seen the White Sox pitching staff assemble the second-worst ERA in baseball has also seen a lot of developing starters trotted out during continued struggles, and a lot of innings where the goal didn't extend much beyond getting through it.

But provided the opportunity to secure a win, Renteria has spared no effort to pull out all the stops in his arsenal. Until Zack Burdi, Ian Hamilton, Ryan Burr, Tyler Johnson, or many other possibilities are on hand to make the later innings less laborious affairs, it sounds like the Sox are going to remain open to mixing-and-matching as much as could possibly be needed.

"I think we have to be," Renteria said. "That's kind of the position in which we're in."

On pace to set MLB strikeout record, Yoán Moncada knows he has to adjust his approach

By James Fegan / The Athletic / August 8, 2018

"You're probably looking at all his at-bats and thinking, 'He sure could use one,'" White Sox manager Rick Renteria said of giving a struggling Yoán Moncada a day off. "He hasn't come in — and I've spoken to him many times — he hasn't expressed a desire nor a need. I'm sure we'll give him one here, but he needs to keep going through this and experience it and see if he can battle through it a little bit."

The same man who has made bold promises that Moncada "will ultimately be everything everybody hopes he will be," has been acknowledging the struggles of the former No. 1 prospect a bit more of late. A recent grisly slide that has seen him go 1-for-25 with three walks and 16 strikeouts over a six-game stretch going into Wednesday made it pretty difficult not to.

"At some point you hit a point of frustration where you say, 'Man, I have to pull the trigger on particular pitches,'" Renteria said Tuesday night. "I think [Yoán]'s finally reached that point. So now it's about getting over that and seeing himself defend and battle and put balls in play and fight pitches. He has a great eye on balls for everything in the zone. Now it's about battling tough pitches in certain situations."

Moncada's 57 strikeouts looking in 2018 are already more than anyone in the majors took during the entire 2015 season. A Statcast search would reveal that the vast majority of those calls were off the edge of the strike zone, which makes sense, given that Moncada's batting eye has regularly proven itself as elite at lower levels and on balance, he is not tremendously unwilling to swing.

But while the theory that Moncada is the victim of a vast umpiring conspiracy across the league has gained more traction among fans than could have been anticipated, the White Sox seem to be going with the Occam's razor approach that he is having a difficult time making the adjustment to playing protect with two strikes. It's not that umpires dislike the 23-year-old infielder, they just make a lot of mistakes and he is putting himself in position to get burned by nearly all of them. Perhaps he's uniquely affected by bad umpiring due to his approach, but it's not going to fix itself anytime soon, so he's aware that he needs to adjust.

"This is more about choke up on the bat or swinging at pitches that are more borderline, pitches you are not sure are in the strike zone," Moncada said through team interpreter Billy Russo. "That's the way I have to approach the situation now, trying to be more aggressive on pitches that are probably borderline and choke up a little on the bat."

Moncada struck out twice in the White Sox's 7-3 loss to the Yankees on Wednesday. But he struck out swinging both times. He added a single.

At 163 strikeouts through 106 games this season, Moncada is in grave danger of setting a new all-time record for strikeouts in a major league season (223 by Mark Reynolds in 2009). While Renteria is unconcerned enough about records and Moncada's confidence that he continues to plug him in at leadoff

against right-handed starters, the total number of strikeouts is enough to indicate that this is not a new problem, and that Moncada's progress on this adjustment has been slow to stagnant at times.

Despite this, Moncada views finding the balance between trusting his batting eye and fighting what it tells him so he can swing at borderline two-strike pitches as "not that difficult at all." Instead, it's something he feels he was doing when he ended the first half with a demolition of Royals pitching, but has now lost for reasons he cannot seem to put his finger on.

"I think right now I'm not feeling as good as I was feeling probably a couple of weeks ago," Moncada said. "That happened. I'm just trying to be more aggressive, especially with two strikes, try to defend a little better, have more good at-bats. Right now I'm not feeling as good with my approach at home plate. That's probably one of the reasons that I've been striking out more than I want to."

Moncada echoed all the things his hitting coach was saying over a month ago about playing protect on the edge with two strikes, says the adjustment is highly feasible and categorizes his current slide as a specific, contained slump in a season that's already seen a couple. On the whole, it's more encouraging than blaming the umpiring or throwing up his hands at pitchers' ability to command the edges at this level. But unlike José Abreu, Moncada doesn't have a long history of successfully refining his approach for a sustained run of success to fall back on to provide confidence that this is all some minor blip in his ascension.

Instead, he'll have to build one now.

"My confidence level is high," Moncada said. "It's there. I don't know how to explain it, I just hope that starting today things start going my way. Hopefully I'll be a more successful player from this point forward."
