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Tommy John likely for No. 13 prospect Kopech

Right-hander will seek 2nd opinion on torn UCL

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

CHICAGO - As a dejected but certainly far from defeated Michael Kopech sat in the White Sox dugout Friday, he began to recite a litany of 2018 personal accomplishments to the media surrounding him.

"You know, after a rough beginning to the season for me, turning it around is really big," Kopech said. "It's exciting for me. I accomplished everything I wanted to accomplish. I cut down my walks. I went deeper in games. I pitched more efficiently. I got myself to the big leagues.

"It's been a whirlwind of emotions for me in the past couple of weeks, obviously. From just about my absolute peak to the absolute rock bottom for me."

That rock bottom referred to by the 22-year-old hard-throwing right-hander was an announcement Friday of the rather significant tear in Kopech's ulnar collateral ligament as diagnosed by Dr. Nik Verma following

an examination. Kopech will seek a second opinion, but the initial recommendation is Tommy John surgery, which would keep Kopech out of action until Spring Training 2020. Kopech is the No. 2 prospect in the White Sox system and ranked No. 13 overall by MLB Pipeline.

"To say it's unexpected would be an understatement," Kopech said. "It sucks. That's it. It sucks."

"This is obviously a blow and something that we are still digesting. We only received this news within the last two hours or so," said White Sox general manager Rick Hahn. "We do know [we] believe Michael will be fully without restriction at the start of the 2020 season and in a position to build off what we feel is a very bright future for a long time in a White Sox uniform."

According to Hahn, Kopech reached out to the White Sox after having trouble getting loose in his last start Wednesday against Detroit at Guaranteed Rate Field. The White Sox recommended, for precautionary reasons, an extensive examination with their doctors Friday.

In that last start -- which featured a rain delay, as did his first two home starts -- Kopech allowed seven runs on nine hits over 3 1/3 innings. Four of those hits were home runs, including three in the fourth, which turned out to be the last 2018 inning for Kopech. Kopech's velocity was noticeably down, although Kopech blamed preparation postgame and manager Rick Renteria pointed more to bad location for the tough outing.

Little did Kopech and the White Sox know he was pitching with a significant UCL tear.

"I just kind of assumed after every start it was soreness, and then some starts I thought it might be a little more sore than others," Kopech said. "I just didn't ever put it in the category of pain. I put it in the category of soreness. I wouldn't be able to pinpoint a time.

"It may have been [a few weeks ago]. It may have just happened the other night. It's just been a little bit of discomfort I've been throwing through. I never thought it was this serious."

Hahn stressed Kopech, who fanned 170 over 126 1/3 innings for Triple-A Charlotte and then struck out 15 against two walks over four starts and 14 1/3 innings for the White Sox, continues to profile as a starter. One silver lining is the timing of the diagnosis, as anything a little later could have jeopardized both '19 and '20 for Kopech

Even in a bit of shock Friday, Kopech, who is known for his intense work ethic, reinforced his commitment to fighting through this setback.

"It's unfortunate and sucks but I don't think my work ethic has ever been in question," Kopech said. "If it has, then I'm here to prove that it shouldn't be and I'll come back stronger than before."

"Probably speaks to how strong this kid really is," said Hahn of Kopech, who struck out six and hit 96.1 mph Wednesday even with his injury. "You can tell it from looking at him and you can see him on the mound and you see him walking around and his workout regimen. But he was pitching with a pretty significant tear in there and he was pitching pretty effectively at the big league level with it, it seems."

Wild 3rd tags Rodon with loss in Angels opener

Los Angeles plates 4 runs in inning vs. Sox southpaw

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

CHICAGO -- Carlos Rodon had a slightly wild night during the Angels' 5-2 victory over the White Sox (56-85) on Friday at a blustery Guaranteed Rate Field.

Wild, as in the third inning alone, the White Sox southpaw threw 21 pitches and only six for strikes. The Angels scored four in that frame and handed Rodon his second straight loss after he hadn't dropped a decision since June 30. Rodon allowed four runs on six hits over 4 2/3 innings, marking the first time in 16 starts this season he hasn't lasted at least five, and struck out four against five walks.

Even in the pregame bullpen session, Rodon knew there was trouble ahead.

"Yeah, just no command," Rodon said. "Down in the bullpen [I] didn't feel good. Usually you try to clear that. Just trying to get out there and grind, man. Find the zone and try to go deep for the boys. But it didn't happen today.

"The first inning went well and I tried to build off of that. Just didn't happen. I wish the whole game went that way. Just no feel for [anything]. It was horse [bleep]."

Shohei Ohtani delivered the most powerful punch, launching a three-run homer on a 2-0 pitch in that third inning after Rodon walked Kole Calhoun and David Fletcher on eight pitches to start the frame. Ohtani's blast barely eluded a leaping effort by center fielder Adam Engel, who lost his glove over the fence in the process.

"I thought it was going to be close. I didn't think it was going to get out," said Rodon of Ohtani's home run. "Big strong guy, got the barrel of the bat on it and Adam made a good run at it. He's made catches like that before. You just can't have them all."

Angels starter Felix Pena earned the victory by allowing two runs over seven innings. He struck out six without issuing a free pass.

It was an overall rough day for the White Sox. The team found out prior to the game that Michael Kopech, the No. 13 prospect overall per MLB Pipeline, had a significant tear of his ulnar collateral ligament, and with Tommy John surgery recommended, he most likely would be lost until Spring Training 2020.

Class A Winston-Salem was eliminated from the Carolina League playoffs, while Class A Kannapolis was knocked out of the South Atlantic League postseason via a Spencer Howard no-hitter for Lakewood. The evening culminated with the rough outing from Rodon, who has been one of the steadier pitchers in the game since the start of July.

"He tried to find his rhythm. He was grinding, trying to get into it, but the homer by Ohtani put him in a little bit of a pickle," White Sox manager Rick Renteria said. "Once he started to get a few more outs, we extended him. When we took him out it was just a matter of trying to keep us in the ballgame."

MOMENTS THAT MATTERED

Garcia is back: After missing four games due to right knee soreness, Avisail Garcia returned with authority as the White Sox designated hitter. He hit a home run leading off the second against Pena, giving Garcia 16 for the season, and was also hit by a pitch, drew a walk and singled.

"Listen, we're going to continue to use him and see if he's comfortable enough to manage the discomfort," Renteria said. "He wants to play. We're going to have to be very mindful of how he's doing and give him an opportunity to kind of recover a little bit. I'll talk to him tonight, talk to him tomorrow to see how he's feeling.

"He's going to have good days and bad days like everybody. It's just the normal wear and tear of the body. We'll maybe do it in the outfield one game and then back to DH. I have to get a feel for how he's feeling tomorrow and then I'll continue to proceed that way."

HE SAID IT

"That's tough, man. Luckily he's young. He's 22 and the kid works really hard. So, he'll be back strong. Just tough news. Tough break when you first get called up. It happens. You just gotta roll with it." -- Rodon, on Kopech

UP NEXT

Right-hander James Shields (6-15, 4.39 ERA) is scheduled to make his 30th start of the season and second overall against the Angels with a 6:10 p.m. CT first pitch scheduled for Saturday at Guaranteed Rate Field.

Matt Shoemaker takes the mound for the Angels. Shields has worked at least six innings in 23 of his 29 starts this season. He is 5-5 with a 2.71 ERA and .204 opponents' average over his last 13 home starts.

Does the Michael Kopech injury dramatically alter the timeline of the White Sox rebuild?

By Vinnie Duber / NBC Sports Chicago / September 7, 2018

The White Sox just lost their top-ranked pitching prospect.

They'll get him back, but likely not until the 2020 season, that news dropping Friday afternoon like a bomb on the team's high-profile rebuilding effort. Kopech will likely undergo Tommy John surgery and miss not just the last few weeks of this season but the entirety of the 2019 season, as well.

The immediate question is, obviously, what it means for Kopech, who stands out in the organization's wealth of talented prospects as a future star, someone who has talked about himself becoming a Cy Young winner — and has received that same projection from those around the game. His recent promotion energized not just those in the stands at Guaranteed Rate Field but those in the home clubhouse, too. He's a flamethrower who struck out a combined 327 batters in two seasons as a White Sox minor leaguer.

Though the White Sox rotation of the future figures to be a crowded one, many fans and observers pegged Kopech as the potential ace of that staff. Where those projections stand after Friday's news, however, is a complete mystery.

These days, Tommy John surgery hardly prevents pitchers from returning to dominance. In announcing the news, general manager Rick Hahn spoke multiple times about his belief that Kopech will still be a big-time big league starting pitcher.

"This is by no means the last we've seen of Michael Kopech," Hahn said. "This is the last we've seen of him for '18 and very likely for '19, but he's still going to play a significant role on what we project to be some very, very good White Sox teams in the future.

"We've been through these before. Lucas Giolito is ... one who has been through it before. Dylan Cease was just named minor league pitcher of the year by MLB.com, he has been through it before. These guys get back to the level that they're capable of pitching at.

"We saw, prior to this, it was a wonderful year for Michael. He showed you what he's capable of doing at the big league level. He's capable of dominating at this level. He's an extremely diligent worker who's going to have some tough work ahead of him in the near future, but again, by 2020 he's going to be back and building off of what he's accomplished this season."

But the missed season is no small thing.

Kopech was just four starts into his big league career, and we've seen this season how the first full go-round at the major league level can be full of challenges. Look at the up-and-down campaigns from Giolito and Reynaldo Lopez. If 2020 arrives and the White Sox rebuild has advanced to the point where they're ready to start competing and contending, will Kopech be ready to compete at the level the team will need him to when he's still getting his first tastes of the big leagues?

Kopech's injury is a big deal, but it's far from the only affliction to befall one of the White Sox highly touted prospects. Luis Robert, Dane Dunning, Alec Hansen, Jake Burger, Micker Adolfo and Zack Burdi all missed significant time this season or have yet to return from their respective injuries, stealing development time away from them, as well. Throw Kopech into the mix, and the entire timeline of the rebuilding effort could be altered from where it was at the beginning of the calendar year.

Hahn is, and justifiably so, confident that his front office has imported enough talent into the organization that it can weather even this long list of significant injuries. But he also brought up the idea of needing to bring in more help this offseason to make up for some of the bad luck.

"I don't want to make any bold proclamations one way or the other right now. We're still digesting all of this," Hahn said when asked about how Kopech's injury could affect the long-term picture. "I do know that throughout this process, we were making this about more than just one guy. We knew that there were going to be setbacks, whether it was due to injury or other performance, and that we were going to have to be prepared and have enough depth in order to insulate ourselves, either internally or via trade and free agency, to be able to withstand some of this stuff."

"Yes, this is going to be a challenge, but in the coming weeks and months we will respond to it and put ourselves in the best position for the long term."

So that 2020 date that so many fans and observers had circled as the point when this thing was going to move from rebuilding to contending. It, to borrow a phrase of Hahn's, by no means is out of the question at this point. But does it come into question? With Kopech a year behind and coming off a long layoff, with all of those other guys further behind schedule than they would have been without the injury-induced absences, does the timeline shift?

We won't know until that date roll around. But it seems a perfectly reasonable question to ask in the wake of the biggest news of the White Sox season.

Here's what we know: When Kopech makes his first start of the 2020 season, it will be just the fifth of his major league career, or about 20-something fewer than it was supposed to be. That seems pretty impactful.

"This obviously hurts. It's obviously a disappointment," Hahn said. "But it's one that we tried to prepare ourselves for along the way. You've heard us speak repeatedly throughout this process about the importance of depth, the importance of quality options and the importance of us never feeling like we had enough. We do have other quality arms coming up through the system behind Michael that will contribute in the coming years, and we also feel that Michael has a bright future in a White Sox uniform for a very long time."

"Unfortunately for all of us, we're going to have to wait a little bit longer before we start seeing him on a regular basis on that mound."

Michael Kopech reacts to Tommy John news: 'From just about my absolute peak to the absolute rock bottom'

By Vinnie Duber / NBC Sports Chicago / September 7, 2018

Getting the call to the big leagues was about as great of news as Michael Kopech could have received.

Getting the info that he'd have to wait until 2020 to make his next major league start was at the other end of the spectrum.

Welcome to Kopech's Friday afternoon.

"It's been a whirlwind of emotions for me in the past couple of weeks, obviously. From just about my absolute peak to the absolute rock bottom for me," he said. "I think to say it's unexpected would be an understatement."

The shocking news that Kopech, the team's top-ranked pitching prospect and a guy many view as a future ace, will likely undergo Tommy John surgery and miss the entirety of the 2019 season hit the White Sox, their rebuilding effort and their fan base like a truck Friday.

And it hit Kopech pretty hard, too, as you might expect.

"It sucks. That's it. It sucks."

While negativity was an obvious reaction to have to such impactful news — combine Kopech's injury with all the other injuries suffered by White Sox prospects this season, and it's reasonable to wonder if the rebuild's timeline will be affected — the silver lining, as general manager Rick Hahn put it, lies with Kopech himself.

Kopech is just 22 years old, and while he'll lose a year of developmental time in 2019, he's also young enough for this injury and the accompanying time off to be less detrimental than it could have been had it happened further along in his career. And the Tommy John track record is a pretty good one. There are plenty of pitchers who have had the surgery and bounced back.

Plus, Kopech isn't exactly your run-of-the-mill pitcher. He's a workout freak and has worked his way back from other obstacles before, as recently as the middle of this season. There might be big-picture concerns about what exactly his future and the White Sox future look like in the wake of this injury. But one thing that doesn't seem to be in question is whether he'll be able to work his way back.

"As you all know from getting to know Michael from the time he's been with the organization or from seeing some of his videos on Instagram and Twitter and understanding what makes part of this kid great is his work ethic, and if there's one person you need not have any concerns about in his diligence in a rehabilitation program, it's Michael Kopech," Hahn said to reporters Friday.

"This is obviously a blow and something that we are still digesting, we only received this news within the last two hours or so. But we do know that at this point that we believe Michael will be fully without restriction at the start of the 2020 season and in a position to build off what we feel is a very bright future for a long time in a White Sox uniform."

It was already what was coming out of Kopech's mouth not long after getting the news. And after seeing how he turned around a walk-heavy season and a high ERA with some elite performances before getting called up to the majors, it's not hard to believe he'll come back from this, too.

Still, though, it's really tough news.

"After a rough beginning to the season for me, turning it around was really big. It was exciting for me. I accomplished everything I wanted to accomplish. I cut down my walks. I went deeper in games. I pitched more efficiently. I got myself to the big leagues. And then this," Kopech said. "It's unfortunate. It sucks.

"I don't think my work ethic has ever been in question. If it has, then I'm here to prove that it shouldn't be and I'll come back stronger than before."

Michael Kopech injury puts unexpected item on White Sox offseason to-do list

By Vinnie Duber / NBC Sports Chicago / September 7, 2018

Michael Kopech likely won't pitch in another big league game until the 2020 season.

It was the bad news that hit the White Sox like a truck Friday, immediately bringing into question how a year plus out of action as he recovers from Tommy John surgery will affect the development of the organization's top-ranked pitching prospect and the team's rebuilding effort as a whole.

But while it's easy to focus on the long term with this future-facing franchise, there's a more immediate topic to consider: Who's going to fill Kopech's spot in the White Sox starting rotation next season?

The 2019 starting staff figured to have just one opening, with Kopech, Lucas Giolito, Reynaldo Lopez and Carlos Rodon returning to form 80 percent of that staff and James Shields heading to free agency. But Kopech's injury creates two holes.

Rick Hahn and his front office have injected an incredible amount of pitching depth into the farm system, but how much more of that depth is ready to hit the major leagues? It took Kopech months to climb from

the start of a Triple-A season to the big league stage. Is there an assurance that any of those prospects will be ready by the time next spring rolls around?

It's for that reason that there could suddenly be an unexpected item on Hahn's offseason to-do list: adding a starting pitcher from outside the organization. Hahn mentioned that very possibility Friday, sparking the idea that a heretofore unnecessary offseason move might now be required to get the White Sox through the 2019 campaign.

"Throughout this process, we were making this about more than just one guy. We knew that there were going to be setbacks, whether it was due to injury or other performance, and that we were going to have to be prepared and have enough depth in order to insulate ourselves, either internally or via trade and free agency, to be able to withstand some of this stuff," Hahn said. "Yes, this is going to be a challenge, but in the coming weeks and months we will respond to it and put ourselves in the best position for the long term."

Of course, the way the White Sox have positioned themselves, they have flexibility and a variety of options.

Maybe the solve is an internal one, a chance given to someone like Jordan Guerrero or Jordan Stephens. (Before you ask, it seems unlikely Dylan Cease, recently honored as MLB Pipeline's minor league pitcher of the year, would skip Triple-A and head straight into a big league rotation.)

But going outside seems a more likely option. The question then becomes: Is that acquisition a short-term fix, a stopgap or a bridge to Kopech's return in 2020? Or do the White Sox try to add a pitcher who could be part of the rotation on the next contending team, given that Kopech will still be in the thick of his major league development for an entire season following his return?

Big-time names like Patrick Corbin, Clayton Kershaw, Dallas Keuchel and David Price will all be on the free-agent market. More manageable might be a list of guys like Nathan Eovaldi, Gio Gonzalez, Matt Harvey, Drew Pomeranz and Tyson Ross. Perhaps bringing back Shields for one more season after his impressive 2018 campaign is an option.

And of course there's the possibility of engineering a trade. Hahn has been asked multiple times dating back to last year's Winter Meetings — when national reports had the White Sox connected to Manny Machado — if he would consider trading from his stockpile of prospects. That strategy seemed at the time and still seems now a rush to abandon the carefully laid rebuilding plans. But the impact of Kopech's injury might well be big enough to force a move that didn't make sense a couple days ago, a move that could still benefit the team in the long term.

The White Sox still believe that Kopech will return to play a significant role, and they're right to believe so given his talent, his electrifying stuff and his admirable work ethic that leaves little doubt he'll fight his way back from this injury.

But after years of every aspect of the White Sox rebuilding effort appearing to run on the same track, injuries to Kopech and a host of other prospects this season have caused some divergent tracks, and the recoveries of those prospects and their missed developmental time in 2018 and 2019 could cause trains to arrive at the station at different times.

If the rest of the team is ready to compete and still waiting on Kopech, it might need another starting pitcher to plug a hole. And that pitcher might need to be acquired this offseason.

Michael Kopech likely to undergo Tommy John surgery and miss 2019 season

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

The White Sox rebuild was dealt a big blow Friday.

General manager Rick Hahn announced that Michael Kopech has a significant tear in his UCL and that it has been recommended that the electrifying pitching prospect undergoes Tommy John surgery.

Hahn also said that Kopech and the White Sox will seek a second opinion but that the team is ready for Kopech to miss not just the remainder of the 2018 season but also the entirety of the 2019 season.

Hahn said he expects Kopech to be ready for the start of the 2020 season.

It's horrible news for the rebuilding White Sox, who just recently promoted Kopech to the major leagues after a strong second half of his minor league campaign at Triple-A Charlotte. Kopech energized the fan base and the home clubhouse at Guaranteed Rate Field, even if rain delays accompanied all three of his home starts and shortened two of them.

After striking out a combined 327 batters in two minor league seasons, Kopech allowed eight runs over his first 14.1 big league innings, striking out 15 batters in four starts.

Kopech was acquired alongside Yoan Moncada in the trade that sent Chris Sale to the Boston Red Sox and jump-started this rebuilding process. While Hahn's front office has stockpiled an unbelievable amount of talent in the farm system, there's no doubt that Kopech is one of the players generating the biggest expectations, partially a result of his own confidence and his comments about being a future Cy Young winner.

This is just the latest injury in a season full of them for White Sox prospects. Luis Robert, Dane Dunning, Alec Hansen, Micker Adolfo and Jake Burger all suffered significant injuries that caused them to miss extensive amounts of developmental time. Add Kopech's lost 2019 season into the mix, and it's reasonable to question if there will be a drastic effect on the timeline of this rebuild and whether the White Sox will transition from rebuilding mode to contention mode as early as previously believed.

Column: Michael Kopech's devastating injury won't slow down White Sox rebuild

By Paul Sullivan / Chicago Tribune / September 7, 2018

The news hit like a lightning bolt Friday afternoon as the White Sox prepared to face the Angels on the South Side.

Prized pitching prospect Michael Kopech suffered a significant tear in the ulnar collateral ligament of his right elbow, an injury that likely requires reconstructive surgery and will put him out of action until the 2020 season.

It couldn't have come at a worse time — for Kopech, the Sox organization or fans patiently waiting out another losing season in the vaunted rebuild.

The devastating diagnosis came from out of the blue, just as Kopech was getting his feet wet, excitement was running high and the rebuild appeared to be turning the proverbial corner.

So what's next for Kopech, the organization and fan base?

No one knows for sure, but these three things seem certain:

Kopech's task

Kopech should recover and return for what looks to be a successful major-leaguer career, just as many other starters have done after Tommy John surgery.

The Cubs were dealt a similar blow in spring training of 1999 when 21-year-old Rookie of the Year winner Kerry Wood blew out his right elbow, forcing him to undergo reconstructive surgery and miss the entire season.

After receiving the bad news, Wood voiced optimism he would make it back and return to his old self.

"It all depends on the individual person and his work ethic to come back," Wood said the next day. "There have been many cases where the guy has come back stronger, and there have been cases where they haven't come back stronger.

"The doctors don't know what happens. They do the surgery, and it depends on the athlete."

A dejected Kopech said Friday he hit "rock bottom," and obviously it would be a tough pill for any young player to swallow, much less one with as much potential and hype as the Sox phenom.

But we already know Kopech has the work ethic and a reliable blueprint to follow thanks to fellow Sox prospect Dylan Cease, who had Tommy John surgery after the Cubs drafted him in 2014.

Cease was just named MLB Pipeline's Pitcher of the Year after going a combined 12-2 with a 2.40 ERA in Class A and Double A, averaging 13.4 strikeouts per 9 innings at Birmingham. With Kopech out, he's the next pitching phenom ready to step up.

Kopech will need the support of family and friends to get through a difficult 2019 rehab process, but there's no reason to believe he won't return to form. His velocity shouldn't suffer because it's an elbow, not a shoulder injury, and he seemingly has a good head on his shoulders.

It's all up to him.

Timetable in flux

The Sox's timetable for contending might have been dealt a blow, but because they never gave one it's impossible to speculate.

Was 2019 a realistic possibility?

The Braves went from 90 losses in 2017 to first place in the NL East heading into the final three weeks, and the Phillies remain in contention after losing 96 games last season. The successes of those two rebuilds, combined with the excitement created by the standout seasons of Kopech, Cease and outfielder Eloy Jimenez, provided hope the Sox could make a big leap forward next season.

But that was probably wishful thinking, and 2020 is the earliest the Sox probably could've hoped to contend, even had Kopech been a part of next year's rotation.

Dane Dunning, who came over in the Adam Eaton deal, should be ready next season, and Cease, who was shut down recently after reaching an innings limit, figures to reach the Sox by midseason.

Jimenez already is ready and should be up by late April to ensure he'll be Sox property for seven years instead of six.

But even if those three prospects are in the picture in 2019, the Sox still would need a bullpen overhaul and a few key free-agent signings to become a contender.

Whether Chairman Jerry Reinsdorf is willing to shell out big money for a top-of-the-line star, as the Cubs did with Jon Lester after Year Three of their rebuild, remains to be seen.

Despite elbow diagnosis, the Angels' Shohei Ohtani still has plenty of power

By Phil Rogers / Chicago Tribune / September 7, 2018

Shohei Ohtani is showcasing his skills as a hitter while he decides when to undergo major surgery on his right elbow, which will keep him off the pitcher's mound next season.

The 24-year-old from Japan blasted a 2-0 fastball from Carlos Rodon for a three-run homer on Friday night at Guaranteed Rate Field, the big blow in the Angels' 5-2 victory over the White Sox. It was his 19th home run, the fourth in his last three games.

"The plan is to finish up the season as a hitter, as of right now," Ohtani said through a translator. "Swinging doesn't affect my elbow in any way. I feel like I'm progressing as a hitter right now so I'm trying to gain as many experiences as I can while the games count."

Ohtani was 4-2 with a 3.31 ERA in 51 2/3 innings while battling recurring issues with his elbow. He is hitting .287 with 50 RBIs and a .953 OPS in 83 games.

He went 4-for-4 with two home runs on Wednesday in Texas, the day it was revealed he would need to have Tommy John surgery.

"Generally I try not to change anything, try to approach every game the same as every other day," Ohtani said. "But obviously that was kind of bad news and I don't like bad news. I like good news better. I was trying to (make) some good news, and I was able to."

Ohtani believes he can be a designated hitter in 2019 even though off-season surgery will keep him off the mound until 2020. He's expected to have surgery immediately after the season.

Extra innings: Avisail Garcia returned to the White Sox lineup after missing three games with a sore right knee and homered in his first at-bat. He was used as the DH. ... Rodon (6-5) failed to make it through the fifth inning for the first time in his 16 starts this season. "Just no feel for nothing," said Rodon, who allowed four runs in 4 2/3 innings on six hits and five walks. ... Rodon hit Mike Trout in the elbow with a pitch in the third inning; Felix Pena hit Garcia in the elbow with a pitch in the fourth. ... Michael Kopech's injury could make the Sox think harder about picking up James Shields' contract option. He has a 4.06 ERA and 1.21 WHIP since the end of April.

White Sox phenom Michael Kopech likely needs reconstructive elbow surgery, will miss 2019 season

By Phil Rogers / Chicago Tribune / September 7, 2018

Michael Kopech, the White Sox's new Superman, has been cut down by a pitcher's version of Kryptonite.

He is believed to have torn the ulnar collateral ligament in his elbow, which could force him to undergo elbow reconstruction surgery and be sidelined until 2020.

It's the same diagnosis that forced the Cubs' Kerry Wood to undergo surgery after his Rookie of the Year season in 1998. More recently, the ligament transplant procedure known as Tommy John surgery has sidelined a long list of active major-leaguers, including Stephen Strasburg, Jacob deGrom, Yu Darvish, Johnny Cueto, Carlos Carrasco, Michael Pineda and Adam Wainwright.

"Unfortunately, in this day and age, it's a regular part of the game with pitchers," Kopech said Friday. "Personally I never thought it would be something I would be going through. But it's part of it."

Kopech becomes the fifth right-handed prospect ranked in the preseason top 100 by MLB Pipeline to suffer a serious elbow injury. He joins the Angels' Shohei Ohtani, Cardinals' Alex Reyes, Ray's Brent Honeywell and Reds' Hunter Greene in having their development delayed by Tommy John surgery.

The success rate of the surgery is good, especially for pitchers who haven't had a previous elbow reconstruction, and the White Sox are confident Kopech will remain a major part of their future despite the specter of major elbow surgery.

"This is by no means the last we've seen of Michael Kopech," Sox general manager Rick Hahn said. "This is the last we've seen of him for '18 and very likely for '19, but he's still going to play a significant role on what we project to be some very, very good White Sox teams in the future."

Kopech experienced his first rough start in the major leagues on Wednesday night, giving up four home runs to the Tigers. It was seen as a minor blip until Friday, when orthopedic surgeon Nikhil Verma examined him and found a torn ulnar collateral ligament.

Hahn said an exam Friday "revealed a rather significant tear in his ulnar collateral ligament." He will receive a second opinion next week but it seems the only question is who will perform the surgery.

This development comes as a shock to both the team and Kopech, who at 22 has been one of the most intriguing young pitchers in baseball.

"It has been a whirlwind of emotions for me in the past couple of weeks obviously," Kopech said. "From just about my absolute peak to the absolute rock bottom. To say it's unexpected would be an understatement."

Kopech, acquired from the Red Sox in the Chris Sale trade, earned a promotion in late August after going 4-0 with a 1.84 ERA and 59 strikeouts in his last 44 innings for Triple-A Charlotte. His first three starts were impressive, despite rain delays shortening two of them. His fastball velocity was down against the Tigers but he felt he was battling soreness, not pain.

The Sox have handled Kopech with caution but did allow him to stay in the game Wednesday after the second inning despite a 28-minute rain delay. Neither Kopech nor the team can say precisely when he was injured. It's possible he had been pitching with the injury for awhile.

"If you are looking for a specific pitch or day, I couldn't tell you," Kopech said. "It has been gradual. I just thought it was a little bit of discomfort. I thought it was something I could throw through. Obviously my last couple of starts, my velocity has been a little bit down. I didn't think much of it."

Hahn said there's no timeline on the injury.

"Based on what we had seen in his last start, it seems like something that may have occurred in between his last two starts or perhaps on the mound against Detroit," he said. "There was no pop, so to speak, or mechanism of injury that was immediate and obvious."

Kopech told the team something was up Thursday.

"He was talking about making his next start, saying it was something he would pitch through," Hahn said. "But erring on the side of caution, we wanted to make sure he went through all of these examinations. Quite frankly, all of us were a little bit shocked when it came back with what the studies revealed."

Manager Rick Renteria echoed Hahn's optimism that Kopech will overcome the injury to remain a front-of-the-rotation starter.

"He is a driven person," Renteria said. "There's no doubt in my mind he's going to go through everything very, very well and he'll be back. ... This is a hiccup, albeit a pretty strong hiccup."

White Sox fall to Angels 5-2, with Shohei Ohtani's 3-run homer the big blow

By Phil Rogers / Chicago Tribune / September 7, 2018

Shohei Ohtani hit a three-run home run to center field in the third inning Friday night, leading the Angels to a 5-2 victory over the White Sox in the opener of a three-game series at Guaranteed Rate Field.

Ohtani crushed a 2-0 pitch from Carlos Rodon. The ball carried just beyond Adam Engel's leap, with Engel losing his glove over the fence as he tried to rob Ohtani.

Rodon (6-5) failed to make it through the fifth inning for the first time in 16 starts this season. He allowed four runs on six hits and five walks in 4 2/3 innings.

Former Cub Felix Pena (2-4) turned in a strong start for the Angels. They also got a solo home run from Andrelton Simmons and a sacrifice fly from Justin Upton.

Avisail Garcia hit his 11th homer for the Sox, a solo shot in the second inning. He scored his team's second run on Omar Narvaez's single in the fourth.

White Sox teammates confident in Kopech's future

By Tom Musick / Sun-Times / September 7, 2018

White Sox pitcher Carlos Rodon was preparing for his start when he got word that Michael Kopech needed Tommy John surgery.

Rodon said the news was disappointing but expressed confidence that Kopech could bounce back strong.

"Luckily, he's young," said Rodon, who took the loss as the Sox fell 5-2 to the Angels. "He's 22, and the kid works really hard. He'll be back strong. It's just tough news. Tough break when you first get called up and that happens. You've just got to roll with it."

Sox manager Rick Renteria remains confident about next year – even if the club is not sure yet how it will replace Kopech. The front end of the Sox' rotation likely will feature Rodon, Reynaldo Lopez and Lucas Giolito, but the back end of the rotation is less certain.

Young arms such as Dylan Cease, Dane Dunning, Alec Hansen and Carson Fulmer could earn a look in the spring. Dylan Covey has gained valuable experience as a starter, and the team could look to the free-agent market for veteran help.

"This is a hiccup, albeit a pretty strong hiccup," Renteria said.

Kevan Smith, who watched Kopech develop in the minors before catching him in Chicago, said the injury news came as a shock.

"We're going to be here for him and keep him motivated," Smith said. "But he's a hard worker. He's going to kick the (stuff) out of his rehab. He's always had great mechanics, repeatable mechanics, but it just shows you, you just never know when your arm might go."

Feeling his pain

Giolito was one of the first teammates to talk with Kopech after the news broke.

Giolito had plenty to share. He underwent Tommy John surgery in 2012 as a top prospect with the Nationals.

"Unfortunately, this day and age, it's a regular part of the game with pitchers," Kopech said. "Personally, I never thought it would be something I would be going through. But it's part of it, and unfortunately for them but fortunately for me, there's a lot of guys in this clubhouse who have gone through it, so there's a lot of people I can talk to about it, and I will.

"Right now, it's an emotional point for me, but seeing there are other guys who have gone through it is going to be helpful."

Giolito expressed confidence that Kopech would be fine in the long term.

"He's only 22 years old and one of the hardest workers I've ever met," Giolito wrote on Twitter. "He's only going to come back stronger from this."

So close

Adam Engel nearly added another highlight-reel catch to his growing collection.

Engel tracked a long fly ball off the bat of the Angels' Shohei Ohtani and leaped against the wall in center field. As he reached above the yellow line, the ball knocked his glove off his hand and over the wall.

The blast marked Ohtani's 19th of the season and his third in two games since learning that he also needs Tommy John surgery.

Elbow injury to sideline White Sox' Michael Kopech until 2020

By Tom Musick / Sun-Times / September 7, 2018

Michael Kopech entered the White Sox clubhouse with his head down.

Manager Rick Renteria and general manager Rick Hahn followed a couple steps behind. Nobody spoke. Nobody smiled.

They were trying to process the team physician's determination that Kopech had a torn ulnar collateral ligament in his pitching elbow and would require Tommy John surgery, sidelining him for the rest of this season and all of 2019.

"I think to say it's unexpected would be an understatement," Kopech said. "It sucks. That's it. It sucks."

Everyone involved with the Sox would agree.

The news shook many within the organization, which had pegged the 22-year-old right-hander as one of the Sox' brightest stars heading into next season. Kopech allowed only one earned run in his first 11 innings but struggled with reduced velocity in his most recent outing Wednesday against the Tigers.

On Thursday, which was an off day for the Sox, Kopech reached out to the team to say he had trouble getting loose and felt slight discomfort in his arm one night earlier. He did not think it was serious and spoke about making his next start.

An exam by Dr. Nik Verma several hours before Friday's game proved otherwise, revealing a "significant tear" in the ligament, Hahn said.

Kopech never felt a pop in his arm and could not pinpoint a single pitch or inning when the injury might have occurred. He described the feeling in his arm as soreness, not pain, and figured he could pitch through it before the surprise news.

"It's been a whirlwind of emotions for me in the past couple of weeks, obviously," Kopech said. "From just about my absolute peak to the absolute rock bottom for me."

The Sox have dealt with recent injuries to several top prospects. Third baseman Jake Burger, the 2017 first-round pick, twice ruptured his Achilles tendon. Pitchers Dane Dunning (elbow sprain) and Alec Hansen (forearm) both went down, while outfielders Luis Robert (sprained thumb) and Micker Adolfo (UCL tear) also saw their progress stall.

Hahn said the injuries reinforced the importance of developing a deep farm system. He said the team still projected Kopech as a starter and expected him to make a full recovery for spring training in 2020.

"Sometimes, the best-laid plans fall apart on you," Hahn said. "Again, this is a disappointment for now, a disappointment for certainly 2019, a very big disappointment for Michael Kopech personally, but he still remains a very big part of what we think is a very bright future."

Kopech said he likely would receive a second opinion next week "even though they seemed pretty certain" about the extent of the injury. His surgery would follow shortly thereafter if the torn ligament is confirmed.

In the meantime, Kopech is trying his best to focus on this season's bright spots. He struggled with command this spring with Class AAA Charlotte but posted a remarkable 59-to-4 strikeout-to-walk ratio in the weeks leading to his promotion. He will be a few weeks shy of his 24th birthday when the 2020 season begins.

"After a rough beginning to the season for me, turning it around is really big," Kopech said. "It's exciting for me. I accomplished everything I wanted to accomplish. I cut down my walks. I went deeper in games. I pitched more efficiently. I got myself to the big leagues.

"It's unfortunate and sucks, but I don't think my work ethic has ever been in question. If it has, then I'm here to prove that it shouldn't be, and I'll come back stronger than before."

Hahn agreed.

"This is by no means the last we've seen of Michael Kopech," he said.

Rozner: While Kopech injury news is devastating, it shouldn't be shocking

By Barry Rozner / Daily Herald / September 7, 2018

Michael Kopech did not look like the same Michael Kopech on Wednesday night.

As he warmed up on the mound before a match with the Tigers on the South Side, he was fidgety and uncomfortable, seemingly unable to find his rhythm.

Kopech took that right into the game, when he allowed 7 runs on 9 hits with 4 home runs in only 3⅓ innings.

It was ugly.

You wondered why his breaking stuff was flat and his fastball velocity down considerably.

Kopech said it was merely bad mechanics and even blamed himself for poor preparation.

If your mind took a dark turn, if you pondered the injury possibility, you wouldn't be alone.

It's only natural.

After all, pitchers get hurt when you least expect it, and pitchers throw with pain every day, sometimes going years or even entire careers with injuries they can manage.

So while it was with great disappointment that White Sox fans got the news late Friday afternoon from the team Twitter account that Kopech was done for the year with an elbow injury -- and facing Tommy John surgery -- it really shouldn't be a shock.

You simply can't be shocked anymore when a pitcher misses a year with an elbow injury.

It's why you collect as many starters as you can, whether in full rebuild or not, because some will make it, some will bust out and some will get hurt.

This is life as a big league pitcher.

"I assumed after every start it was soreness. Some starts I thought it might be a little more sore than others," Kopech said Friday. "I just didn't ever put it in the category of pain."

The bad news is Kopech loses a year of development. Having brought him up when they did, Kopech will use a year of team control to rehab as he misses the entire 2019 season.

The good news is Kopech can return from Tommy John as good as he ever was, assuming all goes well, and can still be everything the White Sox hoped he would be when they acquired him in the Chris Sale trade.

"This is obviously a blow and something we are still digesting," said Sox General Manager Rick Hahn. "We believe Michael will be fully without restriction at the start of the 2020 season and in a position to build off what we feel is a very bright future."

It's been a rough year for White Sox prospects, bad luck being the only kind the organization has had in 2018. It does not mean that the rebuild won't work, but there have been significant individual setbacks this season.

That is also part of the process and Kopech is just the latest and highest profile.

"It's obviously a disappointment," Hahn said. "But it's one that we try to prepare ourselves for along the way."

"You've heard us speak repeatedly throughout this process about the importance of depth, the importance of having quality options and the importance of never feeling like we had enough."

"We have other quality arms coming through the system behind Michael that will contribute here in the coming years."

"Unfortunately, we're going to have to wait a little bit longer until we start seeing (Kopech) on a regular basis."

Kopech absolutely looked the part when he arrived two weeks ago, a surprising promotion given service time considerations. There were moments when he appeared to be every bit as dominant as advertised, and the energy he brought to the ballclub was palpable.

"It's been a whirlwind of emotions for me in the past couple weeks," Kopech said. "I went from my absolute peak to the absolute rock bottom. To say it was unexpected would be an understatement."

"If you're looking for a specific pitch or date, I couldn't tell you. I just thought it was discomfort. I thought it was something I could throw through."

"My last couple starts, my velocity has been a little bit down. I didn't think much of it. I just thought it wasn't there right now."

"But I did think it would be better to get it checked after my start from a couple days ago, just to see if there was something I can fix. This isn't the answer I expected."

The answer is surgery that will keep him out until the spring of 2020, when he should be joining a rotation preparing to compete for a playoff spot.

But the history of Tommy John tells us Kopech won't be Kopech again until 2021. If that occurs, all will be forgotten and the Sox will be right where they want to be.

Until then, Michael Kopech is facing some long and lonely days.

Such is the life of a major league pitcher.

White Sox cap forgettable Friday with 5-2 loss to Angels

By Scot Gregor / Daily Herald / September 7, 2018

Not a good day for the White Sox.

Before playing the first of three games against the Angels Friday night at Guaranteed Rate Field, news broke that rising star Michael Kopech likely needs Tommy John surgery and is out until the 2020 season.

"Tough news," starting rotation mate Carlos Rodon said. "Luckily he's young. He's 22 and the kid works really hard. Tough break when you first get called up and that happens. It happens. You just have to roll with it."

Rodon came back strong from shoulder surgery, returning to the Sox's roster on June 9. But after a string of nine straight quality starts, Rodon has slipped in his last two.

The left-hander never got on track in the Sox's 5-2 loss to Los Angeles at Guaranteed Rate Field.

"No fastball command," Rodon said after allowing 4 runs on 6 hits and 5 walks in 4⅔ innings. "I mean, the first inning went pretty good. I wish the whole game went that way. Just no feel for nothing."

Returning to the lineup after missing four straight games with right knee discomfort, Avisail Garcia was 2-for-2 with a home run. He also walked and was hit by a pitch as the White Sox's designated hitter.

"We're going to continue to use him and see if he's comfortable enough to manage the discomfort," manager Rick Renteria said. "But he wants to play. We're going to have to be very mindful of how he's doing and give him an opportunity to kind of recover a little bit. He's going to have good days and bad days like everybody. It's just the normal wear and tear of the body."

Next arm up:

Like everybody else, manager Rick Renteria was blindsided by Friday's news on Michael Kopech needing Tommy John surgery.

"Very tough for all of us," Renteria said.

Renteria is not yet sure who is going to take Kopech's spot in the starting rotation.

Dylan Covey is the obvious option. The right-hander made 17 starts before being moved to the bullpen when Kopech joined the Sox on Aug. 21.

Hector Santiago is another candidate to start over the final three weeks of the season.

White Sox: Kopech needs Tommy John surgery, likely out until 2020

By Scot Gregor / Daily Herald / September 7, 2018

The White Sox were expecting the rebuild to be painful along the way, but not like this.

Not even close.

Prized pitching prospect Michael Kopech became the latest in a lengthy line of young talent to go down with an injury, and the 22-year-old starter is facing Tommy John surgery that will keep him on the sidelines until the 2020 season.

"It's been a whirlwind of emotions for me in the past couple of weeks, obviously," Kopech said Friday afternoon at Guaranteed Rate Field. "From just about my absolute peak to the absolute rock bottom for me. I think to say it's unexpected would be an understatement."

"It (stinks). That's it. It (stinks)."

One of the best pitchers in minor-league baseball this season before joining the Sox's starting rotation on Aug. 21 from Class AAA Charlotte, Kopech's biggest issue in his first 4 major-league starts was dealing with rain delays.

But something seemed to be wrong with the hard-throwing righty in his last start -- Wednesday night against the Tigers.

Yes, there was the third rain delay in three home starts, but Kopech's velocity was noticeably down before and after the 28-minute stoppage in play.

After giving up 7 runs on 9 hits (4 home runs) in 3½ innings against Detroit, Kopech said he felt fine and blamed his performance on a lack of preparation.

But when he woke up Thursday morning, his elbow did not feel right.

Kopech contacted the White Sox on the off day and he was sent to Dr. Nikhal Verma, a team physician, on Friday.

"Unfortunately, that examination revealed a rather significant tear in his ulnar collateral ligament," said Sox general manager Rick Hahn. "The preliminary recommendation is for Michael to undergo Tommy John surgery. There will be a second opinion coming in the coming days, so we're still going to hold out a little bit of hope that perhaps there's a different prognosis.

"But we are certainly preparing for him to not only miss the remainder of the 2018 season but also miss the 2019 season. If there are any silver linings to this, it would simply be that given the timing of this injury, he will be on pace to be completely without restriction for the start of spring training for 2020 and fully able for the 2020 season."

While his velocity was down Wednesday, Kopech is not exactly sure when he injured his throwing elbow.

"If you are looking for a specific pitch or day, I couldn't tell you," he said. "It's been gradual. I just thought it was a little bit of discomfort. I thought it was something I could throw through. Obviously, my last couple of starts, my velocity has been a little bit down. Didn't think much of it.

"But I did think it would be better to get it checked out after starting a couple of days ago just to see if there was something I could fix. This isn't the answer I expected, but move on from it from now."

Kopech is not sure when -- or where -- he is going to get a second opinion.

"I don't have a date for it yet," he said. "I am going to get a second opinion even though they seemed pretty certain about what it was. I'm assuming it will be next week at some point, but again, I don't have a date yet. I'm just going to wait and see what I can figure it out."

Hahn said Kopech was "stunned" when they first talked about the prognosis Friday.

"He was talking about making his next start," the White Sox's GM said. "I almost think there was a part of him that almost didn't say anything because just talking with him a few minutes ago, he said, 'I sort of felt this was normal soreness and the kind of thing I could pitch through.'

"It probably speaks to how strong this kid really is. You can tell it from looking at him and you can see him on the mound and you see him walking around and his workout regimen, but he was pitching with a pretty significant tear in there and he was pitching pretty effectively at the big-league level with it, it seems."

Unfortunately, it is going to be a long time before Kopech is back on a big-league mound.

"You know, after a rough beginning to the season for me, turning it around is really big," Kopecch said. "It's exciting for me. I accomplished everything I wanted to accomplish. I cut down my walks. I went deeper in games. I pitched more efficiently. I got myself to the big leagues. It's unfortunate and (stinks), but I don't think my work ethic has ever been in question. If it has then I'm here to prove that it shouldn't be and I'll come back stronger than before."

Carlos Rodón's control problems lead to 'horseshit' outing in depressing day for White Sox

By James Fegan / The Athletic / September 7, 2018

The opening notes of Friday night's 5-2 loss to the Angels weren't a great testimony to Carlos Rodón's claims that his raw stuff remains diminished from where he was at pre-shoulder surgery. He spun arcing sliders for strikeouts of Kole Calhoun and Mike Trout through a perfect first inning and he ran 94 mph upstairs to blow away Taylor Ward as he diffused a bases-loaded jam in the second, showing the ability to tap into his velocity reserves relatively early.

"I mean, first inning went pretty good," Rodón said. "I wish the whole game went that way. Just no feel for nothing. It was horseshit."

A fitting word for a day in which the Sox learned Michael Kopecch would very likely be lost until 2020 with a surprise UCL tear and a looming Tommy John surgery.

"Just no command," Rodón said. "Down in the bullpen didn't feel good. Usually you try to clear that. The first inning went well and I tried to do build off of that. Just didn't happen."

After his shortest outing of the season — 4 2/3 innings that dragged him over the 100-inning threshold for the year — Rodón's ERA had spiked to the very mild height of 3.11, which is hardly a clear breaking point to abandon hope in his more contact-heavy run of success. But faith in such a path, which is still hopefully not the path after this season, requires Rodón to compensate with control and strike-throwing, and a final line of 4 2/3 innings, six hits, four earned runs, five walks (one intentional), four strikeouts and a homer did not find him in compliance.

If Shohei Ohtani doesn't find a way to turn on a 94 mph fastball above his belt and two inches inside, or Adam Engel's glove doesn't flip off on impact as he leapt into the wall to rob a three-run fourth inning homer, maybe Rodón grits and navigates through another quality start. But a few inches, or an improbable throwing error his last time out against Boston, are the slim margin of error created by extra baserunners, and with 22 walks in 46 innings, including five hit batters since Aug. 1, Rodón has been staving off this sort of reckoning for a bit now.

The trend is obviously not fixed into a cycle of decline, where the only possible reality is that he regresses to his current 4.75 FIP, or some other modest projection. At 25, Rodon is young enough for his velocity and stuff to continue to progress as he works his way all the way back from his own surgery. He works regularly on staying upright and "stepping through the door" to keep a straight line to the plate and his command could continue to improve, but as it stands, on nights where he has "no feel for nothing," the room for error will be painfully thin.

After three games and an extra off day, Avisail García returned to the lineup as well as could have been hoped, accounting for nearly all of the White Sox offense. He lifted a solo home run (his 16th, into the wind in right-center in the second), took a fastball off the left tricep and scored on an Omar Narváez single in the fourth, and added a single and a walk.

"We're going to continue to use him and manage to see if he's comfortable enough to manage the discomfort," White Sox manager Rick Renteria said. "We're going to spell him, do everything we have to do to keep him off his legs as much as possible. But he wants to play. We're going to have to be very mindful of how he's doing and give him an opportunity to kind of recover a little bit. I'll talk to him tonight, talk to him tomorrow to see how he's feeling."

García served as a designated hitter Friday night, and could return to the field, but Renteria discussed it as if that depends on how he is feeling on a day-to-day basis. It sounds unlikely that he will return to playing back-to-back days in right field, and obviously with expanded rosters and Ryan Cordell up, the White Sox have very little need to push it, even while accounting for García's adamant and somewhat bizarre insistence on playing through a nagging injury at the tail end of a rebuilding season. He has his final year of arbitration coming up, so counting stats have a purpose for him that's easy enough to reason out, beyond his well-known competitive nature.

White Sox GM Rick Hahn reiterated Monday that the White Sox do not feel that his right knee cannot get significantly worse with play, and García must clearly believe that as well.

Michael Kopech lost to Tommy John surgery, and optimism for 2019 goes with him

By James Fegan / The Athletic / September 7, 2018

When Michael Kopech strode out from a back room into the White Sox clubhouse followed by Rick Hahn at the end of pregame media availability, his face stripped of all enthusiasm, it hinted at the worst.

The worst presumed to be that the White Sox, out of abundance of caution, had found some cause to shut Kopech down for the rest of the year after a nightmare fourth inning on Wednesday that saw their top pitching prospect topping out at a mere 96 mph. It turns out they had, but even with that expectation, the diagnosis of a torn ulnar collateral ligament in Kopech's right elbow was a gut punch to an organization that's already absorbed several body blows this year.

"It's been a whirlwind of emotions for me in the past couple of weeks obviously," said a dejected Kopech, who was celebrating his big league debut with his family fewer than three weeks ago. "From just about my absolute peak to the absolute rock bottom for me. I think to say it's unexpected would be an understatement. It sucks. That's it. It sucks."

Kopech is getting a second opinion next week, but didn't possess any optimism that it will provide different news. The examination the White Sox put him through was exhaustive, the results were definitive, the way forward is arduous. Kopech is almost certainly out for the entire 2019 season, with a straightforward goal of trying to work his way back to be a normal participant for spring training in 2020.

"After a rough beginning to the season for me, turning it around is really big," Kopech said when asked to reflect on his 2018 campaign. "I accomplished everything I wanted to accomplish. I cut down my walks. I went deeper in games. I pitched more efficiently. I got myself to the big leagues. It's unfortunate and sucks but I don't think my work ethic has ever been in question. If it has then, I'm here to prove that it shouldn't be and I'll come back stronger than before."

Lest anyone waste tears on the service time that Kopech will accrue on the disabled list rather than the true matter at hand, or suddenly claim the foresight to have confined him to Triple-A until the UCL tear they apparently have always known was going to happen occurred, the White Sox insisted there were no indicators that Kopech was at risk. Without a pop or a sharp pain, there was minimal indication that he was even hurt before he was asked to be checked out, which produced the grim news only hours before Hahn addressed the media Friday evening.

Kopech felt a little stiffness while warming up before his start Wednesday and he felt some soreness afterward but barely crossed the threshold of thinking it needed to be reported to his team. Until he heard the results of his examination, he was preparing to make his next start in Kansas City.

"There were no inklings whatsoever," Hahn said. "Nothing that he reported, nothing in the injury reports, nothing with his delivery, nothing with any of the analytics of his mechanics, nothing until yesterday, when he rightfully shared with us that he didn't feel quite right getting loose during that start against Detroit. You guys saw the start, the velo was a little bit down. He was still, pretty remarkably perhaps with a significant tear in his UCL, he was 93 or 94 mph and up to 96 mph during that outing. But yesterday was the first time he reported any of the slightest concern."

There were multiple references from Hahn and Kopech that he was pitching with the tear in his elbow, completely unaware, at some point Wednesday night. There's a full possibility that it occurred during his most recent start against Detroit, but it could have taken place in between his last two outings, or even as early as his outing against Boston, however unlikely. There's no telling for sure, and accordingly no room for the White Sox to second guess calling up an eminently ready prospect who looked to be at the height of his powers during his final weeks in Triple-A. All the reasons they found it beneficial for him to face major league batters in September stand, as they thought he was fine.

"There's definitely measures that every organization takes, and knock on wood, we've been as successful as most," Hahn said. "But there are certain things that are inevitable, unfortunately. There's guys with the soundest deliveries mechanically that you can break down [who] occasionally fall victim to this. There's an element of biology here that we haven't quite cracked that inflicts pitchers across the board. Yes, there's heightened risk with certain delivery types — not Michael's, per se — and we do our best to manage that risk, as do all 30 clubs, but unfortunately this happens from time to time."

A pet peeve these days is how much Tommy John surgery and the rehab process is looked at as almost automated, rather than a grueling crucible that there is no absolute guarantee of returning whole nor equally effective from. But if there is any carrying quality that can be brought to the mind-numbingly repetitive slate of rehab work, Kopech's work ethic will be well-suited for it. Hahn quickly shot down any notion that this injury would change his role from being a starter.

In the meantime, a 2019 season that could have sparked hope as a "year early" contention campaign behind the arrival of Eloy Jiménez and a rotation that looked capable throughout August will likely need a veteran starter added in the offseason, and a lot of patience. An organization that lacked other true, absolute ace candidates (since how many are there, truly, in baseball?) will become that much more invested in how much Carlos Rodón's raw stuff comes back, whether Dylan Cease adds pitchability to his dizzying stuff, whether Dane Dunning returns from his own elbow injury smoothly, and how many steps Lucas Giolito and Reynaldo López can still take forward.

"Throughout this process, we were making this about more than just one guy," Hahn said. "We knew that there were going to be setbacks, whether it was due to injury or other performance, and that we were going to have to be prepared and have enough depth in order to insulate ourselves, either internally or via trade and free agency, to be able to withstand some of this stuff. Yes, this is going to be a challenge, but in the coming weeks and months we will respond to it and put ourselves in the best position for the long term. This is by no means the last we've seen of Michael Kopech. This is the last we've seen of him for '18 and very likely for '19, but he's still going to play a significant role on what we project to be some very, very good White Sox teams in the future."

It's about more than one guy, but there aren't many one guys in the White Sox organization whose absence will place greater scrutiny how strong the group around him is than Kopech. The rebuild isn't over, and Kopech's 2019 innings weren't figuring to be the most important of his career, but the process of seeing whether this group can grow and mature into one that carries a contender, one that just started to look like it was starting to get fun, just grew more long and troubled
