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Davidson, MLB friends make students' day

White Sox player hosts Best Buddies event at Yucaipa High School

By Chad Thornburg / MLB.com / November 13, 2018

YUCAIPA, Calif. -- Chicago is 2,000 miles away, but Yucaipa, a city located about 90 minutes east of Los Angeles in San Bernardino County, has a number of budding White Sox fans.

It's because one of the White Sox is one of their own. Matt Davidson, who was a first-round Draft pick out of Yucaipa High School in 2009, maintains a frequent presence at his alma mater, and on Tuesday, he, his wife Julianne and five of his Major Leaguer friends participated in a Best Buddies lunch at the school.

"I think that we're just very fortunate [as professional athletes]. We live very fortunate lifestyles," Davidson said. "To give back to people who aren't as fortunate, I think, is huge and puts a lot of things in perspective of what really is important in life.

"What we do is very stressful and takes a lot of hard work. Over time, it can also make you a little selfish, only thinking about yourself. So I think doing things like this can really broaden your view and just kind of get back down to earth and just give back. [Looking at] all these kids' faces, they're jumping up and down, and we're literally just taking a couple of hours out of our day."

Current and former White Sox players Michael Kopech, Dylan Covey, Rob Brantly and Danny Farquhar and the Rays' Daniel Robertson joined Davidson in Yucaipa. Their day started with a visit to a special-education class, where they engaged in a Q&A with the students. They then took to the field for a baseball game in which each student received two at-bats, and the day wrapped with a lunch provided by Davidson. The students each received a T-shirt and a gift bag.

"It's so kind of him," said Hope Gutierrez, a special-education teacher who runs the Best Buddies program at Yucaipa. "It's hard for me to put it into words because he keeps returning year after year. He's so gracious, he's so giving."

Best Buddies is an international nonprofit organization that aims to combat the "social, physical and economic isolation of the 200 million people with intellectual and developmental disabilities." At Yucaipa, the program, which Davidson participated in during high school, pairs students with disabilities with non-disabled students for a variety of activities throughout the year, such as field trips and an annual talent show fundraiser.

For many of the students, Tuesday was a date circled on the calendar.

"Our kids look forward to it all year," said Yucaipa principal Shad Kirkland. "Last year's experience just kind of energized them. The gear that Matt and his friends brought, we saw them wearing it all year long. It's so impactful to our students."

This is the third year Davidson, who's coming off his second full season with the White Sox, has hosted the event, but he's been visiting the school and volunteering in the area for much longer.

Even as a student, Gutierrez said Davidson always made time for Best Buddies, and nearly a decade later, the 27-year-old is still taking an active role in the program.

"People would say to me, 'Mrs. G, you need to let him go because he's got to practice, he's going to be a professional ballplayer,'" Gutierrez said. "I said, 'He knows where his priorities are -- people before ball,' and he always was that way. I appreciate that, and he's still doing that, but because of the ball, he's able to give back to his people."

All of the players Davidson brought with him Tuesday are from or currently live in Southern California -- both Robertson and Brantly played against Davidson and Yucaipa in high school -- and each shared Davidson's desire to give back to the community in which they live. Robertson even hosts his own fan fest charity event benefiting his family's foundation, which aims to help those in need of financial aid when a family member is unable to work due to cancer treatment, in nearby Upland, his hometown.

"When I heard about Matt's [event], I just reached out and told him I want to be a part of it," Robertson said. "This is the platform we're on. This is what I personally like to do just to give back a little bit and spend some time with kids who want to go out and play and have fun."

"It's just a fortunate thing when you've got a group of guys that remember where they came from," Brantly said.

Covey recalled meeting a big leaguer at an early age in school in Pasadena. He doesn't remember who it was, but it didn't matter. He remembers how much it mattered to him at the time. He hoped to have that same kind of impact for the kids at Yucaipa.

"It was such a cool experience. I looked up to him because when I was a little kid, I wanted to play in the big leagues," Covey said. "I may not remember the guy's name, but it had an impact on me."

Abreu to work with Cuban hitting instructor

Slugger has trained with his former coach occasionally through career in MLB

By Scott Merkin / MLB.com / November 13, 2018

CHICAGO -- White Sox first baseman Jose Abreu doesn't plan to make any alterations to his workout regimen this offseason. But hitting-wise, Abreu will be making some changes, as he plans to work with Marcos Hernandez, his hitting instructor in Cuba from when he was 18 and during three seasons with Serie Nacional in Cuba.

"We have been working on and off since 2016 here in the U.S., but nothing formal," said Abreu through interpreter Billy Russo, during a conference call to discuss winning his second career Silver Slugger Award. "He's a guy that knows a lot about my hitting, my offense. He's going to be a big help. You want to be around people who care about you and people that can help you to improve. He's one of those guys.

"It's going to be very good for me. I have a lot of confidence in him. There's a trust there that works very well. That's the best way for me to approach next season, because I want to start the season very good, not like last season when I started slow. I want to start the season as well as I can, and I want to get to Spring Training in very good condition."

Hernandez helped Abreu last season coming out of his first All-Star Game start, when the proud veteran had watched his average drop from .319 on May 26 to .250 on July 22. Abreu enjoys working with White Sox hitting coach Todd Steverson and assistant hitting coach Greg Sparks, but Hernandez has greater history with Abreu.

"Our main focus is going to be to try to stay more in the strike zone, try to be more accurate directly to the ball," Abreu said. "That was an area I struggled with and it was very tough for me to get to that point.

"Sometimes in life, you are going to meet people that know you better than yourself. He's one of those guys for me, especially with offense."

Abreu hit .265 with 22 home runs, 78 RBIs and a .798 OPS in 2018, which all were career lows. He also missed all but six games in September because of emergency surgery correcting testicular torsion and an infection in his right thigh. Due to these trying times, Abreu admitted to crying upon hearing the Silver Slugger news, because it was not expected.

"People know how hard I worked day in and day out," Abreu said. "I think this was a reward for all the work and effort, even though I didn't have my best season this year. It's rewarding."

The 2019 campaign is the sixth and final season on Abreu's current contract with the White Sox. But the 31-year-old wants to stay with the organization for a long time and be part of the rebuild's winning side.

"But that's not in my hands right now," Abreu said. "In case next season is my last, I would like to thank the White Sox organization and all the people who have been around me. Especially the owner [Jerry Reinsdorf], he's been an outstanding person to me.

"I try not to think about that because I truly believe I am going to be part of this organization for a very long time. But we'll see. I know this is a business, and that is the way you have to approach it."

White Sox Robert named AFL's Hitter of the Week

By Jim Callis / MLB.com / November 13, 2018

GLENDALE, Ariz. -- After battling injuries in his first two pro seasons, Luis Robert came to the Arizona Fall League to make up for lost at-bats. Then the White Sox center fielder strained a hamstring running to first base in his fourth game for the Glendale Desert Dogs, costing him nine more days.

Since returning, Robert has been one of the Fall League's hottest hitters. He has batted .354/.404/.521 since his return, including a .400/.429/.600 stretch from Nov. 5-10 to claim the AFL's Player of the Week award.

"I feel very proud to win Player of the Week," Robert said through an interpreter, Yankees outfielder Estevan Florial. "I've been working hard through the week and through the season."

• D-backs' Duplantier named AFL Pitcher of the Week

Robert is batting .338/.386/.462 overall with two homers and three steals in 16 games. He's tied for the league lead with 18 runs and hit safely in his first 14 games, the longest streak in the Fall League this year, before going 0-for-4 in each of his last two contests.

- AFL batting leaders

That's the type of production the White Sox were hoping for when they signed the Cuban defector for \$26 million in May 2017. Not only is that the second-largest bonus ever for an amateur, trailing only the \$31 million the Red Sox lavished on Yoan Moncada, but Chicago also paid another \$26 million as a penalty for exceeding its international spending allotment.

Robert played in just 28 games in his 2017 pro debut because of minor knee and ankle ailments, then damaged ligaments in his left thumb on a slide during Spring Training, sidelining him for three months. He aggravated his thumb injury shortly after returning and played in just 50 games during the regular season, batting .269/.333/.360 with 15 steals.

Ranked No. 44 on MLB Pipeline's Top 100 Prospects list, Robert has the tools to become a 20-20 player and man any of the three outfield spots. His primary goal for the AFL was to refine his right-handed swing, in particular trying to keep his bat in the hitting zone for a longer period of time.

"I had been working on it before and I've been working on it here too," Robert said. "I think I'm getting better at it. I've been working mostly on that here. This league is going to help me a lot because I didn't play a lot this season."

Farquhar to undergo final scan in recovery

Former White Sox reliever suffered brain hemorrhage in April

By Chad Thornburg / MLB.com / November 13, 2018

YUCAIPA, Calif. -- Danny Farquhar's incredible recovery is nearly complete. The former White Sox pitcher, who sustained a brain hemorrhage in April, will undergo his final CT scan on Thursday to ensure his skull has healed properly from his craniotomy. He expects to be fully cleared.

Farquhar, a free agent, is going through his normal offseason throwing program at home in Temecula, Calif., with the expectation of pitching in the Majors in 2019. He's been cleared for baseball activities since his final angiogram on June 5 and said his skull healing was the only thing that held him back from returning to pitch for the White Sox toward the end of last season.

"I felt like I could have faced big league batters and been just fine," Farquhar said Tuesday at Yucaipa High School, where he joined several of his former White Sox teammates at a community event hosted by Matt Davidson. "I actually had some pretty positive doctors that believed in me. ... They saw my drive the whole way. They thought for sure I'd be back on the field, and now I just have to wait for 2019 for that to happen."

The White Sox removed Farquhar from their 40-man roster last month, and Farquhar elected to become a Minor League free agent. He declined to discuss his free agency, but didn't rule out a return to Chicago.

"I didn't cut ties with [the White Sox]," Farquhar said. "There's always a chance I could sign back, so we'll see what the future holds."

Farquhar's brain hemorrhage was caused by a ruptured aneurysm and required surgery. He collapsed in the White Sox dugout after facing four batters in a game against the Astros on April 20 and spent more than two weeks at Rush University Medical Center in Chicago.

"That was definitely one of the scariest things I've ever seen in my life," Davidson said. "Just being there in the dugout and watching him go unconscious, that whole time is really unexplainable. It was just such a weird and tough thing; we didn't really want to go play baseball."

"It just put everything in perspective. He was a totally healthy dude, and he was just out pitching and then it just happened. And for him to come back and make that full recovery is a miracle in and of itself. I'm just really proud to say I'm a teammate of his."

Farquhar visited the White Sox at Guaranteed Rate Field three times after he was discharged from the hospital on May 7, throwing out a ceremonial first pitch before a game against the Brewers on June 1.

"Watching his recovery process is nothing short of incredible," said former White Sox catcher Rob Brantly, who also trains in Temecula and plans to catch Farquhar's bullpen sessions as the season gets closer. "He's looking great, he's looking ready to play, so we'll just see how this free agency shapes up and see what happens."

Farquhar said his offseason routine hasn't changed as a result of April's health scare. His plan moving forward is simple:

"Training, work hard, open up eyes and get a big league job," he said.

Bryce Harper or no Bryce Harper, the White Sox expect to be better in 2019

By Vinnie Duber / NBC Sports Chicago / November 13, 2018

The White Sox are reportedly interested in Bryce Harper, and so White Sox fans are already planning for one of the game's elite talents to be patrolling right field at Guaranteed Rate Field for the foreseeable future.

But, as hard as it might be, forget about Harper for a moment and look at the White Sox as they stand.

There was a belief at this time last year that the White Sox might have been able to be a pleasant surprise from a win-loss perspective during the 2018 season. And that obviously did not end up being the case. They lost 100 games in what general manager Rick Hahn dubbed "the toughest part of the rebuild," while the organization waited for many of its highly touted prospects to develop in the minor leagues. Hopes of everything going right, prospects arriving early, everyone staying healthy and the White Sox making a run at a playoff spot were dashed in emphatic fashion.

That waiting game isn't over, as Michael Kopech became the only one of the organization's highest-rated prospects to reach the majors in 2018 — only to require Tommy John surgery after just four starts. For the time being, the roster looks very much the same, with many of the young players at the big league level going through their own developmental growing pains. And a large number of those much-ballyhooed prospects suffered significant injuries last season, significant enough to throw the entire timeline of this rebuilding process into question.

Yes, there will be offseason additions. They might or might not include Harper, as being interested in one of the game's best players and being able to convince him to sign on the dotted line are two very different things. The White Sox sure seem to have a willingness to spend and spend big, but that opportunity to make a huge splash might not come, in which case the offseason additions could be helpful but not quite as impactful on the long-term status of the franchise. That kind of move might have to wait another offseason.

So what does 2019 hold? Will the White Sox be better next year? Let's let Hahn answer that one.

"We would expect it at this stage," Hahn said last week at the GM Meetings in Southern California. "Having a full year of — knock on wood — a healthy (Jose) Abreu and having Welington (Castillo)'s offensive contribution hopefully for a full year, Carlos Rodon for a full year. Those should all be, from strictly a lineup standpoint, things that we should see improvements from.

"You add in Eloy (Jimenez) likely spending the bulk of the season, if not all of the season in Chicago, that's going to be an upgrade for us as well. Having (Tim Anderson), (Yoan) Moncada continue their development, (Lucas) Giolito, (Reynaldo) Lopez, continuing their development, those are all reasons to believe that there

should be reasonable improvement. That's even before we start augmenting the roster with guys who obviously we're bringing because we think they're going to make us stronger.

"I do think it's reasonable to enter next year, even before we're making any of these additions with expectations that there's going to be a step forward."

Time alone would make that seem to be a fair assessment. While White Sox fans might have been a bit frightened by Giolito's high ERA and Moncada's near-record number of strikeouts, Hahn and the White Sox still have the utmost confidence that these young players can reach their high ceilings. Getting more experience for Rodon, Giolito, Lopez, Moncada and Anderson — all planned to be key contributors for this team for a long time — should make them and therefore the team better.

Abreu, the team's most reliable hitter, was bothered by two freak injuries and an uncharacteristic slump last season. And Rodon didn't start his season until June while recovering from shoulder surgery. The same can be said for Avisail Garcia, who was bothered by a knee injury from Opening Day on, though Hahn did not include him in that list of players above. A report Tuesday indicated the White Sox are trying to trade Garcia and presented the thought that they might not even tender him a contract if no trade materializes.

But the most impactful reasoning Hahn gave was the arrival of more of these prospects to the South Side. Jimenez is the main example, as he's expected to be called up early in the campaign. He's one of the top three prospects in baseball, and that kind of addition can only be a positive one to the White Sox lineup. But he shouldn't be the only prospect to make his White Sox debut in 2019, as Dylan Cease could be on a track similar to the one Kopech was on last season. Zack Burdi, the potential closer of the future, could arrive, too, after spending the last year-plus recovering from Tommy John surgery.

And then there are those offseason additions. Even if they don't include Harper, expect to see two new starting pitchers fill the holes in the rotation and a new face or two out in the bullpen. Those units can only get better after the rotation led baseball in walks last season and the bullpen ranked 25th out of 30 teams in ERA.

See, it was even difficult for this writer to forget about Harper long, as he's mentioned in here multiple times. But the point is that even if the White Sox don't make an earth-shattering addition this winter, they still expect to be better, which can only come as good news to those who sat through the 100-loss campaign in 2018. Will we once again be talking about a surprise playoff appearance in spring training? That's doubtful. But even without a huge move like signing Harper, the rebuilding plan is still firmly on the track.

White Sox reportedly trying to trade Avisail Garcia

By Vinnie Duber / NBC Sports Chicago / November 13, 2018

Is the Avisail Garcia Era about to come to an end on the South Side?

According to a report from MLB.com's Mark Feinsand, the White Sox are trying to trade Garcia away. Feinsand added that there's a belief the White Sox could even non-tender Garcia in the absence of a trade.

Mark Feinsand

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@Feinsand

According to a source, the White Sox are actively trying to trade Avisail Garcia. There's a sense within the industry that Chicago will non-tender Garcia if they're unable to deal him.

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Garcia came to the White Sox in the three-team Jake Peavy trade at the 2013 deadline. Yes, Garcia's been with the White Sox for more than half a decade. He didn't break out until 2017, though, batting just .257 in his first three and a half seasons with the White Sox. Then came the All-Star campaign of 2017, when he hit .330 and reached base at a .380 clip, ranking among the league leaders in both categories.

Last season, though, Garcia was hampered by a knee injury that bothered him from Opening Day on, with his hamstring sending him to the disabled list on more than one occasion. He slashed just .236/.281/.438 in 93 games, though he did set a new career high with 19 home runs.

The injuries made it very difficult to forecast what Garcia's long-term future with the White Sox might be, preventing him from being able to prove he could repeat those All-Star numbers. With one year of team control remaining, the White Sox have options. They could try to deal him this winter, as is being reported, or they could try to trade him during the season.

General manager had this to say about Garcia at last week's GM Meetings:

"We've been talking about Avi for a long time now, and I think we know him as well as anybody about what he's capable of doing when he's fully healthy, as well as some of the challenges created by the health issues for him," Hahn said. "With one year currently left of control, we're having conversations right now about how best to proceed."

With the White Sox expected to bring top prospect Eloy Jimenez, who played mostly left field in 2018, up from the minors early next season and their reported interest in free-agent right fielder Bryce Harper, there could be a desire to open up corner-outfield spots for more productive offensive players.

Jose Abreu confident he will re-sign with White Sox: 'I'm going to be part of this organization for a very long time'

By Paul Sullivan / Chicago Tribune / November 13, 2018

White Sox slugger Jose Abreu doesn't seem too concerned about entering his walk season without a contract extension, believing everything will work out in the long run.

The Sox have repeatedly said Abreu is an integral part of the rebuild as a mentor to young players such as Yoan Moncada and Luis Robert. But unless he re-signs before the 2019 season begins, Abreu's name is bound to come up in trade rumors before the July deadline.

"Everybody knows that 2019 is going to be the last season of my current contract but I try not to think about that because I'm part of the White Sox and believe I'm going to be part of this organization for a very long time," Abreu said through a translator Tuesday on a conference call from Cuba. "But that's something that's not in my hands right now."

"I still have one season left. In the case the next season will be my last one, I would like to thank the White Sox organization and all the people who have been around me in my time with this team, especially (Chairman Jerry Reinsdorf). He has been an outstanding person to me, and one of the best people I've met in this country ..."

"But we'll see. I know this is a business and that's the way you have to approach it."

Abreu, who turns 32 in January, is arbitration-eligible and is coming off his worst year, statistically-speaking, since arriving from Cuba in 2014 on a six-year, \$68 million deal, the biggest in Sox history. He made \$13 million in arbitration last season, when he suffered some painful injuries, including testicular torsion, which prompted emergency surgery to save one of his testicles.

He returned in early September to play six games, hitting .125 before sitting out the rest of the season with a thigh infection.

But Abreu still earned the starting spot at first base for the American League in the All-Star Game and last week won his second Silver Slugger award.

“It was very unexpected because it was a very difficult season for me, especially the way it ended,” he said. “When I heard about the award I started crying. I couldn’t believe it. ... People who know how I work, all the effort I put in day in and day out, I think this is a reward for all that hard work and effort.

“Even though I didn’t have my best season, I sacrificed a lot and I worked very, very hard. It’s rewarding.”

Abreu, who is working out in Cuba with his old hitting instructor, Marcos Hernandez, has said repeatedly he wanted to stick out the rebuild, even though he hasn’t yet experienced a winning season in the majors.

This normally would be the right time for the Sox to shop him around. But Abreu’s injuries and slight drop-off in production hurt his trade value after four solid seasons.

The possibility of the Sox bringing in a big-name free agent obviously appeals to Abreu, who said he would be “really happy and excited to play alongside one of those big names.” Of course, it might be a moot point considering the Sox haven’t given out the kind of lucrative, lengthy contract that a Bryce Harper or Manny Machado figures to command this winter.

But White Sox general manager Rick Hahn said last week at the GM meetings in California it’s “no secret” they put themselves in position to have some economic flexibility at this point in the rebuild to add to their young core.

The Sox don’t have to add an impact player now since they’re unlikely to contend in 2019. Their priority is beefing up the bullpen and outfield, primarily adding some contact hitters to a lineup that set a major-league strikeout record.

Avisail Garcia is the likeliest veteran to move, though his trade value plummeted in 2018 because of injuries and a lack of production.

Still, the Sox will look at the high-priced free agents to see if there’s mutual interest, and there is plenty of money to spend this winter.

“We wouldn’t be doing this properly if we weren’t investigating all of our possibilities via trade and free agency to further expand that group of players we have coming,” Hahn said. “It’s not a surprise to us that at least there are players out there who are going to have some choices (and) may be interested in being a part of (us).”

White Sox’ Jose Abreu goes to work with personal hitting instructor

By Daryl Van Schouwen / Sun-Times / November 13, 2018

Jose Abreu won his second Silver Slugger Award in 2018, but he wants to be better.

Two health issues cut his season short, just when he was rounding into his customary good form following a sluggish first half. To do everything he can to bring his A game to the White Sox in April, Abreu began working Tuesday in Miami with Marcos Hernandez, a hitting instructor he has hit with off and on since he was 18, most recently in 2016.

“He’s a guy that knows a lot about my hitting, my offense,” Abreu said on a conference call through interpreter Billy Russo. “He’s going to be a big help. You want to be around people who care about you and people that can help you to improve. He’s one of those guys and that’s why I’m [doing] this now.”

Abreu, who said talking to Hernandez after the All-Star break helped last season, said he’ll work on staying inside the ball. He said Sox hitting coach Todd Steverson and assistant hitting coach Greg Sparks are “very good instructors, and I like them a lot.”

"I like the style and how they approach the hitting program, how they talk," he said. "They are two people that really care about the guys."

But "hitting wise, I'm going to make some changes," Abreu said.

"I have a lot of confidence in [Hernandez]. He knows me. There's a trust there that works very well. I think that's the best way for me to approach next season because I want to start the season very good, not like last season when I started slow."

An All-Star in a year in which the class of first basemen in the American League was not deep, Abreu became emotional when he learned about the Silver Slugger, given to the best hitter at his position in his league, last week.

"I started crying, I couldn't believe it," he said. "It was a very, very difficult season for me. People know how hard I worked day in and day out. I think this was a reward for all the work and effort even though I didn't have my best season this year. It's rewarding."

Abreu led AL first basemen with 36 doubles but recorded career lows in homers (22), RBI (78) and a .265/.325/.473 hitting line during a season in which he was named an All-Star starter for the first time in his five seasons but was limited to a career low 128 games. He had surgery for a testicular torsion and then was sidelined with a thigh infection.

Now entering the last year of his contract with the Sox, Abreu wants to remain with the team for the rest of his career but knows it could be his last. In fact, he already began thanking chairman Jerry Reinsdorf in the event that it will be.

"He's been an outstanding person to me," Abreu said. "But I try not to think about that because I truly believe I am going to be part of this organization for a very long time. But we'll see."

"Everybody knows that 2019 is going to be the last season of my current contract. But I try not to think about that because [I believe] the White Sox are the team I am going to be part of for a very long time. But that's not in my hands right now."

Whether Abreu goes or stays depends on what the rebuilding Sox would get in return in a trade.

"That's the best answer," Sox general manager Rick Hahn said last week.

As Abreu, who turns 32 in January, enters the last of six years under contract with the Sox, most of the offseason buzz surrounding his team is about free agents such as Manny Machado and Bryce Harper, both of whom are long shots to sign with the club even though the Sox have money to spend.

"We're in a very good position to make some moves," Abreu said. "I would be really happy and excited and happy to play alongside those big names."

Stay tuned. In the meantime, keep an ear open for Hot Stove chatter about Abreu. So far, it has been quiet.

"We haven't shown the hesitancy to move star-type players when the deal made sense for us in the long term of what we were trying to accomplish," Hahn said, "and it's only fair with Abreu going into his last season of control there would be that speculation."

The Sox hold Abreu in high regard for his presence and voice in the clubhouse.

"In how we value him there may be a modest disconnect between us and other clubs," Hahn said. "All 30 [teams] can put some level of valuation of how he performs and does between the lines, and we put a little extra value on it based on what he does in the clubhouse. Which makes it harder to lock up on a deal, but we've shown a willingness to move players like this before."

'Lucky I'm alive:' White Sox radio voice Ed Farmer shaken by California wildfires

By Scot Gregor / Daily Herald / November 13, 2018

A South Side native, St. Rita High School graduate, former White Sox all-star relief pitcher and the radio voice for his hometown team over the past 27 years, Ed Farmer has been calling Southern California his off-season home for 50 years.

Fortunately for Farmer, he still has a home.

Over time, Farmer has grown accustomed to seeing wildfires in and around the Los Angeles area, but nothing like the current blaze that has claimed over 40 lives.

"We've had them here before and they'd maybe burn 1,0000 acres and they'd put them out," Farmer said by phone Tuesday night from his home in Calabasas, Calif. "I've never seen one like this. When we evacuated, I was under the impression it was a little brush fire. It certainly grew.

"I'm lucky I'm alive. I'm lucky my family is alive. I'm not kidding. When we were evacuating and driving out on the 101 Freeway, there were flames on both sides."

With no hotel rooms available Friday, Farmer and family had to sleep in a car before returning to Calabasas the next day. The damage won't soon be forgotten.

"Whatever you've heard about wildfires here, increase it by 100,000 on this one," he said. "That's how fast this fire moved, that's how fast people got out."

Farmer said he was finally able to shower and shave on Monday, but it's going to be quite a while before his community returns to normal.

"I'm looking out the window now and I don't see any greenery," Farmer said. "I can see probably 10 miles away out of my back window, no green anywhere. Nothing. The devastation is severe."

Farmer said he's constantly checked in with two old friends that live in nearby Westlake Village -- former White Sox starting pitcher Jon Garland and ex-Angels manager Mike Scioscia.

Both are fine, although Scioscia did have a scare.

"He had fire on the bottom of the foundation of his house and put it out with his garden hose," Farmer said.

Abreu hopes to keep slugging away with Chicago White Sox

By Scot Gregor / Daily Herald / November 13, 2018

Little or nothing has happened, but it's already been a newsworthy off-season for the Chicago White Sox.

With plenty of money to spend as they move into their third year of a rebuild, the Sox have been linked to a pair of big-name free agents: Bryce Harper and Manny Machado.

On Tuesday, MLB.com's Mark Feinsand reported the White Sox are trying to trade Avisail Garcia and are prepared to non-tender the right fielder if they can't make a deal. Garcia has been the subject of trade rumors for the last two years, as has Jose Abreu.

Both Sox veterans are under club control through the 2019 season, and both have value. As always, Abreu is hoping to stay with the White Sox through the upcoming season and beyond.

"Everybody knows that 2019 is going to be the last season of my current contract," Abreu said Tuesday through Sox translator Billy Russo. "I try not to think about that because the White Sox are the team I am going to be part of for a very long time. But that's not in my hands right now."

"In case next season is my last, I would like to thank the White Sox organization and all the people who have been around me. Especially the owner (Jerry Reinsdorf); he's been an outstanding person to me. But, like I said, I try not to think about that because I truly believe I am going to be part of this organization for a very long time."

There is little doubt Abreu is the best bat in a Sox lineup that has struggled to produce runs for years.

Even though the 31-year-old first baseman played in a career-low 128 games last season due to injuries, Abreu won his second Silver Slugger award after batting .265/.325/.473 with 22 home runs and 78 RBI.

"The award was very unexpected because it was a very difficult year for me," Abreu said. "When I heard about the award I started crying; I couldn't believe it. It was a very, very difficult season for me. People know how hard I worked day in and day out."

"I think this was a reward for all the work and effort, even though I didn't have my best season this year. It's rewarding."

Abreu said he hasn't talked with teammate Yoan Moncada since they both were back home in their native Cuba after the season ended.

But he did hear from White Sox manager Rick Renteria that Moncada already is in Arizona preparing for the 2019 season.

There has been speculation that Moncada is going to move from second base to third, clearing a spot for the impending arrival of first-round draft pick Nick Madrigal.

"That's a very good step forward for him, in his development process," Abreu said of Moncada. "We all know he has the talent, but he needs to improve, and the best way is to work and work hard. I'm very excited for him. That's going to be helpful for him."

- Catch White Sox beat writer Scot Gregor on CLTV's SportsFeed (Ch. 37) Wednesday night

If the White Sox move on from Avisail García, it won't be because of his trade value

By James Fegan / The Athletic / November 13, 2018

In a brisk 72-word answer at the end of the 2017 season, general manager Rick Hahn laid out the question the White Sox need to answer in regards to Avisail García's future with the franchise:

"Is it in our best interest to extend that player, so they're controllable through (our contention window), or do we need to, as we did with other similar extremely talented and very valuable players in the game, explore the trade market and see if we're more better served moving them in exchange for players who would be under control for that extended window of time we project to have for ourselves?"

Ideally, García repeating his boffo 2017 season would have made a contract extension for the 27-year-old a lot more palatable, and it also would have helped drum up more than the very mild trade interest sources indicate García drew last winter. Instead, an injury-ravaged 2018 campaign paired with career-worst on-base and strikeout rates, and a regression of an already hyper-aggressive plate approach, helps clear neither route.

Between the Sox listening to offers last winter, our Ken Rosenthal's report that the team almost traded him for injured Astros pitching prospect Frances Martes in the middle of the 2018 season, and MLB.com's Mark Feinsand's mention of García actively being shopped now in advance of the non-tender deadline at the end

of the month, there's just a bit of a trend at play. Rick Hahn neglecting to mention the presence of a healthy García as a contributor to the 2019 roster feels more like a sign of his attention to detail than a meaningless omission.

García remains a fantastically talented baseball player, with glimpses of the tools that made him an appealing centerpiece of the Jake Peavy trade more than five years ago. Those tools are best summarized in this Eno Sarris tweet.

Eno Sarris

✓

@enosarris

Cody Bellinger threw a ball 100 mph in last night's game. Here is the complete list of players that can have sprint speeds, exit velos, and arm strengths in the top 15%: Shohei Ohtani, Ramon Laureano, Tyler O'Neill, Avisail Garcia, Cody Bellinger*, Javy Baez*, Trevor Story*.

420

11:25 AM - Oct 27, 2018

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140 people are talking about this

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That range of skills should give García a major league job somewhere next year. But with a single year of control left, and coming off a deeply uncertain season added to a deeply uncertain career profile, he's neither a compelling option for a contender looking for a surefire upgrade nor for a rebuild looking for a long-term upside play. League sources indicate García's trade value is quite low at the moment, so searching for a deal could amount to just completing due diligence before non-tendering him.

Even when accounting for the clear indication that Eloy Jiménez will have a starting corner outfield job in the majors for all of — or all but two weeks of — the 2019 season, jettisoning García would be a bit of a surprising move, or at least one that leads to follow-up questions. Losing García would leave the right-field and designated-hitter roles potentially split among the current in-house group of Daniel Palka, Matt Davidson, Nicky Delmonico and Ryan Cordell. Of that group, García can only definitively be said to have outplayed the latter half in 2018 while making several times more in salary than all four combined. Also, only the power of Palka and Davidson can hold a candle to any of García's tools, and that pair might be better suited continuing as a DH platoon. The White Sox's budget is also not at a point where García's estimated \$8 million arbitration figure should hamstring them in any fashion.

Two years ago, an All-Star season for García was improbable to consider, but not as improbable as the idea that there would be any debate over whether the White Sox had given him enough plate appearances to prove himself. Even Hahn acknowledged García's 2017 breakout was the product of the rebuild allowing him another season of opportunities he might not have received in a normal situation. Six seasons, 2,358 plate appearances and a gradual shift toward the mechanical adjustments the team envisioned have produced a .271/.322/.424 line for García in a White Sox uniform, and even another turnaround in 2019 will likely not be enough to draw a midseason trade return that meaningfully aides the competitive window. Nor is such a turn of fate easy to bank on after arthroscopic surgery on his right knee in October.

There's a thread of optimism just in the idea of the Sox moving on from García. With the primary glut of their outfield prospects at least another year away, it would indicate they're ready to explore whether their coveted "payroll flexibility" can produce better solutions in free agency than their in-house, post-hype options. Even if it doesn't mean Bryce Harper is coming to Chicago, it would signal that the time for throwing stuff at the wall and seeing if it sticks is over, and the time for hanging some sturdy frames is at hand.

Or at least it had better be, because while granting García the right field job is a well-worn plan with only fits and starts of success, it is a plan. With García's trade value where it is, abandoning that plan won't bring much inspiration unless the alternative is on point.

Who could we see in the race for 2019's Rookie of the Year?

By Cliff Corcoran / The Athletic / November 13, 2018

The Rookie of the Year races can be hit and miss. Some years you get Albert Pujols and Ichiro Suzuki (both 2001). Some years you get Jason Jennings and Erik Hinske (both 2002). We have been fortunate that the competition for the award this decade has more often than not included players of lasting significance, from Buster Posey edging out Jason Heyward in the 2010 National League race, to this year's embarrassment of riches with American League winner Shohei Ohtani's landmark two-way performance, and the NL race between 20-year-old winner Ronald Acuña Jr., the top prospect in the game entering the season, and runner-up Juan Soto, who turned in one of the greatest performances by a 19-year-old in the game's history. In between, the winners have included Craig Kimbrel, Bryce Harper, Mike Trout, the late José Fernández, Jacob deGrom, Kris Bryant, Carlos Correa, Corey Seager, Cody Bellinger and Aaron Judge.

That streak of high-impact Rookie of the Year award winners should continue into next season, and we're so excited about it we couldn't resist taking a quick look at the prospective candidates. Here, then, understanding that playing time opportunities will change for many 2019 rookies depending on what their respective teams do over the offseason, are the top five candidates in each league for next year's Rookie of the Year awards.

American League

1. Vladimir Guerrero Jr., 3B, Blue Jays

Vlad Jr. is 2019's answer to Acuña. Like Acuña, Guerrero is a second-generation pro heading into his age-20 season and the consensus top prospect in the game due in large part to his tremendous production at the plate. In 2017, Acuña hit .325/.374/.522 with 21 home runs across the top three levels of the minor leagues. In 2018, Guerrero hit .381/.437/.636 with 20 home runs while playing all but four games in Double and Triple A. Guerrero hit those 20 home runs in just 408 plate appearances (compared Acuña's 21 homers in 612 PA in 2017) because he missed a month with a strained patellar tendon in his left knee. Also, while Acuña struck out 144 times in 139 games in 2017, Guerrero, in 95 games in 2018, struck out a mere 38 times. Thirty-eight! Guerrero is a monster talent, and with Josh Donaldson out of the way, third base in Toronto should be his by mid-April.

2. Eloy Jiménez, LF, White Sox

Back in March, I predicted that Jiménez would be the runner-up to Ohtani in the 2018 Rookie of the Year voting. However, as the Blue Jays did with Guerrero, the White Sox, mindful of the impact of service time on their ability to control Jiménez's rights and salary, denied Jiménez so much as a September call-up this year. Still, Jiménez has little left to prove in the minor leagues. The centerpiece of the trade that sent José Quintana to the Cubs in July 2017, Jiménez hit .337/.384/.577 with 22 home runs and just 69 strikeouts in 2018 in 108 games split between Double and Triple A, is one of the top five prospects in baseball, and will turn 22 later this month.

3. Kyle Tucker, LF, Astros

Despite serving as a body double for Ted Williams in this year's American Masters documentary on the Splendid Splinter, prompting teammates to nickname the slender lefty "Ted," Tucker didn't impress much in his major league debut, hitting a mere .141/.236/.203 without a home run in 72 plate appearances. However, in 100 games at Triple A, the 21-year-old hit .332/.400/.590 with 24 home runs and 20 stolen bases in 24 attempts. A top-10 prospect, he should get a chance to claim the Astros' left field, vacated by Marwin González's free agency, in March.

4. Josh James, RHP, Astros

James wasn't much of a prospect a year ago, but a sleep apnea diagnosis after the 2016 season led to improved conditioning during 2017, a breakout in 2018, and a place on MLB.com's postseason top-100

prospects list. James added three miles per hour to his fastball this year, which can now spike into triple digits, and spiked his strikeout rate along with it. That improvement took the 25-year-old from Double A to the Astros' postseason roster in a single year, with a 2.35 ERA and 29 strikeouts in 23 major league innings, including three starts, in between. With Dallas Keuchel and Charlie Morton free agents and Lance McCullers Jr. lost for the 2019 season due to Tommy John surgery, James should get a chance to crack the Astros' 2019 rotation.

5. Danny Jansen, C, Blue Jays

Jansen's 2018 cup of coffee went better than Tucker's, with the 23-year-old catcher hitting .247/.347/.432 in 95 plate appearances. Looking ahead to 2019, Jansen seems likely to split time with, and be mentored by, Russell Martin in the veteran's walk year. However, if Jansen picks up where he left off in 2018, he could easily wind up winning the bulk of the playing time behind the plate, as he looks to replicate the .275/.390/.473 line he put up in Triple-A Buffalo this year.

Also: Justus Sheffield, LHP, Yankees; Willians Astudillo, C/UT, Twins

National League

1. Víctor Robles, CF, Nationals

It's worth remembering that the Nationals' top prospect entering the 2018 season wasn't Juan Soto, it was Robles, who also held that title prior to 2017, and will again enter 2019. However, with Bryce Harper a free agent, Michael Taylor coming off an awful year at the plate (69 OPS+), and Adam Eaton proving fragile and greatly diminished in the field, 2019 should be the year the Nationals give Robles a proper chance to stick in their lineup. Robles didn't have a great year in the minors in 2018 — his playing time and power both sapped by a shoulder injury — but over a pair of September call-ups over the last two seasons totaling 93 plate appearances, he has hit .277/.337/.506 in the major leagues. An outstanding center fielder, Robles will turn 22 in mid-May and should get a chance to win Washington's center-field job in camp.

2. Alex Reyes, RHP, Cardinals

This may be overly optimistic given Reyes's injury history. He lost 2017 to Tommy John surgery and most of 2018 to a torn right latissimus dorsi muscle. Still, he remains absurdly talented, rookie-eligible and has done nothing but impress in his limited major-league exposure. The Cardinals expect him to be ready to go for spring training, and he could make waves in the Rookie of the Year race regardless of the role he winds up filling on their roster in his age-24 season.

3. Peter Alonso, 1B, Mets

A second-round pick out of the University of Florida in 2016, Alonso hit .285/.395/.579 with 36 home runs and 76 walks in a season split between Double and Triple A last year, and new Mets general manager, Brodie Van Wagenen, has said that Alonso will get a chance to battle for the Mets' first-base job in March. Making a commitment to the 24-year-old Alonso early in 2019 would be a great way for the new Mets administration to shift their fans' focus to the future.

4. Luis Urías, 2B, Padres

The last two players on this NL list are merely the leading edge of their respective teams' potential rookie classes. Urias gets top billing here because he has the clearest path to major-league playing time in 2019, having been installed as the Padres' second baseman in late August only to have a hamstring injury end his season in mid-September. Francisco Mejía will have to jockey for playing time, as will fellow catcher Austin Hedges. Still, the 23-year-old Mejía is likely to spend more time in the major leagues than top prospect Fernando Tatis Jr. Tatis won't turn 20 until January, hasn't played above Double A and had his 2018 season ended early by an avulsion fracture in his left thumb. Tatis is the true blue-chipper among this set, all of whom could be in the majors in the second half of 2019, but Urías' projected advantage in playing

time, and .296/.398/.447 batting line as a 21-year-old in the Pacific Coast League last year, makes him the most likely Rookie of the Year contender.

5. Touki Toussaint, RHP, Braves

From where we stand in mid-November, your guess may be as good as mine as to how the Braves are going to sift through their crop of rookie-eligible starting pitchers, including Toussaint, fellow righties Mike Soroka, Kyle Wright and Bryse Wilson, and lefties Luiz Gohara and Kolby Allard, all of whom appeared in the major leagues in 2018. It seems likely that at least one of them will establish himself in both the 2019 Braves' rotation and the NL Rookie of the Year race. From here, I'll take the 22-year-old Toussaint, who pitched the most and the best in the majors in 2018, earning a spot on the Braves' Division Series roster and contributing three scoreless innings against the eventual pennant-winning Dodgers in the playoffs.

Also: Brendan Rodgers, 2B, Rockies
