



### **WHITE SOX HEADLINES OF NOVEMBER 15, 2018**

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### **Kopech calls 2018 'an unforgettable season'**

*Right-hander will miss '19 after undergoing Tommy John surgery*

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

CHICAGO -- Ask Michael Kopech about his 2018 season, which featured his Major League debut, and the No. 2 White Sox prospect and No. 19 prospect overall, per MLB Pipeline, brings up the phrase "rollercoaster of emotions."

The 22-year-old right-hander, who will be sidelined for the 2019 campaign following Tommy John surgery in September, provided an honest look into that up-and-down ride.

"I went from having the yips for a month and a half to getting my big league call to blowing out my elbow and not getting to pitch again," Kopech told MLB.com by phone from Matt Davidson's charity event in Yucaipa, Calif. "It was kind of a crash and rebuild and then crash again. But it was definitely an unforgettable season."

Kopech's ulnar collateral ligament tear was diagnosed after his fourth start for the White Sox when he allowed seven runs on nine hits, including four home runs, over 3 1/3 innings against the Tigers. It was a stark contrast to the one run allowed over Kopech's first three starts (two of which were shortened by rain), which saw him strike out nine with just one walk and no homers allowed.

A noticeably stunned White Sox general manager Rick Hahn made the announcement about Kopech's injury two days after that game against Detroit. Kopech is now two months removed from surgery and no longer wearing the brace he had for the first month during his rehab in Culver City, Calif.

Having the injury set in and getting into the nuts and bolts of the work -- Kopech has mobility and his arm feels good enough to throw although he understands he's not ready -- doesn't necessarily make a positive Kopech feel any better.

"Honestly, it makes you feel worse and worse as the days go on," Kopech said. "It's going to be a mental struggle for me. I know that. I'm ready for it. I'm just going to do what I can to get better mentally in the time being."

"It's depressing. There's no way around it. As someone who deals with anxiety and depression, it's a situation where I have to be aware of myself. I have to know what's going on and I have to be willing to say, 'OK, I'm not going to play next year. Let's get better this year meanwhile and get ready for 2020.' It has to be something where I come to realistic thoughts with myself. I'm in the process of doing that but it is going to be difficult."

Daily meditation helps Kopech, who said he's become a "little guru about meditation," and he's making sure his mind is as clear as it can be all the time. That concept returns us to the yips plaguing Kopech during his stint with Triple-A Charlotte.

From April 9-July 5, Kopech walked 56 batters over 82 1/3 innings. But the problem manifested itself in more than finding the strike zone.

"I was having trouble figuring out how to throw a baseball," Kopech said. "I felt like I had never done it before, and I was having to figure some things out. It depended on the first pitch of the game for me. If the first pitch of the game for me was a strike, then most likely the next pitch was going to be a strike and most likely I would be able to get through that start.

"If the first pitch was a ball, then it was going to escalate. There was a point where I walked eight or nine in 2 1/3 innings or something like that (eight walks in three innings on June 14) and I just had no idea where the ball was going. It was my own mental struggles.

"That didn't have anything to do with my arm or mechanics or anything like that. I was seeking for answers the wrong way. It's really hard to put into words how I felt physically. I mean, I couldn't feel my legs. My arm felt like it wasn't attached to my body. It was a really tough time for me physically, but more so mentally than anything."

When Kopech eventually figured out important mental cues, he felt better than ever and posted a 59-to-4 strikeout-to-walk ratio over his final seven Triple-A starts. It's a learning experience he can use when he returns in 2020.

"Mentally, I felt like a completely different guy and that's what earned me my callup," Kopech said. "It was absolutely something I needed to have happen before I got to the big leagues. I know that sounds silly to say I needed to get the yips. That experience made me grow as a pitcher so I'm glad it happened."

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### **White Sox ACE program puts 20 more in college**

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

CHICAGO -- The locale for the annual White Sox Amateur City Elite collegiate-signing-day ceremony moved from the Guaranteed Rate Field Conference and Learning Center to the Stadium Club on Wednesday night.

But the spirit of this great initiative begun by the White Sox in 2007 certainly stayed the same. The 20 ACE players who signed their letters of intent brought the total to more than 190 who headed to higher-education institutions with the help of ACE. Twenty-four ACE alumni have been drafted by Major League teams.

"I see it changing every year because you see these younger kids who aspire to be these kids who are here tonight," said White Sox vice president of community relations Christine O'Reilly-Riordan, who is also one of ACE's co-founders. "We are seeing the kids see some of the schools where the kids are signing letters of intent, and it's really creating the sense of aspiration we haven't seen in the past. That's pretty amazing."

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Chicago White Sox



@whitesox

#ACESigningDay:

College:

Congratulations to the 20 ACE players who signed their college letters of intent tonight!

"It means family, it means brotherhood," said Justice Page, a 16-year-old from Chicago's South Side who signed to play at Clark Atlanta University. "They stayed there for me. They offer a lot of services and programs and things that can help you physically and mentally."

Page, who skipped a grade at Lindblom Math & Science Academy, mentioned ACT prep courses offered through ACE along with the elite baseball competition provided to nine teams ranging from 12-and-under to 17-and-under. The 17U team won the 2018 Senior Baseball Championship in the RBI World Series, and members of that team received their rings and the trophy at the close of Wednesday's ceremony.

White Sox shortstop Tim Anderson met with the honorees and answered some questions about what these players can expect from their baseball future. A program such as ACE, where top colleges and MLB scouts get a chance to view potentially undiscovered talent, wasn't available to Anderson when he was working his way toward the Majors as a young player in Alabama.

"They are going to try to put you in college, and that's the ultimate goal -- to go to college and further your education. That's really important, and the White Sox care a lot," Anderson said. "I just hope and pray they take advantage of the opportunity and hopefully they will be up here playing against me or with me."



@whitesox

Prior to tonight's #ACESigningDay, @TimAnderson7 spoke with the 20 young men who are about to sign their college letters of intent. We are so proud!

"We had our first signing day in 2011," said O'Reilly-Riordan. "It's hard to believe we've been doing it every year and the success of the kids. We are in this bigger space because we needed it. There are so many kids, really excelling."

An educational consultant works with the older ACE kids, and the White Sox are bringing on another to work with the younger kids, stressing academics as much as athletics. Character development is an important part of the ACE experience.

That trait was on display Wednesday, when the 20 players introduced themselves and announced their present high school and collegiate destination. There were plenty of thanks handed out to ACE coaches, high school coaches and family members.

When it came to talking about what ACE meant to them, a signing-day tradition, words such as "brotherhood" and "family" were frequently used. It's all a byproduct of this unique baseball experience, featuring individuals who want to be forensic scientists, accountants and, of course, Major League players.

"As you can see, the classes are growing. These guys are excited, and I'm excited for them," Anderson said. "A lot of credit goes to the White Sox for what they are doing, and I couldn't be happier to be a part of it."

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**Luis Robert has opposing players in awe: 'What's he going to do? How far is he going to hit it?'**

By Chuck Garfien / NBC Sports Chicago / November 14, 2018

SURPRISE, Ariz. — When Luis Robert comes to the plate, you can't take your eyes off him.

This isn't just me talking. It seems like everybody stops. Fans, coaches, teammates, security guards, birds.

Even Robert's opponents pause with curiosity, wondering what might happen next.

"I hear them in the dugout. They're all at the top of the dugout when he comes up to hit, so that just tells you how they feel about him as well," said Charlie Poe, Robert's hitting coach here in the Arizona Fall League as well as with the Class A Winston-Salem Dash. "I see them, I hear them in the dugout. 'He's up! He's up! What's he going to do? How far is he going to hit it?'"

It would be one thing if these were high school or college players talking about the Cuban phenom. But no, these players gawking at Robert are just like him, some of the best prospects in the game, in awe of the potential of this possible future White Sox star.

Robert has left such an impression, these players from other teams often come to the field before games just to watch Robert take batting practice.

As Poe explained, "He does things on the field that make you say 'wow' because you can tell he's going to be good for a very long time."

The first thing you notice when you see him on the field is his size.

At 6-foot-3, 185 pounds, he's cut like an NFL wide receiver.

A scout told Mike Ferrin of MLB Network Radio: "When he dies, he wants to come back for a second life in Luis Robert's body."

After thumb injuries limited him to 50 games during the 2018 regular season, Robert has been making up for lost time in the AFL. In 17 games, he has slashed .329/.373/.443, showing the White Sox and everybody else what he can do. Monday, he was named the AFL Player of the Week, and he recently had a 14-game hitting streak snapped, a feat that considering the competition here should not be overlooked.

"This is some of the best of the best in the minor leagues," Poe said. "It's pretty tough to have a two-game hitting streak with some of these pitchers that they're throwing out there. For him to have a 14-game hitting streak — and he wasn't playing every day — to keep that consistent every day is really hard because we see some good arms out here. Everybody throws 95-plus and he was very consistent using the whole field and his main thing was just getting good pitches to hit. He wasn't jumping out at the ball. He was being more consistent, tracking pitches and putting himself in good counts and that's what he was doing very well. That's why he was hitting for so long."

One of Robert's highlights this fall was a majestic home run he hit last week in Mesa. He demolished the baseball with such authority, those in attendance saw their jaws drop to the ground.

"Everybody in the stadium was just like, 'Ahhhhhh.' Big wows," Poe said about the reaction to Robert's mammoth blast.

One of Robert's biggest challenges is the language barrier. The Cuban native is trying to learn English. Just about every day he tries to learn a new word with Poe. His new favorite word is "perfect." Whenever Robert hits the ball on the screws, he'll see Poe and tell him: "Purrfect, C-Po, purrrrrfect!"

Despite his impressive talent, Robert is not a finished product. He still needs plenty of seasoning in the minor leagues. He'll likely spend most of 2019 at Double-A Birmingham.

The key for him is to learn, develop and yes, stay healthy.

“You can tell his ceiling is very high and he’s going to do a lot of good things in this game,” Poe said.

Besides working with Robert, Poe has also been the hitting coach for some of the top offensive prospects in the White Sox organization: Eloy Jimenez, Luis Basabe, Blake Rutherford, Nick Madrigal, Micker Adolfo, Luis Gonzalez and Gavin Sheets.

He knows firsthand what the White Sox have in the minors and what will eventually be headed to the majors with Robert.

“They’re coming,” Poe said. “There’s a lot of good young players in this organization that will be in Chicago in the next coming years. It’s going to be fun to watch, because they are coming.”

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### **Jose Abreu is an All-Star starter and Silver Slugger, but will he be with the White Sox past 2019?**

By Vinnie Duber / NBC Sports / November 14, 2018

It was Jose Abreu's worst season in the major leagues. And he still started the All-Star Game and won a Silver Slugger.

The White Sox have a decision to make at some point, though not necessarily this offseason, on what to do with Abreu in the long term. His on-field production isn't a question. His role as an off-field mentor isn't a question. But when Opening Day 2020 rolls around, he'll be 33 years old. Does that "align" — to borrow a word used very often by Rick Hahn at last week's GM Meetings — with the White Sox long-term plans?

Abreu's entering the final season of his current contract coming off a year defined as much by freak injuries and a prolonged slump as by the accolades he received in spite of those things. For the first time as a big leaguer, he finished a season without hitting at least 25 homers and racking up at least 100 RBIs. Only playing in 128 games, he posted career lows in most stat categories, with his 36 doubles, the second most in his career, a notable exception. His .473 slugging percentage was only the second lowest of his five-year major league career.

But if the awards were any indication — though it should be added there was a dearth of productive first basemen in the American League last season — he still has the ability to be one of the game's best at his position. His 162-game average over the course of the past five seasons: a .295/.353/.516 slash line with 32 home runs and 107 RBIs. Three times in five seasons, Abreu has received MVP votes, finishing as high as fourth during his Rookie of the Year season in 2014.

And on top of all those numbers, Abreu has earned consistent praise for his role off the field. He's been an omnipresent mentor to Yoan Moncada, who's not even two years removed from being the No. 1 prospect in baseball, with the two Cubans' lockers right next to each other in the White Sox clubhouse. And Abreu is touted as an example to all the team's young players, who can look to him as a model for how to go about one's business and prepare on a daily basis.

So the value is obvious. But in order to make a decision on Abreu, the White Sox have to figure out when their planned contention window is going to open. Significant injuries to a host of their highly touted prospects — most notably the elbow injury that forced Michael Kopech into Tommy John surgery — has muddied the waters when it comes to predicting when this wave of minor league talent will be ashore on the South Side.

If that year is soon, if it's still 2020, then having a 33-year-old Abreu in the middle of the order doesn't seem like a bad thing at all. But in order to make that happen, the White Sox will need to give him a contract extension at some point before this time next year, or they'll have to give him a new contract if he were to reach the free-agent market. If the year when the contention window opens is much past 2020, how old is too old to help the White Sox make a championship run? When does the dropoff in production that comes with most aging players arrive?

The White Sox talk highly of Abreu, giving no indication they plan to move on from the guy they spent lavishly on after the 2013 season. And for his part, Abreu continues to talk glowingly about the White Sox and remains committed to saying that he hopes to be in Chicago for the foreseeable future.

"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 am part of the White Sox and I believe that I'm going to be part of this organization for a very long time," he said through a translator during a Tuesday conference call with reporters. "That's something that's out of my hands right now because I have one season left on this current contract.

"But in case the next season is my last one, I'd like to thank all the White Sox organization and all the people who have been around me during my time on this team, especially the owner, Jerry (Reinsdorf). He has been an outstanding person to me. He's one of the greatest people that I've met in this country.

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

That answer to a reporter's question covered all the bases, a masterclass in the public-relations friendly response. But Abreu does always come off as someone who wants to stick with this team. He knows what's going on in the minor league system and he knows how bright the White Sox future is.

And the White Sox know what Abreu can do. Their reported desire to trade Avisail Garcia might be an indication they're ready to move on from their older players, but Garcia and Abreu are vastly different cases, with Abreu far more productive on the field and more commonly discussed as an asset to the young players off it.

During the 2017 season, the decision on Abreu seemed an easy one for the White Sox: Keep this extraordinarily productive player and team leader around as long as you can. But injuries might have made that decision more difficult — and not the freak ones Abreu suffered during the season, but the ones suffered by prospects that might have changed the timeline of this whole thing, and therefore the "alignment" of Abreu and this team's bright future.

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### **White Sox free-agent focus: Marwin Gonzalez**

By Vinnie Duber / NBC Sports Chicago / November 14, 2018

This week, we're profiling some of the biggest names on the free-agent market and taking a look at what kind of fits they are for the White Sox.

The best way to plan for a future full of unknowns is to cover all your bases — and all the spots in your outfield, too.

Marwin Gonzalez is going to be a very popular man on the free-agent market this offseason because he is one of the most demonstrably versatile players in the game. He's been a do-it-all savior for the Houston Astros in recent seasons, part of their rise from baseball's cellar to a world championship in 2017 and their current status as one of the best teams out there.

During the 2018 season alone, Gonzalez appeared at every position except pitcher and catcher, playing 73 games in left field, 39 at shortstop, 32 at second base, 24 at first base, three at third base, two in center field, one at designated hitter and one in right field. That versatility is practically unmatched throughout the game, and it's likely to get the soon-to-be-30-year-old Gonzalez a nice contract this winter.

For a rebuilding team like the White Sox, he'd be a perfect fit, chiefly because there's still so much to play out in this rebuilding process and it's difficult to figure out where the future holes will be. In Gonzalez, the White Sox could add someone now who could fill any number of those potential weak spots, be they caused by failed development or injuries down the road.

But what about his offense? If there is a reason to stay away from Gonzalez, it's the significant dropoff in his offensive numbers last season. In 2017, the season he helped the Astros win their first-ever World Series title, he slashed .303/.377/.530 with 23 home runs and 90 RBIs, finishing in the top 20 in AL MVP voting. In 2018, he slashed .247/.324/.409 with 16 home runs and 68 RBIs — and that's with more playing time, his games played jumping from 134 to 145 and his plate appearances jumping from 515 to 552.

Is that enough to scare teams away? That remains to be seen.

Would Gonzalez be a good fit for the White Sox? It sure seems that way, though there are perhaps 29 other teams that could say the same thing.

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### **White Sox say Zack Burdi is fine and could force his way to majors in 2019**

By Vinnie Duber / NBC Sports Chicago / November 14, 2018

Zack Burdi's shutdown in the Arizona Fall League is no cause for concern, at least not to Rick Hahn.

Burdi, who the White Sox took in the first round of the 2016 draft, has been recovering from Tommy John for more than a year. He didn't pitch in any minor league games during the 2018 season, and he was just taken out of action in the AFL after a handful of appearances.

While that might have raised a few eyebrows, the White Sox general manager said there's nothing to worry about when it comes to Burdi, who many fans consider the top internal candidate to be the White Sox closer of the future.

"He is doing well, and it is too early to be concerned about Zack Burdi," Hahn said last week at the GM Meetings in Southern California. "It's important to get back throwing regularly. He had a very long rehab process, as you can imagine, which ended with going out on a regular basis in the Arizona Fall League. He cleared every hurdle we had for him at the end.

"He expressed to us a level of fatigue as far as his overall body being worn out from the time of his throwing program to instructs, to the Fall League, we felt it made sense to just shut him down instead of just running him out there for the last two weeks of Fall League.

"We are pleased with where he's at right now. We had always said that the target for him would be to be essentially back without restriction in 2019. That continues to be the case."

That's got to be pleasant news for White Sox fans who might have worried that the shutdown was an indicator of some sort of setback in Burdi's recovery.

What should be even more pleasant news is that Burdi might make his way to the South Side in 2019. He reached Triple-A Charlotte prior to requiring Tommy John surgery in 2017, logging 33.1 innings there with a 4.05 ERA.

The White Sox bullpen is loaded with youth after a flurry of late-season call-ups in 2018, but perhaps there's room for one more, eventually, the organization's No. 17 prospect.

"Keep in mind that he's still very young," Hahn said. "He still has relatively few minor league innings under his belt. I can certainly see him forcing his way into our picture in 2019. When, whether it's early, middle or late, I don't know. Let's see where he's at once he's back throwing in games regularly for us. We still very much believe in his future and are pleased with where he's at in terms of his rehab."

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### **White Sox ACE program adds 20 more to collegiate ranks**

By Daryl Van Schouwen / Chicago Sun Times / November 14, 2018

The White Sox held their annual signing day ceremony with members of their Amateur City Elite (ACE) program Wednesday, with 20 high school players signing letters of intent to play college baseball.

This year's event at Guaranteed Rate Field raised the number of student-athletes who will go on to higher education institutions to more than 190 participants since 2007. Twenty-four ACE alumni have been drafted.

Sox shortstop Tim Anderson spoke to the players before the ceremony, which was emceed by Laurence Holmes of 670-AM The Score.

Through the ACE program, the Sox offer the top players among the inner-city (and suburban) baseball communities the opportunity to play against highly competitive travel teams. ACE team members (12-18 years of age) participate in elite practice and competition schedules while receiving academic direction to prepare them for success both on and off the field.

White Sox shortstop Tim Anderson (white shirt) talks to ACE program participants who signed letters of intent to play college baseball Wednesday at Guarantee Rate Field. (White Sox photo)

The 2018 signing class:

Michael Bolton, Brother Rice: Purdue

Benji Brokemon, Brother Rice: Miami (Ohio)

Brandon Laux, Brother Rice: Kirkland Community College

Kendall Pettis, Brother Rice: Oklahoma

Jason Hodges, Marist: Arkansas

Deven Jones, Brooks College Preparatory Academy: Triton College

Brandon Tyler, Hammond High School: Grambling State

Henry Perry, Harlan Community Academy: Harper College

Pierce Jones, Marian Catholic: Northern Illinois

Jacob Schroeder, Homewood-Flossmoor High School: Northern Illinois

DJ Gladney, Illiana Christian High School: Eastern Kentucky

Ryan Nelson, Montini Catholic: Eastern Kentucky

Kendal Ewell, Marist: Eastern Kentucky

Wendell Smith, Marist: Morehouse College

Brandon Green, Kenwood Academy: Southern University

Justice Page, Lindblom Math and Science Academy: Clark Atlanta

Cameron Bufford, Marian Catholic: Grambling State

Angelo Cantelo, Marian Catholic: Lewis University



Nic Vitiritti, Mount Carmel: Carthage

Lawrence Noble, Brooks: Coppin State