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Shields reaches 200-IP mark before Sox walk off

By Max Gelman / MLB.com / September 25, 2018

CHICAGO -- James Shields' last start of 2018 went much like his other 32, as the veteran right-hander completed six innings.

For the 10th time in the last 12 seasons, Shields reached 200 innings for the year, attaining the milestone mark with a Josh Donaldson groundout in the second inning. Shields became the eighth pitcher in MLB this season to throw at least 200 innings, and he has more 200-inning seasons since 2007 than all pitchers except Justin Verlander.

And even though Shields left on the hook for his 17th loss of the year, the final score proved the icing on the cake Tuesday evening. Daniel Palka walked off the Indians with a two-run single in the ninth off Carlos Carrasco, giving the White Sox a 5-4 win at Guaranteed Rate Field.

"I just try to keep it as simple as possible," Palka said. "Luckily, it was my third AB off of him, so I saw everything he was getting me out with and was just kind of waiting on that."

Indians starter Trevor Bauer gave up a two-run homer to Avisail Garcia in the first inning -- Garcia's career-high 19th home run. Bauer and Carrasco then combined to hold the White Sox scoreless through the next seven innings before the ninth-inning comeback.

- Garcia to have arthroscopic knee surgery after season

The Indians had left-handed reliever Brad Hand warming up, possibly for Palka, but Carrasco, working his fifth inning in relief, remained in the game.

"I thought maybe there was a possibility [Hand would enter], but also they are not in a position where their wins are vital right now. Maybe they just wanted to let [Carrasco] be in that situation," Palka said.

Shields added to his impressive collection of six-inning starts, going at least six for the 26th time. He joined Max Scherzer, Jacob deGrom, Verlander and Corey Kluber as the only pitchers to accomplish that feat so far in 2018.

With a lat strain having sidelined him for a few months last season, Shields said his main goal for 2018 was to get back to the 200-inning mark.

"This is one of the things that I've prided myself in every single year -- to be able to go 200, and more than anything to be able to post every start," Shields said. "Last year was the only time in my career I went on the DL for a couple months, and the dedication that I put in on a daily basis in the offseason, during this season, in between starts -- I definitely am trying to reflect on it and enjoy the moment."

"He worked his rear end off to put himself in a position to do that," manager Rick Renteria said. "Even when he was in the last inning of his work and working in some traffic, most were thinking, 'Gosh, this could implode on him,' but he's a professional and he ended up working really well. ... A tribute to his experience and his knowledge and his confidence and his grittiness."

Shields kept the Indians off the scoreboard in the first two innings, but he struggled to find the strike zone, throwing 19 of 33 pitches for balls. Cleveland eventually took advantage of Shields' wildness in the third, stringing together three two-out hits and a walk before Yonder Alonso's two-run single put the Indians in front for good.

Yan Gomes added a leadoff home run in the fourth against Shields, the last run he allowed for the night. Shields finished the year with a 4.53 ERA and 204 2/3 innings pitched, his highest total since 2015 -- but only the eighth-highest of his career.

As Shields' 2018 comes to a close, his status for next season remains uncertain. The White Sox can exercise a \$16 million team option or buy Shields out for \$2 million.

Regardless, Shields says will enjoy Tuesday as long as he can.

"We'll see where life takes me after this season's over," Shields said. "I've loved my time here. The guys are great, the coaching staff's a great coaching staff, and the training staff I can't say enough about what they've done for me over the last three years, and just the organization itself has been an amazing organization to be a part of."

"So we'll see where it goes this offseason, but right now I'm enjoying my time, and I'm gonna reflect on the season this year and get back to work."

MOMENTS THAT MATTERED

A new first baseman?: Utility infielder Jose Rondon made an appearance at first base in the ninth inning after pinch-running for Matt Davidson the previous inning. The ninth marked Rondon's first professional inning at first, and he made two nice plays. Rondon ran several dozen feet to catch a foul pop up in front of the Indians dugout, and picked a Leury Garcia throw out of the dirt to retire Brandon Guyer.

HE SAID IT

"Ever since I was in Tampa, I've prided myself on being a leader in this clubhouse, and just helping the guys out and being a good teammate. Hopefully these guys take all of the advice and the experience that I've had over the years and take it to heart, and I love every one of my teammates I've ever been with. It's been nice." -- Shields, on being a mentor to the younger White Sox pitchers

MITEL REPLAY OF THE DAY

As the White Sox ramped up their comeback attempt in the ninth, Gomes tried picking off Adam Engel at second base. Engel was ruled safe on the field, but the Indians challenged the call. After a review, the call on the field stood, leaving Engel in scoring position with no outs.

UP NEXT

The White Sox play their final home game of the 2018 season on Wednesday, taking on the Indians at 7:10 p.m. CT at Guaranteed Rate Field. Renteria said that the White Sox will have a "bullpen game" for the finale. Jace Fry (2-2, 4.32 ERA) is expected to take the ball to start. Shane Bieber (10-5, 4.80) goes for Cleveland.

Avi Garcia to have arthroscopic knee surgery

Outfielder has been plagued by pain all season, will have procedure after season

By Scott Merkin / MLB.com / September 25, 2018

CHICAGO -- Avisail Garcia will have arthroscopic surgery on his right knee on Oct. 2 in Chicago to clear up persistent pain Garcia said has plagued him all season.

"Early in the season, Opening Day, I feel something in my knee," Garcia told the media before Tuesday's 5-4 win over the Indians, in which Garcia hit a two-run homer in the first inning, setting a new career high with 19. "I had been feeling something, something, something and then I started feeling my hammy because I think I was [favoring it].

"Especially because it's my right knee, and that's where all my power is. It's crazy, but it is what it is."

Garcia, 27, talked about receiving three cortisone shots in the problematic area this season. Garcia and the team decided against surgery previously because examinations showed playing wouldn't cause any sort of extensive damage.

The White Sox right fielder also estimated a 6-to-8-week absence if he had surgery, not to mention the ensuing strengthening process to get back into playing shape.

"But I don't want that. I just want to play, because that's why I'm here," Garcia said. "I've been working really hard since last year and then Spring Training and then here. And then injury. It's tough, but nothing that I can control."

"It was actually considered to be very manageable," White Sox manager Rick Renteria said. "Just cleaning it up. There's nothing in terms of repairs or anything to be done. It's just being cleaned up."

Described as a possible five-tool talent as he originally made his way through Detroit's system, Garcia fulfilled that potential with his All-Star selection during the 2017 season. Garcia hit a career-high .330 with a career-high .885 OPS last season, along 18 home runs, 80 RBIs and 27 doubles.

A pair of hamstring injuries limited Garcia to 89 games this season. He also has dealt with that ongoing knee pain, trying to give Renteria and the White Sox as much as he can while on the field.

"Everything can happen. It's baseball," Garcia said. "You can have 10 good years and one bad year. Or whatever. Like [what] happened to me, really good last year and this year I've been injured a lot. It is what it is."

"He's been playing through some discomfort. He's been managing it and giving us a tremendous effort," Renteria said. "I know he doesn't talk about it a whole lot, but you see him really grinding through it."

Chicago holds one more year of contractual control of Garcia, who figures to be back with the team in 2019. Garcia also believes the ability shown during the breakout '17 campaign will be back on display once healthy.

"I know the talent is there. I know what I can do when I'm healthy, so let's see what happens next year," Garcia said. "It's always been there. Everybody knows it's hard when you get injured and then sit down and then go play and then sit down again. It's hard to be consistent like that."

"This game is difficult, so you have to be out there every day, so you get used to it. But it's not an excuse. Everybody knows that. I've been playing like this, so I'm trying to do my best. It's been a crazy year -- not for me, but for the whole team."

Blum was unlikely hero for 2005 White Sox

By Scott Merkin / MLB.com / September 25, 2018

CHICAGO - Geoff Blum had exactly one career World Series at-bat.

And in that one at-bat -- coming in the 14th inning of Game 3 of the 2005 World Series between his White Sox and the Astros -- Blum connected on a 2-0 pitch from Houston reliever Ezequiel Astacio for what would become the game-winning home run to right. The White Sox raced to the title via a four-game sweep, marking their first championship in 88 years.

Blum calls that moment the greatest of a solid 14-year-career. But 13 years later, he spoke about a worry briefly overtaking him in that moment.

Not worry over the pressure of the situation, but instead concern over his lone World Series appearance resulting in a sacrifice bunt. That inning began with a Jermaine Dye single, followed by a Paul Konerko double-play grounder.

"In my mind, I'm thinking if JD gets on, which he did, and then Konerko is at the plate and I'm on-deck, I'm thinking my only World Series at-bat I'm going to have to lay down a sacrifice bunt to get Jermaine Dye and Paul Konerko into scoring position," said Blum, who currently works as a television analyst on Astros broadcasts. "So, there was a little bit of panic. Not that I couldn't bunt, but it's not one of the things I was very good at or wanted to do on that type of stage under that kind of pressure."

"Full disclosure and honesty. When Konerko hit into that double play, it was a little bit of a sigh of relief."

The White Sox acquired Blum from the Padres at the 2005 non-waiver Trade Deadline, with the switch-hitter playing 31 games and getting 99 plate appearances in addition to an already established powerhouse. When it came to Game 3, though, Blum originally was set to pinch-hit for reliever Bobby Jenks if his spot in the order came up in the 13th.

That spot ended up three away after the White Sox went down in order. Pablo Ozuna was scheduled to enter the game as part of a double-switch, also bringing in eventual winning pitcher Damaso Marte in the bottom of the 13th, but in a last-minute change, manager Ozzie Guillen went with Blum at second base.

Astros catcher Brad Ausmus clearly set up outside on the deciding pitch to Blum, but as Blum mentioned and the replay supports, Astacio missed his location inside "by a foot and a half." The rest was history.

"When I barreled it up, I knew I smoked it. Probably one of the harder balls I ever hit in my career," Blum said. "But the trajectory was so low off the bat, even at Minute Maid Park, I wasn't sure if it was going to

get out. With two outs, my intent was to get to second base. Get myself in scoring position, because I believe Aaron Rowand was hitting behind me.

"I wanted to give him an opportunity to get that game-winning hit. I put my head down for about the first two or three steps to get a good break out of the box, and I looked up and the second I looked up, it hit about six rows up and ricocheted back on the field. The next thing I saw was (first-base coach) Tim Raines about six feet off the ground with both of his arms in the air."

Having played with Jeff Bagwell, Craig Biggio, Adam Everett and Morgan Esnberg in Houston from 2002-03, Blum didn't want to show up his former teammates via a raucous celebration. So, he put his head down and ran as an unlikely hero into White Sox history. Blum celebrated a World Series title in 2017 with the Houston team he helped vanquish in '05.

"My thought process going around was, 'You better damn well touch every base,'" Blum said. "If there's one swing or one moment that really not necessarily defined my career, but if I had one moment to speak of, that was definitely it."

Avisail Garcia, slated for offseason knee surgery, has been playing hurt since Opening Day

By Vinnie Dube/NBC Sports Chicago/ September 25, 2018

While some players' seasons have been open for interpretation, it's been an undeniably disappointing one for Avisail Garcia.

Turns out there's a good reason for the big change in his production from 2017 to 2018.

Garcia's battles with injuries this year have been no secret, but the White Sox outfielder revealed Tuesday that it's literally been going on all season long. He said that he felt something in his knee on Opening Day and that he's played hurt throughout the entire season. He also reported that he'll have arthroscopic knee surgery on Oct. 2, two days after the end of the season.

"Opening Day, I feel something in my knee," he said. "I had been feeling something, something, something and then I started feeling my hammy because I think I was favoring it. Especially because it's my right knee, and that's where all my power is. It's crazy, but it is what it is.

"It's sore. Every time I go home, it's a little swollen. But I'm going to fix it soon. It's been a crazy year, not for me, but for the whole team. Thank god we are alive and we are here. We have a chance. Let's see what happens next year."

Garcia did make two trips to the disabled list this season, both due to an injured hamstring, which he said stemmed from the hurting knee. He played in 88 of the team's first 154 games, with six remaining on the schedule heading into Tuesday night's contest with the visiting Cleveland Indians.

Entering 2018, Garcia had the tall task of repeating his breakout campaign from a season before, when he made his first career All-Star appearance and posted some of the best offensive numbers in the American League with a .330 batting average and a .380 on-base percentage. During this injury-filled season, those numbers plummeted to .238 and .278.

"It's been difficult. Difficult year," he said. "Nothing that I can do. I've been playing like this the whole season. Just gotta play and get after it, so it is what it is. I can't control that. I can control what I do on the field.

"(The knee injury has) always been there. Everybody knows it's hard when you get injury and then sit down and then go play and then sit down again. It's hard to be consistent like that. This game is difficult so you have to be out there every day so you get used to it and it's hard to play like this. But it is what it is. It's not an excuse. Everybody knows that. I've been playing like this so I'm trying to do my best."

Obviously, it's tough to judge Garcia's follow up to his All-Star season knowing how much his knee bothered him. But it still leaves unanswered the question of what his place is in the organization's long-term plans. He's under team control for one more season. The White Sox have the flexibility to do one of many things this offseason: keep him for one more season, try to trade him this offseason, hold on to him and try to trade him to a contending club next summer or extend him and keep him in the mix for when rebuilding mode transitions to contention mode. Garcia is just 27 years old.

Garcia said he'll be "100-percent" ready for spring training next year, and should his health be back to normal, his prove-it campaign that was supposed to come in 2018 could come in 2019. But there's also a wave of outfield prospects making its way toward the South Side that includes Eloy Jimenez, Luis Robert, Micker Adolfo and plenty of others. So no matter what statistics Garcia might be shooting for, the pressure will be on to show he's a safer bet than all that young talent.

Keep it simple: How Daniel Palka has emerged as the clutch king of Chicago

By Vinnie Duber / NBC Sports Chicago / September 25, 2018

Daniel Palka's been asked a lot about his approach in clutch situations, mostly because he keeps coming through in them.

Palka flexed his walk-off muscles again Tuesday night, driving in the tying and winning runs with a base hit off Cleveland Indians strikeout machine Carlos Carrasco in the bottom of the ninth and giving the White Sox an exciting win in their penultimate home game of the 2018 season.

It was just the latest in an increasingly unbelievable series of clutch hits from the guy White Sox fans have fallen in love with during this rebuilding season. He now has 10 hits, two doubles, six homers and 13 RBIs in the ninth inning this season. Heck, it wasn't even the first time he's walked off these Indians this season.

You might think that explaining how to come through with a game-winning hit against a major league pitcher is easier than actually doing it. But that's the thing: Palka's making it look easy specifically because he's trying to keep it easy.

"I just try to keep it as simple as possible," Palka said, a reasonable follow up to what he said after a big home run earlier this season. "What were you trying to do in that situation?" was the question lobbed his way. He hit the answer to that one out of the park, too: "I was trying to hit a home run."

Palka's big moments continue to fuel the conversation surrounding his place in the long-term plans of an organization with its eyes squarely set on the future. He long ago took the title of Surprise of the Year, considering he wasn't on the Opening Day roster and yet will almost certainly finish as the team leader in home runs. He's five ahead of his closest competition, the injured Jose Abreu, with a team-best 27 dingers and five games to play. Tim Anderson and Matt Davidson would need seven apiece over the next five contests to catch Palka.

Whether Palka's place on those planned contenders of the future is as an everyday designated hitter or an everyday outfielder or a platoon guy or simply a left-handed power bat off the bench, he's looking more and more like the totally unexpected success story of this rebuilding effort. Of course, there's still a long time to go — and plenty of prospects still to develop and reach the major leagues — before any final assessments on lineups of the future can be made.

Still, it figures Rick Hahn's front office could find a spot for a guy with such a flair for the dramatic and a knack for big hits in big moments.

And for someone who makes all that so easy.

"I think the outcome is just based on him keeping it simple," manager Rick Renteria said. "He really doesn't complicate it. He really does focus on the baseball and tries to get something he can handle and

tries to hit it hard. It's kind of that simple. You can't control what happens once the ball leaves your bat, but you can control how simple you approach the at-bat. And he does that."

White Sox fans know how they feel about Palka's heroics. How does Palka feel about them?

"Yeah, it's cool."

See? Simple.

"I don't really know what else to say about it besides I like that moment and I'm happy to be in that moment. That's it."

James Shields wraps impressive 2018 campaign, but is it last he'll pitch in White Sox uniform?

By Vinnie Duber / NBC Sports Chicago / September 25, 2018

James Shields is unlikely to go down as one of White Sox fans' most beloved pitchers.

It was always going to be hard to erase the memories of his first two seasons on the South Side, which saw him post a 5.99 ERA and give up 58 home runs.

But Shields, a 36-year-old veteran who doesn't figure to have much of a place in this rebuilding franchise's long-term plans, made a heck of an impact and did a heck of a job during this losing season, one that could end up being felt when the team does transition to contention mode.

Shields capped his 2018 season with another six innings Tuesday night. It didn't end up his 20th quality start of the season, with him giving up four runs, but he reached the 200-inning mark for the 10th time in his 13-year major league career, as good an example as any of how reliable and how steady a veteran presence he's been this season.

As of this writing, baseball's 200-inning club in 2018 looked like this: Max Scherzer, Corey Kluber, Jacob deGrom, Justin Verlander, Aaron Nola, Zack Greinke, Dallas Keuchel and Shields.

"Going into this season, I was really taking pride in being able to get to that 200 mark again," Shields said. "It's my 10th time I've done it in my career, so that was kind of looming over my head a little bit, and to be able to get that, it's just all the hard work I've put in this year and I'm really really proud of that."

The other numbers might not scream "overwhelming success" of a season, even if it was by far his best year in a White Sox uniform. Shields finished with a 4.54 ERA and 154 strikeouts. The 34 home runs he gave up are the second most in baseball. His 78 walks put him in the top five in the game in that category.

But Shields' impact has been as much about what he's done off the mound as what he's done on it. He's served as a mentor to this team of young players, one that keeps getting younger with every highly touted prospect that gets his call to the big leagues. He's been a particularly strong influence on Lucas Giolito, with the two set up next to each other in the clubhouse all season — that is until Michael Kopech arrived and Shields requested Kopech slide in between him and Giolito, again for mentoring purposes.

That's a valuable thing on a team that figures to stay young as this rebuilding process moves along toward planned contention.

"I think more than anything, when you see how he's continued to pitch and work through all of the things he's done over the course of his career, I think he's been a big factor by example," manager Rick Renteria said prior to Tuesday's game. "He goes out there and shows you how to get through innings, grind through some rough outings and continue to eat up outs. I think these guys are seeing it. He's been someone that's shown them why he's been around for so many years."

"I think these guys have taken on some of his personality, some of his traits. Hopefully it's something they can cling to and continue to help each other with. It certainly doesn't hurt to have someone that's something like that. He's done everything he could to help with both between the lines and being in the clubhouse."

"I've done it my whole career," Shields said of that leadership, mentorship role. "Ever since I was in Tampa, I've prided myself in being a leader in this clubhouse and just helping the guys out and being a good teammate. Hopefully these guys take all of the advice and the experience that I've had over the years and take it to heart."

Shields' 2018 season is over, but is his time on the South Side?

He is expected to hit the free-agent market this winter, though given how impressive he was as a reliable arm and as a team leader in 2018, perhaps the White Sox opt to bring him back. Not only do they have a recent track record of making similar additions — see Hector Santiago and Miguel Gonzalez this past offseason — but they have a need in the starting rotation, two holes to fill in Shields' spot and that of Kopech, who will miss the 2019 season as he recovers from Tommy John surgery.

It's an option, if it's something Shields and the White Sox both want to do. Certainly he's given them reason to consider it with what he did this season.

"We'll see where life takes me after this season's over," Shields said. "I've loved my time here, the guys are great, the coaching staff's a great coaching staff, and the training staff, I can't say enough about what they've done for me over the last three years. And just the organization itself has been an amazing organization to be a part of. So we'll see where it goes this offseason."

James Shields has played important role for young White Sox pitchers

By Phil Thompson/ Chicago Tribune / September 25, 2018

James Shields got what he was looking for on Tuesday: His 10th season with 200-plus innings and 26th outing going at least six innings — the mark of a 13-year veteran who prides himself as a marathon man.

Yet he didn't achieve what he envisioned when the Sox acquired him from the Padres in 2016: To be a key piece of a rotation with playoff aspirations.

Shields instead settled into another role: Mentor.

If 2018 is to be his last season on the South Side (he's a free agent after the season), he'll remember how the Sox gave him a chance to reinvent himself as a pitcher, but he'll also have to come to terms with no longer being the big brother to a young staff.

"We'll see where life takes me after this season's over," he said. "I've loved my time here."

The core of the rotation of the future consists of starters 25 years old or younger, so at 36 Shields has them by more than a decade.

But he said he never felt out of place.

"I've done it my whole career. Ever since I was in Tampa, I've prided myself in being a leader in this clubhouse, and just helping the guys out and being a good teammate," he said. "Hopefully these guys take all of the advice and the experience that I've had over the years and take it to heart."

He was just an inning and two-thirds shy of his 10th 200-inning season entering Tuesday's game and reached it by striking out Melky Cabrera in the second inning.

It was Shields' 10th season of 200 or more innings, second to Justin Verlander (11) since 2007.

James Shields has played important role for young White Sox pitchers
He gutted out six innings — his 26th time lasting at least that long — struck out six and gave up a home run (to Yan Gomes). He has allowed 34 homers this season, two in each of his previous three starts. It was also the ninth game in which he gave up three or more runs in an inning.

"I think he's been a big factor by example," manager Rick Renteria said. "He goes out there and shows you how to get through innings, grind through some rough outings and continue to eat up outs. I think these guys are seeing it. He's been someone that's shown them why he's been around for so many years."

The Sox will likely need someone to take that mantle next season. Who that will be remains to be seen.

"I think he's done everything he could to be that guy," Renteria said. "I think these guys have taken on some of his personality, some of his traits. Hopefully it's something they can cling to and continue to help each other with.

"It certainly doesn't hurt to have someone ... like that."

White Sox's Yolmer Sanchez douses his latest Gatorade victim — NBC Sports Chicago's Chuck Garfien

By Phil Thompson/ Chicago Tribune / September 25, 2018

Last month, reporters in the White Sox clubhouse asked Yolmer Sanchez whether he ever considered douse any members of the media with Gatorade.

Sanchez had already poured it on himself twice to celebrate walkoff victories at Guaranteed Rate Field, and third-base coach Nick Capra was another unsuspecting victim.

Big mistake. If Sanchez hadn't had the idea, he did then, and as NBC Sports Chicago broadcaster Chuck Garfien stood next to him, Sanchez answered that he might make Garfien a future victim.

So when Daniel Palka slapped a walkoff single up the middle Tuesday in the second to last home game of the season, Sanchez had what likely was his last chance to make good on his prank. And he took it.

As Garfien as was interviewing Palka live for NBC Sports Chicago after the 5-4 comeback victory over the Indians, Sanchez snuck up behind Garfien and dumped a full bucket on the unsuspecting broadcaster — it appeared to be ice water, though Garfien thought it might have been "purple" Gatorade.

After a laugh, Garfien carried on with the interview. Drenched.

Manager Rick Renteria wore a devilish grin when asked about it after the game.

"I did see it," he said. "We told you guys one of you guys was going to get it, and today was his day."

Palka said he gave Garfien no warning what was coming.

"I was just blank," he said. "I was like I better get out of the way and let this get all over his nice suit."

Later, Garfien said Sanchez and Renteria told him earlier this summer that he was a likely target. "But I really didn't feel like Yolmer would actually go ahead and do it," the broadcaster said. "Sure enough, I could kind of feel something behind me. ... So Yolmer, true to his word, got me."

Daniel Palka's 2-run single in ninth lifts White Sox to 5-4 win over Indians

By Phil Thompson / Chicago Tribune / September 25, 2018

he White Sox just seem to prefer ninth-inning theatrics.

Up 4-2 in the final inning, Indians reliever Carlos Carrasco walked Yoan Moncada and gave up consecutive singles to Adam Engel and Yolmer Sanchez.

Leury Garcia moved the runners to second and third with a sacrifice bunt, setting the table for Daniel Palka, who is no stranger to ninth-inning heroics this season and became the first Sox player to hit a walkoff homer this season, Aug. 10 against the Indians. Palka delivered once again, raking a two-run single to center field to seal a 5-4 victory Tuesday at Guaranteed Rate Field.

Avisail Garcia, who revealed before the game that he has been playing with knee pain all season, hit a two-run home run off Indians starter Trevor Bauer in the first inning. It was Garcia's 19th of the season, a career high.

James Shields claimed his own milestone on the evening. He was just an inning and two-thirds shy of his 10th 200-inning season entering the game and got it by striking out Melky Cabrera in the second inning.

The game started off smoothly enough for the Sox.

In the first, Sanchez advanced to third off a bunt and throwing errors by Indians third baseman Josh Donaldson and second baseman Jose Ramirez.

In the end, it didn't matter.

White Sox 5, Indians 4

Photos from the White Sox's 5-4 win over the Indians on Sept. 25, 2018, at Guaranteed Rate Field. (Associated Press and Getty Images photos)

With two outs, Garcia plated Sanchez with the 385-foot blast to left field.

Shields ran into trouble in a three-run third. He gave up an RBI single to Jose Ramirez then loaded the bases for Alonso, who knocked in two runs. Then Gomes made it 4-2 in the fourth with a 360-foot jack to left field.

Later that inning, left fielder Nick Delmonico went airborne to snag Francisco Lindor's line drive. Delmonico was slow getting up but received an ovation and tip of the cap from first base coach Daryl Boston, who regularly works with the outfielders.

Delmonico left the game in the fifth with right shoulder soreness and has been listed as day to day. He was replaced by Ryan LaMarre.

The Sox had a potential rally cooking in the eighth when Omar Narvaez walked and Matt Davidson hit a ground-rule double, but it flamed out with LaMarre's groundout.

From start to finish, Yolmer Sanchez keeps it fun for White Sox

By Daryl Van Schouwen / Chicago Sun Times / September 25, 2018

White Sox catcher Omar Narvaez played on the same team with infielder Yolmer Sanchez in Venezuela when they were 7 years old.

What was Yolmer like then, Omar?

"Same," Narvaez said.

That's all you need to know about Sanchez, whose boyish manner has been a welcome presence for a team approaching 100 losses. Somehow, somehow, you have to keep the game fun.

Yolmer Sanchez, center, and Avisail Garcia, right, celebrate after Daniel Palka hit the game-winning two-run single, as Cleveland Indians relief pitcher Carlos Carrasco, left, heads to the dugout at the end of a baseball game Tuesday, Sept. 25, 2018, in Chicago. The White Sox won 5-4. (AP Photo/Nam Y. Huh)

Aside from being one of the Sox' best overall players, that's what Sanchez did best this season.

Whether it was playing stupid card tricks, playing an umpire during replay challenges, dousing teammates, coaches, himself and, after a 5-4 walk-off victory Tuesday against the Indians, TV reporter Chuck Garfien with the Gatorade bucket or just being the player who keeps things loose in the clubhouse, Sanchez was a good guy to have around.

"I've played [at] every level in this organization — Dominican, rookie ball, low A, high A, Double-A, Triple-A — and I see how many guys there are in the big leagues with me," Sanchez said. "I've seen a lot of guys with talent who work hard and don't make it. So I know how hard it is to get here, so I want to enjoy every day, every second here with my teammates."

Sanchez singled in a run against Carlos Carrasco in the ninth inning and scored the winning run on Daniel Palka's two-run single to center after Leury Garcia had bunted Sanchez and Adam Engel to second and third, respectively.

"I'm just going to enjoy it," Sanchez said. "I love this game."

Sanchez has been pretty good at it, too, with good defense at third base and backup work at the middle-infield spots. He is batting .246/.311/.375 with an American League-leading nine triples, eight home runs, 33 doubles, 53 RBI and 14 stolen bases in a career-high 150 games.

Sanchez's 2.8 wins above replacement, according to Baseball-Reference.com, was tied for first on the team with right-hander Reynaldo Lopez and shortstop Tim Anderson.

"He's showing you that he's a really good major-league baseball player," manager Rick Renteria said. "He has defended well and given us good at-bats at the plate. Gives you energy, hustle and has a good idea of what is going on around him."

To wit, Sanchez saw an opportunity and led off the first inning with a bunt single before advancing two bases on two throwing errors. He scored on Avisail Garcia's homer that gave the Sox an early 2-0 lead.

"He gives you everything he's got, but he takes good care of himself," Renteria said.

"This is the first year I've played every day [he played in 141 games and started 124 last season], and I've proved that I can stay in the lineup," Sanchez said. "My body feels really good. Hey, I still have a lot of energy. I'm going to finish strong."

"We've had a lot of moments here that I will take with me forever. Sometimes it's the little things. Being in a major-league uniform is special."

Right-hander James Shields, in what probably was his last moment with the Sox, surpassed 200 innings for the 10th time in his career, the second-most among active pitchers behind Justin Verlander (11). Shields allowed four runs in six innings but finished his outing by striking out Francisco Lindor to post a scoreless inning after the first two batters had reached.

“After going on the DL last year, I really took pride in going over that 200-inning mark,” Shields said. “I’m really proud of that.”

“We’ll see where life takes me when the season is over. I’ve loved my time here. The organization has been an amazing one to be a part of.”

Manager Rick Renteria expects White Sox’ coaches to return next season

By Daryl Van Schouwen / Chicago Sun Times / September 25, 2018

Say what you want about the White Sox’ coaching staff, but manager Rick Renteria says it would be hard to find a harder-working bunch.

“Everybody works very, very hard wherever we’re at,” he said last week. “We’re prepared, and we’re already preparing for the next series. You have a lot of guys in there that care about all these players, in spite of the fact that the players get upset with us because we’re more truthful than they would like us to be.”

Vice president Ken Williams has sung the staff’s praises this season, despite a performance from a rebuilding team that hasn’t been easy on the eyes every night. Renteria, who is finishing his second season with the current staff, said he expects his coaches will be back next season.

“I anticipate everybody is, yes,” Renteria told the Sun-Times. “I hope so, yeah.”

Manager Rick Renteria and bench coach Joe McEwing greet Avisal Garcia after the right fielder hit a home run home run against the Twins during a game last season. (Getty Images)

Renteria said he thinks there is “reciprocal affection” between players and coaches.

“I think the players appreciate that we’re honest with them,” he said.

Renteria, who missed four games last month when he was hospitalized in Minneapolis after a bout of lightheadedness, said he won’t lighten his load because of that episode. The tests revealed no health concerns, he said.

“I have not scaled back,” Renteria said. “I am not doing anything differently. It hasn’t even crossed my mind. I’m not going to live and do things based on what that was — an anomaly. And I feel great.”

Renteria is always an early arrival at the ballpark, and he’s still throwing batting practice.

“It doesn’t change my approach to how I do things,” he said. “I go all-out. People have been telling me to slow down my whole life. I don’t think that’s going to happen. I’m not going to change.”

Avi to have knee surgery

Right fielder Avisail Garcia isn’t waiting long to have arthroscopic surgery on his right knee after the season. He said he’s having the cleanup done Tuesday.

Garcia, 27, said he felt something in the knee on Opening Day and has since played through knee and hamstring issues all season. He was on the disabled list twice with a strained hamstring and took three cortisone shots for the knee this season, he said.

He revealed in August that he would have the procedure.

“Especially because it’s my right knee, and that’s where all my power is,” Garcia said.

Garcia entered the Sox' game Tuesday against the Indians batting .238/.278/.440 with 18 homers and 46 RBI in 88 games. He hit a two-run homer in the first inning to give him a career-high 19, but he hasn't done enough to enhance his trade value and figures to return next season.

"I know the talent is there," said Garcia, who was an All-Star in 2017. "I know what I can do when I'm healthy, so let's see what happens next year."

This and that

Renteria said the scheduled home finale Wednesday will be a bullpen day for the pitching staff.

- Reynaldo Lopez and Lucas Giolito will start in a day-night doubleheader Friday in Minnesota. Carlos Rodon will start Saturday and Dylan Covey in the final game of the season Sunday.
- Jim Angio is retiring at the end of the season after 40 years of directing Sox and Bulls games on television in Chicago. He began his Sox broadcasting career in 1978 with WSNS-TV (Ch. 44), working with Harry Caray and Jimmy Piersall.

Avisaíl García's 'difficult' 2018 will end with knee surgery

By James Fegan / The Athletic / September 25, 2018

Avisaíl García had a feeling back on Opening Day that the follow-up to his career year in 2017 was going to go a little differently.

Specifically, he had a feeling in his right knee — a soreness and propensity for inflammation that has persisted throughout an up-and-down 2018 season. Compensating for and trying to play through the underlying injury contributed to two disabled list stints for right hamstring strains, the first of which cost García two months.

"Early in the season, Opening Day," García said. "I feel something in my knee. I had been feeling something, something, something and then I started feeling my hammy because I think I was favoring it. Especially because it's my right knee, and that's where all my power is. It's crazy, but it is what it is."

García has been open about the injuries he's been dealing with throughout the season, and on Tuesday he told reporters arthroscopic surgery has been scheduled for his right knee on Oct. 2, two days after the season finale in Minnesota.

The surgery is a fittingly dour closing note to a season in which the 2017 All-Star has looked consistently limited while trying to employ the constant hustling style that defined his breakout year. García revealed that amid the talk of managing the soreness and days off from playing in the field, he also received three cortisone shots during the middle of the season. Ironically, despite his right knee being limited, power has been the one carrying trait of his .238/.278/.440 (91 wRC+) batting line at the plate. A career-high 26.4 percent strikeout rate and career-low on-base percentage have dragged down his overall contributions, but the 2018 season has still seen him sock 18 home runs, in almost 200 fewer plate appearances than he needed to reach the same total last year.

"It's sore," García said. "Every time I go home, it's a little swollen. But I'm going to fix it soon, so it's been a crazy year, not for me, but for the whole team."

"Everybody knows it's hard when you get (an) injury and then sit down and then go play, and then sit down again. It's hard to be consistent like that. This game is difficult so you have to be out there every day so you get used to it and it's hard to play like this. But it is what it is. It's not an excuse. Everybody knows that. I've been playing like this so I'm trying to do my best."

It was a curiosity at the time back on Aug. 18 when manager Rick Renteria benched García for the seemingly innocuous crime of not running out a routine, inning-ending fly out to right field while Matt Davidson was on first base. Renteria likely made the decision with full awareness that García's knee issue was serious enough to merit surgery immediately after the season and of the efforts that were undertaken to keep him on the field. As Renteria pointed out, everyone in baseball is physically compromised by the end of a 162-game schedule. But García laying out what he went through this season, all because he would rather play through pain than miss an estimated six-to-eight weeks to recover from surgery, plus additional time to get his leg and timing back to full-strength, certainly doesn't make the decision look any better.

"He's been playing through some discomfort," Renteria said. "He's been managing it and giving us a tremendous effort. I know he doesn't talk about it a whole lot but you see him really grinding through it. We've been trying to manage it and allow him an opportunity to be out there for us. I think they're just going to clean it up and we'll see where he's at after that."

García expects to be physically 100 percent for 2019 spring training, which will effectively be a contract year if the White Sox make a tender offer to him, as he is entering his final year of eligibility for salary arbitration and would likely be due a raise upon his current \$6.7 million salary. Going into the year, Rick Hahn said the White Sox eventually had a decision to make as to whether García is going to be part of their contention window. While the deadline for that decision does not come until/unless he hits free agency after the 2019 season, Hahn certainly did not get the most useful year of data with which to assess García's ability to help the team in 2018 and beyond.

"I know the talent is there, I know what I can do when I'm healthy so let's see what happens next year," García said. "It's been difficult. Difficult year. Nothing that I can do. I've been playing like this the whole season. Just gotta play and get after it, so it is what it is. I can't control that. I can control what I do on the field."

As Eno Sarris wrote Tuesday, despite his size, García still has 88th-percentile sprint speed, and the massive raw power his profile has always hinted at was on display more than ever in 2018. Six years after his major league debut, García is still a tantalizing blend of high-level physical tools with flashes of ability to translate that into above-average production at the major league level, but uncertainty about how consistent he can be. His reasons for a disappointing 2018 are compelling, and hopefully will start getting resolved on Oct. 2, but his role on the next contending White Sox team remains hard to know for sure.

White Sox win, end James Shields' 200-inning season in style

By James Fegan / The Athletic / September 25, 2018

Despite all his experience with rebuilding baseball teams, James Shields is not one to give a happy interview about a strong performance in a loss. Given that he's told all of his keys to success to all his teammates, his commitment to the name on the front of his jersey isn't really in question.

But he certainly knew ahead of time that the first out in the top of the second inning of Tuesday night's 5-4 walk-off win over Cleveland meant he had sealed up 200 innings for the 10th time in his 13-year career. He bent over at the waist, planted his right fist firmly in his glove and held it to his chin for a second. Then he made damn sure he threw the ball to the dugout, to later be added to a mountain of career keepsakes, and got back to work.

"This year going into this season I was really taking pride in being able to get to that 200 mark again," said Shields, who has important baseballs saved in cases in his locker. "It's my 10th time I've done it in my career, so that was kind of looming over my head a little bit, and to be able to get that, it's just all the hard work I've put in this year and I'm really really proud of that."

Like many Shields starts in 2018, Tuesday night was labor-intensive, and a bit more than usual as he walked four over six innings and battled his control. He always knew he was conceding command for

movement when he dropped his arm angle and had resolved to work through it. White Sox manager Rick Renteria conceded that there were stretches Tuesday when he wasn't sure whether Shields was going to get through five innings, but he wound up entrusting him to toss 112 pitches — two shy of a season high — the last of which was a knee-buckling 77 mph full-count curveball to strike out Francisco Lindor and strand two runners in scoring position in the sixth.

“Even when he was in the last inning of his work and working in some traffic, most were thinking, ‘Gosh, this could implode on him,’” Renteria said. “But he’s a professional and he ended up working really well and recording the last strikeout against Lindor. A tribute to his experience and his knowledge and his confidence and his grittiness, and he was able to get through that inning.”

Like most of Shields’ 33 starts this year, he kept his team in the game and within striking range all night, only to be staring down the barrel of his 17th loss. Unlike many of those starts, an offensive rally came in the ninth. Cleveland’s Trevor Bauer-Carlos Carrasco playoff tuneup tandem fell apart at the end, with the latter half allowing a three-run, game-ending rally. Cleveland manager Terry Francona didn’t bother bringing in a warmed and ready (and left-handed) Brad Hand to face Daniel Palka, and watched Palka punch a two-run walk-off single through a drawn-in infield as a result.

The result allowed Shields to soak in his accomplishment, smile and laugh at his locker with his older brother Jeremy and receive hugs from teammates and coaches as they passed by and paid tribute to the end of six months of work.

Shields is an easygoing, gregarious presence in the clubhouse. But for a half hour after any loss, he’ll admit he’s just pissed, and that kind of attitude would have marred what he’s accomplished this season.

Shields dropped his arm angle for more movement, sure, but he didn’t find the fountain of youth and start throwing harder after a nightmarish 2016 season. He didn’t get younger, after his lat muscle tore and placed him on the disabled list for the first time in 2017. As physically impressive as his nine-year run of collecting 200-inning seasons from 2007 to 2015 was, this year was finding a way to get back to that level through grit and guile, of adjustment upon adjustment, having a plan for every game situation and showing “the feel to start,” to borrow scouting parlance.

“This is one of the things that I’ve prided myself in every single year, is to be able to go 200, and more than anything to be able to post every start,” Shields said. “Last year was the only time in my career I went on the DL for a couple months, and the dedication that I put in on a daily basis in the offseason, during this season, in between starts, I definitely am trying to reflect on it and enjoy the moment.”

That pitch to Lindor, that moment of escaping a jam to deliver six innings again, it may have been the last of a mostly difficult White Sox tenure for which he never stopped working to find a redeeming arc. A season of 204 2/3 innings with a 4.53 ERA is not going to get his \$16 million option for 2019 picked up, but it will allow him to keep pitching in the majors, which the 36-year-old wants to keep doing for a few years until his body finally insists that he stop.

“We’ll see where life takes me after this season’s over,” Shields said. “I’ve loved my time here, the guys are great, the coaching staff’s a great coaching staff, and the training staff I can’t say enough about what they’ve done for me over the last three years. Just the organization itself has been an amazing organization to be a part of, so we’ll see where it goes this offseason. But right now I’m enjoying my time, and I’m gonna reflect on the season this year and get back to work.”

Matt Davidson probably isn’t the next Shohei Ohtani, but the White Sox will at least discuss the possibility

By James Fegan / The Athletic / September 25, 2018

White Sox infielder Matt Davidson would love to be the next pitching and hitting dual-threat in major league baseball, and he doesn't think it would take a huge overhaul of his offseason training regimen to get ready for it.

"You put it into your offseason workout and then when you start throwing in the offseason, just throw a little bit more than usual," Davidson said. "As far as infield, you don't need to necessarily throw as much as pitchers. I'll probably just throw a bit more."

Davidson acknowledged his arm care routine would probably need to take a step up, but as he told The Athletic this weekend, he plans to meet with team officials to discuss the idea of preparing to pitch more in the future.

"We've kind of talked just a little bit," Davidson said. "I think we'll formally kind of do it more in the offseason, just kind of see maybe if that is a legit option to maybe do. They know I can pitch and if we're ever in those situations, I'm the guy to do it. We'll see what we come up with it."

A source told The Athletic's Ken Rosenthal that Davidson and the White Sox will discuss using the offseason to work on preparing for a dual role, in which he would pitch and continue to contribute in his current capacity as an infielder and designated hitter. But while Davidson lives near the White Sox's spring training complex in Glendale during the offseason, expectations should remain very tempered that an improbable transition will take place. The Sox indicated they do not plan to send Davidson to instructional league nor the Arizona Fall League as a way of testing his pitching ability against live hitters. It does not appear that the pursuit of the dual role possibility has ascended to that level of seriousness.

Even in a year when the use of position players pitching has exploded across the league, Davidson — a 27-year-old former standout high school pitcher in California — stood out for his ability to comfortably sit at 90 mph or above with his fastball and get swings and misses on mid-70s breaking balls with splitter-type action. He recorded three scoreless innings across three separate appearances and posted a surprisingly above-average 13.6 percent swinging strike rate. He allowed just two of the 11 batters he faced to reach base. It's a tiny sample, but a pretty good one.

But he has also not pitched since Aug. 6, as the White Sox's September bullpen has swelled to a size that takes away any need for Davidson to eat innings, and he has not pitched outside of the exceedingly low-leverage and lower-effort opportunities in which position players usually appear on the mound. More exposure to hitters in moments that matter, advanced scouting and the rigors of pitching regularly could reveal that Davidson is not up to the task of just dropping into major league action and providing quality innings on a semi-regular basis.

Which wouldn't be any slight on him.

Thousands of talented pitchers toil in the minors working on their craft for years and still aren't capable of holding down even low-leverage bullpen roles in the minors. The wave of teams across the league carrying eight-man bullpens and using position players to grab mop-up innings already indicates there's value in finding someone who can help soak up all the extra innings at hand. But until Davidson is on the field, pitching on a regular basis and holding his own against major league hitters, it's still hard to fathom. Plenty of elite high school arms as good as Davidson was or better have worked for years and failed to make the leap in ability required to survive in the majors without having to overcome a layoff of nearly a decade.

It's fun, it's interesting, and for the baseball fan in all of us — and the pitching lover in Matt Davidson — it's hard to resist the urge to hope it happens. But what makes the unusual and unlikely moments in Major League Baseball so great is the knowledge that the sport and the league are hard as hell. Davidson has raised his on-base percentage by more than 60 points in one season and given himself a future as a big league corner bat, and that might just be enough.