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Kopech, Jimenez among White Sox NRIs

By Scott Merkin/ MLB.com/ Jan. 22, 2018

CHICAGO -- The 22 players invited by the White Sox to Spring Training, announced by the club on Monday, reads like a prospect showcase for the South Siders.

Sixteen players within the organization received non-roster invites. When coupled with the players already on the 40-man roster, nine of the White Sox Top 10 prospects will take part in big league camp at Camelback Ranch in Glendale, Ariz.

Right-hander Michael Kopech, ranked as the club's No. 2 prospect by MLB Pipeline, and outfielder Luis Robert, ranked No. 3, top the group of non-roster invites from within the system. Those 16 also include right-handers Chris Beck, Dylan Cease, Tyler Danish, Dane Dunning, Alec Hansen, Jordan Stephens and Connor Walsh; left-handers Brian Clark and Jordan Guerrero; catchers Zack Collins, Alfredo Gonzalez and Seby Zavala, infielder Jake Burger and outfielder Jacob May.

Outfielder Eloy Jimenez, the club's No. 1 prospect, is joined by other top young talent on the 40-man roster including second baseman Yoan Moncada, outfielders Nicky Delmonico, Micker Adolfo, Charlie Tilson and Luis Alexander Basabe; infielder Casey Gillaspie and pitchers Aaron Bummer, Ian Clarkin, Jace Fry, Carson Fulmer, Lucas Giolito, Reynaldo Lopez and Thyago Vieira. Simply put, the White Sox future will be on full display in Arizona.

The White Sox agreed to terms on Minor League contracts with six free agents, bringing that Spring Training invite total to 22. Those players are right-handers Rob Scahill, Chris Volstad and Michael Ynoa, left-hander T.J. House and infielders Patrick Leonard and Matt Skole.

House has appeared in 29 career games (22 starts) with the Indians (2014-16) and Blue Jays (2017), going 5-7 with a 4.44 ERA and 90 strikeouts over 119 1/3 innings. Scahill has worked in 118 big league games over six seasons with the Rockies (2012-14), Pirates (2015-16) and Brewers (2016-17), going 5-7 with a 3.79 ERA.

Volstad spent most of the 2017 season with Triple-A Charlotte (27 games/18 starts), but he finished the season with the White Sox (six games/two starts).

White Sox pitchers and catchers report to Spring Training on Wednesday, Feb. 14, including physicals and a workout. Position players will report and undergo physicals on Monday, Feb. 19. The first full-squad workout also takes place on the 19th. The White Sox begin the Cactus League season on Feb. 23 as the visiting team against the Dodgers at Camelback Ranch. Chicago will play its first official home game on Feb. 25 vs. Cincinnati.

"We are going to get creative," White Sox pitching coach Don Cooper said during a recent interview on his preparation for Spring Training. "We are going to play 'B' games because the whole experience for everybody, especially the kids that we see as a big part of our future, this is like an investment in the bank. We just made a deposit here. We are going to hope that this pays dividends later because of the opportunity.

"Let them get the lay of the land, meet everybody, pitch in big league camp, Spring Training games, everything you can think of as a bonus that a kid receives by coming to camp. That's kind of the way I've always seen it. Now being in the spot we are in is even brighter."

Burger among MLB's Top 10 3B prospects

By Scott Merkin /MLB.com / Jan. 22, 2018

CHICAGO -- It wasn't until Jake Burger's sophomore year of high school in Missouri when he decided to crack down and focus on baseball over hockey.

The White Sox, who selected Burger with the 11th overall pick in the 2017 Draft, are glad he selected the diamond over the ice. Burger is ranked as the No. 10 third base prospect in the game per the newest list released by MLB Pipeline on Tuesday.

"He's in good shape. He looks strong," White Sox director of player development Chris Getz said. "The ball is loud coming off of his bat. I think he's going to open some eyes this season. I know he's excited for Spring Training to begin."

Hitting the baseball for Burger, 21, shouldn't be an issue according to his early profile. Over 51 games and 194 at-bats during the 2017 season for Class A Kannapolis and the Arizona Rookie League White Sox, Burger produced a .263 average with a .749 OPS. He knocked out five home runs, 10 doubles and finished with 29 RBIs.

There's also a strong belief within the organization in Burger's ability to stay at third defensively. He worked diligently at the position during instructional league action in Arizona and then moved to Arizona during the offseason to continue that work.

"I love it over there and it has been going well for me," Burger said during an instructional league interview regarding third base. "It's just been a ton of reps, which I love. That's how you get better at defense, having that many reps."

MLB Pipeline ranked the Blue Jays' Vladimir Guerrero Jr. No. 1 among third-base prospects. He's followed by Nick Senzel of the Reds, Miguel Andujar of the Yankees, Michael Chavis of the Red Sox, Christian Arroyo of the Rays, Austin Riley of the Braves, Ryan Mountcastle of the Orioles, Colton Welker of the Rockies, Brian Anderson of the Marlins and Burger.

Michael Kopech, who received a non-roster invite to White Sox Spring Training like Burger, was ranked No. 3 by MLB Pipeline among right-handed pitchers. Zack Collins, who also will be part of the 2018 White Sox big league camp, checked in at No. 9 among catchers.

Meet the Prospects: Jameson Fisher

By Vinnie Duber/NBC Sports Chicago/ Jan. 22, 2018

Fisher, the 24-year-old outfielder, was a fourth-round pick of the White Sox in the 2016 draft.

A Louisiana native, Fisher slashed .342/.436/.487 in 50 rookie-ball games after being drafted in 2016.

Last year, Fisher split time between Class A Kannapolis and Class A Winston-Salem, playing 124 combined games. On the season, he slashed .245/.342/.402 with 30 doubles, 10 home runs, six triples and 68 RBIs to go along with 58 walks and 114 strikeouts.

As of their most recent rankings, MLB Pipeline had Fisher rated as the No. 25 prospect in the White Sox organization.

Prospects highlight White Sox spring training invitees

By Dan Santaromita /NBC Sports Chicago/ Jan. 22, 2018

Pitchers and catchers report in just over three weeks and the White Sox announced the list of spring training invitees on Monday.

The White Sox signed six players to minor-league contracts to get them to camp, but, as has been the case for the past year-plus with the White Sox, all eyes will be on the prospects.

Pitchers Michael Kopech, Alec Hansen, Dane Dunning and Dylan Cease and position players Luis Robert, Zack Collins and 2017 first-round pick Jake Burger are among the top prospects the White Sox invited to spring training. The team's top prospect, Eloy Jimenez, is already on the 40-man roster so he was already set to be included. Jimenez, Kopech, Hansen, Robert and Dunning were just included on Baseball America's top 100 prospects.

Kopech and Collins were in spring training last year and Jimenez was in spring training with the Cubs in 2017 so it's not an entirely new experience for them, but White Sox fans will be able to get a more extended and accessible look at Jimenez for the first time. Robert will likely have extra attention on him due to this being his first professional baseball in the U.S. Robert played in the Dominican Summer League after signing with the White Sox last summer.

The other non-roster invitees are pitchers Chris Beck, Tyler Danish, Jordan Stephens, Connor Walsh, Brian Clark and Jordan Guerrero and position players Alfredo Gonzalez, Seby Zavala and Jacob May.

The players signed on minor-league contracts are Rob Scahill, Chris Volstad, Michael Ynoa, T.J. House, Patrick Leonard and Matt Skole. Volstad and Ynoa both pitched with the White Sox in 2017, but have since been removed from the 40-man roster. Scahill is a Chicagoland product who graduated from Willowbrook High School and pitched at Bradley in college.

Don't call me Carlos: 'I think I'm gonna stick with Yolmer'

By Slavko Bekovic, /NBC Sports Chicago/ Jan. 22, 2018

After a breakout season in 2017, don't expect any more name changes from the man formerly known as Carlos Sanchez.

"Yolmer hit more home runs so I think I'm gonna stick with Yolmer," said Sanchez in an exclusive interview from his Arizona home. "I'm the same person, but Yolmer worked good this year, so I'll stay with Yolmer."

After doing away with the name Carlos, the 25-year old infielder set career-highs across the board last year, slugging 12 home runs, driving in 59 runs while posting a .732 OPS.

He ranked third on the White Sox in Wins Above Replacement with 3.5, trailing only Jose Abreu's 4.7 and Avisail Garcia's 4.5. In the three seasons prior, Sanchez totaled just 0.4 WAR in 201 combined games.

And now, 2018 provides a new opportunity. Sanchez is expected to be the everyday starting third baseman, the spot he took over following Todd Frazier's midseason trade to the New York Yankees.

With an elevated role comes a vigorous offseason schedule. He took only 20 days off after the regular season before starting to train for the upcoming spring.

"I don't want to work just on one thing. I want to do everything and that's why I start training so early," he said. "My speed. More power. Agility. A lot of things."

Sanchez certainly isn't the flashiest name in a White Sox infield that includes Abreu and the middle-infield tandem of Yoan Moncada and Tim Anderson. But he knows his role on the team – being flashy off the field and bringing energy to the clubhouse.

"If you go with a lot of energy to the game, a lot of things change," said Sanchez. "That makes a lot of difference in one game. And one game can make a lot of difference during the season."

But a 70-92 record by the White Sox certainly was not due to a lack of energy as much as a general lack of talent. That should change in 2018 – when fans can expect to see Moncada, as well as other names like Nicky Delmonico, Lucas Giolito and Reynaldo Lopez play a full major league season. Not to mention prospects like Eloy Jimenez and Michael Kopech knocking on the door to the big leagues.

And that excites Sanchez.

"We've got really young players but really talented [players]," said Sanchez. "We have to get better, but I think we can do a lot of good things next year."

Are there any young players Sanchez is specifically excited to see develop?

"They're all going to be really good if they keep working," he said. "Moncada could be a superstar."

That's exactly what the White Sox are hoping as well.

If Michael Kopech and Eloy Jimenez spent 2018 in the majors, what would their production look like?

By Slavko Bekovic/NBC Sports Chicago/ Jan. 22, 2018

It's no secret that the White Sox and their fans are hoping to see both Eloy Jimenez and Michael Kopech in the big leagues in 2018. And according to one full-season projection system, it seems that the computers agree that both will be MLB contributors very soon.

FanGraphs' Steamer600 projections forecast what MLB hitters would do over 600 plate appearances and what pitchers would do over 200 innings – and both Jimenez and Kopech are close to MLB-ready.

Jimenez, MLB.com's 5th ranked prospect, is projected to provide a 1.9 offensive WAR and Kopech, MLB.com's 10th ranked prospect, would account for 1.4 WAR over the course of a full season.

So what does that mean?

Here are some comparable MLB players from 2017 in offensive Wins Above Replacement for Jimenez:

Jackie Bradley Jr., BOS – 1.9 (541 PA)

Jedd Gyorko, STL – 1.9 (481 PA)

Andrew Benintendi, BOS – 1.9 (658 PA)

Yasiel Puig, LAD – 1.9 (570 PA)

Salvador Perez, KC – 1.9 (499 PA)

Very solid company, considering those five players combined for an average OPS of .788. The Steamer600 projections peg Jimenez for a .770 OPS over 600 plate appearances.

The full forecast is as follows: a .267 batting average, an on-base percentage of .317 and a .453 slugging percentage to go along with 23 home runs.

Meanwhile, Kopech might be a bit further away from being an impact player with a projected WAR of 1.4 over 200 innings.

Here are some MLB WAR comparisons from 2017 for Kopech:

Julio Teheran, ATL – 1.6 (188.1 IP)

Lucas Giolito, CHW – 1.5 (45.1 IP)

Dellin Betances, NYY – 1.5 (59.2 IP)

Miguel Gonzalez, CHW/TEX – 1.5 (156.0 IP)

Greg Holland, COL – 1.4 (44.2 IP)

As you can see, the comparisons are not nearly as promising for Kopech as they are for Jimenez. The comparable range is mostly made up of late-inning relievers or middle-of-the-pack starting pitchers.

With a 100 mile-per-hour fastball and wipeout slider come the occasional control issues, and that is where the Steamer600 projections hurt Kopech the most, with a forecasted walk rate of 5.4 walks per 9 innings pitched.

The full forecast for Kopech includes a 4.84 ERA with 216 strikeouts over 32 starts with 32 home runs allowed.

Whether these projections come close to reality or not, having Kopech and Jimenez on the Major League doorstep is sure to give the White Sox rebuild yet another boost in the coming season..

White Sox invite 22 players to spring training

By Chris Kuc /Chicago Tribune/ Jan. 22, 2018

The White Sox extended spring training invitations to 22 non-roster players Monday.

Sixteen of the players were already signed with the organization but not on the 40-man roster, while six free agents agreed to terms on minor-league contracts Monday: Right-handed pitchers Rob Scahill, Chris Volstad and Michael Ynoa, left-hander T.J. House and infielders Patrick Leonard and Matt Skole.

The others receiving invitations are a who's who of the Sox's top prospects. They are right-handed pitchers Chris Beck, Dylan Cease, Tyler Danish, Dane Dunning, Alec Hansen, Michael Kopech, Jordan Stephens and Connor Walsh, left-handers Brian Clark and Jordan Guerrero, catchers Zack Collins, Alfredo Gonzalez and Seby Zavala, infielder Jake Burger and outfielders Jacob May and Luis Robert.

Seven of the 22 invitees are ranked among the club's top 10 prospects by Baseball America and MLB.com, while seven have major-league experience.

Pitchers and catchers report to spring training Feb. 14 for physicals and a workout. Position players report and undergo physicals Feb. 19. The first full-squad workout also takes place Feb. 19, and the Sox begin Cactus League play Feb. 23 against the Dodgers at Camelback Ranch in Glendale, Ariz.

Whether these projections come close to reality or not, having Kopech and Jimenez on the Major League doorstep is sure to give the White Sox rebuild yet another boost in the coming season..

White Sox place 5 on Baseball America's Top 100 prospects list

By Chris Kuc /Chicago Tribune/ Jan. 22, 2018

The future continues to look bright for the White Sox.

Baseball America released its Top 100 MLB Prospects list Monday, and five Sox players were on it, led by outfielder Eloy Jimenez at No. 4 and pitcher Michael Kopech at No. 11.

Pitcher Alec Hansen (No. 57), outfielder Luis Robert (No. 58) and pitcher Dane Dunning (No. 82) also made the Top 100.

Jimenez, acquired from the Cubs in July in a trade for Jose Quintana, was behind Braves outfielder Ronald Acuna, Angels pitcher/outfielder Shohei Ohtani and Blue Jays third baseman Vladimir Guerrero Jr.

Kopech, a flamethrowing right-hander, was the third-ranked pitching prospect.

After being called up by the Sox during the 2017 season, infielder Yoan Moncada and pitchers Reynaldo Lopez and Lucas Giolito graduated from the list.

The Braves topped the list with eight Top 100 prospects, while the Brewers, Padres, Rays and Yankees each had six.

The Cubs did not have a prospect ranked in the Top 100

White Sox prospect Jake Burger namaste'd in Arizona this winter, but will the sweat equity pay off?

By James Fegan /Chicago Tribune/ Jan. 23, 2018

GLENDALE, Ariz. — Last week, the main hallway of the White Sox spring training facility — into which reporters might lazily amble out into — suddenly became very dangerous.

For the last few months, White Sox prospect Jake Burger's Wednesday afternoons have included plyometrics, agility training and resistance band running, the latter of which includes dragging a strength coach, who is holding a harness around Burger's waist while he runs in a dead sprint up the hallway. With

fellow prospect Gavin Sheets in town for the hitters minicamp and joining him in this exercise, the hallway got very crowded very quickly.

As the pair were both panting, a passerby made a comment they both agreed with: "It beats being in school, right?"

For Burger, working on explosiveness for charging grounders and running to first isn't just what he chose over finishing up school at Missouri State, but also seeing friends and family, or visiting home.

"It's just one of those things where something inside me told me it's going to be more beneficial to stay up here and get away from friends and distractions up in Missouri," Burger said. "I've gone back and said hi to a bunch of my friends and hung out with them, but it's not like I'm there for months on end. It's good to get down here and away from that distraction and get after it. I think the ultimate goal of this offseason was to come back in some of the best shape of my life and I think I've achieved that."

Despite Nicky Delmonico's success after moving to Arizona last offseason, there was not a wave of young players traveling out to Glendale this winter for their training. White Sox strength and conditioning coaches can monitor player progress and issue workout plans remotely as well as in person. Tim Anderson is perfectly content working out at the Charlotte Knights complex near the house he bought with his wife and young child; Blake Rutherford couldn't pass up training alongside Christian Yelich in California; Zack Collins found a private training facility near his home in Florida shared by Salvador Perez and Christian Vazquez, etc. So the Sox's spring training home was nearly empty this winter, despite Delmonico's belief in its merits.

"You don't pay anything to come here," Delmonico said. "You see [all the coaches] every day. I think it's a great thing. You have great weather, you can swing, you can go take ground balls if you want to. You literally have all the tools right here to do everything. I hope more people come out because it's a lot of fun."

Other than minor league pitcher Brian Saucedo, the only player to follow Delmonico's lead was Burger, who did note "it gets boring at times." Burger didn't move to Glendale to follow the Delmonico Plan. He did it on his own.

"I knew he lived out here, I knew Matt Davidson might be down here," Burger said. "I think I just kind of came out on a limb, like, let's live down here."

Jake Burger, the White Sox's resident Large Adult Son, eliminated distractions this offseason by moving to Glendale from Missouri. (James Fegan/The Athletic)

But Delmonico and Burger became fast friends. They come to Camelback Ranch every weekday, work out for two hours, hit in the cages for 45 minutes, occasionally do some field work, and then end things with the most important restorative activity of the day: hot yoga.

"We're going every day," Burger said. "It's awesome, I love it. It definitely loosens you up and gets your muscles going. It's a workout but it also makes your body feel good, feel real loose and whatnot. And the strength guys have been real good with active warmups to keep our bodies in good shape."

During that four-plus-hour routine, and the additional Arizona Coyotes games Burger convinces Delmonico to attend, he peppers the 25-year-old with questions. Ranging from diet, routine, personal life, it all centers around the fundamental question: how do I get to where you are now? Delmonico has come out of the experience sounding like a real Burger Boy.

"Not just on the field stuff but off the field — just a great guy," Delmonico said. "I worked out with him all offseason. He's going to be a great clubhouse guy and can swing it pretty good."

The “swinging it pretty good” part was enabled by spending the entire winter working directly with minor league hitting coordinator Mike Gellinger. Major league hitting coach Todd Steverson might be reticent to emphasize fly ball launch angles for players already in the big leagues, but for Gellinger and Burger, generating more fly balls has occupied all of their focus as they work to unlock Burger's obvious raw power.

“Me and Gelly have been working on that, a different launch angle, just a different launch with your hands,” Burger said. “That’s definitely helped big time. It’s something you don’t want to think about once you get in a game, but in BP it’s good to focus on.”

Burger knows ground balls are coming. He knows there are such things as productive outs on the ground (and if he forgets he'll surely get reminded by this staff). He knows pitchers are going to try to sink the ball to avoid his power. But after a season where he made a ton of contact but still slugged just .409 in Low-A Kannapolis, he's using his reps in the winter to make sure he gets himself to the point where anything in his hitting zone — like the locations he sees in BP — is getting taken to the gaps or flying over them, often to right-center, where the right-handed Burger feels most comfortable.

After months of working with Gellinger, Burger thinks he's found a balance. He's not worried his approach is too extreme that pitchers can exploit it, and he trusts his hand speed to allow him to make the adjustment. Despite his size, you can physically see him dip to square up the low ball just watching him in BP. After a few months of steady work, the hope is it will be second nature by April. If the number of “Attaboys!” and butt pats he got from Rick Renteria during hitters minicamp are any indication, Burger's winter has been spent well.

“He’s been swinging the bat pretty well. I saw him last year a little bit and he’s a pretty impressive young hitter,” Renteria said. “Everyone says it’s just BP, but there are certain things that you look for: hand-eye coordination, calmness, approach to the baseball, and he’s pretty consistent. I think as he continues to experience and learn and see more competitive pitching and things of that nature where you start to make an adjustment, and then there’s still another adjustment that you make once you get to the big leagues, that he’ll be able to have that success.”