



WHITE SOX HEADLINES OF AUGUST 6, 2018

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Palka's late blast lifts White Sox to sweep

Garcia notches two home runs in see-saw game; Shields posts quality start in old park

By Scott Merkin / MLB.com / August 5, 2018

ST. PETERSBURG -- The White Sox picked up their first four-game winning streak of the season, their first three-game sweep since Aug. 8-10, 2017, against the Astros and their first road sweep since April 25-27, 2016, in Toronto -- courtesy of Daniel Palka's 439-foot blast in the ninth inning of an 8-7 victory over Tampa Bay on Sunday at Tropicana Field.

Rays reliever Diego Castillo had retired the first two hitters in the ninth before Jose Abreu singled to left and Palka connected on a 96.2-mph first-pitch fastball for his 17th home run of the season. Palka had struck out in each of his first four at-bats before the ninth. Hector Santiago earned the win as the White Sox fifth reliever, despite giving up one run in the bottom of the ninth.

"I was jokingly saying it earlier -- just trying to make contact," Palka said. "But that's really what I was doing. Just had to forget the first eight-ninths of the game and move on from there."

"It's pretty impressive to watch. His work ethic is phenomenal every day," said White Sox starting pitcher James Shields of Palka. "He comes to the ballpark and gets his work in. To see the results that he's doing in a game is a testament to what he's done."

Shields, who was honored this weekend as part of the 2008 American League champion Rays, allowed two earned runs (four total) over six innings, striking out six and walking four against his old team. Shields left with a 6-4 lead but finished with a no-decision, meaning he has not won on the road since Opening Day against the Royals.

After the 114-pitch effort, Shields admitted to having nothing early and no feel for the baseball over the first four innings. He found a rhythm in his last two frames on the mound.

"We ended up getting it done," Shields said. "Good win."

The White Sox carried a 6-4 lead into the seventh on the strength of two home runs from Avisail Garcia, giving him 12 long balls in his last 28 games. Tim Anderson also knocked out two hits and drove in two, while catcher Dustin Garneau, replacing Kevan Smith who is on the paternity list for the birth of his son, picked up his first single and first RBI with the White Sox.

But the relief tandem of Xavier Cedeno and Jeanmar Gomez could not hold the lead in the seventh. Gomez managed to strike out pinch-hitter C.J. Cron with the bases loaded and nobody out but then gave up a two-run single to Ji-Man Choi to tie the game.

Ultimately the White Sox prevailed, taking the season series from the Rays, 4-2. Palka pulverized the opposition as the finishing touch, just as he did as a pinch-hitter on Thursday against the Royals to start the streak.

"The second half has been pretty strong," said Palka of the 41-70 White Sox. "I don't think it's ultimately as good as we actually are. Some things haven't come together, but it's been a good start to the second half."

"Over the weekend and the past week, we've been playing some good baseball overall," Shields said. "The guys are really putting it together."

MOMENTS THAT MATTERED

No room for wildness: With the bases loaded, one out and the game tied in the seventh, both Brandon Lowe and pinch-hitter Carlos Gomez worked the count full against White Sox relievers. Jace Fry struck out Lowe for the second out, and Tyler Danish retired Gomez on a grounder to second baseman Yoan Moncada to end the threat.

LEURY EXITS EARLY

Leury Garcia, who started in center field Sunday, left the game in the ninth with left hamstring soreness. He will be re-evaluated Monday, as Adam Engel replaced him defensively. White Sox manager Rick Renteria said Garcia hurt himself while making the catch on a Matt Duffy flyout in the eighth.

Eloy Jimenez, the White Sox top prospect per MLB Pipeline and No. 3 overall, was scratched from Sunday's lineup for Triple-A Charlotte. But sources tell MLB.com that Jimenez was held out of the lineup with flu-like symptoms.

HE SAID IT

"This whole weekend was really special for me personally. To be able to come see the boys from 2008, celebrate that, it's a good moment in our careers. To be able to have Tampa do that for us was pretty special." -- Shields

UP NEXT

Dylan Covey (4-7, 5.57) is scheduled to make his 15th start of the season, eighth at home and first vs. the New York Yankees in the start of a six-game homestand Monday at Guaranteed Rate Field. First pitch is scheduled for 7:10 p.m. CT with Lance Lynn on the mound for the Yankees. Covey is 1-6 with an 8.68 ERA, eight homers allowed, a .299 opponents average and 1.82 WHIP over his last eight starts.

Avilan in the mix as closer role remains fluid

By Scott Merkin / MLB.com / August 5, 2018

ST. PETERSBURG -- When Luis Avilan recorded the final out in Thursday's victory over the Royals, the White Sox southpaw immediately asked for the baseball from first baseman Jose Abreu. Avilan had picked up his first MLB save in career appearance No. 378.

On Saturday, it was Thyago Vieira with the demonstrative postgame celebration after recording his first career save by shutting down the Rays in the ninth. Eight different pitchers have saved games this season for the White Sox, and with closer Joakim Soria moved to the Brewers before the non-waiver Trade Deadline, that role will remain fluid for the South Siders.

View Full Game Coverage

"When it's about helping the team, it doesn't matter who is going to have the ball in their hand," said Vieira through interpreter Billy Russo. "We all have to be ready for the opportunity because our goal is to help the team to win the game."

"I'm always ready for when the manager is trying to get me in the game," Avilan said. "I've never been on a team besides the closer, where any [other reliever] has a role. It works better like that because you are going to be prepared for every single situation."

Avilan has been in the same bullpen as two of the best closers in the game in Craig Kimbrel and Kenley Jansen. He spoke of how late-inning presences such as those two would have the confident look of being locked in somewhere around the seventh in potential save situations.

It's a challenge Avilan would like to face again.

"I never even had the opportunity to go in a save situation before," Avilan said. "To get that means a lot because when you are a relief pitcher, obviously you want to get that opportunity. I was pretty excited."

Moncada's support system

Yoan Moncada lives approximately eight minutes from Tropicana Field in the offseason. So he was expecting a big support system in the crowd for Sunday's series finale.

"It's like an army coming. It means a lot for me," said a smiling Moncada through Russo. "It's going to be the first time I'm going to be able to play in front of them."

That group includes David and Jo Hastings, Moncada's close friends and advisors from St. Petersburg. They have been with the White Sox second baseman since he came to the U.S as part of the Red Sox organization.

"They are my family here," said Moncada, whose mother, father, sisters and brother remain in Cuba. "They are the ones who have been taking care of me in my time here in the U.S. and they are the ones who are teaching me about things here.

"Even though it's not a blood family connection, they are my family. It's motivation. I wouldn't say it's pressure. You are trying to do your best in front of them to be able to give them some joy, too."

Cease leaves lasting impression

Dylan Cease's season-long dominance continued Saturday night, as the right-hander threw six scoreless innings for Double-A Birmingham against Mobile. The White Sox No. 5 prospect per MLB Pipeline allowed one hit with nine strikeouts, having posted a 2-0 record with a 1.00 ERA and 51 strikeouts over his last 36 innings.

"His stuff's good, but I think it's a lot of his demeanor," said White Sox manager Rick Renteria, who watched Cease during Spring Training. "He has a quiet confidence about him, you can see it when he gets on the mound.

"He knows what he wants to do. As young as he is, he has a good feel for how he will attack, what he has and how he will use it. Very polished emotionally, and a very thoughtful individual."

Third to first

- Renteria did a spot-on, albeit abbreviated, chest-pounding impersonation of Vieira's postgame celebration Saturday during his interview session Sunday. Vieira joined Atlanta's Luiz Gohara as the only Brazilians in Major League history to record a save.

"I did enjoy it," Vieira said. "It was a very important victory for the team and an important moment for me. That was the way I could express my happiness."

- Nick Madrigal, the White Sox top pick in the 2018 MLB Draft and fourth pick overall, struck out Saturday for the first time in his professional career in his 73rd plate appearance and 20th game. Madrigal also had two hits and walked once for Class A Advanced Winston-Salem.

- Right-handed pitcher Zack Burdi struck out one and walked one over two-thirds of an inning for the White Sox Arizona Rookie League team Saturday. It marked the first appearance for the 23-year-old potential future closer since July 9 of last season following Tommy John surgery.

Chris Getz on Eloy Jimenez: 'We're getting very close'

By Dan Santorimita / NBC Sports Chicago / August 5, 2018

Eloy Jimenez didn't play on Sunday, but when he makes his major league debut continues to be a hot topic for White Sox fans.

The uber prospect has ripped apart Triple-A pitching since moving up from Double-A in June. Jimenez is hitting .376/.425/.679 in 29 games with the Charlotte Knights.

White Sox director of player development Chris Getz was on 670 The Score's Hit & Run show on Sunday and talked about a number of prospects in the farm system, beginning with Jimenez.

"He's one of those players that you rarely see seamlessly kind of move through the minor leagues and I would imagine he's not going to waste any time at the major league level," Getz said. "We would just want to make sure he's as well-rounded as possible whether that be baserunning, defensively, obviously offensively and we're getting very close. I think when that time comes I'll be excited to see what happens, but all signs point to plenty of success to come in the major leagues for Eloy."

The 21-year-old Jimenez is ranked as the No. 3 overall prospect by MLB Pipeline. The White Sox could play the waiting game with him given that the major league team doesn't have anything significant to gain the rest of this season. They also could get another year of control and wait until mid April like the Cubs did with Kris Bryant in 2015.

Either way, there's no denying Jimenez's production since being traded to the White Sox last July.

"Once we acquired him in the trade last year he's done nothing but perform offensively," Getz said. "This guy has been able to drive the ball to all fields. He seems to be able to set up pitchers, he's very advanced. Each level brings new challenges. The Double-A level I'd say generally speaking more of a fastball type level. Then you go Triple-A when you've got some veterans, some guys that have been in the major leagues, some six-year free agents, they pitch backwards. But he's been able to close the gap at each spot."

Getz also talked about Michael Kopech, who has been on fire lately for Charlotte after a midseason slump. "It's been an interesting season," Getz said of Kopech. "I think ultimately for his long-term development a lot of good things he went through this year. It hasn't been completely smooth, but that's a good thing. He's in a good spot right now. He's commanding his fastball the best he has. He's differentiating his curveball, his slider. He's getting more consistent with those. He's getting more confident with his changeup."

Kopech struck out nine and didn't walk any batters in a start Sunday. He allowed two runs in seven innings. On the season Kopech has a 4.05 ERA with 152 strikeouts and 60 walks in 113 1/3 innings.

"Michael is a very confident player and we feel that he is going to be an impactful type starter in the major leagues and there's a chance it happens very soon," Getz said.

The Nick Madrigal dream is over, he finally struck out

By Dan Santorimita / NBC Sports Chicago / August 5, 2018

Nick Madrigal held out for a long time, but he finally struck out in professional baseball.

The No. 4 overall pick in the June draft struck out in his second plate appearance in Saturday's Winston-Salem Dash game. He had gone 72 plate appearances without striking out in pro ball. He struck out swinging on a 2-2 pitch.

This is the same White Sox prospect who said he thought striking out was embarrassing.

"For me I really think it's one of the most embarrassing things ever to be on a baseball field and to let the pitcher strike you out and you have to walk back to the dugout," Madrigal said on the White Sox Talk Podcast in late July. "It doesn't sit well with me. It never has and I don't think it ever will."

Madrigal has already been moving up the system quickly, getting promoted from Kannapolis to the Dash after just 12 games. He's off to a hot start with the Dash as well.

Madrigal had two singles a walk and a hit by pitch in addition to the strikeout on Saturday. He went 2-for-4 on Sunday and is hitting .417 (5-for-12) in three games for the Dash.

"He's off to a nice start without the strikeouts, but he's putting quality at-bats," White Sox director of player development Chris Getz said on 670 The Score's Hit & Run show on Sunday. "We targeted this guy, couldn't have been happier to acquire him in the draft. He doesn't take a pitch off. He's a winner, he communicates well on the field. When he comes to the box he's looking to make something happen. When he's on the bases he's looking to wreak havoc there. Then you just talk to him as a person and he is a tremendous teammate. He can be a middle of the order bat, he can be top of the order all just based on what you have on your team, but he's going to be a valuable piece for us moving forward. I'm really excited to continue to watch his growth."

Top prospect Eloy Jimenez 'really close' to joining the White Sox

By Teddy Greenstein / Chicago Tribune / August 5, 2018

Eloy Jimenez has wisely responded to questions about when he'll be called up to the White Sox, saying: "Only God knows."

Sox player development director Chris Getz also has an idea, and he told WSCR-AM 670 on Sunday that Jimenez is "really close" to joining the big-league club.

"He has done nothing but perform," Getz said. "This guy's been able to drive the ball to all fields. He's been able to set up pitchers. ... He's got a pretty good arm. We just want to make sure he's as ready as possible. We're getting really close."

Jimenez, a 21-year-old corner outfielder, has dominated Triple-A pitching since being promoted to Charlotte in late June. He is batting .376 with eight homers, nine doubles and 18 RBIs in 29 games.

The Sox could use him to spur an offense averaging 3.7 runs over its last six games heading into Sunday.

The Sox host the Yankees from Monday-Wednesday and, following an off day, welcome the Indians for a weekend set.

READ: New White Sox catcher: Prospects Eloy Jimenez and Michael Kopech are 'ready to go' »

Jimenez and right-hander Dylan Cease, acquired from the Cubs in the Jose Quintana trade, have been crushing it in the minors. Cease threw six scoreless innings for Double-A Birmingham on Saturday night, striking out nine while allowing one hit and no walks. He is 2-0 with a 1.00 ERA over his last six starts.

Said manager Rick Renteria: "His stuff's good, but I think it's a lot of his demeanor. He's very polished, emotionally."

The Sox also rave about Jimenez's demeanor, with general manager Rick Hahn saying, "He's a gregarious, fun, high-energy kid with a marvelous personality."

Jimenez is MLB's No. 3-rated prospect, and right-hander Michael Kopech is 13th.

Kopech had a fifth consecutive strong start Sunday, going seven innings and allowing two runs on eight hits with no walks and nine strikeouts.

"He's commanding the fastball the best he has," Getz said on the Score. "He's getting more confident with his changeup. We just want to build off of that. ... There's a chance that (his call-up) happens very soon."

First time for everything: Top 2018 draft pick Nick Madrigal, recently promoted to Class A Winston-Salem, struck out for the first time in his professional career in his 73rd plate appearance.

White Sox earn their 1st 3-game sweep in nearly a year

By Mike Didtler / Chicago Tribune / August 5, 2018

Daniel Palka hit a go-ahead two-run homer in the ninth inning and the White Sox completed their first three-game sweep in a year by beating the Rays 8-7 on Sunday.

It was the Sox's first three-game sweep since Aug. 8-10, 2017 against the Astros. The White Sox's last three-game road sweep occurred April 25-27, 2016 at Toronto.

Palka had struck out in each of his first four at-bats before connecting on his 17th homer off Diego Castillo (2-2) with two outs.

Hector Santiago (4-3) went the final 1 1/3 innings for the win.

C.J Cron had a leadoff double in the ninth off Santiago and scored one out later on Kevin Kiermaier's two-base hit. After Brandon Lowe walked, Jesus Sucre hit into a double play.

The Rays top the majors in one-run losses (26) and one-run games (46).

Avisail Garcia had a solo homer in a two-run fifth and made it 6-4 on another solo shot during the seventh for the White Sox. It was his eighth career multi-homer game.

Ji-Man Choi tied it at 6-all with a two-run single in the seventh, an inning that saw the White Sox use four relievers.

Sox starter James Shields left with a two-run lead but was denied his first road win since opening day. The one-time Rays ace threw a season-high 114 pitches, allowing four runs, five hits and four walks over six innings.

Tim Anderson had two RBI singles for the White Sox.

Joey Wendle had three hits, including a first-inning RBI single and a solo homer in the fifth that pulled the Rays within 5-4.

Brazilian reliever Thyago Vieira makes history (almost) for the White Sox

By Teddy Greenstein / Chicago Tribune / August 5, 2018

Thyago Vieira recorded his first career save Saturday night and celebrated in grand style, pounding his chest. Teammate Leury Garcia impersonated that in a joyous clubhouse after the game, and manager Rick Renteria even did a mini-version Sunday for the media.

"You know what?" Renteria said. "Good for him. Hopefully nobody took offense. It was a genuine, joyful expression."

The 25-year-old right-hander became the second Brazilian to earn a major-league save, joining the Braves' Luiz Gohara. Seven other Sox pitchers have earned saves this season as Renteria continues to mix and match following the trade of Joakim Soria.

Vieira's top fastball hit 98 mph Saturday, and he stands an imposing 6-3, 260 pounds.

"I don't mind that he looks ominous when he gets onto the mound," Renteria said. "At the end of the day, I think it's what comes out of his arm. His fastball has some good life when he commands it."

Vieira, who mixed in English and Spanish during an interview, said his desire to play baseball in Brazil was rare. His aunt's friend married a Japanese man, and Vieira learned the game in Sao Paulo through him. He started by throwing balls against a wall.

Asked if he thinks he's the best soccer player in the Sox clubhouse, he replied with a smile: "I don't know. When I played soccer I was a defender. I liked to kick people's ass."

Series preview: Yankees at White Sox

By Teddy Greenstein / Chicago Tribune / August 5, 2018

YANKEES AT WHITE SOX

All games on WGN-AM 720.

Monday: 7:10 p.m., NBCSCH.

RH Lance Lynn (7-8, 4.89) vs. RH Dylan Covey (4-7, 5.57).

Tuesday: 7:10 p.m., WGN-9.

LH CC Sabathia (6-4, 3.59) vs. RH Reynaldo Lopez (4-9, 4.47).

Wednesday: 7:10 p.m., NBCSCH.

RH Luis Severino (14-5, 3.08) vs. Lucas Giolito (7-8, 5.97).

White Sox prospect Dylan Cease puts up more zeroes

By Daryl Van Schouwen / Sun-Times / August 5, 2018

Right-hander Dylan Cease impressed in his first major league spring training, looked dominant at times in Cactus League games and hasn't missed a beat between high Class A Winston-Salem and Class AA Birmingham.

He's the next big up-and-coming pitcher in the White Sox' farm system behind Michael Kopech.

Acquired with Eloy Jimenez and two other prospects from the Cubs in the Jose Quintana trade last year, Cease earned a place in the Futures Game during All-Star Week and was named the Sox' minor league pitcher of the month for July.

In his first outing of August on Saturday, Cease had his third consecutive start without allowing a run, pitching six scoreless innings of one-hit ball with nine strikeouts and no walks for the Barons against Mobile. He's 2-0 with a 1.00 ERA and 51 strikeouts in his last six starts covering 36 innings.

In short, the 2018 season could not be going better for the No. 44 prospect (16th among pitchers) per MLB Pipeline.

"I feel if I was up there right now, I could definitely compete," Cease said. "But I'm not worried about it right now. I'm just trying to see what I can do to be the best player I can be."

Cease certainly has the stuff with an upper-90s fastball and three good secondary pitches, and Birmingham pitching coach Rich Dotson said Cease's slider has emerged as his second-best pitch. A new grip on his curve has made that one better, Cease said, and the changeup has also been good. All of the components are there to envision Cease being part of the Sox' starting rotation in the future.

"It's the talent," Dotson said. "He has great stuff. Great fastball. Got good ride to it. Locating it pretty well. And right now, he's working on his secondary pitches."

"He's even-keeled and goes about his business in a real good way. Goes out there prepared to pitch a game. He has an even temperament, not really up or down. He listens well and he shows a focus in what he's trying to accomplish."

A sixth-round Cubs draft choice in 2014, Cease had Tommy John surgery that same year, which delayed his jumping-off point. Before this season, he hadn't pitched more than the 93 innings he put in last year. At 112 $\frac{1}{2}$ innings so far in 2018, Cease's innings will be monitored down the stretch, said Chris Getz, the Sox' director of player development.

Dotson said Cease continues to look strong, a good sign for a player whose health issues are looking like a thing of the past.

"I think it's just the weight room, continuing to do my throwing program and make sure I get enough recovery and sleep and eating good," Cease said. "I've already [thrown] more than I've thrown previously, so we'll have to see how everything holds up this last month."

It's reasonable to assume that Cease's 2019 debut, just one of many that will be eagerly anticipated as the farm system begins turning prospects into major leaguers, will be at Class AAA Charlotte. As the Sox are showing with Kopech, they will be patient, although Cease (140 strikeouts, 41 walks) has a better handle on throwing consistent strikes.

"We can plan it but when you get [to the majors] it's a whole different game and you're going to learn from what you learn up there, too," Dotson said. "Sometimes you have to face the best to get to a different level. Guys usually don't go up and dominate."

Cease seemingly has the right mindset for when it's time to pitch at the highest level.

"As young as he is, he has a good feel for how he will attack, what he has and how he will use it," manager Rick Renteria told reporters Sunday. "His stuff's good but a lot of it is his demeanor. He has a quiet confidence about him, you can see it when he gets on the mound. He knows what he wants to do."

Scouting report White Sox vs. New York Yankees at Guaranteed Rate Field

By Scot Gregor / Daily Herald / August 5, 2018

TV:

NBC Sports Chicago Monday and Wednesday; WGN Tuesday

Radio:
WGN 720-AM

Pitching matchups:

The White Sox's Dylan Covey (4-7) vs. Lance Lynn (7-8) Monday; Reynaldo Lopez (4-9) vs. CC Sabathia (6-4) Tuesday; Lucas Giolito (7-8) vs. Luis Severino (14-5) Wednesday. All games 7:10 p.m.

At a glance:

The White Sox are back home after sweeping a three-game series vs. the Rays at Tampa Bay. The Sox have won four in a row, a season high. Jose Abreu is 11-for-23 with 3 home runs and 4 RBI over his last six games. Daniel Palka ranks second among major-league rookies with 17 home runs. Covey is 1-6 with an 8.68 ERA over his last 8 starts. This is the first meeting of the season between the White Sox and Yankees. The Sox were 3-4 vs. New York last year (2-2 at home).

Next:

Cleveland Indians at Guaranteed Rate Field, Friday-Sunday

Sox is singular: The art of Rick Renteria's bullpen management

By Jim Margalus / The Athletic / August 5, 2018

White Sox manager Rick Renteria, in the midst of all of his desperate, frantic pitcher-switching activity during the seventh inning on Sunday, created a daring work of abstract expressionist art.

Tampa Bay had the bases loaded, and every single Ray on the field was the responsibility of a different White Sox pitcher.

Tyler Danish entered the game to deal with Carlos Gómez at the plate, and he inherited three baserunners. On third stood Jake Bauers, who had reached with nobody out on a walk by Xavier Cedeño. On second was Ji-Man Choi, who tied the game with a two-run single off Jeanmar Gómez. Kevin Kiermaier occupied first base after drawing a walk from Jace Fry.

Had Carlos Gómez somehow thwarted the matchup and slammed Danish, he would have put a run on the tabs of four different pitchers with one swing of the bat. Instead, he bounced out to second, and the game headed into the eighth inning tied at six.

Renteria, with the way he splatters his relievers against the canvas game after game, has forced me to reconsider everything I thought I knew about bullpen management.

Before this week, I tended to assume that games had spiraled hopelessly out of control any time a manager found himself using four pitchers in one inning. Recent examples from the last White Sox rebuild include this game, and this game. Then again, Robin Ventura usually erred by not going to the bullpen early enough, so any of his four-pitcher innings required an unbelievable amount of failure by default.

That isn't necessarily the case with Renteria, who has his starters on a much shorter leash than his predecessors. The White Sox still haven't produced a complete game during Renteria's tenure, so it's not surprising that he ends up going to the bullpen far more frequently.

Still, this is a little severe even by his standards, because the White Sox have used four pitchers in an inning in three of their last four games.

That'd normally spell disaster, except they've won all of those games. In fact, it's their first four-game winning streak of the season. Going back to the start of the season, they've now used four pitchers in an inning six times this year, and they're 5-1 when they do so.

Based on this data, we can only conclude that Renteria hasn't been going to the bullpen enough. By the time the rebuild bears fruit, Renteria is going to be to relievers what Gillette is to blades.

I'm kidding. I think.

I'm guessing Renteria would rather slow-play his relievers, at least based on his behavior while he had a stocked bullpen during the first half of the 2017 season. Anthony Swarzak, Tommy Kahnle and David Robertson all averaged an inning per outing, more or less, while they built resumes toward July trades. So did Danny Farquhar when he proved himself, and the same can be said for Zach Putnam, Juan Minaya, Greg Infante, Tyler Clippard and anybody else who appeared adequate at any point.

A counterargument: Maybe Renteria only used his relievers for full innings last year because Dan Jennings was the lone lefty for a large swath of the season. Perhaps he'd always prefer to manage his team army style, and Cedeño, Fry and Luis Avilán allow him to call left-right-left-right to his heart's content.

I'm skeptical, mainly because nobody ever looks happy when they're on the bullpen phone. Maybe if Nate Jones stayed healthy or Minaya and Infante kept what they'd discovered last year, Renteria would have established a clear 7-8-9 hierarchy with Avilán and friends around for lefty-heavy situations. Instead, high-leverage types are in short supply after the Joakim Soria trade, and so it seems like he'd rather take the blame for over-managing a bullpen instead of hanging out to dry some greenhorn reliever who's pitching above his pay grade.

If this season-best winning streak says anything about the 2018 White Sox, I hope it's merely that they're capable of making better teams feel awful about themselves, and the parade of relievers with awful numbers contributes to that cause.

Even without a bullpen, the Sox look like a competent MLB team when José Abreu and Avisail García hammer away, when Tim Anderson contributes with his bat and glove at the same time, when Daniel Palka gets pitches up and on the outer half. The Rays came into the series inspiring wild card dreams after sweeping the Angels. Three one-run losses to the White Sox later, the Rays are back at .500 and FanGraphs gives them a 0.2 percent chance of reaching the postseason.

Now the White Sox, in the middle of their longest winning streak of 2018, catch the Yankees in the middle of their longest losing streak this season, including a late-night loss to the Red Sox that capped a four-game sweep at Fenway Park. There's never a bad time to beat the Bombers, but it's even sweeter when it provokes panic in the tabloids. (Or tabloid, since the Daily News got tronç'd.)

Hopefully this is the last season the White Sox will have to resort to spoiling for their only competitive release after the All-Star break. Renteria probably hopes this is the last season the White Sox trade any and all relievers worth a rumor.

The long-term bullpen could take shape even before the White Sox establish themselves as contenders. Zack Burdi surfaced in the Arizona Rookie League, working his way back from Tommy John surgery. Ian Hamilton is handling Burdi's old job as Charlotte closer. Throw in Fry, Carson Fulmer, Thyago Vieira, Aaron Bummer and any other rookie relievers hovering around the 40-man roster, and maybe the Sox will be in a position of having arms to spare.

The idea is that most of those guys will click, after which seventh-, eighth- and ninth-inning guys will emerge, and four-pitcher innings will join the Charlie Tilson-Adam Engel-Trayce Thompson outfielders as artifacts from rock bottom. Should Renteria still love making trips to the mound even with credible arms abound, then we'll have to resign ourselves to the idea that matchups are his muse.

Bowden: Sixteen waiver-wire targets who could boost teams' playoff chances

By Jim Bowden / The Athletic / August 5, 2018

The August trade waiver period started with a bang on Sunday when the St. Louis Cardinals claimed Tyson Ross off trade waivers from the San Diego Padres, and the Milwaukee Brewers did the same with Jordan Lyles. The Padres' response was quick: Take them. Take the salary. We don't need a prospect return. We'll

take the savings and promote our younger prospects. It was another reminder to teams — if you claim, you may end up getting the player, so you better be careful if your intent is just to block. You might get the player anyway.

Last year, the Houston Astros traded for Justin Verlander of the Detroit Tigers right at the Aug. 31 postseason roster deadline, and that waiver trade was the difference maker in the Astros winning the World Series. Could it happen again this year? Doubtful, unless a team like the Washington Nationals fall out of it and decides to shock the baseball world and trade Bryce Harper to a contender. However, that doesn't mean there might not be a few waiver trades that can make a difference in a team making the postseason, gaining home-field advantage or winning a playoff game. Here are 16 players who GMs around the game think have a shot at being traded by Aug. 31, before it's too late to make postseason rosters.

1. Josh Donaldson, 3B, Toronto Blue Jays

Donaldson was once considered a prime candidate to be traded by the July 31 deadline, but those plans changed because of a calf injury that has kept him on the disabled list since May 28. The Blue Jays don't know when he'll be healthy enough to be reinstated from the DL, but if he is able to return before the end of August, don't be surprised if a contending team takes a chance on him, even with the continued injury risk. Remember, he's only three years from winning the AL MVP Award and two years from finishing in the top four of the voting. Toronto is not expected to pursue him in free agency at the end of the season, and their top prospect, Vladimir Guerrero Jr., will be ready for a September call-up if Donaldson is dealt.

2. Andrew McCutchen, OF, San Francisco Giants

The Giants had one team inquire on McCutchen at the trade deadline, but there wasn't any momentum at that time for a deal. San Francisco is still within striking distance of a wild-card berth. However, if the team were to fall out of contention in the next few weeks, they might consider putting him on trade waivers and at least see what the return would be. McCutchen would fit well on division-leading teams like the Phillies and Indians.

3. Ervin Santana, RHP, Minnesota Twins

The right-hander has made only two starts since returning from finger surgery, making it impossible for the Twins to move him before July 31. However, if he can put together three or four solid starts, and makes it on waivers to a contending team like the Mariners, Athletics or Yankees, he could be a difference-maker come September. Remember, Santana had an ERA of 3.32 the last two years for the Twins.

4. Kirby Yates, RHP, San Diego Padres

The Padres have had a tremendous amount of interest in Yates, and would be willing to deal him if they can get a good prospect in return. Yates, 31, has a 1.49 ERA, and because of his dominant season, he won't get far on waivers. But if they can get him to a team like the Cardinals, he could be a significant under-the-radar August acquisition.

5. Adam Jones, CF, Baltimore Orioles

The Orioles reportedly had a deal in place with the Philadelphia Phillies for Jones at the trade deadline, but Jones made it clear that he would exercise his 10-and-5 rights and nix any trade. Jones loves Baltimore, where his home and charity is. Even if, after thinking about things for another month, he were to change his mind and accept a deal, it's unlikely he would get another chance to go to the Phillies, the team that tried to trade for him in July. Probably a team like the Indians or Yankees could put in a claim to either block to try to acquire him. Jones is still a .280 hitter, .310 on-base percentage player still capable of 20 home runs, but probably needs to move to right field going forward.

6. Adrián Beltré, 3B, Texas Rangers

Much like Jones, Beltré has 10-and-5 rights and can control his future, and he too has made it clear he prefers to stay where he is, with the Rangers, the team whose hat he'll wear when he eventually is inducted into the Hall of Fame. Multiple teams expressed interest in him before the trade deadline, including the Braves and Red Sox. Beltré, 39, is still in search of his first championship, which makes it hard for me to believe that if the Red Sox cut a deal for him this month, he would nix it and essentially eliminate any chance of playing in the postseason again.

7. Kyle Barraclough, RHP, Miami Marlins

The Marlins priced Barraclough right out of the trade market in July, but might reconsider their position if they get another chance to trade him to a contender later this month. The problem they'll have is that he won't get very far on trade waivers, and might not even make it to a contending team. He'd be an interesting pickup if he did.

8. Matt Harvey, RHP, Cincinnati Reds

The Reds tried to trade Harvey at the July 31 deadline, but never received a respectable offer. They decided to hold on to him, hoping that if he can make three or four good starts in August, someone might change their mind and give the Reds a mid-level prospect for him. Harvey has regained his velocity, improved his groundball rate and has behaved on and off the field since joining the Reds. Teams shouldn't forget his competitiveness and unselfishness in pitching beyond his physicians' recommended pitching limits to help pitch the Mets to their last World Series appearance.

9. Dan Straily, RHP, Miami Marlins

The Marlins sent a clear message to the rest of baseball at the trade deadline that they are no longer trading players for financial reasons or service time; rather, they are focused on making baseball trades and acquiring championship talent. With that in mind, if they don't get someone to give them a legitimate prospect, they'll hold on to Straily. However, with so many contending teams struggling at the back of their starting rotations, there is a chance he gets moved.

10. Starlin Castro, 2B, Miami Marlins

Castro was not targeted at the trade deadline by many contending teams because there were better second basemen available — like Brian Dozier, who was dealt to the Dodgers, and Jonathan Schoop, who was traded to the Brewers. If any contenders have an injury at second base, however, Castro could become a target this month. The Red Sox already lost Dustin Pedroia, possibly for the season, and now their newly acquired second baseman, Ian Kinsler, is on the DL for a hamstring injury. As of now, the Red Sox haven't expressed an interest, but that could change.

11. Shane Greene, RHP, Detroit Tigers

The Tigers listened on offers for Greene, but had no interest in giving him away, since they control him beyond this year. That doesn't mean that, if they could get the right mid-level prospect back, they wouldn't trade him to a contender. With so many relievers already changing teams, Greene moves up on most teams' lists of back-end-of-the-bullpen trade options.

12. Sergio Romo, RHP, Tampa Bay Rays

It was surprising that Romo wasn't involved in any of the Rays' deadline trades, based on the success he's had this year as an opener, closer and everything in the middle. He can still locate his fastball and can still miss bats with his slider. Teams looking for veteran bullpen depth will be circling back to the Rays by the third week of August.

13. José Bautista, OF, New York Mets

Bautista is still drawing walks and showing occasional pop, which makes it possible that he could add another team to his resume. The Yankees reportedly demonstrated some interest after losing both Gary Sánchez and Aaron Judge to the disabled list.

14. James Shields, RHP, Chicago White Sox

The White Sox didn't find an interested team for Shields at the deadline, but the fact he's thrown at least six innings in 17 of his 22 starts, including 13 quality starts, means a contender with starting pitching depth issues could still come calling — especially if the White Sox agree to eat most of the financial exposure.

15. Shin-Soo Choo, OF/DH, Texas Rangers

Choo, 36, is having another solid season with 20 home runs and a .388 on-base percentage. The problem is his contract, because he's due \$21 million per year in each of the next two seasons. He'll definitely clear

waivers, but for the Rangers to trade him, they'd probably have to eat over 65 percent of the remaining salary, which makes a trade unlikely at this point.

16. Mike Fiers, RHP, Detroit Tigers

It was reported that the Oakland Athletics had a deal in place for Fiers in the final hour before the trade deadline, but that report was downplayed by GM Al Avila, who said they just didn't get a good enough trade proposal to move him. The Tigers control Fiers for another season and have no interest in letting him go for a small return. But if he makes on waivers to the Mariners or Athletics, he could still get dealt.

Avisaíl García's unprecedented, yet inevitable transformation into a power hitter

By James Fegan / The Athletic / August 5, 2018

Avisaíl García's second home run of the afternoon on Sunday in Tampa, an opposite-field smash of a Ryan Yarborough cutter that managed to cut right down the middle of the plate, sealed up the eighth multi-home run game of his career, and his second of the season. He has now had a multi-home run game in each of the last five seasons, which seems to lend itself to some vague statement that when García's power is there, it's there. For my money, it was the less impressive home run of the day.

That came when Yarborough fooled García with a changeup two innings earlier, getting his upper body way out in front of his left leg, and the White Sox right fielder still showed the raw strength to flick the ball over the left-field wall. He's done this a few times this season, with a memorable previous instance where he one-handed a ball out of Safeco Field to dead center.

"It's natural," García said — This has always been obvious enough just from looking at him. "I always had the power. It's going to come because I know I have the power. Just have to keep working, keep focused on my routine."

Despite missing over two months with hamstring strains, García is up to 13 home runs on the season in 207 plate appearances, which is one more than he hit during his 453 plate appearances in 2016, and the same number he hit in 601 plate appearances in 2015. It's one fewer than he collected in his most homer-happy season in the minors, and again, that came in more than twice as many plate appearances.

"No, first time, first time," said the 27-year-old García about whether he's ever had a power binge like this one. "I just try to do the same, try to have patience, not to push things, not try to do too much, and I've been doing the same."

Absent is any sort of specific adjustment or deviation from García's "line drives to right-center" mindset, even while producing a fairly isolated power binge (12 homers in 28 games) that dwarfs any such similar outburst in his career. Maybe that's weird, or maybe that just means that we weren't crazy the last five years, when the weird thing seemed to be that the 6-foot-4, 240-pound García wasn't hitting for big-time power.

García is riding the highest fly ball and pull rates of his career, which explains what's been happening simply enough. Anecdotally, there have been more cases of him jumping on plus fastballs and launching them into left field than ever before, when he previously preferred to let balls get deep and spray them to right for a base hit. These are the markers of someone who has adjusted to utilize their raw strength more, and his hitting coach Todd Steverson sees it as a natural evolution for a guy who was playing in a World Series at age 21, and never really had the time to develop his power in the minors.

"He's had to learn how to become a hitter first, which everybody should," Steverson said. "He never really hit a lot of homers in the minor leagues, so he can't say that's who he was. But everybody knew through just raw ability and raw swing that you saw in batting practice that he had it in him. It's just a matter of translating that over into a game, now with that, becomes an approach. Not necessarily to hit home runs, but to put yourself in a position to be on time, and have the ability to bring that outcome. At the end of the day, I think he just wants to go out there and hit the ball hard and hit it on a line, and sometimes you hit them, they go out of the ballpark."

It's not simply a matter of a big right-handed hitter developing his hit tool before his in-game power; that's normal enough. It's a matter of degree. When nagged about García hitting for power previously, Steverson would say that even if he sold out his entire approach for a 30-home run season, there would be 570 other plate appearances to worry about. Steverson doesn't want "any of my hitters to be a one-trick pony" with no ability to adapt to game situations.

But in this small, insane sample, García's .269/.290/.523 batting line is barely distinguishable from Daniel Palka's, the guy who literally goes to the plate trying to hit home runs. He took a couple of walks this weekend, but after leaning into his naturally aggressive approach for a breakout .330/.380/.506 line in 2017, this season has been tilting those tendencies into overdrive.

García is posting his highest total swing rate and his highest out-of-zone swing rate, which is in turn producing more swings-and-misses (18.3 percent) than ever. While he had always had one of the most aggressive approaches in the league, it seemed like he had gone over the borderline when he slumped his way through the first few weeks and admitted he was "swinging at bad pitches." A sub-.300 OBP and five walks all season suggest he's still suffering some consequences of his love for letting his bat fly, but generally, if you're actually swinging at everything you don't get pitches you can drive 400 feet.

It helps that even an off-balance García can still hit a ball to the moon, but a top-shelf ISO is a big smoking gun that he's doing something very right at the plate, at a time when his approach otherwise seems like it has yet to settle into normalcy. White Sox executive vice president Kenny Williams suggested tracking the health of García's swing by his head movement, which, in five years, has gone from a jutting rush forward that threw off his timing and the release of his hands, to a barely perceptible twitch only spotted from the side if you know what you're looking for. The reduction allows him to stay with and hammer pitches he seems a millisecond away from being fooled by.

A physical explanation always seems like the best one for García. Because as much as he seemed like a big, raw clump of talent when he first arrived in Chicago, the White Sox cannot be accused of trying to drastically overhaul his approach or force him to be something he isn't. Rather, they have just tried to remove the obstacles to his bat speed and strength impacting games. So when García turns on a heater and launches it to left field quicker than ever before, it's not because he's been told to target that part of the park.

"Reaction," said García. "That's reaction."

White Sox prospect Luis González proving more than qualified during breakout season

By James Fegan / The Athletic / August 5, 2018

WINSTON-SALEM, N.C. — White Sox prospect Luis González had the same observation about the Winston-Salem Dash lineup as a league scout in attendance for one of their games last month.

"This team is unbelievable," González said. "Everyone is hitting above .280 it feels like, so it's a fun time to be with a fun group of guys."

To be fair, the scout said everyone was hitting .300, which, 35 games into his term in High-A Winston-Salem, is a bar González is also clearing going into Saturday night (.311/.363/.497). Finally at the level that player development director Chris Getz said he could have started the year at, González is more or less producing the exact same offensive line he had at Kannapolis (.300/.358/.491), just with fewer strikeouts (just 16.3 percent since his promotion).

"He uses the whole field," Getz said when González first was promoted. "He's got some naturalness in the box. He gets on base. He has some sneaky pop. And then defensively he continues to improve. He's better than he was last year. He's throwing better."

The sneaky pop is the sneaky difference in González's 2018 breakout season as a 22-year-old. He slugged .361 at Low-A Kannapolis last season after being drafted in the third round out of the University of New Mexico, but showed enough on-base ability to provide optimism about his speedy, left-handed center fielder profile. This year he's clubbed 11 home runs combined across both levels of Single-A, and collected 46 extra-base hits in all. González said the primary difference since being promoted to the Carolina League is getting pitched backwards with off-speed stuff, and apparently it's agreeing just fine with his approach.

"I've always had some power in me," González said. "I didn't display that in my first professional year but now that I have a little more confidence and am getting myself in a nice groove, the power numbers have come up. It's just my swing, just have a compact swing. Just having quick hands. I've been working more on trying to drive the ball to left-center, but the pull side power has always been there. Just trying to generate more power to left, left-center and right-center gaps."

González spent most, if not all of instructional league this past fall working with Aaron Rowand on his outfield defense. With Luis Robert and Blake Rutherford on the Dash roster, he has spent plenty of time rotating into the corners, and serving as the DH — where just a handful of games made him wonder how Micker Adolfo was handling being sidelined so easily there. González is increasingly showing the bat to provide optimism that he can have a career in the corner, but the best hope for his long-term prospects obviously involves him sticking up the middle in center.

He certainly has the arm for it. The 6-foot-1 left-hander is not a physically imposing presence, but he was recruited as both a pitcher and a hitter coming out of high school and covered 126 2/3 innings over his three years in New Mexico. A collegiate ERA of a 6.13 suggests there were limitations to his "challenge the hitter" approach and that he's found the right niche for his career, but he'd be more than willing to give a Matt Davidson impersonation if provided the chance.

"It's something I thought would be pretty fun," González said. "I saw Anthony Rizzo do it the other day and he had so much fun doing it. Pitching is always fun. You're into the game, you're into the pitch. Every single pitch, you're in it."

Originally born in Hermosillo, Mexico, the bilingual González moved to Arizona — where many wondered whether he was named after the other Luis Gonzalez — with his family when he was 10 years old. Shortly after his arrival he was playing travel ball, and has been moving around the country playing baseball ever since. He first got the inkling that the sport would be his career when he noticed that he was constantly playing in leagues where he was the youngest player on the team.

Now, with the White Sox outfield prospect crunch, González is in a bit of a flipped position, where he's arguably a step above the competition that he's currently playing against. With Luis Basabe, Alex Call, Joel Booker and Jameson Fisher manning the outfield in Birmingham, Winston-Salem is the best place for González to get playing time, even if he now has competition for the leadoff slot with Nick Madrigal in town. Getz has praised him for not complaining about a conservative assignment, and at the very least, González will take the gaudy numbers and the confidence that comes with them.

"Being up here in High-A has put good thoughts in my head," González said. "I'm able to compete here as well. So I'm just trying to make my way up the ladder and hopefully I'm able to prove myself at every level."

"Overall I think I could be a more consistent hitter. It's always what I've worked on and having good at-bats every single time. But it's a funny sport. It's a game of failure so you've got to take failure well. I feel like I can do better than what I have been doing. Just trying to keep hitting the ball hard, keep working and keep winning."
