



WHITE SOX HEADLINES OF JANUARY 25, 2018

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Anderson on mission after challenging 2017

*Sox exec: Jimenez, Robert are 'physically gifted players that have god-gifted skill sets'*By Scott Merkin/
MLB.com/ Jan. 24, 2018

CHICAGO -- White Sox fans offer up a collective broad smile when thinking about a future Major League outfield anchored by Eloy Jimenez and Luis Robert.

For now, they can enjoy Jimenez (No. 2) and Robert (No. 8) earning spots on MLB Pipeline's list of the top 10 outfield prospects, which was released on Thursday.

"These are physically gifted players that have god-gifted skill sets that can impact the game in a lot of different ways. When those guys walk into a clubhouse, they stand out," said White Sox director of player development Chris Getz of this high-end outfield. "It's exciting to kind of put together or have this vision of what we might have running around in Chicago."

Robert, 20, earned praise during his 84-at-bat stint with the White Sox Dominican Summer League team, where he hit .310 with a 1.027 OPS, 12 stolen bases, 12 extra-base hits and 14 RBIs last season after joining the organization as an international free agent from Cuba. As the legend goes, the right-hander connected for a home run on his first trip to the plate during Dominican instructional league action this past November and then greatly impressed again during his United States debut at the team's hitters mini-camp in mid-January. MLB Pipeline ranks Robert as Chicago's No. 3 prospect.

The young man, who earned a \$26 million signing bonus, received a non-roster invite to Spring Training to show off his burgeoning five-tool capabilities. Jimenez, 21, also will be with the big league team at Camelback Ranch as part of its 40-man-roster.

After coming over from the Cubs as the centerpiece of the Jose Quintana trade, Jimenez hit .348 between stops at Class A Winston-Salem and Double-A Birmingham. He also knocked out 11 home runs and 16 doubles while driving in 33. Every look at Jimenez's swing or his play in the field seems to have "can't-miss standout" written all over it. MLB Pipeline has him as the Sox top prospect.

Atlanta's Ronald Acuna earned the nod as the top-rated outfield prospect, followed by Jimenez. Washington's Victor Robles ranked third, followed by the Angels' Shohei Ohtani, who also was rated No. 1 among right-handed pitchers. Houston's Kyle Tucker, Baltimore's Austin Hays, Milwaukee's Lewis Brinson, Robert, the Nationals' Juan Soto and the Dodgers' Alex Verdugo fill out the list.

White Sox hurler Michael Kopech was ranked No. 3 among right-handed pitchers, while Zack Collins finished No. 9 among catchers and Jake Burger finished 10th among third basemen.

Several former White Sox miss HOF election

By Scott Merkin /MLB.com / Jan. 24, 2018

CHICAGO -- Other than legendary slugger Jim Thome, no other former White Sox player came close to National Baseball Hall of Fame election this year, with the results for the 2018 class announced Wednesday night on MLB Network.

In his first year on the ballot, Omar Vizquel received 156 votes (37 percent), well below the 75 percent needed for election. Vizquel, who played for Chicago in 2010 and '11, will manage Class A Advanced Winston-Salem in the White Sox system this season.

Andruw Jones, also appearing on the ballot for the first time, received 31 votes (7.3 percent) to remain above the 5 percent mark needed to stay on the ballot. Jones played the 2010 season with the White Sox, hitting 19 homers with 48 RBIs. The center fielder had 434 homers, 1,289 RBIs, 152 stolen bases and 10 Gold Glove Awards over his 17-year career.

Manny Ramirez (second appearance) and Sammy Sosa (sixth) received 93 and 33 votes, respectively. Carlos Lee earned one vote, while Orlando Hudson had none.

Lee had the longest White Sox tenure from that group, hitting 152 of his 358 home runs and collecting 957 of his 2,273 hits during six years with Chicago from 1999-2004. Ramirez had the shortest stint, playing 24 games in 2010 and hitting just one of his 555 career homers after being claimed off waivers from the Dodgers.

Thome, who had 134 home runs, 369 RBIs and a .933 OPS over four seasons with the White Sox, was elected into the Hall along with Chipper Jones, Vladimir Guerrero and Trevor Hoffman. Thome now serves as a special assistant to White Sox general manager Rick Hahn,

Thome's power leads to Hall of Fame election

Former White Sox slugger receives 89.8 percent of votes in first year on ballot

By Scott Merkin/MLB.com/ Jan. 24, 2018

CHICAGO -- White Sox executive vice president Ken Williams and chairman Jerry Reinsdorf had a nickname for newly elected first-ballot Hall of Famer Jim Thome when they regularly faced him during his time with the Indians.

That nickname was shared by Williams with Thome, one of the game's great sluggers, after the White Sox acquired Thome via trade from the Phillies on Nov. 25, 2005. Actually, it was a nickname Williams didn't initially want to share until an intrigued Thome insisted.

"I said, 'Yeah, well, your nickname is Jim [expletive] Thome, because it seems like every time we played you, you did the kind of damage to where we were going, there's Jim [expletive] Thome again,'" Williams said with a laugh. "I didn't like him very much prior to us getting him."

Thome, who received 379 votes for 89.8 percent support from the Baseball Writers' Association of America voters as announced Wednesday night by the National Baseball Hall of Fame, hit .300 with 43 homers and 117 RBIs lifetime against the White Sox. Aaron Rowand, who was traded to Philadelphia for Thome, was asked what it was like to face Thome as the opposition.

Rowand's response was summed up by two words.

"A nightmare," Rowand said. "It was my second year in the big leagues, and I went in for defense for Carlos Lee late in the game and Bobby Howry was on the mound. We were in Cleveland, and [Thome] hit a ball over my head, a home run that went about half-to-three-quarters up the bleachers in left field.

"It was a no-doubter right off of his bat the other way. I remember jogging off the field thinking, 'I cannot believe how far that human being just hit the ball the other way.' He was amazing."

Over four seasons with the White Sox, Thome had 134 home runs, 369 RBIs and a .933 OPS. He launched his 500th career homer in walkoff fashion against the Angels' Dustin Moseley on Sept. 16, 2007, during a game in which Vladimir Guerrero also went deep. Guerrero, Chipper Jones and Trevor Hoffman were elected to the Hall along with Thome on Wednesday.

Thome's mammoth solo home run off of Nick Blackburn gave the White Sox a 1-0 victory over the Twins and the 2008 American League Central crown in a tiebreaker game at U.S. Cellular Field. But Thome is an even better person, with the good-natured accessibility he showed as a player continuing on in his current role as a special assistant to White Sox general manager Rick Hahn.

"The adjectives come easily when describing Jim Thome," Reinsdorf said in a statement. "Class, strength, honesty, integrity, character, Hall of Famer."

"He was an amazing person, player, hitter, teammate," Rowand said. "As much as he doesn't like receiving, he gives that much more of himself to other people."

Rowand recounted the story of getting a call from Thome, who he knew at the time but not well, a few days after the 2005 trade, with Thome simply trying to help the center fielder by offering information on Philadelphia. Rowand did the same for Thome about Chicago.

During the White Sox recent hitters mini-camp, Williams said the room was silent when Thome spoke to the players during a chalk-talk session.

"The approachability has been invaluable to our young hitters," Williams said. "Ultimately, when you see some of them come through the big leagues -- and I think some of them have the chance to become stars -- it will be largely for some of these talks that we were having right now, and them paying close attention to Jim Thome."

Thome elected to the HOF

Joyce Thome, Jim's mother, died following a battle with lung cancer on Jan. 5, 2005, and Thome, a proud native of Peoria, Ill, and a true family man, said joining the White Sox and having his family so close helped ease the pain of his mom's death. Thome made five other Major League stops after his White Sox tenure, but he found a true baseball family in Chicago.

"I love the fans, I love the White Sox organization and they've always treated me with the utmost respect," said Thome, who received the news Wednesday with his wife, Andrea, and children, Lila and Landon, close by at home. "That starts at the top with Jerry Reinsdorf. He's one of the true gentlemen, good men in the game that loves the game."

Meet the Prospects: Luis Robert

By Vinnie Duber /NBC Sports Chicago/ Jan. 24, 2018

Robert, the 20-year-old outfielder, has only been part of the White Sox organization for a short while, but he's already one of the biggest stars of the rebuild.

A Cuban native, Robert signed with the White Sox last May, and the scouting reports already had South Side baseball fans dreaming of Robert as the team's center fielder of the future. And hopes are high everywhere. Manager Rick Renteria offered his own scouting report at the Winter Meetings after seeing Robert play in the Dominican Republic: "He's a pretty impressive specimen. Listen, this kid can fly. I saw him run down to first I think it was like 3.56 after a full swing on a ground ball. He ran down a ball in center, right-center field effortlessly. He hit a ball against the wind and a gust into center, left-center field that I thought had no chance and it ended up going over the trees."

Robert has yet to play a game of minor league baseball in the United States, his lone action since joining the White Sox coming in 28 games in the Dominican Summer League. But there's been talk of the possibility that he could begin the 2018 season as high as Double-A Birmingham.

There's reason for all this hype, though. Robert is good. In those 28 games in the Dominican Summer League, he slashed .310/.491/.536 with 12 of his 26 hits going for extra bases.

And have you seen him swing?

As of their most recent rankings, MLB Pipeline had Robert rated as the No. 3 prospect in the White Sox organization.

Ten years before he was elected to Hall of Fame, Jim Thome took a special trip to Cooperstown

By Chuck Garfien/Chicago Tribune/ Jan. 23, 2018

There are Hall of Fame players, and there are Hall of Fame people.

Jim Thome represents the rarest of breeds as someone who is actually both.

He's a man who brought the best of himself to the clubhouse and the baseball field every single day he wore a uniform.

He didn't know any other way to be, any other way to play.

This is only part of what made Thome so special. Of course, he was also supremely talented at hitting a baseball.

His power, swing and dedication (let's call it "obsession") to hitting helped produce those 612 home runs (eighth most all-time) as well as his 13 walk-off home runs, which remain a major league record.

White Sox fans will always remember the day Thome hit his 500th career homer in 2007. It was one of those 13 walk-offs, a towering blast against the Los Angeles Angels at U.S. Cellular Field, a moment cemented by Hawk Harrelson famously shouting into the microphone, "You're awesome big man!"

The fan who caught Thome's 500th home run ball, a man named Will Stewart who was visiting from Texas, gave the ball back to Thome in exchange for a few pieces of signed memorabilia and two season tickets the following year. Since Stewart couldn't use the tickets, he asked Thome to donate them to his favorite charity.

Fitting that the fan who caught Thome's 500th ball did the kind of thing Thome would do.

"I feel it is a part of Chicago baseball history," Stewart said.

As for Thome, he felt that baseball was bigger than Chicago history and bigger than him.

Almost immediately after getting the baseball in his possession, Thome decided that it didn't belong to him. It was meant to be somewhere else, a place where baseball history lives and now where Jim will be inducted in July: the Hall of Fame.

That following summer on a White Sox off day, Jim flew his dad and the baseball to Cooperstown to present that 500th home run ball to the Hall of Fame — and I tagged along with them.

"The baseball fans of America get to come here and experience all the great memorabilia and all the things that have happened during baseball, the pastime," Thome said that day. "That's why I thought it was important to bring it here, with Dad especially."

It was the first time Thome had ever set foot in the Hall of Fame.

He received a tour of the shrine, stood in amazement looking at Babe Ruth's locker and carefully envisioned a day when he would become a Hall of Famer himself.

"I do dream about it," Thome said. "I guess that will all be answered later on. I try not to get ahead of myself with that, to be respectful to the game."

Good luck finding a baseball player respected more than Jim Thome. His time has come

Jim Thome credits Peoria roots for path to Hall of Fame

By Paul Sullivan/Chicago Tribune/ Jan. 24, 2018

After knocking out three home runs in a game against the White Sox in the summer of 1994, Indians third baseman Jim Thome was thinking about his family and friends back home in Peoria.

"They're probably dancing in the streets," he said afterward.

Twenty-four years later, the dancing began anew as the former Tribune All-Stater from Bartonville-Limestone High was voted into the Baseball Hall of Fame.

Thome and Braves third baseman Chipper Jones cruised into the Hall on their first year of eligibility, joining slugger Vladimir Guerrero and closer Trevor Hoffman, who got in on their second and third years on the ballot, respectively.

Thome, who currently serves the White Sox as a special assistant to general manager Rick Hahn, played for six teams in his 22-year-career, including the Sox, but never forgot the people who helped make it happen.

"Everything starts at your roots," Thome said Wednesday after learning the news. "I'm proud that I grew up where I did. Peoria is a special place... It's where it all started. Every Midwest kid can dream of a day like this, and I'm living it today."

Thome and the other three inductees will join Jack Morris and Alan Trammell, who the Baseball Writers' Association of America rejected during their years on the ballot before the Modern Era committee selected them last December.

The numbers of the newest members of the Hall speak for themselves. Thome is eighth on the all-time home run list with 612, while Jones was the best switch hitter of his era, averaging 32 home runs and 107 RBIs with a .961 OPS during an eight-year span from 1996-2003.

Hoffman's 601 career saves are second to Mariano Rivera, a surefire first-ballot Hall of Famer next year, and Guerrero finished with a career average of .318 while slugging 449 home runs and using his cannon arm to gun down baserunners from right field.

Thanks to the online Hall of Fame tracker, we already knew Thome, Jones, Guerrero and Hoffman were good bets to get in. Jones wound up with 97.2 percent, leading the pack, while Thome finished third with 89.8 percent. There were 422 ballots cast, including one blank one, down from 442 in 2017.

The only real question was whether Mariners designated hitter Edgar Martinez would join them. Though he came close with 70.4 percent, Martinez just missed the necessary 75 percent cutoff. He figures to get in next year in his final year of eligibility, along with Rivera and perhaps starting pitcher Mike Mussina.

As for Hall of Famer Joe Morgan's controversial "steroid" letter to BBWAA voters last fall, it didn't seem to have much of an effect on the electorate, which always had been divided on whether PED-tainted superstars Barry Bonds and Roger Clemens belonged.

Morgan's letter said: "We hope the day never comes when known steroid users are voted into the Hall of Fame. They cheated. Steroid users don't belong here."

After six years on the ballot, Bonds and Clemens remain a ways off, with Clemens picking up three votes (from 239 to 242) and Bonds remaining the same at 238. In 2013, their first year of eligibility, Bonds was at 36.2 percent, while Clemens was at 37.6 percent. Now they're at 56.4 percent and 57.3 percent, respectively, with four more shots at a spot in Cooperstown.

Former Cubs slugger Sammy Sosa wound up with 33 votes (7.8 percent), down from 38 last year. The meager total keeps Sosa on the ballot at least one more year, prolonging the inevitable.

Last week I asked Cubs great Billy Williams if Morgan spoke for him and the rest of the Hall of Famers with the "steroid" letter.

"All the players, this is what we think," Williams replied. "We talk about it at the Hall of Fame, and he just sent a letter to us that this is what we're going to send to the writers."

Isn't it likely some alleged cheaters already are in the Hall?

"They're in already," Williams admitted. "But it's a letter you (writers) are having a problem with. They don't know about (whether to vote in) the steroid guys. We're just giving you guys an outlet, to ease your conscience knowing this is how we feel. We don't vote."

I told Williams Morgan should have had all of the Hall of Famers sign the letter if he wanted it to have more impact. Nevertheless, the voters seemingly are entrenched in their views on Bonds and Clemens, with little movement this year.

Two players picking up momentum in '18 were Mussina and Curt Schilling. Mussina went from 51.8 percent to 63.5 percent in his fifth year, and Schilling from 45 percent to 51.2 percent in his sixth. Schilling was at 52.3 percent in 2016 but dropped down last year after sharing on Twitter a photo that suggested journalists should be lynched.

Omar Vizquel, the perennial Gold Glove-winning shortstop, garnered 37 percent in his first year, which bodes well for his chances down the road.

As for the other Chicago candidates, Jamie Moyer, Kerry Wood and Carlos Zambrano were all one-and-done on the ballot, failing to get the necessary 5 percent in their first years of eligibility to be listed again in 2019.

Moyer had 10 votes, Wood received two votes, while Zambrano was shut out.

Luis Robert believes he's just scratching the surface of what he can be

By James Fegan/The Athletic/ Jan. 25, 2018

GLENDALE, Ariz. — Luis Robert hit a delirious .310/.491/.531 in 28 games in Dominican Summer League, walking nearly as often (22 times) as he struck out (23 times). After that, he moved on to participate in the instructional league the White Sox held at their Dominican academy. It's been nearly eight months since his signing was announced, and he was pulled from the discordant life of private workouts and batting practice showcases, into regular team activities.

Getting to work with major leaguers and practice in the United States is a big step and very meaningful to Robert, but surely he's felt like he's back to his old rhythm again by now?

"No I don't think so," Robert said through interpreter Billy Russo during hitters minicamp. "I think that's something I'm still trying to regain because also when I was playing in the DR, I didn't play a lot. I had two injuries and that shortened the time I had to play there. I just played like, 20-something games. I felt kind of weird, different because I didn't have the timing. Not just with my bat. I didn't have the timing running the bases, to slide and things like that. That's something you regain just playing and I didn't have the opportunity to play continuously because of the injuries I suffered, That's something I hope to regain this year here in the U.S."

That poor timing showed up and was exacerbated when Robert sprained his left knee on a slide and took himself out of game action for over two weeks in July. When he returned, he was nailed by a pitch off his left foot in his very first plate appearance back. The combined effect of the two maladies was that Robert took all of seven plate appearances in the month of July, during a year that was all about getting him re-acclimated to live pitching and used to the grind of playing everyday. Suffice it to say, this stretch did not bring him closer to this goal.

Not that the Dominican Summer League didn't offer its own challenges. In Serie Nacional, Robert was typically facing older competition, short on velocity and raw stuff perhaps, but high on polish and command, and pitchers mostly dedicated to trying to trick him and mess with his timing. In the Dominican, suddenly Robert was often the crafty veteran in his showdown with pitchers, as shown in his nutty walk totals, but also a perhaps elevated strikeout rate (20.2 percent) given how much more talented he was than his competition. Even if live arms with no concept of the strike zone sound like easy marks, it's hard to get used to for an advanced hitter in such a limited window.

"In Cuba the pitchers throw more breaking balls and they have more command of their pitches," Robert said through Russo. "In the DR, you can face pitchers with more velocity but some of them don't command their pitches and then you have to make an adjustment. I would say that's probably the biggest difference between the leagues, but either way they are good, and you have to make adjustments and you have to do whatever it takes for you to get better. I think I did a good job and it's just a learning process. I took good lessons there."

Yoan Moncada was an integral presence in Luis Robert's time at hitters minicamp two weeks ago, and Jose Abreu will likely add his voice to the mix during spring training. (Photo by Ron Vesely/MLB Photos via Getty Images)

Good lessons, but not fully developed ones. Robert's explanation for why he's on Instagram hitting a tire with a mallet, or shadowboxing in a park with a weird breathing mask, or sprinting on a beach while dragging some weird metal object that is presumably heavy, is that he wants to get in the type of shape where there's no injury that crops up to slow down his development again. There's no level of fitness that is going to prevent him from stepping on a base wrong, or stop another control-optional pitcher from nailing him with a wayward slider, but whatever marginal benefit in injury prevention he can squeeze out of whatever marginal improvement he can make to his already lauded physique, Robert says he intends to draw it out.

However impressed you might be by Robert OPS-ing over 1.000 against Dominican teenagers, or his batting practice displays, or Rick Renteria essentially saying he's as fast as Billy Hamilton, he thinks he hasn't been as good as he can be yet. Not just from the perspective that he's 20 years old, and has a world of development left, but he doesn't feel like he's back to being as good as the 18-year-old who torched the Cuban national league for a .401/.526/.687 batting line, and has a certain anxiety about getting back there — if his stated goal about making the majors in 2018 wasn't enough of an indication.

The White Sox, for their part, seem like they want him to relax. That's part of the proactive effort to have him monitored by Yoan Moncada, and Jose Abreu during spring training, to help him get comfortable with his surroundings as quickly as he can, but also while emphasizing that not everything needs to happen this year.

“So much of his progress this year is going to be stuff that is impossible to be quantify,” Rick Hahn said. “It's going to be about getting him comfortable and used to being a pro in the states. Obviously we've got a little bit of experience with other players going down this path. We've got a good support group in place for him. Part of the reason we wanted him here was to get comfortable with some of his teammates, get comfortable with some of the staff and with Camelback Ranch.

“Couple of great rounds of BP the last couple of days, but so much of what's going on with him is going on off the field.”