



WHITE SOX HEADLINES OF APRIL 14, 2018

White Sox-Twins PPD; no makeup date set

By Scott Merkin / MLB.com / April 13, 2018

MINNEAPOLIS -- Friday's contest between the White Sox and Twins at Target Field was postponed due to inclement weather and the forecast of continued inclement weather. Makeup date information will be announced at a later date.

According to weather.com, snow was to begin Friday night in the Minneapolis area and run through Sunday morning. White Sox manager Rick Renteria hasn't decided on Saturday afternoon's starter, with a first pitch scheduled for 1:10 p.m. CT. Reynaldo Lopez, Friday's scheduled starter, and Miguel Gonzalez, who was scheduled for Saturday, are both in the mix.

"It's incredible that we are talking about snow in the middle of April," said Renteria, who will be approaching Saturday with his team as if it's a normal game day. "We'll deal with it and everybody will do what they can to move forward. There's so much baseball left and we'll just keep working through it."

"All the people who are involved in this business are trying to grind through these first two weeks because the weather has been really bad," said White Sox first baseman and Cuba native Jose Abreu, through interpreter Billy Russo. "It's something that we have to deal with. It's really difficult to get used to this weather."

This postponement marked the second of the season for the White Sox, who had their series finale at Kauffman Stadium postponed on April 1 due to cold weather and snow. The first four games of the White Sox home ledger were played with a first-pitch temperature no higher than 36 degrees, including Monday against the Rays, when head groundskeeper Roger Bossard and his 23-person crew had to prepare the field following two inches of snow.

Having Friday's unscheduled off-day, marking the third straight Friday the White Sox haven't played in the 2018 season, provided a break for Yoan Moncada. The 22-year-old second baseman, who once was considered the game's top prospect by MLB Pipeline, has a .184 average, .604 OPS and 24 strikeouts over 49 at-bats in 12 games.

Renteria prefers to give players a day off on a game day, when they can sit back and watch the process without the pressure of playing, but understands Moncada is not a finished product. Both Abreu and Renteria talked to Moncada about his struggles postgame Thursday.

"I want him to understand there are certain things you have to do," Renteria said. "You have to maintain focus, and if you're not hitting, you've got to catch the ball, and if you're not catching the ball you better hit. But you can't fail at both, because then there's a problem. But he has to be Yoan. Yoan Moncada has to be Yoan Moncada."

"He has enough talent to surpass this moment," Abreu said. "It's just one more lesson for him to learn and I think that with all of our help, he's going to be good."

Injuries hamper prospects' development

Burger leads list of White Sox youngsters dealing with setbacks

By Scott Merkin / MLB.com / Apr. 13, 2018

MINNEAPOLIS -- Spring Training was considered a successful six-week stretch as a prelude to Year 2 of the White Sox rebuild, aside from one major deterrent: injuries.

Right-handed pitcher Alec Hansen, the White Sox No. 4 prospect per MLB Pipeline, experienced forearm soreness limiting him to 1 2/3 innings pitched in just one Cactus League game. He continues to work his way back in extended spring training.

Outfielder Eloy Jimenez, the team's No. 1 prospect, missed a couple of weeks due to left knee tendinitis and had the start of his regular season with Double-A Birmingham pushed back due to a mild left pectoral muscle strain sustained while working out at Camelback Ranch. Outfielder Luis Robert, the team's No. 3 prospect, was knocked out for 10 weeks with a moderate sprain of his left thumb ligament sustained while playing in Arizona. Outfielder Micker Adolfo, the No. 10 prospect, has been limited to designated hitter duties for Class A Advanced Winston-Salem due to a sprained UCL and strained flexor tendon in his right elbow.

Then there was No. 8 prospect Jake Burger, who was lost for the season due to a left Achilles rupture.

These sorts of injuries can slow promotions to the next level in some situations, but in the case of the White Sox, it also cost key future pieces valuable developmental time.

"Listen there's nothing more ideal than having these guys on the field playing," White Sox director of player development Chris Getz said. "But obviously that's not always going to be the case. Fortunately, with some of these guys, it's just a minor setback, meaning they will be joining their teams here fairly soon."

"The development time missed stinks, no doubt about it," said White Sox general manager Rick Hahn, referring more to Burger's injury. "It's lousy and you feel for the kid. You have to adjust your expectations in terms of timeline going forward. There's no positive from that standpoint, but from a physical standpoint, we don't view it as a long-term impact."

In 2010, outfielder Jared Mitchell was ranked as one of the top prospects in the White Sox system. The first-round Draft pick in 2009 was coming off of a solid partial first season in the White Sox system when he sustained a left ankle tendon tear playing left field during a Cactus League game and missed the entire 2010 campaign.

Mitchell never was completely the same after that injury, although as Hahn pointed out, Mitchell was a speed guy coming back from a serious ankle problem. In comparison to Burger, Hahn has more concern about the psychological injury impact for a 22-year-old from the 2017 Draft.

"It's hard to sit by and watch other guys that you want to be out there playing with advance in their career while you are limited, to no fault of his own," said Hahn of Burger. "With that said, when I walked in the training room and he was still lying on the training table getting treatment by our doctors, he saw me and turned and said, 'I'm going to kill this rehab and get my diet in order, my nutrition in order. I promise you.'"

"He's got the right attitude. He has the right makeup to make the most out of this setback, but you do feel for the kid. He wants nothing more than to be out there with his teammates and continue to advance up our ladder."

Getz added there's still plenty of professional development to be gained this season by Burger through some of the things he will be exposed to.

In addition to pitching for the White Sox, Chris Volstad also co-owns not one, but two breweries

By Scott Merkin / MLB.com / Apr. 13, 2018

Chris Volstad has already started his post-baseball career, even as he joined the White Sox bullpen when his contract was purchased from Triple-A Charlotte Thursday.

Volstad, his cousin, Karl, and another friend own Civil Society Brewing Co. in Jupiter, Fla. The right-hander mentioned Thursday that a second venue is currently in the works for West Palm Beach, Fla., about 15 minutes away.

"So yeah, it's definitely getting more hectic," said the 6-foot-8 Volstad with a smile. "Be kind of nice to be around it I guess, but this is the better alternative. It's cool to get updates and talk with them."

The Civil Society website features info about their beers, the brewery, the story of how it all began and Civil Society products that can be purchased.

Volstad, 31, is beginning his second stint with the White Sox after posting a 4.66 ERA over 19 1/3 innings last September.

Friday's best: Padres prospects show big-time power

By William Boor / MLB.com / Apr. 13, 2018

Here's MLB Pipeline's roundup of the top prospect performances in the Minor Leagues on Friday.

Double-A San Antonio may have lost to Arkansas, 8-4, but two of the Padres' top prospects helped illuminate the fact that San Diego has the best farm system in baseball.

No. 8 overall prospect Fernando Tatis Jr. (Padres' No. 1), Josh Naylor (Padres' No. 16) and Austin Allen (No. 29) each homered, with the Naylor and Tatis blasts coming back-to-back in the third inning.

Naylor, who hit two homers on Thursday and leads the Minors with six, came up first and went deep to center. Five pitches later, Tatis hit his first homer of the season out to left.

While Naylor has been on fire and is hitting .467, Tatis has gotten off to a slower start with a .206 mark. The shortstop was hitless (0-for-12) over his first three games but has hits in four of his past five games, including two multi-hit efforts.

Allen, who went 2-for-4, is already halfway to his 2017 home run total. The catcher hit eight homers in 121 games last season and has four through just seven contests in 2018.

Other top prospect performances from Friday's action:

- No. 13 overall prospect Bo Bichette (Blue Jays' No. 2) extended his hitting streak to seven with an RBI triple in the third inning of Double-A New Hampshire's loss to Hartford. Bichette finished 1-for-4, while Vladimir Guerrero Jr. (No. 3 overall, Blue Jays' No. 1) went 2-for-5 with an RBI.

- A pair of top-100 prospects helped lead Triple-A Durham to a win over Columbus as Willy Adames (No. 22 overall, Rays' No. 2) and Jake Bauers (No. 64 overall, Rays' No. 5) combined for five hits, three RBIs and two runs scored. Both players entered the game on cold streaks as Adames, who finished 2-for-3, had been held hitless in three straight, while Bauers was hitless in his past five before his 2-for-5 effort.

- No. 29 overall prospect Juan Soto (Nationals' No. 2) hit three homers in 32 games a season ago, and he needed just nine games to surpass that total this year as he hit his fourth homer in the fifth inning of Class A Hagerstown's loss to Greensboro.

- No. 48 overall prospect Justus Sheffield (Yankees' No. 3) was stuck with a no-decision despite firing a gem for Double-A Trenton. The 22-year-old lefty threw 60 of his 96 pitches for strikes and was lights-out save for a solo homer in the fifth. Sheffield lasted 5 2/3 innings, struck out nine and gave up one run on one hit. Sheffield wasn't the only Yankees prospect with a strong night on the mound as Nick Nelson (No. 27) set a career high with 12 strikeouts in five innings for Class A Charleston. Jonathan Loaisiga (No. 14) and Trevor Lane (No. 28) also combined to throw seven scoreless for Class A Advanced Tampa.

- No. 61 overall prospect Dylan Cease (White Sox No. 5) cruised to his first win as Class A Advanced Winston-Salem topped Carolina, 8-1. Cease retired the first seven batters he faced and never looked back, giving up just two hits and two walks in 6 2/3 scoreless innings. The right-hander struck out five and threw 51 of his 79 pitches for strikes.

- No. 83 overall prospect Max Fried (Braves' No. 7) gave up his first run of the season, but that was the extent of the damage allowed. Fried, pitching for Triple-A Gwinnett, threw 4 2/3 scoreless in his first start of the year with Double-A Mississippi and was bumped up a level before giving up one run over 5 2/3 innings. Braves No. 10 prospect Joey Wentz also put together a strong performance, striking out six and giving up just one hit in five scoreless innings for Class A Advanced Florida.

- Royals No. 1 prospect Khalil Lee hit his second homer of the season for Class A Advanced Wilmington. Lee, batting .393 through eight games, went 3-for-4 with two runs scored.

- Pirates prospects Luis Escobar (No. 12) and Oneil Cruz (No. 14) helped lead Class A Advanced Bradenton and Class A West Virginia to wins with strong performances on the mound and at the plate. Escobar lowered his ERA to 0.82 as he fired six scoreless frames for the Marauders, while Cruz went 2-for-3 with four RBIs in his first career two-homer game.

- Rangers No. 14 prospect Jonathan Hernandez was unhittable for Class A Advanced Down East. The right-hander gave up one run on three hits in his first start of the season, but he was even better the second time around as he notched six strikeouts across five hitless frames.

- Phillies No. 18 prospect Dylan Cozens hit 67 homers over the past two seasons, and his power has shown up once again early in 2018. Cozens hit his first two homers of the season as part of a 3-for-5 night with Triple-A Lehigh Valley. The 23-year-old knocked a solo homer in the first inning and a two-run blast in the fifth of the IronPigs' win over Louisville.

• Giants No. 29 prospect Jordan Johnson did a little bit of everything for Double-A Richmond in a win over Reading. On the mound, Johnson spun six scoreless frames, striking out five, issuing one walk and yielding just three hits. The 24-year-old also helped himself on the other side of the ball, hitting a solo homer in the fifth as part of a 1-for-2 night at the plate.

Why White Sox fans shouldn't freak out about Yoan Moncada's high strikeout total just yet

By Vinnie Duber / NBC Sports Chicago / Apr. 13, 2019

No doubt about it: Yoan Moncada has had a rough start to the 2018 season.

Entering play Friday — play which never happened for the White Sox considering their game in Minnesota was postponed — Moncada's 24 strikeouts were the most in baseball. His .184/.298/.306 slash line is ugly by any measure.

But the panics and calls for demotion on social media seem a little premature.

Here's a reason those fans won't like: It's early. But seriously, it's been cold and it's only been two weeks and the 2018 season has not progressed far enough to allow observers of any kind to determine that this is who Moncada is and that it's a bad sign. It's not good, but let's chat in a few more weeks, a month, two months and see if he's in the same place. If he is, yeah maybe panic levels can more appropriately rise. But not yet.

Another reason that no one should freak out about Moncada: We kind of expected this to happen. Let me explain. No, we didn't think Moncada would come out and strike out 24 times in his first 12 games, but in his limited major league appearances last season, he showed a penchant for punching out. He did it 74 times in 54 games. He's doing it this year at a higher rate, of course, but striking out a lot and walking a lot is what we saw from Moncada in 2017. To expect that to change over the course of one offseason is perhaps expecting too much. By the way, Moncada is still walking. For all the deserving attention given to Matt Davidson's team-leading nine walks this season, Moncada has just one fewer, with eight.

The most important thing to remember, of course, is that Moncada's struggles are not taking away from the White Sox chances of contending for a championship in 2018. That wasn't expected to happen, anyway, and it's not like removing him from the lineup and replacing him with Tyler Saladino or Leury Garcia or whoever is going to suddenly solve all of the White Sox problems and vault them to the top of the American League Central standings.

This is a developmental season at the major league level, and Moncada, who just last year was the No. 1 prospect in baseball, is the one of the biggest parts of that. These are the growing pains that come with development and a rebuilding effort. The reaction is so strong because fans are watching these growing pains in real time on the big league stage. Manager Rick Renteria has called these early season struggles learning experiences, and it wouldn't come as a surprise if the "learning experiences" continue for various players throughout the 2018 campaign. But those "learning experiences" are what's hoped to produce a perennial contender just a couple years down the line.

Moncada's development is critical to the success of the rebuild. But to suggest that he needs a demotion to Triple-A — where in 2017 he struck out 102 times in 80 games, by the way, and was still deemed ready for the majors — to figure things out seems a little rash at this point in the season.

Weather becomes the third opponent in White Sox-Twins weekend series

By Colleen Kane / Chicago Tribune / Apr. 13, 2018

Wearing a sleeveless shirt, shorts and a winter hat, Jose Abreu dashed out of the visitors' dugout for a few seconds Friday at Target Field to have his photo taken.

A few other White Sox players stood at the dugout's edge and snapped their own pictures as small balls of hail fell around them.

That was as far as the Sox's outing extended as the Twins postponed Friday night's game because of a forecast for rain, snow and cold.

The final two games of the four-game series Saturday and Sunday are also in question because of a snowstorm set to hit Minneapolis on Friday night. Some forecasts predicted up to a foot of snow by Saturday night.

"It's really difficult to get used to this weather," Abreu said Friday through a Sox interpreter. "All the people who are involved in this business are trying to grind these first two weeks because the weather has been really bad. It's something that we have to deal with."

Friday's game is the second postponement for the Sox in 13 games. Their game April 1 in Kansas City also was postponed, and they moved a home night game this week against the Rays to the afternoon to mitigate cold weather.

The Sox did some pregame work Friday, with some players throwing in the outfield until the bout of hail. Manager Rick Renteria said the team planned to arrive at Target Field on Saturday morning before the scheduled afternoon game and will move their work into the batting cages until they receive word on the game status.

A makeup date for Friday's game wasn't announced immediately. The Sox return to Minneapolis for series June 5-7 and Sept. 28-30, their final three games of the regular season.

In the short term, more than one postponement in a row could put a serious kink in Sox pitchers' routines. Right-hander Reynaldo Lopez was scheduled to take the mound Friday, but Renteria said he wasn't certain who would throw Saturday if a game is played — Lopez or Saturday's scheduled starter, Miguel Gonzalez.

Twins right-hander Lance Lynn was slated to pitch Saturday.

"We are a routine-based species in the game of baseball," Renteria said. "We are trying to do everything we can not to disrupt it too much. (Pitching coach Don Cooper and bullpen coach Curt Hasler) are continuing to grind out a schedule and work routines so (the pitchers) feel as comfortable as possible for their next starts and the day we are using them."

Many teams have had to play through lousy weather over the first two weeks of the season, but the Sox have put up some lousy results while battling it.

Their 4-0 loss to the Twins on a chilly but dry Thursday night was their sixth loss in seven games.

They ranked among the top five home run-hitting teams in baseball with 17 entering Friday, but they also are hitting .162 with runners in scoring position.

On a rebuilding team with many of his players still developing, Renteria said he is evaluating his players on their approaches more than their results, especially given the weather they have played through this season.

"Physically you can be limited," Renteria said. "The cold certainly constricts you a little bit, but I think we have to go through and keep everything as fundamentally sound as possible. That has to do more with approach. We deal with those things. This is an experience some of these guys are having for the first time, especially guys from the Caribbean."

Abreu, who is from Cuba, said he still isn't used to playing in the cold five seasons into his major-league career. But he's having a decent start to the year, hitting .250 with two doubles, three homers, six RBIs, nine strikeouts and an on-base percentage of .333.

"The key for me is I'm mentally stronger right now," Abreu said of a better April. "It doesn't matter how the weather is or the situation outside, if you have your mind in the right place, you're going to be able to overcome all of the obstacles that are outside."

Rick Renteria chats with Yoan Moncada after Sox loss: 'I want him to understand he's not a finished product'

By Colleen Kane / Chicago Tribune / Apr. 13, 2018

White Sox manager Rick Renteria took a few extra minutes after Thursday's 4-0 loss to the Twins to meet with second baseman Yoan Moncada.

Most of the Sox players had a difficult night at the plate against Twins right-hander Jose Berrios. But Moncada went 0-for-4 with three strikeouts, and his batting average dropped to .184 through the Sox's first 12 games. He also misplayed a groundball that allowed Eduardo Escobar to reach base in the eighth.

Renteria's purpose for the chat was twofold. He wanted to reinforce to Moncada that he should worry about himself and not outside expectations. And he wanted to remind Moncada he needs to maintain his focus and his willingness to learn throughout an entire game and an entire season.

"He's by no means a finished product, and I want him to understand he's not a finished product," Renteria said. "But I want him to understand there are certain things you have to do. You have to maintain focus, and if you're not hitting, you've got to catch the ball. And if you're not catching the ball, you better hit. But you can't fail at both, because then there's a problem. So a lot of it has to do with learning, focusing and continuing to concentrate."

It was the second time in two games Renteria has had to address Moncada specifically.

In Wednesday's victory over the Rays, the Sox called for a suicide squeeze with Omar Narvaez on third base. But Moncada laid off the bunt, and Narvaez was caught in a rundown.

"He just told me in those situations, I have to execute," Moncada said Thursday through a team interpreter. "It doesn't matter if it's a good or bad pitch, I have to bunt the ball. I understood that, and I know that it was my mistake.

"It's always good when you have a manager like Ricky who is able to communicate in your own language and can explain to you the things that you need to do and why things happen. After we talked, I felt better. I'm not saying that I felt good, because I knew that it was my responsibility, but after we talked I was able to digest a little bit better the situation just because of the way he talked to me."

The outside expectations Renteria spoke of Thursday are real for Moncada.

He joined the Sox organization last season from the Chris Sale trade as baseball's top prospect. After he finally was called up to the majors in July, he took a while to heat up before a solid September.

Moncada's taking a while this season too.

He is 9-for-49 with three doubles, a homer, three RBIs, eight walks and a team-leading 24 strikeouts.

His swing is not in sync, he said, and it doesn't help that he is playing for the first time in his life in cold, snowy weather. Renteria has also noticed an issue with head movement.

"He's got to just stay within his approach, get pitches he can handle, try not to do too much," Renteria said. "Honestly, I think he's pulling his head a little bit, so he's not really seeing the ball into the zone as well as I would like him to see the ball into the zone. But on top of that just continue to eliminate noise."

Moncada said he hopes guidance from the coaching staff and fellow Cuban Jose Abreu will help him to overcome his recent struggles.

"I'm not frustrated," Moncada said. "I know that probably the results are not there, the good results, but I still have plenty of confidence in me. I believe in myself because I know what I'm capable of doing. Right now it's just a matter of a rough time, but I still feel very confident in myself."

'Wheel of Fortune' makes amends for an earlier White Sox snub

By Chicago Tribune Staff / Apr. 13, 2018

Wheel of Fortune" put a positive spin on its relationship with the White Sox.

In February, the game show aired a Chicago-themed episode as part of its "Great American Cities" week and gave contestants a crossword-style puzzle that contained four of the five major professional sports teams.

The contestant solved it: "Blackhawks," "Bulls" and "Bears," with "Cubs" intersecting all three.

No White Sox.

The White Sox responded with their own corrected puzzle board.

But on Thursday night, the White Sox finally got some love. The category was "People." The answer was "Chicago White Sox fans."

The White Sox tweeted the new puzzle with these comments:

"AKA the best people in the world.

Guess we're good now, @WheelOfFortune."

White Sox' Yoan Moncada turning to mentor Jose Abreu for offensive guidance

By Steve Greenberg / Sun-Times / Apr. 13, 2018

MINNEAPOLIS — Yoan Moncada calls Jose Abreu by his longtime nickname, “Pito,” which in Spanish means “whistle.” But that’s not much of a window into the White Sox players’ relationship, is it?

Put it this way: The 22-year-old Moncada has looked up to the 31-year-old Abreu for a long time. Idolized him, even. One Cuban ballplayer grew up wanting to be like the other. Now they share a clubhouse, and Abreu’s mentorship is one of the most influential factors in Moncada’s development.

“Pito is always talking to me and giving me advice,” Moncada said through an interpreter.

After Thursday’s 4-0 loss to the Twins, during which Moncada struck out three times — for the third game in a row — the pair spent some much-needed time together.

“We sat down and talked for a long time just trying to figure it out, how he’s feeling at home plate and what is happening to his mind in his at-bats,” Abreu said through the same interpreter. “It was just to get deep into his thinking process when he is at home plate.”

Moncada — batting .184, with 24 strikeouts in 49 at-bats this season — was a hot commodity from a very young age. Abreu figures it is the first time in the switch-hitting second baseman’s life he has dealt with a start quite like this one.

“My advice for him has always been you can’t control what people think or what people expect of you, but you can control what you can do and expect from yourself,” Abreu said. “Confidence is a big key for him, and he’s already confident in himself. I don’t doubt the talent he has, and I think nobody does. It’s just a matter of getting him through this moment. We all know he has the talent to do it.”

Kopech sighting

Sox fans will be excited to learn they can watch prized prospect Michael Kopech pitch Saturday. Sorry, no, it won’t be in a big-league game. But Kopech will be on the hill for the Class AAA Charlotte Knights against the dreaded Scranton/Wilkes-Barre RailRiders in a 6 p.m. contest on NBCSCH. Hey, it is better than nothing.

It’ll be the second start of the season for the flame-throwing right-hander, who turns 22 on April 30. Kopech went a scoreless four innings in his first start, allowing only two hits, walking two and striking out eight.

Unfinished business

Circle June 4 on your calendar. The Sox and Twins both have that day off before a series at Target Field. It would be a natural time for a makeup game after the weather-affected series the teams are trying to get in this weekend.

White Sox righty James Shields rebounds after rough first inning on Opening Day

By Chris De Luca / Sun-Times / Mar. 29, 2018

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — Somewhere during a four-run, five-hit, 35-pitch first inning, James Shields started trending on Twitter.

White Sox fans were hyperventilating over the latest struggles from the oldest dude on a team full of kids.

“It was a grind,” Shields said. “No doubt.”

The Kansas City Royals stacked up four runs before getting their first out and Shields looked like he was about to ruin the eighth Opening Day start of his career.

But after that ugly first inning that was punctuated by Lucas Duda’s three-run homer on a 2-0 pitch — the only one Shields says he would take back — the veteran settled down. He retired 18 of the next 21 batters and didn’t allow another hit or run to earn the victory in the Sox’ 14-7 romp Thursday at Kauffman Stadium.

“But those are the games I love, man,” the 36-year-old said. “It’s been that way my whole career.”

This was Shields’ 139th career victory — and his first without striking out a single batter. He pitched six innings and never nudged manager Rick Renteria into warming his relievers in the early stages.

“Nice recovery,” Renteria said. “He was upset a little bit after that first inning. He decided to attack the zone in a controlled way. It says a lot about his experience — and his heart.”

Shields watchers might have noticed that after all the trouble in the first, the right-hander dropped his arm into a lower slot — a move that helped him finish 2017 on a strong note.

The adjustment Thursday was out of necessity.

“I did drop down a little bit more at the end, just to get a few more ground balls and a little more movement. An in-game adjustment,” he said with a laugh. “I’m still working on it.”

Shields is in the final year of a four-year, \$75 million contract that seems to be a drag on the Sox’ payroll. There are no guarantees if he will get a major-league contract next spring training from any team. But there is no question the cool veteran remains a popular figure in this maturing clubhouse.

“We are a family here,” said designated hitter Matt Davidson, whose three home runs helped rescue Shields’ day.

Feeling Minnesota: White Sox are where a team on a cold streak probably belongs

By Steve Greenberg / Sun-Times / Apr. 13, 2018

MINNEAPOLIS — White Sox manager Rick Renteria isn’t certain if it’ll be Reynaldo Lopez or Miguel Gonzalez who takes the mound Saturday afternoon against the Twins. At least, Renteria didn’t have a ready answer after Friday’s game, which Lopez was scheduled to start, was postponed amid a mix of rain, snow and — look out below — hail.

No big deal. We’ll just wait to find out.

Normally, we’d feel obliged to stay hot on the trail of such a developing news story. But something about a forecast promising piles of snow by early morning and gametime temperatures in the 20s made any immediate decisions about the Sox rotation seem rather moot.

“We are planning on coming into a normal-routine day,” Renteria said. “Kind of anticipating there might be some elements involved, especially since the weather is supposed to take effect a little later. We’ll probably move everything into the [indoor batting] cage to start and then go from there. We’ll just determine what we do once they let us know what’s happening.”

Translation: Maybe we’ll get to play baseball on Sunday?

Whenever the Sox take the field again, they’ll get to the business of trying to end a cold stretch of eight losses in 10 games. A good place to start would be improving their performance with runners in scoring position. Over the last six games, they are an awful 3-for-47 (.064) in those situations.

There are numerous unflattering stats that can be cherry-picked when detailing the Sox’ poor start. For example: Heading into Friday, they’d grounded into a major league-high 13 double plays. But it is the overall “RISP” trend that really jumps out.

“It’s baseball. Sometimes that happens,” right fielder Avisail Garcia said. “We’ve just got to keep working to get hits. It’s going to work. It’s going to get better.”

Shortstop Tim Anderson addressed the topic with a dismissive wave of his hand.

“We’re knocking at the door,” he said. “As bad as it looks, it’s not bad. We still play with a lot of excitement and have fun. We just have to take those things and learn from them and continue to push.”

The Sox also are batting only .150 — worst in the American League — with a runner at third base and less than two outs. They’ve done a decent job of putting the ball in play, striking out only three times in 26 plate appearances, but the run-scoring results have been less than desired.

“It’s something in batting practice and hitting meetings that we talk about, with approaches with guys on third and not trying to do too much or whatever,” third baseman Matt Davidson said. “It’s something that really good teams do well, and that’s something that we want to do well, too. We did it the first couple of games, and we’ve got to get back to it.”

A shutout loss in the opening game of this series probably was the last thing the Sox needed, although their hitting with runners in scoring position hardly was an issue — they had only one such chance all night. Assuming the Sox escape this nasty weather with their lives, they’re just plain going to have to get a lot better at getting them on and getting them in.

"I try to make sure that we keep perspective into the picture," Renteria said, "and the only way you can do that is to make sure that they see that I'm not the one who's going to panic. I'm not the one who's going through a process of, 'Oh, no, what's going on next?'"

White Sox-Twins game postponed Friday due to snowy forecast

By Stachel Price / Sun-Times / Apr. 13, 2018

The White Sox and Twins won't be playing Friday night due to expected inclement weather in the Minneapolis area. Forecasts currently project 7-10 inches of snow for the region, so rather than ask fans and players to attempt to bear it out at Target Field, the game will be postponed and rescheduled for an unspecified date.

The two teams were set to face off in the second game of a four-game series, but an unseasonably late snow storm has thrown a wrench into those plans. The teams will hopefully be ready to play their next game Saturday at 1:10 p.m. CT.

This is the second White Sox game of the season to be postponed due to weather. The team also had a game against the Royals postponed on April 1. It's been that kind of start to the season, with cold temperatures and precipitation abound.

Reynaldo Lopez was set to start for the White Sox on Friday. Miguel Gonzalez faces Lance Lynn on Saturday and Carlson Fulmer takes on Jake Odorizzi on Sunday.

White Sox' Yoan Moncada — striking out half the time — on 'rough' early season

By Steve Greenberg / Sun-Times / Apr. 13, 2018

MINNEAPOLIS — Yoan Moncada's troubles at the plate could simply be a matter of what he's doing with his head when he swings the bat.

"He's not keeping his head down through the swing," White Sox manager Rick Renteria said. "I think he's pulling off a little bit so he's not allowing himself to track the ball as long as he possibly could.

"He's got a really, really good eye. But I think from a physical standpoint, if he keeps his head down a little bit longer — I know the guys are working on trying to stay behind the baseball — he'll put himself in a better position."

Is that all it is? Is that why the 22-year-old second baseman, as important to this Sox rebuild as anybody, is striking out in nearly half of his at-bats this season and living below the Mendoza line?

It's not the sort of performance Renteria had in mind when he anointed Moncada the team's leadoff man. Yet in his first two at-bats Thursday against Twins starter Jose Berrios, Moncada struck out looking and swinging, respectively — saddling him with his seventh multiple-strikeout game (out of 12) already this season. And when he watched three straight strikes from Gabriel Moya go by in the ninth inning of the Sox' 4-0 loss, he was staring at his third straight game with three strikeouts.

Berrios was dominant, tying a career high with 11 strikeouts in seven innings. It was his third time reaching that number, and the first since last August against the Sox. Moncada was bound to have a difficult time with the nasty right-hander.

Still, Moncada hasn't just had a problem with strikeouts. He has, to name one other, been the opposite of clutch with runners in scoring position. So here's a question: Is his main problem what he's doing with his head when he swings, or what's going on inside it?

"I feel good," Moncada said through an interpreter before the game. "I'm not frustrated. I know that probably the results are not there, the good results, but I still have plenty of confidence in me. I believe in myself because I know what I'm capable of doing. Right now, it's just a matter of a rough time — but I still feel very confident in myself."

Moncada has reviewed video of his swings with coaches. He continues to receive guidance from friend and mentor Jose Abreu. He insists that batting leadoff is right in his wheelhouse.

"Even though I'm feeling good right now, my swing, my offense is not where it's supposed to be," he said. "My swing is not in sync right now. I hope that probably in one or two more days, I'll be able to adjust and put my swing where it's supposed to be. I've been patient. I've been recognizing the pitches. It's just my swing is not there."

On a night when 34-year-old Joe Mauer became the third Twins player to 2,000 hits — joining Rod Carew and Kirby Puckett — the struggles of the young Sox stood in interesting juxtaposition. Starting pitcher Lucas Giolito had his

moments, but his five walks allowed were indicative of his uneven performance. Shortstop Tim Anderson had a throwing error that allowed an unearned run to score, and he appeared to get himself picked off first base for the second game in a row; only a numbingly long replay process saved him.

And then there was Moncada, who again just couldn't get anything going. After whiffing nine times in three games, he stood at 24 strikeouts in his first 49 at-bats on the season. It led to a postgame meeting with Renteria in the manager's office.

"They beat themselves up because they want to do well," Renteria said. "Most on the outside don't understand that the pressure that they put on themselves to have success, it's pretty daunting."

Q&A with José Abreu on the struggles of Yoán Moncada and the rest of the White Sox

By James Fegan / The Athletic / Apr. 13, 2018

MINNEAPOLIS – Not much is going right for the 4-8 White Sox, but José Abreu is still hitting .250/.333/.479, which shakes out to a sterling 134 wRC+ in this depressed early offensive environment. Also his sage words usually help put the White Sox's frequent struggles in perspective, including those of his protégé, Yoán Moncada. In the wake of Saturday rain/snow postponement, Abreu spoke with the traveling Sox beat writers and explained how he's keeping cool during a rough start.

This interview was re-ordered for flow and Abreu's answers were translated into English by team interpreter Billy Russo.

Yoán's never struggled like this before, do you say anything to him to keep him upbeat?

José Abreu: Last night we sat down and talked for a long time just trying to figure it out; how he's feeling at home plate and what is happening to his mind in his at-bats. It was just to get deep into his thinking process when he is at home plate. We're just trying to figure out of what is the best way, and what we can try for him to get over it. I have no doubt he is going to be good. He has enough talent to surpass this moment. It's just one more lesson for him to learn and I think that with all of our help, he's going to be good.

You faced big expectations from outside when you arrived with the Sox too. Are you able to give him advice on dealing with it?

Abreu: My advice for him has always been you can't control what people think or what people expect of you, but you can control what you can do and expect from yourself. Confidence is a big key for him, and he's already confident in himself. I don't doubt the talent he has, and I think nobody does. It's just a matter of him getting through this moment. We all know he has the talent to do it.

Is Moncada pressing or is this just a natural adjustment period to playing at the highest level?

Abreu: I don't think he's pressing himself. I think all of the players pass through rough moments, and in his case, it's probably the first time he's passing through a moment with this. But I think with all of our support and Ricky's support, he's going to be good. He's smart enough. He has enough talent. He has to learn from this, and I'm pretty sure he's going to do it.

This is your fifth year in the majors. Do you ever get used to the weather?

Abreu: No. Not at all. It's really difficult to get used to this weather. All the people who are involved in this business are trying to grind these first two weeks because the weather has been really bad. It's something that we have to deal with.

This is a rough stretch for the team. What is the vibe in the clubhouse and what do you say to pick them up?

Abreu: I think we all have to be thankful because we're able to do what we like to do. That is playing baseball. We all have to be thankful for that. We all know that in a long season, you are going to have ups and downs and the only way to get over it is to keep your mind positive and to have confidence in yourself and the guys that are around you. That has been my message for all the guys and we're good.

You're an aggressive hitter, as are many hitters in this lineup. When pitchers try to prey on your aggression with sliders early in the count with runners in scoring position (detailed earlier this week by Jim Margalus at Sox Machine) is there an adjustment to make?

Abreu: I tip my cap to them. They have been doing their job. I haven't been able to figure it out and have my approach where it used to be in those situations. I'm working through that process too, and hopefully sooner rather than later I'm going to figure out how to start producing again in those situations.

April has been a difficult month for you in the past and it certainly hasn't been warm this year, how are you able to keep producing?

Abreu: The key for me is I'm mentally stronger right now. That's the key. It doesn't matter how the weather is or the situation outside, if you have your mind in the right place, you're going to be able to overcome all of the obstacles that are outside.

Jackie Robinson Day is coming up, what are your thoughts on the impact he had?

Abreu: He is a person who did a lot for the game. He deserves all of our respect. He was able to open the path for a lot of players in this league, and we all have to be thankful for all of the things he did and all of the sacrifices he made.

What's ailing Yoán Moncada? White Sox diagnose second baseman's struggles at the plate

By James Fegan / The Athletic / Apr. 13, 2018

MINNEAPOLIS — The first indication that Yoán Moncada's rough start to the 2018 season has sapped his typically highly visible confidence probably won't come via public statement.

"I feel good in [the leadoff] spot, and I like it," Moncada said Thursday through team interpreter Billy Russo. "Right now it's just a matter of being able to make adjustments. Be patient, make adjustments. And I think with the help of the coaching staff and Pito [José Abreu], who is always talking to me and giving me advice, I'll be able to overcome this situation."

It might have come via an uncompetitive ninth-inning at-bat later that night in which he stared at a 92-mph fastball down the pipe from Gabriel Moya, which along with a bobble on an eighth-inning Eduardo Escobar grounder ruled a single, seemed to factor into Moncada spending several minutes after the game in manager Rick Renteria's office discussing focus level, tuning out expectations and how "He has to be Yoán," per Renteria.

Confidence is pointed to as a critical issue for major leaguers across the diamond enough times that it has to be taken seriously as a significant factor, but Moncada's woes didn't begin due to a lack of belief.

When someone a player strikes out in more than 42 percent of their plate appearances over a two-week span, it's pretty easy to determine that their weaknesses at the plate are being exploited. That Moncada has started the season with a .184/.298/.306 line means it's getting more magnified than a bad two-week stretch buried in the middle of July might, but he came into the season with flaws and the White Sox are offering a bit of what he's working through as dismay builds that the former No. 1 overall prospect is struggling like this, even if he's still just 22.

"I think he's pulling his head a little bit so he's not really seeing the ball into the zone as well as I would like him to see the ball into the zone," Renteria said. "He's not keeping his head down through the swing. I think he's pulling off a little bit so he's not allowing himself to track the ball as long as he possibly could. [Pitchers are] doing a lot of different things. He's got a really, really good eye. But I think from a physical standpoint, if he keeps his head down a little bit longer — I know the guys are working on it, trying to stay behind the baseball — he'll put himself in a better position."

Despite an ISO that has dwindled down to .122 in the early going, Moncada continues to be near the league leaders in hard hit percentage, affirming that his contact is very loud when he makes it. And he's still drawing walks at a 14 percent rate this year with one of the lowest rates for swinging outside of the strike zone in baseball, suggesting his batting eye is every bit as advanced as it seems when he's taking close two-strike pitches an inch off the plate. But there's clearly a gap currently between his ability to recognize pitches and being able to put that information into action and lay off the breaking balls he's repeatedly being fed.

"It's there," hitting coach Todd Steverson said of Moncada's pitch recognition. "You can recognize it, but is it a strike? There's recognition and there's recognition of a strike. I think that's where some people get mistaken. His recognition is good, but recognition of what? Recognition of strike or recognition of pitch and strike? Or recognition of a ball? When I talk about recognition, I don't talk about being able to see 'Oh that's a slider,' I mean 'That's a slider for a ball,' and I'm able to stop or 'That's a slider for a strike' and I'm able to swing. Those are totally different things.

"He's good at recognizing the pitch and now it's just a matter of height. That's the next piece of it."

Last season, the league's plan of attack against Moncada involved a lot of changeups, this season it has shifted to sliders, which he's being thrown roughly 21 percent of the time per FanGraphs. He's still being thrown a league-average amount of fastballs (57.2 percent) but because the trend in baseball is moving toward more breaking balls, and Moncada currently has a "disastrously high likelihood to swing and miss" against sliders per Brooks Baseball, we can only expect that trend to continue, especially if his ability to track movement is compromised.

"If you're going to go straight numbers, who hits over .250 or .240 on breaking balls? Not a lot of people," Steverson said. "So I can understand why they're going to an off-speed league, but the fact of the matter is most off-speed pitches are not strikes. It's up to us to take the balls and that's just the game. The days of 2-0, my heater vs. your swing are kinda over. Not completely, but they kinda are. It's more of a cutter or something off the plate. A lot of guys, even though they throw 95-97 mph, don't want to challenge with their heater sometimes. OK, that's well known, but that shouldn't deter you from your approach. Everything is based off the heater in this game. So if he doesn't throw me the heater I've got to be in position to hit something else if it's a strike."

Avisail García, who is currently leading all of baseball in both swing rate and swing rate for pitches out of the zone, and probably will draw scrutiny of his own soon if he continues on his current path, doesn't stir memories of Moncada at the plate. Yet he also went through a period of learning to keep his head on the ball and unlocking just the right amount of recognition to let his skills play up in games. That process took years, many of them grueling, as he had to take an action that he didn't realize he was doing, actively work to stop it, and then make that new stillness in his swing become second nature. Looking back on that process, there lies the possibility that it might take a similar length of frustrating time for Moncada.

"It could! It could," Steverson said. "But he's got a good enough eye. If you don't have a good eye from the get-go, it's tough to do that, if you're just a swinger. He's not just a swinger. He actually has an idea of the strike zone, so he'll start to realize the stove's hot on that pitch, don't swing at that one. I think he'll bring it together a lot faster than guys who are just swingers."

The solution for Steverson and for all of the White Sox leadership is obviously to get Moncada more at-bats, more exposure to how he's being attacked. It could include days off for Moncada to gather himself mixed in, much as they were for Tim Anderson last year. And recalling Anderson's progression and current state of affairs, it could mean moving Moncada down in the order if the Sox determine that's where his skill set is best used. But it's going to involve a longer view than 12 games, though Moncada insists it won't take much longer than that.

"I've said it before, even though I'm feeling good right now, my swing, my offense is not where it's supposed to be," Moncada said through Russo. "My swing is not in sync right now. I hope that probably in one or two more days, I'll be able to adjust and put my swing where it's supposed to be. I've been patient. I've been recognizing the pitches. It's just my swing is not there."

Sarris: Eight bats to watch in the early going

By Eno Sarris / The Athletic / Apr. 13, 2018

If trying to figure out anything in baseball is difficult in the early going, then it's even worse when you're looking at hitters specifically. Pitchers give you big chunks of information every five days, hitters just offer a daily trickle. That said, there are a couple things we can look at in the early going.

Hitting does share one thing with pitching. There is an easy truth to remember when it comes to both, even if so many other things come into play: Velocity matters. Last week we looked at those pitchers who have lost velocity, so let's flip it around to the batters that have gained the most velocity — exit velocity, that is.

It's definitely a little too early to do this. Exit velocity becomes meaningful around 50 balls in play into a given season, and most of our batters are well short of that number so far. But let's put the cutoff at 25 balls in play and see if we can't identify a breakout before the breakout has taken hold. In the right situation, there will be reasons around the exit velocity to make us believe in the small sample inkling provided by the list below.

Here are your top ten exit velocity risers, minimum 25 balls in play.

Player	Results 2018	2017	Diff		
Tim Anderson	26	93.6	85.0	8.6	
Dixon Machado	32	91.0	83.8	7.2	
Willson Contreras	32	94.2	87.1	7.1	
Tommy Pham	31	95.7	89.2	6.5	
Mike Moustakas	34	93.5	87.3	6.2	

Carlos González	30	93.4	87.4	6.0
Ryan Rua	30	90.1	84.4	5.7
Starling Marte	35	87.3	81.8	5.5
Xander Bogaerts	31	92.8	87.3	5.5
Yasiel Puig	37	93.8	88.4	5.4

One of the ways that the lack of sample size shows itself is that there are possibly calibration issues in certain parks that don't become obvious — or wash away out of the overall average — until more players play at all parks. You'll see here, for example, that Tim Anderson is first, and that Yoan Moncada, with 24 balls in play, would have been first on this list. Next off the bottom of the list is Yolmer Sánchez.

Is there an issue with the exit velocity numbers coming out of Chicago's south side? If this is too small a sample to know about each player, then it's also probably too small a sample to know whether Chicago's Trackman needs a kick. But it is interesting to see all these players on this list, and know that only six series this year have produced an average exit velocity over 91 mph, and that two of those were played in The Cell.

Let's still try to identify six bats on this list that deserve a little more attention than the rest.

Tim Anderson, White Sox

The good news about Tim Anderson is that hitting the ball hard would be gravy, not the meat. By all accounts, the shortstop has a great glove and will provide value on the base paths. James Fagan recently talked to him about how the league-leading base stealer has studied hard, added confidence, and put up sprint speeds better than Billy Hamilton so far this year. Dude's going to steal 30 this year, easily, and only six players in baseball managed that feat last year.

But if he could zero in on the balls that produce the best outcomes? Not even take a walk, just swing at better pitches and produce a little more power? The evidence is there that he's figured something out. He's swinging at fewer breaking balls and at more fastballs than he did last year, and it's having an effect. If he has better than league average power, he'll be good to elite in all facets of the game other than plate discipline, and that'll do.

Dixon Machado, Tigers

This is perhaps the biggest surprise on the list (even to the player, who laughed and said “good” when confronted with the knowledge). His reports from the minor leagues, even while they praised his ability to defend, were collectively unsure about his bat.

“His approach is very simplistic, he tracks well and identifies balls and strikes early in flight, but has poor strength and bat speed, leading to weak contact on the ground,” wrote Eric Longenhagen, for example.

It's actually good that Longenhagen brought up the strength in that quote, though. Machado is currently at his biggest, and strongest.

“I'm getting stronger,” the player told our Max Bultman. “Maybe I'm hitting the ball more consistently with the barrel.”

It's true that he's pulling the ball more in the air than he ever has. Deep fantasy leaguers — and Tigers fans looking for someone who can even play at a league average level at second base — should take heart.

Carlos González, Rockies

Exit velocity can be an indicator of health, as Carlos Correa once admitted to me. It makes sense — the body's aches and pains would naturally steal bat speed, which produces exit velocity.

So it's comforting to see González here, as well as a few other notable names on the list. Miguel Cabrera (+2.0) and Adrian González (+4.0) also had debilitating injuries last year that robbed their production. It looks like they're all healthy again.

At this point, they're likely owned in most of your leagues, and buying high is always a poor idea. But if their fantasy managers remember last year too forcefully, or are tied to projections that, by nature, didn't include their injury information last year, you might find them more easily available than other players. Maybe consider them as a throw-in as you try to put together a bigger deal? Or just be happy your veteran might be dancing for one more Saturday night.

Yasiel Puig, Dodgers

One last chance to buy low on a guy that could be an absolute stud this year. Puig's early exit velocity numbers are only a small part of why he might be a monster in 2018.

Late last year, Puig started to lift the ball more while hitting the ball harder, reaching less, striking out less, and walking more — all the things you like to see from a player heading into his peak. Though Puig has taken a step back on the plate discipline and the launch angle, he's hitting the ball harder now than ever before. A .280 season with 30 homers and 10 steals is still within his grasp.

You know what stabilizes even earlier than exit velocity? Swing rates. It can take as few as 50 plate appearances to see a meaningful shift in swing rates, and most of your everyday players have managed that so far this year.

The thing that makes this difficult is that not swinging isn't always the best way forward for a player. Sure, taking pitches is correlated well with power and overall outcomes, but it can also lead to more strikeouts, and certain players are too passive and need to swing more.

That said, we could look at a list of batters who have lowered their swing rates the most and identify the players that might be benefiting the most from the practice. So let's do that.

Name	17 Swing%	18 Swing%	Diff Swing
Freddie Freeman	52.9%	36.4%	-16.5%
Matt Davidson	48.4%	35.6%	-12.8%
Chris Owings	55.5%	42.9%	-12.6%
Jon Jay	51.4%	39.5%	-11.9%
Robinson Canó	52.0%	40.1%	-11.9%
Evan Gattis	49.2%	37.5%	-11.7%
Paul DeJong	51.6%	41.5%	-10.1%
Didi Gregorius	58.2%	48.3%	-9.9%
DJ LeMahieu	41.3%	32.3%	-9.0%
Adam Duvall	48.2%	39.4%	-8.8%

I find this is the most interesting when it comes to young players that might be showing a new approach that could dovetail with their athleticism and produce a breakout. So while it's nice that Freddie Freeman and Robinson Canó and Evan Gattis and the like are locked in right now, his probably doesn't presage their best seasons.

But for the following batters, we might have something real on our hands.

Matt Davidson, White Sox

Only Keon Broxton struck out more than Matt Davidson last year, and though the White Sox third baseman made the most of his contact, it seemed that he, like Broxton, was on the hot seat this year for a job. Well, after a strong spring, Davidson is doing everything right at the plate when it comes to swing rates. He's swinging less, reaching almost half as often at balls, and swinging at more strikes.

"Sometimes you might only get a couple pitches to hit," he told our James Fegan this week, "and you've got to be really disciplined. And when you get it, you've got to do that."

Still, for a player with his strikeout rate, there's some risk here. What if this eventually leads to more taken called strike threes? And he ends up with a 40 percent strikeout rate, along with decent walks and that power? Will it be enough? And, even at his current strikeout rate — 32 percent — is there any way that his batting average and OBP will be enough for him to be a major league or fantasy regular without tremendous batted ball outcomes? Last year, only eight batters struck out more than 32 percent, only three of them were regulars, only two hit better than .250, and only one had an above-average OBP.

There's reason to like Davidson in deep leagues, and as a good player for now. But he's still not likely to be an average major leaguer or hit even .230 this year.

Chris Owings, Diamondbacks

A shoulder injury in 2014 kept Owings from finishing his swing with two hands for two years, a problem that Owings only finally rectified last year. His bat answered with the two best months of his career... before Owings was injured again and

lost half the season. Now he's back, and he's swinging less across the board, and finishing with two hands. There's potential here for the full season Owings has never had.

"We had a meeting in spring training and something clicked," Owings told me of his new swing rates this week. "Just going up there with a good plan now."

The other swing rates aren't as meaningful yet, but they do paint the picture of a hitter that is swinging less, and not necessarily pairing that with more swings at strikes. That could lead to more strikeouts and walks, but Owings has hovered around league average with respect to strikeouts. If he can walk at a league average rate, hit for league average power, strike out a bit, and play all over the diamond with his speed, we could easily see a .280/.330 15/15 season out of Owings, something that most head-to-head leaguers (and manager Torey Luvullo) will enjoy.

Paul DeJong, Cardinals

Used to be, if you struck out ten times for every walk, you didn't have a chance in Major League Baseball. That's changed a bit recently, and since DeJong can pair great defense with great power against that poor discipline, he should have a shot. His team will probably be happy with him, because they signed him to a deal that makes him a well-paid utility man in the worst case, and a poorly paid superstar if he figures out the discipline.

But I think fantasy owners should sell, if they can. His peripheral numbers look good, and DeJong's swinging less, so there's something going on here — except that DeJong is swinging less at strikes. His reach rate on pitches outside the zone is virtually unchanged. More passivity without selectivity may lead to more walks, but a strikeout rate over 40 percent (he was at 41.3 percent before yesterday's game) is untenable.

Didi Gregorius, Yankees

Everyone should be buying in on Didi Gregorius right now. If it's not already too late — but this might be the case where buying high makes sense.

For one, people don't think of Didi Gregorius as a 30-homer hitter, even after he got to 25 last year without getting 600 plate appearances. But, as Marc Carig detailed, there's a lot of reason to believe in his power. Gregorius improved both the velocity of his balls in the air as well as his attack angle with every season, at least.

And now Didi is doing all the right things with his swing. He's improved his reach rate by nearly ten percentage points, he's still swinging at strikes more than average, and — in a related matter — he's making more contact than he's ever made. He could easily end up with the best walk and strikeout (and power) rates of his career.

The bonus is this — if he does all those things, he'll creep his way up the batting order. That means more counting stats, and more chances. Buy.

White Sox are willing to be patient with Carson Fulmer, less so with 'negative crap'

By James Fegan / The Athletic / Mar. 29, 2018

KANSAS CITY — White Sox pitching coach Don Cooper is less than pleased with the level of negativity surrounding his 24-year-old starter, Carson Fulmer. And getting him to open up about it is as easy as saying "Carson Fulmer," in an open scrum. Mentioning the calls for him to get moved to the bullpen after his first four outings in spring training isn't necessary.

"I'm going to go back on Carson, when he first came to the big league, we put him in the bullpen out of Triple-A," Cooper said. "He had a couple of good outings and a couple of lemons. But everybody was writing Carson Fulmer off. Can he do this, can't do this, can't do that. All of that negative crap.

Then he had a start against Minnesota and couldn't get out of the first. Oh, Carson can't do this and can't do that. He sucks. After one freaking outing. Come on. That's not even fair to anybody.

Then he got off and had some really good starts for us. So again looking to pick up where we left off with him. But to write a guy off after a couple, you gotta have a little patience. I'm not patient for a lot of things in life but with pitching I find myself more patient because it doesn't happen overnight. It's a process."

Contrary to the way Cooper remembered it, Fulmer did get into the second inning that rough night against Minnesota last August, but unintentionally is the only way the Sox coaching staff would minimize their guy, who remains universally beloved and respected in the clubhouse. A couple of sharper outings near the end of spring killed some of the awkwardness of penciling Fulmer in the rotation over Héctor Santiago when the latter was looking sharp and the former

seemed in the throes of command troubles. Yet the way the former eighth overall pick has been discussed by Sox higher-ups, and was discussed again Thursday, it's again hard to see a scenario in which Fulmer doesn't get his chance to show he can thrive out of the rotation.

"Coop and Ricky [Renteria] really fought for this kid and wanted to make sure he got this opportunity going forward," general manager Rick Hahn said. "Obviously ability is going to be the most important element but guys who have that special fight or commitment or understanding of themselves or openness to new ideas and instruction are at an advantage as things unfold, especially once the inevitable struggles arrive.

"If you're talking specifically about Carson, I don't know if Carson has ever had a teammate that didn't point to him as having a tremendous makeup and being a leader on his team. That definitely will serve him well going forward, whether he takes off five days from now or he winds up having some fits and starts as part of the normal pitcher development at the big league level."

Last year, the White Sox reaped the benefits of probably being the only club, or maybe one of five, that was willing to give full-time at-bats to Avisail García for another season. Still in a rebuild, perhaps that's the hope with Fulmer, that the team's patience for his command to come around and match his still-exceptional raw stuff will be rewarded, and deliver found value when other teams would have long since opted to see what they could recoup from Fulmer in a relief role.

"It's possible if we were in a different spot in our success cycle, you don't get the opportunities that certain guys are having here, and based on this spring, I would certainly understand why people would point to Carson and think maybe that's not as dependable of a bet as you would want at a different spot in your cycle," Hahn said. "That said, what we're trying to do here is learn as much as we can about our guys and how they fit going forward and we do have the opportunity to give Carson a handful of repetitions and see how it unfolds."

Still, there are limits. Michael Kopech, Carlós Rodon and others are nearing, and eventually, the majors becomes impatient with the results of everyone. There isn't a set audition window for Fulmer, but while the Sox were willing to sit through some ugly outings in spring to see the guy they grew confident in last season, Hahn made it clear they won't stick with any pitcher endlessly if he's getting hammered during the season and not showing progress. Ultimately, it's not good for his development or his confidence. But part of the Sox believing in their guy is that they don't think it's going to be an issue with Fulmer.

"We aren't lowering the bar for everybody, we are keeping it where it's always been," Cooper said. "Take the bulk of the game, give us a chance to win, put us in a position to win. Stay out there long enough for you to possibly get the win. There you go. That's the short version of White Sox starting pitcher's job description."

How James Shields tried to create a little brotherhood on a chilly golf course

By Dave Brown / The Athletic / Apr. 13, 2018

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — Coming out of the Cactus League, the Chicago White Sox have talked a lot about team chemistry, or at least the camaraderie they feel toward each other.

From the manager, Rick Renteria, to veteran players such as James Shields, along with some of the youngsters, the Sox laid it on pretty thick. Earnest, but thick.

These guys are 100 percent together like no other group anyone's ever seen. They love each other like brothers. More than brothers.

"Oh, brother," a more cynical person might say.

But when you're 29th of 30 in major-league payroll at a reported \$71 million, and picked by most to finish fourth or fifth in a top-heavy AL Central, and much of the organization's best talent grows in the minor leagues, it's probably a good thing to try and get along. Because it's likely that another losing record is coming in 2018, and who wants to win 65, 70, 75 (maybe 80) games cooped up for 7 1/2 months with untold dozens of mismatched Sox you dislike?

Possibly with that in mind, and two days before the start of the regular season, a sextet of Sox players (a Soxtet!) headed to the National Golf Club of Kansas City in suburban Parkville, Missouri for a day on the links.

Shields, bringing fellow hurlers Danny Farquhar, Carson Fulmer, Lucas Giolito and Gregory Infante, along with catcher Omar Narváez, had the course all to themselves. Sure, it was a breezy 44 degrees, but with precious few days off ahead during a months-long sojourn, it's good to hang out with the guys and get some fresh air, and to do it away from the office.

“We wanted to go golfing, we invited everybody, and a couple of the guys wanted to go,” Shields said. “I wanted us to enjoy our day off.”

Shields could have another motivation for promoting togetherness—that it also helps to foment winning. The presence of good chemistry has been, at least, a remarkable coincidence in the past for Shields, famously with the Kansas City Royals and Tampa Bay Rays, where individuals got along with each other while buying into a system and process, and acting with agency in order to make it all work. Shields, whose disastrous arrival in Chicago in 2016 was the harbinger of a teardown, has pitched in two World Series in a former life.

“It’s everybody doing their job and everyone holding themselves accountable for everything they do on a daily basis, all the hard work,” Shields said. “For me, these guys do it just as good as anyone I’ve ever seen. It’s a brotherhood in here. And it definitely reminds me a lot of what the Royals were when I was over there, and as well as in Tampa when I was in Tampa.”

Preseason PECOTA projections had the White Sox winning 69 games. Not very nice, but Shields doesn’t care.

“It’s going to be a good season,” Shields said. “I’m looking forward to it.”

The White Sox won two games in Kansas City to open the season — Shields gave up four runs in his first inning of the year, but settled down to throw six innings and get the win — while the third was postponed for weather-related reasons. Since then, they’ve gone 2-8, nearly getting swept out of their first homestand.

That’s where the team chemistry comes in, right?

While it’s a reasonable assumption that strong team chemistry helps individuals get through the grind lies one of baseball’s oldest, least-answerable questions: how much of the chemistry talk is just a lot of noble gas, and how much does chemistry really have to do with winning? It is not illogical that chemistry would matter. A significant plurality of managers, players, coaches and executives have said, time immemorial, that it matters. It’s just hard to assign a value to it. How much was winning the World Series in 2017 due to all of those extra-base hits from the Houston Astros lineup, shutdown innings from its pitching staff, and sparkling plays on defense, and how much was it due to details like Carlos Beltrán sharing his old-person wisdom about hitting that gave insight and confidence to youngster Carlos Correa?

There are periodic contrary examples, too, which might or might not be apocryphal (the Oakland Athletics of the 1970s, most notoriously), which tell us that individuals literally can fight each other and still win as a group. Maybe bad chemistry helps to keep a fire burning in certain extreme cases. (Think: Richard Burton and Liz Taylor.) But bad chemistry, in most clubhouses, probably makes winning tougher.

Farquhar has played on one team with a winning record over parts of six seasons in the majors: the Seattle Mariners in 2014. Farquhar’s other teams have been losers, in terms of the standings, but not because they stocked the clubhouse full of ballplayers with losing personalities.

“Good chemistry starts with actual production on the field,” Farquhar said. “Everybody producing and playing well. And you get into that joyful mood. You almost kind of build on that. Not to say that you can’t break out of it if you’re struggling, but it’s definitely on-field performance that builds that chemistry with everybody—to be 100 percent honest.”

After closing for the Mariners during his first full season in 2013, Farquhar was a set-up man in '14 for a team that won 87 times and missed the playoffs by one game, getting as close as they did in large part because of Seattle’s historically great, and also lucky, bullpen. With the “Great Eight” of Farquhar, Tom Wilhelmson, Charlie Furbush, Yoervis Medina, Brandon Maurer, Dominic Leone, Joe Beimel and closer Fernando Rodney taking the bulk of the workload, the Mariners collectively posted a 2.59 ERA in a combined 500 innings, and set several team and league records—including tying an MLB mark by having seven pitchers appear in at least 50 games.

Mariners relievers also enjoyed each other’s company. They’d run detailed pass patterns and toss around a Nerf football for the sake of “conditioning and ammunition for good-natured insults,” Seattle Times reporter Ryan Divish wrote. They’d prepare, scout and talk shop in the bullpen, but they’d also chant and sing like Little Leaguers when their hitters would come to the plate.

“We had absolute blasts together,” Farquhar said.

The thing was, the chemistry came later, after the Mariners started to have success.

"It's not gonna happen overnight," Farquhar said. "You can't have one good game and go, 'Hey, everything's gonna be great.' It's a long season—months and months of baseball. We didn't have the confidence in April that we did in July, August and September. But once everyone got rolling in April and May, we realized, 'Hoy cow—we're a pretty good staff.' That confidence builds and we were almost unbeatable as a bullpen that year."

That's why it's hard to call clubhouse chemistry bullshit. It might be a little fertilizer, though, which is partly why Farquhar found value in Shields' golf venture.

"Hanging out off the field helps," Farquhar said. "I think we do a good job of that."

Giolito, who came up in the Nationals system, says the nature of professional ballplayer life, with the long hours, frequent travel and periodic confinement, can be challenging in maintaining healthy attitudes toward teammates. Playing golf in a group is a way to break away from the monotony and the emotional lags.

"When we get on the road, there's kind of a tendency for guys to do their own thing and sit in their hotel room on a cold day," Giolito said. "We decided we'd get out there, have some fun, hang out. When you play golf, you're hanging out with the same people for like four, five hours, but it's away from the field, away from baseball. We're not talking about baseball, we're just talking golf and about our lives. Just hanging out. That kind of stuff is super-important because that's the kind of chemistry we have in our clubhouse. We're all very close, like a family."

Some players are closer than others. Farquhar said he got a chance to spend time on the course with teammates he didn't realize even played golf, like Narváez and Infante, who are from Venezuela. It's funny, too, because Farquhar represents something of a clubhouse bridge between the Latino and non-Latino groups on the White Sox. Farquhar fluently speaks conversational Spanish, and his mother is from Venezuela. Golf as a subject just hadn't come up much in clubhouse conversation with him since Farquhar joined the Sox this past August.

"That was my first time golfing with Latin players," Farquhar said. "I was shocked at their ability to play. I didn't think they would score as well as they did. I was shocked at how good they were and how much fun we had. Infante had only golfed a couple times and Narváez — I think he picks up the sticks a little more."

The group split into three-man teams and played best ball, with the Farquhar, Fulmer and Narváez side beating the trio of Shields, Giolito and Infante on the 17th hole. Narváez, who refers to golf as a "hobby," plays with right-handed golf clubs, whereas he hits lefty in the batter's box, a quirk that came about after growing up a righty in all sports. He didn't start hitting lefty until his first pro season. But you might say Narváez has the essential attitude for golf.

"I really enjoy playing golf, even though I'm bad," Narváez said. "I'm just kind of having fun out there. You can always learn something from each shot. But I'm really good at my sport, which is baseball."

It hasn't always been Farquhar's experience in baseball that Latino players hang out, inside or outside of the clubhouse, with their non-Latino counterparts.

"On most teams that I've been on, there's almost two separate sides of the clubhouse," Farquhar said. "You have the Latin guys and the American guys. I'm sure our guys appreciated being included in something like that."

Farquhar's assertion about segregated MLB clubhouse culture is not uncommon.

"There is a tendency, just because of the cultural differences and language barriers, that Latin players will kind of be in their own group or niche," Giolito said. "We don't really have that here. Everyone's on the same page, so if we go out to dinner, or to play golf, or whatever, it doesn't matter. We're all going to be, like, 'Come along, come along.'"

Latino influences in the Sox clubhouse are strong, with about half of the roster hailing from Caribbean countries and Mexico. Latinos are among the biggest names and key players, too, including slugger José Abreu and second baseman Yoán Moncada, who are from Cuba. Two of their top three prospects, Eloy Jiménez and Luis Robert, hail from the Dominican Republic and Cuba, respectively.

Common ground for all of the players is Renteria, a bilingual manager who, Abreu says, sets a tone of belief, trust and pluck. Engaged and helpful with details, but not a micromanager.

"That's our duty, to work hard, to prepare the best way that we can, and we owe that to Ricky," Abreu said. "He's the guy who has done all the hard work for us, and he's the guy who has given us the confidence and the right mental approach for this season, and we're buying into it."

Renteria's presence provides an amount of comfort for Latino players; Abreu says there's no reason any player on the roster should feel like he couldn't take a problem to the ultimate authority in the clubhouse. To that end, Giolito says White Sox players make an effort to talk out potential problems before Renteria or the coaches need to mediate. The White Sox have a full-time Spanish-to-English interpreter for interviews with the media, but he's used sparingly among the players themselves. When they talk to each other, they tend to talk with each other.

"Most of these guys speak fantastic, fluent English anyways," Giolito said. "That really helps. At the same time, we as American players have to do our part to make them feel welcomed. I try to learn Spanish here and there so I can have an understanding."

Narváez voiced no complaints about how he's been treated as a person coming from Latin America, nor did he want to tell any stories he might have heard about what it's like for others on other teams. The invitation from Shields definitely meant something to him, though.

"I appreciated the invite from my teammates because it meant that they were thinking about me a little bit," Narváez said. "In my case, it helps me a little bit more because I speak more English than some. And Farquhar is Venezuelan so we can speak a lot of Spanish to each other."

Shields said he wasn't consciously thinking about anyone's first language or homeland customs when gathering buddies for the golf outing.

"I haven't been on a team where we haven't been brothers in the clubhouse," he said. "Latin, whatever race you are, it doesn't really matter. We're all human and we're all playing baseball. I love everybody that I play with. Hopefully they think about that with me as well. That [other stuff] doesn't mean anything to me."

Winning, of course, means a great deal. Shields possesses no illusions about the place that chemistry has in the Sox's course load. The White Sox won't become the Royals of 2014 and 2015 just because they feel good about themselves, like each other, and want to win.

"We can sit here and say it all day long, but at the end of the day, we've got to produce, we've got to get the wins and move forward," Shields said. "But right now we're going in the right direction."

Shields isn't the manager, but he certainly carries himself like a pacesetter, and with an obligation to be inclusive and to set a good example. It's an authority he brings, but also one that other players have given him. Fulmer, a recent first-round pick from Vanderbilt, likened the White Sox clubhouse attitude to that of a collegiate team, and Shields to something akin to a coach.

"A tremendous human being," Fulmer said. "A guy that's helped us so much. One of the things was to make us feel comfortable. He's that veteran guy you always want to have around because he's there to guide you through. He's a personable guy. He is our leader and we all understand that. We just surround him as much as we can and soak in as much as we can."

Like a favorite professor, special uncle, or an extra dad. Some on the team have taken to calling the 36-year-old veteran "Papa Shields." Add it to the list of nicknames, which includes old favorite "Big Game James" and "Juego G," a much-cooler sounding interpretation, honestly, via the Spanish speakers in the clubhouse.

"I'm definitely the veteran on this team, for sure, there's no doubt," Shields said. "It's awesome. These kids are great. They come up to me, ask me a lot of questions. More than anything, they're just fun dudes. They're fun dudes to hang around with, and I'm enjoying myself."

Fulmer sounds like a grateful student.

"I always remember him as that veteran guy who helped me settle in," Fulmer said.

One day, perhaps, it will be Fulmer who will take his young teammates golfing on a cold day in the Midwest just to get them out of the hotel.

By the Numbers: Lucas Giolito's control issues continue as José Berríos baffles White Sox once again

By James Fegan / The Athletic / Apr. 13, 2018

MINNEAPOLIS — Lucas Giolito's various battles to command his arsenal, Tim Anderson losing his balance on a throw home to try to nab Byron Buxton, Aaron Bummer trying and failing to stall Joe Mauer from reaching history ... all were irrelevant landmarks on a crisp night at Target Field, where José Berríos pitched far too well for much else to matter.

Most pitching prospects take time and patience, because most pitching prospects are not Berríos, who at 23 years of age, overwhelmed the White Sox (4-8) for seven scoreless innings in a 4-0 Twins victory that could be matched only by the last time Berríos dominated the White Sox for seven scoreless innings, which was Aug. 30.

“He did a really nice job,” manager Rick Renteria said. “I thought he attacked the strike zone. His breaking ball was working very, very well again. It was a good fastball. He was able to elevate and use it in different ways. You've got to tip your cap to that young man there. Our guys kept trying to grind, kept trying to get him up to where they could handle him a little bit more. They weren't able to get a whole lot going.”

Berríos probably won't pitch again this series, which is a source of solace.

3: Hits for the White Sox on the night. They were all singles. This isn't a very interesting stat, but what can be said? They did not do much.

8-12: The strikeout-to-walk ratio for Giolito three starts into the 2018 season after he walked five and struck out three in 6 1/3 innings. Given that volume of extra runners on the bases and the amount of balls in play, it remains some kind of impressive that he's kept the White Sox as competitive as he has in his outings without being able to command his offspeed stuff consistently. That said, this obviously won't do over the course of a full season.

“Just pulling off and flying open on pitches,” Giolito said of his control issues. “The big thing is I have to do a better job of commanding the fastball. That's my No. 1 pitch. When I throw it right, it gets guys out. I have to do a better job staying through it.”

26.7 percent: Swinging-strike rate for Giolito's slider and curveball command on the night, which is pretty good all things considered. One of the things to consider is that his command for both —especially the curveball — really did not emerge until the latter half of the game. The fact that his fastball sat in the 89-92 mph range is still an issue. So is the fact that he lacked control of it. But the offspeed stuff reared its head eventually.

42.1 percent: Strikeout rate for Yoán Moncada after an 0-for-4, three-strikeout night. Before the game, Moncada reiterated that he's comfortable in the leadoff spot and is confident results are going to come, but the way he stared at an 0-2 fastball down the pipe in the ninth inning certainly did not look like a hitter who is in sync. Renteria had a meeting with Moncada in his office after the game. He said a day off for Moncada to watch from the sidelines and gather himself is possible, but that he had made no determination whether it was imminent.

“He's by no means a finished product, and I want him to understand he's not a finished product, but I want him to understand there are certain things you have to do,” Renteria said. “You have to maintain focus, and if you're not hitting, you've got to catch the ball, and if you're not catching the ball you better hit. But you can't fail at both, because then there's a problem. So I think a lot of it has to do with learning, focusing and continuing to concentrate.”

11: Career-high number of strikeouts for Berríos, who was absolutely untouchable all night. If Giolito or Reynaldo López or Dylan Cease or anyone in the White Sox's system ever gets to the level of command with the curveball that Berríos showed while getting 12 swinging strikes on the pitch alone, that would be a developmental coup. Berríos is good, is what I'm saying.

2,000: Hits for Joe Mauer in a superb career full of timely, back-breaking hits against the Chicago White Sox, much like a two-run single he bounced through the middle off Aaron Bummer in the seventh for No. 2,000. Apparently a lefty specialist perhaps on the level of Chris Sale is needed to retire Mauer in a critical situation. The White Sox offense didn't show many signs of life to encourage the idea that a comeback from 2-0 was in the works, but at least Giolito's already muddled stat line could have been saved from further harm.

“I didn't know he was at 1,999,” said Giolito, who struck Mauer out during his first crack at 2,000 hits. “I remember when I had that, his [third] at-bat when I struck him out, I remember the crowd was up and cheering. I was like, ‘Oh, man. The crowd is really into it right now. They want to get that run across.’”

Meet the White Sox's new backup catcher: Tyler Saladino

By James Fegan / The Athletic / Apr. 13, 2018

MINNEAPOLIS — The goofy smile on Tyler Saladino's face as he strode through the White Sox clubhouse in full catcher's gear was pretty indicative that he's fully aware of how unusual the team's current predicament is. That or he's just keeping warm in anticipation of the snowy forecast this weekend in Minneapolis.

"I might just leave it on all day, feels great," Saladino said. "We don't want anything to happen that would need me to be in the ballgame. But given the situation, I'm just trying to be best prepared as I can. It is kind of silly when you see me walking around in the gear. But at the same time I take it seriously."

A day after his right cleat got caught in the dirt and he left a game against Tampa Bay with knee soreness, starting catcher Wellington Castillo felt more discomfort while on the plane to Minneapolis. Another doctor visit reaffirmed what his initial MRI revealed: no structural damage of note. But the lack of progress in how he feels left the Sox starting Omar Narváez for a second straight game on Thursday. Narváez played 90 games last year, so him starting is not the issue. With Kevan Smith already nursing an ankle sprain, the Sox are in limbo as they wait on a player who is day-to-day, and remain an injury — or even an ejection — away from putting their utility infielder behind the plate.

"I don't know exactly where he stands right now, but if he isn't able to go then I mean, I already got the signs down and practicing putting down some signs too," said Saladino, who caught Carson Fulmer's side for practice. "But I feel like I'm pretty much as prepared as I can be if it were to happen."

The Minnesota weather will probably solve the issue for the Sox. Most discussion at Target Field is centering around whether even half of this four-game set will be able to be played.

Carlos Rodón was always an extreme long shot to return before May 28, and even in spring training general manager Rick Hahn tamped down expectations that he could make a major league start before June, so placing him on the 60-day disabled list to make room on the 40-man roster for Chris Volstad to be added to the bullpen isn't much of an ordeal.

Thyago Vieira would have been one of the only options in the Triple-A bullpen if the Sox didn't have the ability to create a 40-man spot. The Brazilian flamethrower indeed throws extremely hard, and has struck out five in 2 2/3 scoreless innings so far in Charlotte, but a league scout who watched him recently pushed back against the idea that his control or mechanical consistency is ready for a major league role.

Volstad, who was fellow Sox reliever Danny Farquhar's roommate during a showcase in Wilmington, North Carolina back when they were high school seniors, doesn't have the "future closer" ceiling that Vieira would offer, but he did throw 14 scoreless innings in the Cactus League and provides some more capability for long relief alongside Héctor Santiago. Either way, the Sox have already shown by sending down Juan Minaya and now Gregory Infante that they will have a surprisingly short leash.

"When we broke camp, one of the things we talked about was they had earned an opportunity beyond the spring for some of these guys that didn't go as well as everybody would have wanted," manager Rick Renteria said. "The idea was to give them an opportunity to get here, break with the club and see what they could do in the first couple of outings or whatever is they got in terms of performance. It didn't go as well as we would have wanted it to. With the guys that performed well with some history from behind, and still in the minor leagues with us, we have the ability to make the switch to allow the guys to get back on track."

Pitching prospect Dane Dunning's torrid start at High-A Winston Salem (0.79 ERA in 11 1/3 innings, 16 strikeouts and two walks) is bringing back memories of the way he tore through the competition at Low-A Kannapolis last April and earned himself a promotion in a month. Sending him back to Winston-Salem always seemed like an especially cruel decision toward hitters across the Carolina League, and now that Triple-A Charlotte has lost one of its starters, perhaps someone will get moved up from the loaded Double-A Birmingham rotation, and make room for Dunning to get challenged.

Jordan Stephens is 25 and is repeating the level at Birmingham, and it shows. Stephens' strong six-inning debut (one earned run on two hits, seven strikeouts) built off a strong Cactus League performance. He looks like the first Baron to get a trip to North Carolina at this rate.

Dunning gave some credit to James Shields for showing him a new grip for his curveball during spring training, and Shields put on a clinic with slow curves of all types against Tampa, including a version that clocks well under 70 mph that pitching coach Don Cooper calls "The Slow Boy." At this point, Shields' fingerprints are visible all across baseball given his work with David Price, Alex Cobb, Chris Archer, Jake Odorizzi and others, but he said he views it as part of his role as a teammate, not as a mentor.

"I'm always around guys and talking to them and interested in what they're doing," Shields said. "Dane asked me how I threw my curveball. He was kind of struggling with it a little bit in spring training and sometimes year-to-year you don't really realize that you're changing your grip midseason or even year-to-year. You don't really realize it. You go into spring training naturally thinking you're going to have a good curveball and maybe it's just a little grip adjustment from the year

before. I just showed him what I do and he ended up throwing it in a bullpen and feeling really good with it. I'm glad he's doing well."
