



WHITE SOX HEADLINES OF July 7, 2018

White Sox find pop too late in loss to Astros

By Scott Merkin / MLB.com / July 6, 2018

HOUSTON -- The 11-4 Astros victory over the White Sox Friday night at Minute Maid Park reinforced a point already well known to the baseball public.

Houston has a much stronger team than Rick Renteria's crew. Need further proof? The Astros have outscored the White Sox by a 42-9 margin over five straight wins this season.

In reality, the Astros, sitting at 59-31, are better than a good number of teams. But another reality is the White Sox, at a season-low 28 games under .500 with a 30-58 mark, aspire to arrive where the defending World Series champions currently reside at the end of this rebuild.

Friday's outcome became another pothole on what the White Sox hope is the road to perennial contention.

Lance McCullers Jr. (10-3) no-hit the White Sox for 5 1/3 innings and set a career high with 12 strikeouts. The White Sox had one baserunner over the first five, when Kevan Smith was hit by a pitch to start the third. McCullers fanned seven of the first 10 hitters and struck out Leury Garcia to open the sixth.

Adam Engel followed with a single to right, and singles from Yoan Moncada and Yolmer Sanchez followed to break the shutout. But with runners on first and third and one out, Jose Abreu hit into an inning-ending double play.

"That young man was [throwing a] heavy dose of breaking balls today. Sharp with some tilt, angle, mix in a fastball every now and then. Was more predominantly breaking ball," said Renteria of McCullers. "Elevated his fastball at times or started you off high and/or running. But stayed with his breaking ball predominantly. It was pretty good."

White Sox starter Reynaldo Lopez lasted 4 2/3 innings, although he gave up just three runs. Lopez walked five and recorded only three swinging strikes among his 97 pitches, according to Statcast™. Tim Federowicz delivered the big hit off of Lopez, a two-run double to right-center in the fourth, leaving Lopez screaming into his glove in anger as he backed up the play at third base. Lopez topped out at 97.1 mph with his fastball, but didn't have his best stuff.

"I didn't feel my arm as strong as it used to be. I couldn't command my pitches," said Lopez through interpreter Billy Russo. "Kind of battling with the strike zone. I tried to do my best, but it wasn't a good outing."

"Too many issues, too many balls. I tried to do my best. I didn't get a response from my arm every time I wanted to throw hard or throw as good as I wanted. It was tough. Just one of those nights, a bad outing. I don't feel anything wrong physically. Just one of those nights."

It was still a three-run game entering the eighth before the Astros erupted for seven off of Hector Santiago. Three of those runs came on a long home run by Evan Gattis, while two others scored when Avisail Garcia overran Yuli Gurriel's fly ball to right with the bases loaded and one out. Gurriel was credited with a sacrifice fly, but Garcia also was charged with an error.

Avisail Garcia hit a two-run homer with two outs in the ninth and in the next at-bat, Daniel Palka launched a solo shot the opposite way off of Brad Peacock to complete the scoring. The duo have combined to hit eight home runs and eight of the team's last 11 since Monday.

MOMENTS THAT MATTERED

Big trouble avoided: The Astros scored on run in the third inning, but it could have been worse without Lopez picking off Tony Kemp at second for the inning's first out. Kemp walked, easily swiped second and was moving toward third when Lopez spun around and caught him leaning with a perfect throw to Moncada at second base.

SOUND SMART

On May 26, Abreu knocked out four hits against Detroit to raise his average to .319. Over his last 38 games, Abreu is 27-for-145 (.186) and has watched his average dip to .262. He has three home runs and 20 RBIs during that stretch.

HE SAID IT

"We were hoping he would still be able to minimize his pitches and remain a little bit more efficient. Once he got in trouble in the fifth, we had to get him out." -- Renteria, on Lopez.

UP NEXT

James Shields (3-9, 4.12 ERA) is scheduled to make his 19th start of the season, seventh on the road and second against the Astros in a 3:10 p.m. CT game Saturday against Charlie Morton. Shields has lasted at least six innings in 13 of his last 14 starts, posting a 3.15 ERA over his last 10 trips to the mound.

Cease, Basabe to play in Futures Game

By Scott Merkin / MLB.com/ July 6, 2018

HOUSTON -- Right-handed pitcher Dylan Cease and outfielder Luis Alexander Basabe have been selected to participate in the 2018 SiriusXM All-Star Futures Game, which will be played at 3 p.m. CT on Sunday, July 15, at Nationals Park in Washington, DC.

Cease, the No. 4 White Sox prospect, per MLB Pipeline, will be play for the U.S. team. Basabe, the No. 13 White Sox prospect, will suit up for the World Team.

"To have those two guys join it, it's awesome for them, awesome for the organization," White Sox manager Rick Renteria said. "We're excited for their opportunity to show the world who they are and what they're about, and I hope they have some success, allow themselves to shine and have some fun."

It was last year when Michael Kopech struck out Yoan Moncada during this same competition in a battle between two of the White Sox top young players competing on that day for different teams.

Cease is 9-2 with a 3.13 ERA and 96 strikeouts in 83 1/3 innings over 15 starts between Class A Advanced Winston-Salem and Double-A Birmingham.

Basabe is slashing .251/.351/.452 with 12 doubles, seven triples, nine home runs and 34 RBIs in 72 games with the Dash and Barons. Cease came from the Cubs as part of the Jose Quintana trade, while Basabe was part of the four-player return from Boston for Chris Sale.

Garcia can strengthen the core

Avisail Garcia doesn't pay attention to trade rumors involving his name. He doesn't hear anything from friends or family on the matter either.

"No, they don't talk about it," Garcia said. "They know I don't pay attention to that and I don't like people talking to me about that. Only rumors.

"I've been through the same thing every year. It's not something new. I don't pay attention to all of that. I control what I can control. Working hard, doing my best during the game, and whatever happens, happens. It's business. One day you are here, the next day you never know. So let's see what happens."

Since returning to action from the disabled list on June 22, Garcia leads the Majors with the highest hard-hit rate per Statcast™. Garcia's percentage checks in at 63.4 for balls hit with an exit velocity of 95+ mph, leading Nick Markakis (60.5), Manny Machado (60) and Hunter Renfroe (60).

Garcia has erased a slow start with a .339 average, 1.123 OPS, six home runs and nine RBIs upon getting healthy, and focusing again on not expanding his strike zone, which worked so well during his 2017 All-Star campaign. He could become a trade candidate for contenders, but at 27, even with only one more year of control after this one, he could be part of the team's rebuilding core.

"For sure. I'm only 27," Garcia said. "I'm old because I've been here [six] years. I feel part of it. So, let's see what happens. I came here trying to work hard and do my best and be an example for all these guys."

Anderson out of action

Shortstop Tim Anderson was sidelined Friday after being hit by a Chris Devenski pitch in the left forearm during the eighth inning of Thursday's 4-3 loss. Anderson was available to pinch-run and thought he would be back Saturday.

"It's a little sore," Anderson said before Friday's game. "Swollen a little bit, but I feel a lot better than yesterday."

"Usually there is concern because there is residual effect of the blow, but he feels he can go out and do what we need him to," Renteria said. "We're just taking a precautionary note. If I need to use him I will converse with him, but he's doing well."

Third to first

- The White Sox sent outfielder Nicky Delmonico on a rehab assignment to Birmingham on Friday. Delmonico has been on the disabled list since May 19 with a fractured third metacarpal on his right hand. He sustained the injury after being hit by a Matt Moore pitch on May 18 vs. Texas.

Dylan Cease, Luis Alexander Basabe to represent White Sox in Futures Game

By Vinnie Duber/ NBC Sports Chicago / July 6, 2018

The White Sox could've sent a whole bunch of prospects to the Futures Game, but they'll settle for a pair of representatives at the All-Star event later this month in Washington.

Dylan Cease and Luis Alexander Basabe were announced as members of the rosters for the annual contest that puts the best prospects in the game on display two days before the All-Star Game. Cease will play for the U.S. Team and Basabe for the World Team.

Cease, acquired in last summer's crosstown swap with the Cubs, has been tremendous this season and was recently promoted from Class A Winston-Salem to Double-A Birmingham. In his 13 starts with Winston-Salem, he posted a 2.89 ERA with 82 strikeouts in 71.2 innings. In his two starts since arriving at Birmingham, he's had one bad start (five runs allowed in 4.2 innings) and one good one (one run allowed in seven innings).

Basabe, part of the trade that sent Chris Sale to the Boston Red Sox, had a fantastic start to the season with Class A Winston-Salem and has since been promoted to Double-A Birmingham. In his first 24 games of the year, he slashed .315/.422/.630 with five homers and 20 RBIs. He's slowed since and wrapped his time at Winston-Salem with a .266/.370/.502 slash line. In 14 games at Birmingham, he's slashing .196/.274/.268.

The White Sox contingent could have looked a lot different if not for a spate of recent injuries that have put Eloy Jimenez, Luis Robert and Dane Dunning — three of the organization's top six prospects — on the shelf. Instead it will be Cease, the organization's No. 4 prospect, and Basabe, No. 13, heading to D.C.

White Sox's Avisail Garcia takes businesslike approach to trade-deadline rumors

By Paul Sullivan / Chicago Tribune / July 6, 2018

White Sox right fielder Avisail Garcia doesn't really care about hearing his name in trade rumors, and he expects it to happen again as the July 31 trade deadline nears.

"I've been through the same thing every year," Garcia said Friday before the Sox's 11-4 loss to the Astros. "It's not something new. I don't pay attention to all of that. I control what I can control. Working hard, doing my best during the game and whatever happens, happens."

"It's business. One day you are here, the next day you never know. So let's see what happens."

Garcia — who hit his eighth home run in 33 games Friday, a two-run shot with two out in the ninth — isn't expected to be dealt and isn't a free agent until after 2019. But he's one of the Sox's more valuable pieces and thus could become a wanted man.

Either way, Garcia, who came to the Sox from the Tigers in 2013 in the three-way deal that sent Jake Peavy to the Red Sox, doesn't discuss the possibility with his family.

"They know I don't pay attention to that and I don't like people talking to me about that," he said. "Only rumors."

White Sox shortstop Tim Anderson doesn't think hit-by-pitch was related to April fracas with Astros

By Paul Sullivan / Chicago Tribune / July 6, 2018

White Sox shortstop Tim Anderson was on the bench for Friday night's game against the Astros after being hit by a pitch in the left forearm Thursday night, though manager Rick Renteria said it was precautionary.

Anderson said before the game it was "sore" and "swollen a little bit" but much better than Thursday.

He said his legs worked fine, so he was available to come off the bench, but he didn't play in the Sox's 11-4 loss. Leury Garcia started at shortstop.

While some wondered if reliever Chris Devenski's plunking was payback for an earlier incident between Anderson and the Astros, Anderson said it "was just a pitch that ran in," adding he thought it was "accidental."

Anderson and Astros pitcher Justin Verlander had a war of words in April at Sox Park when Verlander criticized the shortstop for attempting to steal two bases with his team trailing 5-0.

"That's probably not great baseball," Verlander remarked.

On Friday, Astros starter Lance McCullers hit Kevan Smith leading off the third before Sox starter Reynaldo Lopez plunked Alex Bregman with two out in the bottom of the third. Bregman came around to score on Yuli Gurriel's RBI single.

Sox reliever Chris Volstad hit Gurriel in the seventh.

Extra innings: Lopez lasted 4 2/3 innings, allowing three runs on six hits and five walks. The walks tied his season high, set April 8 against the Tigers. ... Outfielder Nicky Delmonico was sent to Double-A Birmingham on a rehab assignment.

White Sox, looking to the future, routed by Astros

By Daryl Van Schouwen / Chicago Sun Times / July 6, 2018

HOUSTON — Class AA Birmingham right-hander Dylan Cease and outfielder Luis Basabe were selected Friday to represent the White Sox in the Futures Game during All-Star week.

For an organization that is all about the future, news such as this will get a headline almost every time.

Especially on nights such as Friday, when the Sox lost 11-4 to the defending World Series champion Astros. The result dropped the Sox to 2-6 on their road trip and to 30-58 for the season.

"To have those two guys join [the Futures Game], it's awesome for them, awesome for the organization," manager Rick Renteria said. "We're excited for their opportunity to show the world who they are and what they're about, and I hope they have some success, allow themselves to shine and have some fun."

Renteria managed his own futures game at Minute Maid Park, as he does every time 24-year-old Reynaldo Lopez takes the mound for the Sox. During a season in which 2015 first-round draft pick Carson Fulmer was demoted from the starting rotation to

Class AAA Charlotte and Lucas Giolito has avoided the same fate despite struggling with a 6.93 ERA and 54 walks in 89 2/3 innings, Lopez has set himself apart on a team hoping to form a championship-caliber rotation for the future.

Lopez wasn't all that good against the Astros, searching in vain for his good fastball, getting through only 4 2/3 innings and needing 97 pitches (53 strikes) to do it. He allowed three runs and six hits, walked five and struck out two.

"It wasn't a good outing," Lopez said. "Too many issues, too many balls. Every time I wanted to throw hard or get more, my arm didn't respond. It was tough."

Reynaldo López labors as White Sox overmatched by league's best innings

By James Fegan / The Athletic / July 7, 2018

The last time the Astros faced Reynaldo López, back in April, he held one of the best offenses and most contact-oriented lineups in baseball to just one run, but they worked him for 100 pitches in five innings as he walked four and struck out just two.

Whatever subtlety there was in that game about the unfavorable nature of the matchup between a young fireballer who flaunts much more pure velocity than vertical rise and command on his four-seam fastball, and a Houston lineup that trotted out six hitters with strikeout rates under 20 percent, was beaten away over the course of 4 2/3 innings that dragged out like a knife in an 11-4 loss Friday night.

López walked five as the Astros repeatedly drew out plate appearances long enough to benefit from López's frequent misfires with his four-seamer. And while his slider backing up Friday night made for an amusing incident in which he struck out Evan Gattis in the second inning, because Gattis was anticipating slider movement and whiffed when López's spinner stayed in on his hands, not having his most reliable swing-and-miss offering at his command spelled doom against such an already difficult lineup.

As he has mostly done this year despite a profile that shows too few strikeouts, too many extra baserunners from walks and not enough weak contact on the ground to mitigate it, López wriggled his way through keeping the game close and respectable even while getting pulled with two outs in the fifth, trailing 3-0. The garish final score had nothing to do with him and everything to do with more miserable defense from the most error-ridden group in the league, and Héctor Santiago getting torched in garbage time three days after he was heroic and untouchable in extra innings. Three straight hits in the sixth even brought up the go-ahead run in the form of José Abreu, but it turns out Lance McCullers against Sox hitters was the far more severe mismatch.

Throwing an endless wave of hard-knuckle curves, McCullers took a no-hitter into the sixth and got 16 swinging strikes on 58 curves while striking out 12 in seven mostly untouchable innings. Maybe Eloy Jiménez will come help fix it at some point. Maybe the more contact-oriented Avisail García will continue his absurd run of power (he launched his seventh home run in 11 games with two outs in the ninth). But right now the Sox are on track to lead all of baseball in strikeouts and post one of the worst strikeout-to-walk ratios of all-time.

On its own, a high strikeout rate isn't entirely poisonous, just like Yoán Moncada having a strikeout rate over 30 percent doesn't doom him to be a bad hitter, it just demands he does other things really well. The Sox don't have an awful offense by any means (94 wRC+), certainly not for a rebuilding team, but series against elite pitching staffs like Cleveland and Houston find them frequently looking overmatched and incapable of stringing baserunners together in any meaningful way.

For sure, these pitching staffs do this to a lot of teams, but for a young, hustle-happy Sox club that prides itself on being able to stay competitive even while taking its lumps, the White Sox have been unable to make themselves dangerous in these 2018 showdowns with the level of competition they expect to conquer in a few years. At least until Brad Peacock comes in and gives up back-to-back homers to García and Daniel Palka with two outs in the ninth.

How James Shields has sparked a resurgence since he last faced the Astros 12

By James Fegan/ The Athletic / July 7, 2018

CINCINNATI — Questions about being a mentor to the young pitchers still have a healthy lead, but questions about re-inventing himself by dropping his arm angle are surely catching up in the standings for what James Shields is most frequently deluged by in this, his 13th major league season.

Since Shields last faced the Astros — a miserable April night in Chicago that not only saw him get shelled and raised his ERA to 6.17, but is the same evening Danny Farquhar collapsed in the White Sox dugout — most of the questions have been about unadulterated success. In that time he's covered 90 1/3 innings over 14 starts (more than 6 1/3 per outing), and held opposing hitters to a .207/.269/.363 batting line, lowering his season ERA to 4.12, which is a fair bit lower than the American League average for starting pitchers (4.28). It's also all a sort of victory against the central conceit at the root of his adjustment that he's fighting against.

"The one thing I'm fairly disappointed with in the first half this season is my walks," said Shields, whose 9.4 percent walk rate this season is higher than anything he posted in Tampa Bay or Kansas City. "The tradeoff with throwing with that arm angle is it's a little bit more difficult to pound the strike zone and repeat your delivery. So it is a tradeoff, but again I'm trying to refine that and trying to perfect that."

His walks are actually down from his past two seasons in Chicago, even while managing the wildness, but most importantly, his home run rate has been cut in half, dropping from 2.25 per nine innings from his Sox debut through the end of last season to just 1.03 this season. While he's sacrificed a bit of control and a bit of velocity from switching out of

an over-the-top delivery, he spent the offseason honing his two-seamer, hoping the increased life on it would give him something he could challenge hitters with in the zone when he falls behind in the count.

Shields pushed back on the notion that he actually had to rebuild his entire arsenal in the wake of dropping his arm angle, or how he throws all his pitches, even if some of his usage habits have changed in correlation. He's been tinkering with different angles for years, so nothing was brand new when he made the switch, but he did need to work to find the ideal release point on every pitch. That especially affected his changeup, which doesn't work much at all when his release point is out of sync and has only started to return to heavy use in the past month.

As a result, he built up reliance and trust in his two-seamer in the meantime. It hasn't actually boosted his ground-ball rate, but with only 1.83 inches of carry, he's getting more sinking action on the pitch than any point of his career, and it's given him a better tool for inducing contact — ideally, weak contact — than a four-seamer that sits around 90 mph these days.

"I've had a lot more movement on my balls than I've had in the past, and so I'm getting behind in the count," Shields said. "But I'm able to get deeper into games because I'm able to get early outs quicker, and I'm able to be more aggressive with it as much as I possibly can. It definitely helps with getting guys out in less than three pitches."

That's one part of his newly viable game worth watching, but obviously the big, looping curveballs, the harder of which grades out as one of the best pitches in baseball, are another. Shields' arsenal is so wide and varied that pinning him down on a single smoking gun for his resurgence is difficult. It's difficult, at least, if you ignore the obvious straightforward answer he keeps providing: he's healthy.

"Last year was the first year I've ever been on the DL," said Shields, who has noted in the past that there were multiple times earlier in his career when he could've gone on the DL but did not. "Having a torn lat isn't easy to come back from and my body just wasn't responding and I was overcompensating. This year I got my body back in order this offseason, it's been good so far."

The Southern California native and resident has spoken about focusing on flexibility in his workouts this offseason, doing more low-impact stuff like swimming, and his cryotherapy business in San Diego is still running. Aside from the fact that we all witnessed him endure such grave struggles for two years, Shields possesses a lot of the hallmarks — varied arsenal, the ability to change speeds, willingness to adapt and tremendous conditioning — of a pitcher who should age relatively well. And relative to the number of pitchers who are able to coax out league average seasons at age 36, he might be doing just that.

"I never had any doubt that I was going to feel better," Shields said. "I worked really hard in between starts and I work really hard in the offseason as far as my workout regimen and my routine, so I trusted that process to be able to get my body back in the shape I needed to and to get my arm strength back. It's all about recovery. This year I'm recovering a lot quicker. My body is responding to me this year compared to the last couple years and it's been good."