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White Sox acquire Alonso in deal with Tribe

Veteran is Machado's brother-in-law; expected to split time between first base, DH

By Scott Merkin / MLB.com | December 15, 2018

CHICAGO -- It doesn't take much of an internet search to find out first baseman Yonder Alonso is the brother-in-law of premium free agent Manny Machado.

That same search turns up that the White Sox are reportedly meeting with Machado this coming week. So, the addition of Alonso via trade from the Indians in exchange for Minor League outfielder Alex Call, a move made official on Saturday morning, figures to help the recruitment cause.

But general manager Rick Hahn, speaking on a conference call on Saturday before going to work the scoreboard at one of his sons' youth hockey games, pointed out this deal was much more than a family affair.

"Fundamentally this is a baseball deal," Hahn said. "We feel this makes us better."

"We like how Yonder fits in between the lines and in the clubhouse, and helps further what we're trying to accomplish in 2019 and beyond. The potential ancillary benefits to it in terms of his relationships with others really can't be part of pulling the trigger in making the decision to acquire a big league player, especially a veteran one with this type of contract commitment."

Alonso, 31, hit .250 with 23 home runs, 83 RBIs, 19 doubles and a .738 OPS in '18. He played 138 games at first base for the American League Central champions, and he will split time with Jose Abreu between first and designated hitter. Abreu, who enters his last year of White Sox contractual control, played 114 games at first and served as DH 13 times during an '18 campaign marked with a couple of late injuries.

Abreu has not been a huge fan of the DH role, and Alonso only DHd once in each of the past two seasons. But Hahn talked to Abreu prior to the trade on Friday, and he's excited to have his good friend join the team.

"If he had his preference, he'd play 162 games per year, all of them at first base," Hahn said of Abreu. "Ultimately as he's gotten older and he's seen the seven and a half or longer month grind as part of being a big leaguer, he knows there's benefit to being off his feet and pacing himself, so he can be strong and continue to be the powerful offensive force that he is at the big league level."

Alonso has an \$8 million salary for 2019 and a \$9 million option for '20 with a \$1 million buyout. Per Cot's Contracts, Alonso's 2020 option is guaranteed if he passes a physical after the 2019 season and has 550 plate appearances in 2019 or 1,100 plate appearances in '18-19 combined.

Plenty of contractual room exists for the White Sox even after adding Alonso's salary, as Spotrac has them just over \$33 million pre-arbitration for '19. This Alonso move, which followed the free-agent signing of catcher James McCann on Friday yet to be announced by the White Sox, might indicate a change in direction from fellow premium free agent Bryce Harper. Or the relationship between Machado and Alonso could be just an interesting side note.

Regardless of the potential ancillary benefits mentioned by Hahn, the White Sox are happy to add a player in Alonso, who they pursued via free agency last offseason and have scouted since his days at the University of Miami.

"He provides a nice balance in our lineup and has nothing but a great reputation in terms of his game preparation, his professionalism, and the element of veteran leadership he will add to our clubhouse," Hahn said. "We certainly feel like it improves us in 2019 and like the potential of having him around in 2020 as well."

Sources: White Sox sign James McCann

By Jason Beck / MLB.com | December 14, 2018

The White Sox didn't have to look far for catching help following the Omar Narvaez trade. They've reached an agreement with former American League Central foe James McCann on a one-year, \$2.5 million contract, a source confirmed to MLB.com.

The White Sox have not announced the agreement, which is pending a physical. Jeff Passan of Yahoo Sports was the first to report the agreement.

McCann is the second former Tigers catcher in three years to sign with the White Sox as a free agent after leaving Detroit, following in the footsteps of Alex Avila. The Tigers non-tendered the 28-year-old McCann last month, making him a free agent after four-plus seasons in Detroit -- spending the majority of the time as the Tigers' primary catcher.

McCann is a prime bounceback candidate coming off some of the deepest offensive struggles of his career. He batted just .220 (94-for-427) in 2018 with eight home runs, 39 RBIs and a .581 OPS, 72 points below his career clip. Much of his offensive production came in the first two months of the season.

Though McCann has traditionally been known as an effective hitter against left-handed pitchers, he hit just .176 (18-for-102) off lefties last year with 30 strikeouts and a .514 OPS.

McCann's struggles coincided with an offseason workout routine last winter that added muscle and bulk to his frame in hopes of helping him stay strong through the grind of his season. In terms of durability, it helped; his 114 games caught and 112 starts were both career bests, the former ranking him third among AL catchers.

Defensively, McCann has consistently been among the strongest catchers in baseball at controlling the running game. He threw out 36 percent of attempted basestealers last season, eight points above league average, and owns a 37 percent career rate. His pitch-framing skills drew varied ratings: While his minus-11 Framing Runs Above Average ranked 67th out of 85 Major League catchers with at least 1,000 pitches caught last season according to StatCorner.com, he sat in the middle of the pack among regular catchers in extra called strikes above expectations according to the Bill James Handbook.

When the Tigers non-tendered him, McCann tried to take a positive outlook on a chance for a fresh start.

"Could be a good thing, could be a neutral thing, and that's something that only time will be able to tell," McCann said earlier this month. "Moving forward, I'm extremely thankful and grateful for the time I had in Detroit, and I'm excited to see what the future holds."

In Chicago, he'll be part of a catching mix with Welington Castillo, working with a group of talented young pitchers. He'll also have a chance to face a Tigers pitching staff he knows well.

With meetings with White Sox and Yankees reportedly set for next week, who has best sales pitch for Manny Machado?

By Vinnie Duber / NBC Sports Chicago | December 16, 2018

While Bryce Harper met with teams in his hometown of Las Vegas during last week's Winter Meetings, fellow mega free agent Manny Machado is just embarking on his free-agent tour.

According to Fancred's Jon Heyman, the former Baltimore Oriole and Los Angeles Dodger will meet with both the White Sox and New York Yankees early next week.

Other reports have listed a total of six teams in on Machado: the White Sox, Yankees, Philadelphia Phillies and a trio of "mystery teams."

Heyman brings up an interesting point. Who has the advantage between the White Sox and Yankees in the race for Machado?

Machado has long been linked to the Yankees, especially since their starting shortstop, Didi Gregorius, had Tommy John surgery earlier this offseason. He's expected to miss multiple months of the 2019 campaign while in recovery mode. That opens up a hole on the Yankee infield, and at the position Machado most wants to play. After winning a pair of Gold Gloves as a third baseman with the Orioles, he slid over to shortstop in 2018 and has stated his preference to play there.

The White Sox already have a shortstop in Tim Anderson, one of the few players on the current major league roster who figures to be a long-term piece for the rebuilding South Siders. Anderson's improvement, particularly on defense, was one of the team's biggest positive takeaways from the 2018 season.

Does Anderson's occupancy of the shortstop position prevent the White Sox from signing Machado? Of course not. Machado is a great player, and he's the kind of guy you make room for. But it's a discussion surrounding the White Sox that doesn't necessarily surround other teams, including the Yankees.

The White Sox have greater financial flexibility than the Yankees, greater financial flexibility than pretty much every team out there with almost no long-term financial commitments to speak of. That allows them to offer the kind of gargantuan contract expected to be necessary to land Machado (and Harper, for that matter), though a recent report from ESPN's Buster Olney indicated the White Sox might not be willing to offer a record-breaking type deal. Certainly, though, the aggressive nature of their pursuits of Harper and Machado this winter makes the White Sox look willing to spend and spend big.

When it comes to Machado's now-infamous "Johnny Hustle" comments, in which the superstar professed his distaste for hustling in an interview with The Athletic's Ken Rosenthal, Yankees managing general partner Hal Steinbrenner told reporters last month at the GM Meetings "that ain't going to sell where we play baseball."

It's been an interesting hypothetical to guess how Machado's comments would play with White Sox manager Rick Renteria, who made a habit of benching players for not hustling throughout the 2018 season. Last week during the Winter Meetings, Renteria answered questions about the topic — without reporters bringing up Machado's name, of course — and said he won't be changing his ways just because a big-money player might play differently than he'd like to see.

"There are going to be situations in which I might have to have conversations with guys that are coming from the outside," Renteria said. "But I will venture to say this, I've said it enough publicly, they know how we want to play the game here. I think anybody who is thinking or contemplating becoming a White Sox, that we go about it a certain way.

"It's a little more difficult at the major league level to change an attitude of an individual if they've been doing that their whole life, if they're not giving you the effort all the time, absolutely. But it requires conversation. That person is that person. My job is to get the most out of that individual to the best of my ability.

"Will I be able to do that 100 percent? Probably not. But I'm going to give it a shot. But I've got to be creative and find ways to communicate with the players."

The biggest difference between the two teams is their current major league fortunes. The Yankees won 100 games last season, and the White Sox lost 100 games last season. The Yankees have a star-studded roster featuring young players like Giancarlo Stanton, Aaron Judge, Gary Sanchez, Miguel Andujar and Gleyber Torres, and they can pitch Machado on joining that group and starting a new Bronx dynasty beginning in 2019.

The White Sox have their own batch of young talent to pitch, and they think the lure of playing alongside Eloy Jimenez, Michael Kopech, Dylan Cease, Luis Robert, Yoan Moncada and others is as attractive as anything any other team can offer. But Machado (or Harper) perhaps wouldn't be joining a team on a playoff quest in 2019, likely signing up because of planned future success instead.

But one of Rick Hahn's biggest points made during his multiple Winter Meetings media sessions was that he's receiving plenty of positive feedback when making that future-focused pitch, that it's one players are listening to and finding value in.

"There's very bright days ahead," Hahn said. "Now again, it might be a year premature in terms of selling this club as a postseason contender, but we've spent a lot of time over the last couple of years to put us in a position where we very reasonably, or objectively we have a bright future ahead of us. And we've heard from a number of different players about their interest in being part of it, which I don't think should be surprising.

"There's been a lot of positive feedback in terms of the long term. It's funny because when you are talking about a shorter-term deal, like a one- or two-year deal, you are getting a response from a lot of the players like, 'Hey, we want to be part of the fun times, too. I'll just do something a little bit longer.' It can cut both ways.

"Definitely, the general consensus is one of optimism."

And here's one more pot-sweetener: The White Sox just made a trade for Machado's brother-in-law, Yonder Alonso, who's under team control for two more seasons. Hahn said that Alonso's relationship to other players didn't factor in the acquisition. But hey, only one team can offer Machado the opportunity to play alongside his brother-in-law for the next two seasons.

We likely won't get a Machado decision for a while, but we can guess what the teams' pitches will be. The question: Which one will Machado like most?

White Sox top prospect Eloy Jimenez likely to be shut down until spring training

By Paul Roulmeliotis / NBC Sports Chicago | December 16, 2018

Eloy Jimenez will be ending his winter ball a bit earlier than expected.

According to Bruce Levine of 670 The Score, the White Sox are likely to shut down Jimenez (quad injury) until spring training.

As Levine points out, the White Sox top prospect was scheduled to be shut down next week.

James Fegan of The Athletic reported on Saturday that Jimenez had been dealing with a quad injury and was day-to-day, so it's no surprise the White Sox want to play it safe with a guy they believe has superstar potential.

In eight games, Jimenez hit .448/.500/.759 for Gigantes in the Dominican Winter League.

White Sox acquire first baseman Yonder Alonso from Indians

By Dan Santaromita / NBC Sports Chicago | December 14, 2018

After a lot of rumors and not many moves at the Winter Meetings, the White Sox made a notable trade after everyone left Las Vegas.

The White Sox traded for first baseman Yonder Alonso from Cleveland. The team announced the move on Saturday.

"Alonso provides a proven offensive performer from the left side of the plate and he also brings a veteran presence both on and off the field," White Sox general manager Rick Hahn said in a press release. "Yonder has a solid reputation around the league as a professional and a great teammate."

Now that the trade is official, one thing worth noting with Alonso is that he is the brother-in-law of Manny Machado. This is after the White Sox were reportedly set to meet with Machado next week.

Outside of his connection to Machado, the trade is an odd fit without the context of the entire offseason yet. Alonso is 31 and coming off a bit of a down year by his standards. He hit .250/.317/.421 with 23 home runs and 83 RBIs last season with the Indians. The year before that he was an All-Star for the first time in his career while splitting the season between the Mariners and A's.

However, Alonso's 83 RBIs in 2018 were a career high. He is under contract for \$8 million in 2019 and has a \$9 million option (that includes a \$1 million buyout) for 2020.

The intriguing part of this is that it brings into question Jose Abreu's future with the White Sox. There have been rumors about the Cuban first baseman potentially being involved in a trade this winter. Alonso's addition means something has to give with the first base/DH situation. After non-tendering Matt Davidson

because he fell behind Abreu and Daniel Palka as players who only fit those two spots, adding another in Alonso wouldn't make sense unless Abreu or Palka are on the move.

USA Today's Bob Nightengale said that the White Sox have no intention of trading Abreu, for what it's worth.

Report: White Sox sign firmer Tigers catcher James McCann

By Tim Stebbins / NBC Sports Chicago | December 14, 2018

It's no Bryce Harper or Manny Machado splash, but the White Sox reportedly made a rather substantial move on Friday.

According to Jeff Passan of Yahoo Sports, the White Sox and former Tigers catcher James McCann have agreed upon a deal. The move is pending a physical.

Fancred's Jon Heyman reported that the deal is for \$2.5 million, while The Athletic's James Fegan said it is for one-year.

McCann, 28, made his MLB debut in 2014 and has spent his entire MLB career with the Tigers. He is a career .240 hitter and posted a slash line of .220/.267/.314 in 118 games/427 at-bats with the Tigers in 2018. While he hit just eight home runs, McCann reached double digits in 2016 (12) and 2017 (13).

Offensive numbers aside, McCann is a solid defensive catcher. Since 2015, he has ranked third or better in the American League in throwing out runners, finishing second in 2016-18.

McCann's 36.8 caught stealing percentage is third best by active catchers in MLB, only trailing Yadier Molina (40.7 percent) and Martin Maldonado (37.6).

Adding McCann helps the White Sox bolster their catching depth for 2019. This offseason has seen the team lose Kevan Smith to the Angels on waivers and Omar Narvaez in a trade with the Mariners that netted potential-closer Alex Colomé.

GM Rick Hahn calls trade for Yonder Alonso – Manny Machado's brother-in-law – 'a baseball deal'

By Mark Gonzales / Chicago Tribune | December 16, 2018

All in the White Sox family.

Despite Yonder Alonso being the brother-in-law of marquee free agent Manny Machado, White Sox general manager Rick Hahn said he had no ulterior motive to the acquisition of Alonso from the Indians.

"Fundamentally, this is a baseball deal," Hahn said Saturday during a conference call to elaborate on the trade of Alonso for minor-league outfielder Alex Call. "We feel this makes us better. We feel Yonder fits in between the lines, in the clubhouse and helps further what we're trying to accomplish in 2019 and beyond.

"The potential ancillary benefits to it, in terms of relationships with others, really can't be part of pulling the trigger and making the decision to acquire a big-league player — especially a veteran one with this type of contract commitment."

Hahn never mentioned Machado or Bryce Harper, the other major free agent on the market, by name. But it's no secret the Sox are pursuing each star player, despite the club having lost 100 games in 2018 and facing stiff competition from well-financed teams.

Nevertheless, the trade late Friday created some curiosity because Machado is married to Alonso's sister — and Alonso, 31, plays the same position as slugger Jose Abreu, who is entering the final year of his contract.

But Hahn insinuated Abreu and Alonso can co-exist, adding that Abreu was happy with the trade and that he and Alonso are friends who exchanged text messages Friday night after they learned of the deal.

"We feel (Alonso) provides a nice balance in our lineup and has nothing but a great reputation in terms of his game preparation, his professionalism and the element of veteran leadership that he will add to our clubhouse," Hahn said.

"We envision both he and Abreu getting the bulk of the (at-bats) between first base and the (designated hitter) spots. How that exactly breaks down will be a managerial decision and something Ricky (Renteria) can get into more detail with ... over the course of the season as things evolve."

Alonso's contract includes an option for 2020 — for \$9 million or a \$1 million buyout — that vests automatically if he has 550 plate appearances in 2019 or a combined 1,100 plate appearances in 2018-19. Alonso had 574 plate appearances in 2018, batting .250 with 23 home runs and 83 RBIs.

"We do view him as a nice fit over the both the 2019 and 2020 season," Hahn said.

Meanwhile, Hahn said Daniel Palka, who smacked 27 home runs and drove in 67 runs during his rookie season, could play more in the outfield. The 6-foot-2, 220-pound Palka started 40 games as the DH, 40 in right field and 22 in left last season and has worked this offseason to get in better shape to play the outfield, Hahn said.

"I know Daniel, at 27, doesn't want to be a full-time DH," Hahn said. "He still believes he can contribute on the defensive side of things."

The Sox and Indians started discussing Alonso only after Hahn and the Sox's contingent left the winter meetings in Las Vegas on Thursday. The Sox had been interested in Alonso since his college days at the University of Miami in 2006-08. The Reds selected him with the seventh pick in the 2008 draft — one pick ahead of Gordon Beckham.

The Sox pursued Alonso as a free agent last winter.

White Sox trade for first baseman Yonder Alonso, the brother-in-law of free-agent target Manny Machado

By Mark Gonzales / Chicago Tribune | December 15, 2018

The White Sox made a surprising move Friday night in their quest to upgrade their roster and lure free agents Bryce Harper or Manny Machado — or both.

The Sox acquired left-handed-hitting first baseman Yonder Alonso from the American League Central rival Indians, a source confirmed. The deal was finalized one day after the winter meetings concluded and while the Sox are in the midst of negotiations involving Harper and Machado, who is Alonso's brother-in-law.

There also is some intrigue because Alonso, 31, plays the same position as Jose Abreu. Alonso is scheduled to earn \$8 million in 2019 with a \$9 million option or \$1 million buyout for 2020. Abreu is projected to earn \$16 million in his final year as an arbitration-eligible player.

Alonso batted .250 with 23 home runs and 83 RBIs in 145 games for the Indians in 2018. He hit 51 home runs over the last two seasons with the Athletics, Mariners and Indians. Alonso was eighth among AL left-handed hitters with a .288 batting average with runners in scoring position.

The trade was formally announced Saturday, with the Sox sending outfielder Alex Call to the Indians, according. Call, 24, batted .248 with 12 home runs and 58 RBIs in 123 games between Class-A Winston-Salem and Double-A Birmingham.

“Alonso provides a proven offensive performer from the left side of the plate, and he also brings a veteran presence both on and off the field,” Sox general manager Rick Hahn said in a statement. “Yonder has a solid reputation around the league as a professional and a great teammate.”

The Indians have looked to shed payroll since the end of the season, so they were not looking for a high-level prospect in return for Alonso.

The Sox have been interested in Alonso since his days at the University of Miami. The Reds selected Alonso with the seventh pick in the 2008 draft, one spot ahead of former Sox infielder Gordon Beckham.

With the move, the Sox’s 40-man roster increases to 39.

White Sox agree to terms with James McCann, who started 112 games at catcher for Tigers last season

By Mark Gonzales / Chicago Tribune | December 14, 2018

The White Sox strengthened their catching depth Friday, agreeing to terms on a contract with James McCann, who handled the catching for the Tigers for most of the last four seasons.

McCann, 28, threw out 27 of 74 potential base stealers in 2018 for a 36 percent success rate and has earned the nickname “McCannon” for his throwing prowess. But the Tigers didn’t tender him a contract two weeks ago after he earned \$2.375 million in 2018.

McCann started 112 games at catcher last season and caught 987 1/3 innings. He could seize the majority of the catching duties from Welington Castillo; either way, the agreement assures the Sox of two catchers with plentiful major-league experience.

The 6-foot-3, 225-pound McCann batted .220 with eight home runs and 39 RBIs last season. His best offensive season was 2015, when he batted .264 with seven home runs and 41 RBIs.

The Sox drafted McCann in the 31st round in 2008, but he elected to attend Arkansas. He was a second-round pick by the Tigers three years later.

The deal will become official once McCann passes a physical examination. Jeff Passan of Yahoo Sports first reported the agreement.

What if White Sox don’t sign Bryce Harper?

By Daryl Van Schouwen / Chicago Sun-Times | December 15, 2018

And what if the White Sox don’t pull it off?

What happens if they don’t sign Bryce Harper?

What happens if, after all the intoxicating speculation about their dogged chase of the biggest free agent on the market, the Sox’ pursuit is blown up by a higher bidder?

National pundits are beginning to line up, touting the Sox as the favorites to sign the 26-year-old superstar outfielder to what likely would be the richest deal in baseball history. They’re not lining up en masse, but it has only taken a few to lift the yearning Sox fan base to higher heights of suspense by the day.

Eloy Jimenez (left) and Luis Robert at spring training. The White Sox have a deep stash of outfield prospects in their farm system. (John Antonoff)

But what if the Sox get a lump of coal in their black-and-white stockings this Christmas, leaving nothing more than Ivan Nova, Alex Colome, Yonder Alonso, James McCann and a replacement-level outfielder as their best gifts of the offseason?

Oh, the collective crash and groan that would befall Sox Twitter world, which has been whipped into a frenzy with dreams of Harper as the big-name centerpiece of the rebuild.

That would leave a mark.

Sox fans would need time to heal.

The Sox can say they tried, as they did for Alex Rodriguez, Masahiro Tanaka and other big free agents only to finish as runners-up.

If they don't get Harper, a lower-tiered outfielder will be signed or traded for as a temporary stopgap for their up-and-coming crop of outfielders in the farm system, arguably their deepest area of talent.

At least there would be that to fall back on.

Small consolation?

"We have an abundance of outfielders I'd consider average to above-average prospects," director of player development Chris Getz said. "We have some impact talent in the outfield."

That they do. There is prized prospect Eloy Jimenez, a star in the making in his own right who would form an imposing pair alongside Harper in the middle of the lineup and wrapped around center-field prospect Luis Robert in a future outfield. Jimenez, ranked No. 3 among all prospects by MLB Pipeline, and Robert, No. 44, top a classy crop of outfielders in the Sox' system.

Four more outfielders are ranked among their 14 top prospects: No. 9 Luis Basabe (acquired in the Chris Sale trade), No. 11 Micker Adolfo, No. 12 Steele Walker (their 2018 second-round pick) and No. 14 Luis Gonzalez.

That's a deep class, which could, should Harper get signed, be dipped into as trade assets for a finishing piece or two down the line when the Sox are ready to win. There is your best-case scenario.

But if Harper signs with — speculate where you may — the Phillies, Dodgers, Nationals or a late-breaking team to be named to the sweepstakes, gloom and doom for the Sox' outfield of the future would not be warranted.

Who knows? Maybe there's another young star in the making besides Jimenez on the way.

In any case, general manager Rick Hahn wants you to know the Sox are trying to put a current star in some prospect's way.

"There's only so much we can control in the end," Hahn said on the last day of an uneventful winter meetings. "Ultimately, free-agent players have earned the right through hard work and longevity in their career to choose their ultimate destination. And sometimes factors beyond money factor into these things, whether it's location, whether it's a wife's family's location, family preference, spring training, all sorts of factors that come into this decision at the end.

"All we can do is put our best foot forward, our most aggressive foot forward and try to convert on what we feel are necessary targets."

If they don't convert on Harper, there will always be next year, when Rockies star third baseman Nolan Arenado could hit the free-agent market. That would seem to line up with the Sox' window to win, anyway.

And for now, there's always Manny Machado. He is expected to meet with several teams, including the Sox, next week.

White Sox announce trade for Yonder Alonso

By Daryl Van Schouwen / Chicago Sun-Times | December 15, 2018

In a short-term move with potential implications for a bigger, long-term endeavor, the White Sox acquired first baseman Yonder Alonso from the Cleveland Indians.

The Sox gave up 24-year-old minor-league outfielder Alex Call in the trade, announced Saturday. It's an intriguing acquisition because Alonso is the brother-in-law of free-agent infielder Manny Machado, whom the Sox are expected to meet with this week.

General manager Rick Hahn wouldn't link the deal to Machado in any fashion, even though everybody else was doing so for obvious reasons.

"I hate to disappoint you, but I have not read every story that has mentioned his brother-in-law. ... It's out there, huh?" Hahn said in a lighthearted tone. "Fundamentally, this is a baseball deal. We feel this makes us better. We like how Yonder fits between the lines, in the clubhouse, and he helps further what we're trying to accomplish in 2019 and beyond.

"The potential ancillary benefits to it in terms of his relationship to others really can't be part of pulling the trigger and making a decision to acquire a big-league player, especially a veteran with this type of contract commitment."

Also, the Sox already have a highly regarded first baseman in All-Star Jose Abreu, who has one year left on his contract. Hahn talked to Abreu before the deal was announced and said Abreu was "enthusiastic" about the trade.

"He's probably the ultimate team guy, and he felt good about the addition of a good player and someone he's good friends with," Hahn said.

Manager Rick Renteria will determine how time is divided between Abreu and Alonso at first base and designated hitter, the latter a role Abreu doesn't care for.

"Jose just wants us to win," Hahn said. "He also knows there is benefit from getting off his feet some time."

The Sox have hinted all along they would prefer to keep Abreu, so the trade doesn't necessarily signal a desire to move what figures to be a \$16 million salary through arbitration. Alonso, 31, who will earn \$8 million in 2019, could be used in a first base/designated hitter rotation with Abreu.

"Alonso provides a proven offensive performer from the left side of the plate, and he also brings a veteran presence on and off the field," Hahn said. "Yonder has a solid reputation around the league as a professional and a great teammate."

After non-tendering corner infielder/DH Matt Davidson, who hit 20 home runs in 2018, the Sox seemed to be opening more opportunities for left-handed-hitting outfielder Daniel Palka, who hit 26 homers with a .240/.294/.484 batting line.

Palka struggled defensively at the corner outfield spots, but Hahn said "there's certainly the chance [Palka can be a regular outfielder]."

“At age 27, Daniel doesn’t want to be a full-time DH,” Hahn said. “He still believes he can contribute on the defensive side of things, and he has worked hard this offseason already. He told [hitting coach Todd Steverson] recently he’s back down to his college weight.

“We like what he brings in terms of his power, and we feel his offensive game will improve as he rounds that out as a pro.”

The Sox agreed to terms with free-agent catcher James McCann on a one-year deal Friday. Hahn had said acquiring a catcher was on his to-do list this offseason, but adding a first baseman such as Alonso came as a surprise, considering the Sox’ fondness for Abreu, 31, and his valued leadership.

Alonso, a left-handed bat who is better defensively than Abreu, will be under club control for 2020 with a \$9 million option. After batting .250 with 23 home runs and 83 RBI in 145 games, his move to another club appeared imminent after the Indians traded for first baseman Carlos Santana and first baseman/outfielder Jake Bauers on Thursday.

Machado and Bryce Harper are the two biggest free agents on the market, and the Sox are pursuing both. And with only \$33 million in pre-arbitration salary commitments for next season, they have the payroll flexibility to afford at least one of them.

Would they commit to \$50 million or more for two players for one season, the likely combined cost for Harper and Machado for one season? Moving Abreu would be one way of creating even more space. Acquiring Alonso suggests they’re leaving no stone unturned in a bid for Machado.

In the end, they may end up with neither. So while going after Harper and Machado as long-term, nine-figure pursuits, the Sox continue to check off short-term needs for 2019. McCann’s one-year deal, for a reported \$2.5 million, will be announced pending a physical, a source said. The Sox also traded for starting pitcher Ivan Nova on Tuesday and for reliever Alex Colome last week.

Call batted .248/.345/.415 with 12 homers and 58 RBI between Class A Winston-Salem and Class AA Birmingham in 2019. The Sox are stacked with outfield prospects at the A and AA levels, and Call, a 2016 third-round draft pick, is not ranked among the Sox’ top 30 prospects.

White Sox sign catcher James McCann

By Daryl Van Schouwen / Chicago Sun-Times | December 14, 2018

The White Sox addressed their need for a second catcher Friday by agreeing to terms with free agent James McCann.

The one-year deal, for a reported \$2.5 million, will be announced pending a physical, a source said.

McCann, 28, who can control a running game with the best of them, batted .220/.267/.314 with eight homers and 39 RBI in 118 games for the Tigers in 2018. His career numbers in five seasons in Detroit are better — .240/.288/.366 hitting line and .653 OPS.

The Sox have Welington Castillo under contract for \$7.5 million next season with an \$8 million club option for 2020. They traded Omar Narvaez to the Mariners for relief pitcher Alex Colome last week and lost Kevan Smith to the Angels on a waiver claim, creating a need for a second catcher while waiting for prospects Seby Zavala and Zack Collins to develop.

“Long term, we’re still very optimistic on how Zack Collins and/or Seby Zavala will fit in for us,” general manager Rick Hahn said this week. “They’re not ready yet, they’re going to need some more time, and we want to make sure that, as with all the other of our prospects we feel good about, that they’re not rushed.”

Zavala, 25, is expected to open the season at Class AAA Charlotte. He batted .258/.317/.418 with 13 homers and 51 RBI in 104 games split between AA Birmingham and Charlotte while Collins, 23, the No. 10 overall pick in 2016, batted .234/.382/.404 with 15 homers, 68 RBI in 122 games at Birmingham.

The right-handed hitting McCann will be coming off a down year offensively after batting .253/.318/.415 with a career-high 13 home runs in 112 games with the Tigers in 2017. Against lefties last season, McCann batted .176/.229/.284, and the Tigers declined to tender a contract after he was paid \$2.375 million.

Defensively, McCann has thrown out 37 percent of base stealers during his career, which is excellent. His blocking and framing numbers are below average, however.

In any event, McCann serves as an adequate complement to Castillo. While it remains to be seen how manager Rick Renteria will have them share the workload, it's reasonable to expect Zavala, and perhaps Collins, will get major league time in 2019 barring any setbacks. Zavala, who led Sox minor leaguers in homers two years ago, might be closer because of his age while Collins, at No. 8 in the Sox system, is ranked higher among prospects. Zavala is ranked 22nd.

Both prospects, while still needing polish behind the plate defensively, are thought of enough offensively to get some work at first base.

"It's more versatility, and it's something we intend to explore here in the coming months with both Zack and Seby," Hahn said.

The Sox drafted McCann out of high school in the 31st round in 2008. He attended Arkansas and was drafted by the Tigers in the second round in 2011.

White Sox trade for Manny Machado's brother-in-law, who also plays baseball

By James Fegan / The Athletic | December 14, 2018

Yonder Alonso has a decent enough shot to be a solid contributor for the White Sox next year. The 31-year-old left-handed first baseman was an All-Star in 2017, and Baseball Prospectus' shiny new DRC+ metric (Deserved Runs Created Plus) rated him as an above-average hitter (His DRC+ was 106, which means he was expected to produce six percent more runs at the plate than the league average hitter) during a 2018 season that looked like a fall back to Earth (.250/.317/.421). For a middle of the order hitter, his walks and contact profile are encouraging if his first half of 2017 power returns, and a \$9 million option (which vests if he gets 526 plate appearances) for 2020 allows him to be more than a purely short-term acquisition if he's productive.

"We certainly view it as having the potential to (vest) given his past playing record," said general manager Rick Hahn in a conference call. "Knock on wood he stays healthy, that option would vest and we do view him as a nice fit over both the 2019 and the 2020 season. If for whatever reason the option doesn't vest, then we have the flexibility of exercising it and making an assessment at the end of the next season about how he fits going forward. We certainly feel like it improves us in 2019 and like the potential of having him around in 2020 as well."

But this is a big offseason for a White Sox front office that has pledged not to waste time or resources for short-term moves. So upon The Athletic's Ken Rosenthal reporting that they have traded for Alonso, the fact that the Cuban-born first baseman's sister Yainee is married to free agent Manny Machado — normally a talking point fit for message board speculation — is fair game for The Athletic speculation that he could be used for recruiting a superstar relative to the South Side. If this is really going to be an offseason that sees the White Sox competing for top of the market free agents, maybe it will take them getting acting like a college basketball coach to get it done.

"Fundamentally this is a baseball deal," Hahn said. "We feel this makes us better. We like how Yonder fits in between the lines and in the clubhouse and helps further what we're trying to accomplish in 2019 and

beyond. The potential ancillary benefits to it in terms of his relationships with others really can't be part of pulling the trigger in making the decision to acquire a big league player, especially a veteran one with this type of contract commitment."

As Hahn alludes to, college coaches don't typically need to shell out between \$8-\$17 million to bring on a family member for recruitment, so it's certainly not a calculation you would expect a big league team to make. Alonso is certainly capable enough of earning his keep on his own. But on its own merits, while this is not a bad acquisition by any means, it creates roster questions to navigate for the sake of adding a player that's more of a nice rebound candidate and clubhouse presence than a seismic upgrade.

Cleveland is happy to use the White Sox's payroll flexibility to shed Alonso's salary, so the prospect cost of freeing Alex Call from the Sox' massive glut of Double-A outfielders is light and there are no near-ready first base/designated hitter types in the high minors Alonso will be blocking. But Alonso has always played first base, and José Abreu adores playing first base (or merely detests DH-ing), so one or both of the Cuban first basemen will need to adjust to life with a lot more DH-ing with it, provided the Sox's attitude about trading Abreu did not undergo some sudden flip. (Hint: It didn't.)

"I spoke to Pito yesterday before the trade was announced," said Hahn, who sees no issues putting Abreu and Alonso in a timeshare. "He was enthusiastic. He's probably the ultimate team guy and he felt great about the addition of not only what he felt was a real good player but someone that he's good friends with. He was very positive about the addition at that time yesterday afternoon. It was my understanding he was texting with Yonder last night as well. They were sharing each other the enthusiasm about playing together going forward."

Even if those two coexist fine, Daniel Palka's rookie campaign was one of the 2018 White Sox offense's few offensive bright spots, and he is left-handed like Alonso. He's been working to lose weight this offseason, and did extensive extra practice to improve his outfield defense, but pairing both he and Eloy Jiménez (since his defense was claimed to have kept him in Triple-A) in the outfield corners could put a strain on Adam Engel, let alone a less fleet of foot centerfielder. Palka had also been working on his first-base defense, but perhaps he'll take it easy on that for a bit.

It's December, and the White Sox are adding value, not filling out their Opening Day lineup, which is as Hahn pointed out multiple times, is Rick Renteria's job. There are functional matters to address, as they did by signing backup catcher James McCann to a one-year deal (pending a physical) earlier on Friday per a source, but squeezing Palka out of a defensively optimal role is probably not a concern large enough to stall the entire offseason, or even just a small, reasonable trade at this point.

And given the goals of this offseason, acquiring Alonso is probably not a big enough of a landmark to grade the White Sox progress toward them. Obviously the division rival that dealt him to the Sox did not view him as a sea-changing piece, even if the increased supply of professional at-bats on the South Side will be noticeable and appreciated. What follows from here will determine how this deal is remembered, both for the Sox and for Machado-Alonso holiday gatherings.

Busy day for White Sox: Alonso acquired in trade, McCann signs one-year deal

By Staff / Daily Herald | December 14, 2018

As he left Las Vegas Thursday, White Sox general manager Rick Hahn sounded far from satisfied with the one move made at the winter meetings -- acquiring starting pitcher Ivan Nova in a trade from the Pirates.

"We still have a fair amount of work to do, and even if we are able to convert on something big, there's still going to be work behind it over the coming years to get us where we need to be," Hahn told mlb.com.

The GM didn't waste any time getting back to work.

Friday afternoon, Yahoo Sports' Jeff Passan reported the White Sox signed catcher James McCann to a one-year contract, pending a physical.

Over five seasons with the Tigers, McCann hit .240/.288/.366 with 40 home runs and 177 RBI in 452 games.

While prospects Zack Collins and Seby Zavala gain another year of experience at Class AAA Charlotte, McCann moves into the backup role next season behind No. 1 catcher Welington Castillo.

Friday night, Hahn struck again.

First reported by watchstadium.com and later confirmed by a source, the Sox acquired Yonder Alonso in a trade from the Indians for a minor-league player, reportedly outfielder Alex Call.

While the motives behind getting McCann are crystal clear, the Alonso deal has some layers.

In nine seasons with the Reds, Padres, A's, Mariners and Indians, Alonso has played 879 games, 847 of them at first base.

Alonso has only been designated hitter for 7 games, so it looks like the White Sox have a logjam at first with Alonso and all-star Jose Abreu, who intensely dislikes being DH.

That's what makes the deal interesting. Alonso -- who batted .250 with 23 home runs and 83 RBI for Cleveland last season -- is owed \$8 million for 2019 with a vesting club option for 2020 worth \$9 million that includes a \$1 million buyout.

With a projected arbitration salary of \$17.9 million in 2019, trading Abreu would save the Sox close to \$9 million.

Abreu's name has come up in trade rumors since the White Sox started their rebuild two years ago. With Alonso in the fold, moving Abreu would open up even more payroll room for the Sox to add an impact free agent like Bryce Harper or Manny Machado.

Slowed by injuries last season, Abreu batted .265 with 22 home runs and 78 RBI. From 2014-17, Abreu batted .301 and averaged 31 home runs and 103 RBI.

Another interesting point regarding Friday night's trade? Machado is married to Alonso's sister, Yainee, and both players live in Miami.

The White Sox are expected to meet with Machado and his representatives next week.

AP source: McCann agrees to 1-year contract with White Sox

By Jay Cohen / Associated Press | December 14, 2018

CHICAGO -- The Chicago White Sox answered one of their offseason questions on Friday, agreeing to a \$2.5 million, one-year contract with catcher James McCann.

The White Sox had an opening at the position after trading Omar Narvaez to Seattle on Nov. 30 for reliever Alex Colome. They also lost Kevan Smith when he was claimed off waivers by the Los Angeles Angels in October.

Zack Collins and Seby Zavala are coming up through the minors, but the addition of McCann allows the White Sox to move slowly with the catching prospects. They also have Welington Castillo on their major league roster.

A person with direct knowledge of the situation confirmed to The Associated Press the deal for McCann on condition of anonymity because the contract is pending a physical. Yahoo Sports first reported the agreement.

The 28-year-old McCann hit .220 with eight homers and 39 RBIs in 118 games last season with Detroit. The rebuilding Tigers didn't offer him a contract for the 2019 season, making him a free agent.

McCann was selected by the White Sox in the 31st round of the 2008 draft, but he decided to go to the University of Arkansas instead. He then was drafted by the Tigers in the second round in 2011.

McCann made his major league debut in September 2014 and spent his first five seasons with Detroit, batting .240 with 40 homers and 177 RBIs in 452 games. He set career highs with 13 homers and 49 RBIs in 2017.

White Sox reportedly acquire Yonder Alonso in trade with Indians

Alonso hit 23 home runs, and is the brother-in-law of free agent star Manny Machado

By James Neveau / NBC Chicago | December 14, 2018

The Chicago White Sox have reportedly added another power bat, acquiring first baseman Yonder Alonso from the Cleveland Indians.

The trade was first reported by streaming service Stadium and was later confirmed by The Athletic's Ken Rosenthal.

Alonso, who spent the 2018 season with the Indians after stops in Cincinnati, San Diego, Oakland, and Seattle in his career, hit 23 home runs and drove in 83 RBI in Cleveland last year.

The most interesting part of the trade is who Alonso is related to. The first baseman's brother-in-law just happens to be highly-prized free agent Manny Machado, who is reportedly set to meet with the White Sox next week.

Aside from his family, Alonso's place on the White Sox could lead to questions about the futures of several players. Alonso plays the same position as Jose Abreu, who is set to become a free agent after next season, but both could split time between first base and designated hitter if the team opts to keep both.

The move could also mean less playing time for Daniel Palka, who appeared in 47 games as a designated hitter last season.

For the White Sox, 'The times they are a-changin' – from losing to winning

By Robert Kuenster / Forbes | December 15, 2018

The White Sox brass packed their bags Dec. 13 and departed the 2018 Baseball Winter Meetings in Las Vegas and headed for sweet home Chicago. Packed in those bags was a trade for veteran right-handed pitcher Ivan Nova from the Pirates for minor league pitcher Yordi Rosario and future considerations.

But those meetings also laid the groundwork for some more rebuilding moves to put the White Sox in position to move up in the A.L. Central Division in 2019 which is controlled, at the moment, by the Cleveland Indians—who are remodeling a club that has a championship window that is closing rapidly.

The White Sox signed catcher James McCann of the Tigers, who is a sturdy, reliable performer. General manager Rick Hahn then made a deal with the Indians for slugging first baseman/DH Yonder Alonso for minor league outfielder Alex Call.

Alonso, who clubbed 23 homers with 83 RBIs in 2018 and established a career-high mark of 28 homers with 67 RBIs in 2017, is the brother-in-law of Manny Machado.

Machado's name has been linked with the White Sox as one of the club's top free-agent pursuits.

As of December 14, the White Sox have some talented names to include in their lineup in Jose Abreu, Alonso, Tim Anderson, Yoan Moncada, Yolmer Sanchez, and Daniel Palka. Add Machado, top prospect Eloy Jimenez and the improving Adam Engel to the equation and the Sox have a lineup that could do some damage.

The young pitching staff will need some more veteran presence besides Nova and the bullpen can be upgraded further than the addition of late-inning specialist Alex Colome, who has 96 career saves over the last three seasons.

With the White Sox having just over \$54 million committed in payroll for 2019, they have some money to spend and the ability to make offers to two of the most sought-after free agents on the market in Machado and outfielder Bryce Harper.

"We've had a number of conversations on a number of different fronts," Hahn said. "All you have to do is type White Sox into Twitter or White Sox rumors and you see all sorts of interesting ideas being floated about, some of which are more accurate than others but we are approaching this with a wide-open frame of mind and a number of interesting conversations."

That is encouraging to all White Sox fans to see the club pursuing big names and players who will put a charge into the team's future.

"Top prospects are certainly highly valued," Hahn said, "some of the price points on the free-agent market you understand why young, controllable impact talent is of great value to clubs. It also allows when you have that impact talent on your roster to reallocate your resources in other ways."

The deal for Alonso was rumored to be a bargaining chip for the Sox to land Machado, but Hahn denied that was the reason for acquiring the productive slugger.

"We're pleased to add Alonso to our club. We feel he provides a nice balance in our lineup and has nothing but a great reputation in terms of his game preparation, his professionalism, and the element of veteran leadership that he will add to our clubhouse. We envision both he and Abreu getting the bulk of the at-bats between the first base and DH spots over the course of the season. We feel he will improve us in the short term and he's one of those players who will have a potential lasting impact on the young players as they continue to grow and learn how to be winning big-leaguers.

"Fundamentally this is a baseball deal. We feel this makes us a better team. His relationship with others really can't be part of pulling the trigger and making the decision to acquire a big-league player, especially a veteran one with this type of contract commitment."

A historic move in signing Machado or Harper would certainly change the club's budget for future years, but a team-changing move of this magnitude would bring an explosive bat to the White Sox along with instant credibility to a team in transition from losers for the last six years to a serious contender for future title runs.

The Machado and Harper corners are both rumored to be searching for 10-plus years on a contract worth more than \$300 million.

"There's been a lot of positive feedback on long-term free agents," said Hahn. "It's funny though because when you're talking about a short-term deal like a one or two-year deal, you get a response from a lot of the players saying, 'Hey we want to be a part of the fun years too, so let's do something a little bit longer.' So, the negotiations can work both ways.

“Definitely the general consensus is one of optimism. There is a very deep understanding on the other side of the table about what we’re about and where we’re going.”

That is the important selling point the White Sox have in luring big-name stars to Chicago’s southside. The club has young stars that will shine at the major league level and adding veteran leadership with star power on the offensive, defensive and pitching sides of the game will reinforce that the White Sox will be a contending team sooner rather than later.

Regardless of what happens before the 2019 campaign starts on March 28, the White Sox are in position to win and they will add to the club in a big way to be a serious contender for the A.L. Central Division, the A.L. pennant, and a World Series title in the near future.

White Sox fans have to keep the faith and believe in the Bob Dylan tune, “The Times They Are a-Changin’.”

Jon Heyman: Harold Baines Hall of Fame criticism is over-the-top, immature

By Jon Heyman / Fan Cred Sports | December 13, 2018

LAS VEGAS, Nev. — The criticism of Harold Baines’ surprise election to the Hall of Fame was in many cases over-the-top and in some cases embarrassingly immature. In a rush to destroy the decision of the Veterans Committee, some critics also destroyed Baines, who didn’t deserve that. It’s debatable whether he merits inclusion among baseball’s ultra elites, but a couple greats who faced him applauded that call, fighting back against the critics, many of whom were overzealous.

“He hit like .400 off me. He wore me out, so I thought he was a great player,” said Hall of Famer Jack Morris. “In my experience he is a Hall of Famer.” Dave Stewart, who won 20 games four straight years, said, “This guy could (bleeping) hit. And it didn’t matter who was pitching. That’s what makes a Hall of Famer.”

Morris wasn’t quite right about the stats, but Baines did have impressive at-bats against him; Baines’ career line against the longtime ace was .294/.380/.800 with three home runs, 19 RBI and 17 walks, with just 19 strikeouts in 137 at-bats.

Stewart went on to name a couple others who are favored by the new crowd he doesn’t see as Hall of Famers. But as for Baines, he does see him as Cooperstown worthy. Baines was painted by critics as a total product of longevity when the reality is that no one who isn’t really good gets to play 22 years. In those more than two decades, Baines had more than 2,800 hits, more than 1,600 RBI and made six All-Star teams.

I was in the vast majority who didn’t vote for Baines in the BBWAA tallies, when he peaked at six percent. But that doesn’t mean he didn’t have a fantastic career. He did. Perhaps the Veterans Committee is a little more lenient than the writers. And perhaps they bring a perspective of an older crowd. Perhaps that isn’t so terrible. The writers have been too tough (a lower percentage of players from the second half the 20th century have gotten in) and it isn’t so bad to allow the more experienced group to have their say. “I get what the issues are, especially guys stepping through the crack,” Morris said. “But that’s why you have second opinions.”

In one article condemning the vote — and Baines — the author even got in a shot at Morris, a favorite whipping boy of the new-stat guys (I voted for Morris 15 times out of 15 and he won a majority of votes his last years on the BBWAA ballot before the Veterans Committee voted him in), saying that Baines’ claim to fame, like Morris’, was a product of “durability.” Morris said durability isn’t such a bad thing, and I agree.

But my real issue there is that anyone old enough to have seen Morris’ career would understand that what he was known for was racking up wins — and big wins — and complete games as the No. 1 pitcher on three World Series winners, including 1991, when he won Game 7 with the most memorable pitching performances in modern history.

Perhaps Baines was fortunate to have a committee stocked with folks who were key to his career — White Sox owner Jerry Reinsdorf, former White Sox manager Tony La Russa and former Orioles GM Pat Gillick — and that is an issue with such a small group making these calls. No doubt that trio persuaded many of the others to favor Baines. But that doesn't change the fact he was an extremely good player for a very long period of time, one who was more appreciated in his day, and by his peers, than by the WAR counters.

"If you didn't play with him," Stewart said, "you couldn't have any idea how good a hitter he was."