



### **WHITE SOX HEADLINES OF DECEMBER 20, 2018**

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### **Thompson using Rule 5 letdown as motivation**

*Right-hander posted 1.55 ERA in Minors after converting to relief*

By Scott Merkin / MLB.com | December 19, 2018

CHICAGO -- The camera was set in selfie mode at home as Zach Thompson and his wife, Ashlyn, prepared to follow the Rule 5 Draft on MLB.com last Thursday at the close of the Winter Meetings.

With the announcement of Thompson's name, the 6-foot-7 right-hander in the White Sox organization would become a Major Leaguer somewhere else, and the Thompsons would have that moment of his instant promotion captured forever. The announcement of his name never came.

"You don't want to see that video," Thompson said with a laugh during a recent phone interview. "It was kind of a letdown just because it's one call away, hearing your name, and all of a sudden it's like, 'Wow I'm on a 25-man roster.' That aspect is really disappointing.

"But again, being a part of the White Sox now, it's still really cool. It went from depressing to, 'Wow, OK, all right, I have another opportunity with the Sox.' If I don't break with the club, I know Charlotte is a really nice park if that's where I end up going. I know all the guys there. I know what the rebuild is doing. It made me more excited than I was before the Rule 5."

Thompson's past few months have featured highs and lows, but they are steeped in something inherently positive -- his breakout 2018 campaign. The fifth-round selection in the 2014 Draft didn't find a niche during his first four years in the system as primarily a starter, but he posted a 1.55 ERA between stops at Class A Advanced Winston-Salem and Double-A Birmingham over 43 games as a reliever in '18. He struck out 76 and walked 29 in 75 1/3 innings, and then fanned 15 over 13 1/3 innings in 11 games for Glendale in the Arizona Fall League.

Those impressive numbers led to speculation of a 40-man roster add for Thompson, who turned 25 in October. When he was not protected on the 40-man, he became a potential Rule 5 pick.

"Honestly it was pretty disappointing," Thompson said of not being added to the White Sox roster. "I thought I had earned a spot on the 40-man, but it doesn't change my attitude about anything. I'm still going to work the same way I worked last year."

After the Rule 5 Draft was completed, White Sox general manager Rick Hahn praised Thompson.

"We like Zach," Hahn said. "Really when it comes down to setting the roster, you try to put it in order of guys you are concerned may get taken and survive at the big league level.

"Sometimes those guys don't check those boxes for you, and you take the risk they are getting exposed. But Zach has a real bright future, and we are glad he's still part of the White Sox organization."

Everett Teaford, the quality control coach in the White Sox system, also called following the Rule 5 and delivered "a really nice message" about the organization being stoked to have him back, per Thompson. He also was pleased to read the plaudits from Hahn, turning the brief Rule 5 disappointment into added motivation for reaching the Majors in 2019.

"Before this whole switch to a reliever, I didn't know if I would still be around," Thompson said. "Getting to become a reliever and this 2018 season going from nobody to having everyone talk about me, thinking I'm worthy of 40-man and Rule 5 picks, it was like 'Wow, I never would have thought I would have got to this point.'

"Honestly, the quote-unquote disappointment has lit a fire under my butt. It makes me want to work even harder to go into Spring Training and earn a spot."

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### **Inbox: Can White Sox land Machado, Harper?**

*Beat reporter Scott Merkin answers questions from fans*

By Scott Merkin / MLB.com | December 18, 2018

CHICAGO -- Take a guess as to the central theme of this week's White Sox Inbox. No need to guess: just read for yourself. Happy Holidays to all.

Do any offseason moves, realistic or highly unlikely, get the Sox in playoff contention this season ('19)? And will the bullpen be adequate in 2019? #GoBlue  
-- Jeff, Indianapolis, @IndyJeffrey

White Sox general manager Rick Hahn and others in the organization will rightfully caution this team lost 100 games in 2018, so making a jump to .500 in '19 represents significant growth. The American League Central is not exactly a powerhouse, especially behind Cleveland and the Twins, so the White Sox could make major strides if they are able to get Bryce Harper or Manny Machado via free agency, along with another reliever and possibly a veteran infielder.

As for the bullpen, adding Alex Colome was a big move for stabilizing high-leverage moments. Hahn is not done yet with that crew, but remember, some of the best future Chicago relievers might be players who are currently working as starters in the system.

Expectations for the White Sox in 2020 are high. If the White Sox front office cannot sign Harper or Machado, will this hurt the Sox for their 2020 run?

-- Jay, San Antonio, Texas

Absolutely not. This team isn't losing any of its top prospects if its strong pursuit of Harper and/or Machado doesn't translate into a deal. The White Sox also can add players via trade at the non-waiver Trade Deadline, and next offseason with trades and free agency.

Does signing a player like Harper or Machado speed up the rebuild or is Hahn still dead set on giving his Minor Leaguers the proper time to develop?

-- Dominick, Tacoma, Wash., @DominickTrezza

Harper and Machado are franchise-changing players. But even if the White Sox were to work out a deal with one of them, it wouldn't signal the final piece of the rebuild. Hahn has acknowledged there's more work to do overall, starting with the current offseason, and the prospects will get their proper time to develop as has been the plan for the past couple of seasons.

If the White Sox sign Bryce Harper, why shouldn't the marketing promo be this -- 2019 White Sox: We are allowed to have nice things?

-- Jon, North Liberty, Iowa, @jonny33baseball

Jon was good enough to include an image of Harper photoshopped in a White Sox uniform with this suggestion, and of course, it's playing off a comment Hahn made to the media during the Winter Meetings in Las Vegas. The White Sox probably need to add a picture of someone holding the 2005 World Series trophy with Harper, but otherwise, Chicago senior vice president of sales and marketing Brooks Boyer should take notice.

Is it too late to open up the stadium so 50,000 of us can be in there chanting, "Manny, Manny, Manny!!!!!!," tonight before he leaves? I can be there in about 3 hours.

-- Jamie, Fishers, Ind., @thejamiehopper

Good idea, Jamie. If Chicago agrees to terms with Machado, it should open the press conference to the fans. It would be that big of a moment.

Can the White Sox sign both Machado and Harper?

-- Robert, @rjdmichjr

They can. They are in pursuit of both, although never mentioning either one by name. They certainly have the payroll flexibility to do so, by design, with this offseason as a target. But I would say it's unlikely. I believe it's unlikely any team gets Harper and Machado.

If we miss out on the big fish this year, should we still go for someone this year, or save the money for next year? Thanks.

-- Ben, Lindenhurst, Ill., @Ben\_Shanahan

I don't know if it's necessarily about saving money. The White Sox are set up ridiculously well payroll-wise through 2023. Other potential free-agent additions have gone off the board during the Harper/Machado pursuit, but as has been mentioned many times before, Hahn will not be making moves just to make moves. If it makes sense in the fit for the team, then a move will be made.

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## **White Sox sign James McCann**

By Jason Beck / MLB.com | December 19, 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. The club announced the deal on Wednesday.

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.

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## **Did Manny Machado's meeting with the Yankees change anything?**

By Dan Santaromita / NBC Sports Chicago | December 19, 2018

White Sox fans have been anxiously checking their phones for the latest on the Bryce Harper and Manny Machado free agency sagas.

Wednesday was another key day in this on-going soap opera, at least for Machado. After meeting with the White Sox to begin the week, Machado met with the Yankees on Wednesday.

Just like NBC Sports Chicago grabbed footage of Machado entering Guaranteed Rate Field, SNY got footage of Machado entering his meeting with the Yankees.

The meeting reportedly took about 90 minutes. Compare that to Machado spending hours with the White Sox on Monday and reportedly staying overnight into Tuesday before heading to New York.

MLB Network tweeted out a video with some details of what went down. Yankees GM Brian Cashman and manager Aaron Boone were reportedly both a part of the meeting.

That seemed to cover the initial bit of rumors, news and gossip about how Machado's Bronx meeting went. Then two bits of info from national reporters came out at night.

Yankees contingent dined with Manny Machado, his wife and agent tonight in Manhattan. Yanks are interested and in the game, along with Chisox and Phillies. Tour was believed to be those 3 teams, no mysteries.

The second one from Nightengale is potentially no information at all, but at the same time could be very meaningful. On the surface, a number of teams are likely enamored with Machado and believe he would be a perfect fit. That's not really say anything at all. Then again, if the Yankees really want someone, who's going to want to bet against them?

Let's do this all again tomorrow. Machado is set to meet with the Phillies then in the third of his three known scheduled meetings.

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### **White Sox make James McCann addition official, check catcher off to-do list**

By Vinnie Duber / NBC Sports Chicago | December 19, 2018

The White Sox officially crossed another item off their offseason to-do list Wednesday.

It was reported at the end of last week that the White Sox were adding veteran catcher James McCann to the roster for the 2019 season, and the team announced the move Wednesday.

The White Sox had a hole to fill at catcher after the trade that sent Omar Narvaez to the Seattle Mariners in exchange for new closer Alex Colome. While there were rumors during the Winter Meetings that linked them to free-agent backstop Yasmani Grandal, the type of talent who would vault over Welington Castillo on the depth chart and be a long-term piece in the ongoing rebuilding project, general manager Rick Hahn said that adding a veteran backup was the most logical route to go, and that's what the White Sox get in McCann.

The 28-year-old McCann spent the past five seasons with the division-rival Detroit Tigers, where he turned in a .240/.288/.366 slash line in 452 games. He's coming off a .220/.267/.314 line in 2018, a season that saw his home-run total drop to eight after he smacked a combined 25 of them during the 2016 and 2017 seasons.

McCann had himself a good year behind the plate in 2018, though, ranking second among AL backstops by throwing out 24 would-be base stealers. His 36.5-percent caught-stealing rate was fourth best in the AL.

McCann will slide in behind Castillo on the depth chart as the White Sox new backup catcher. His deal is for only one season, giving catching prospects Zack Collins and Seby Zavala time to finish their developments in the minor leagues. With Castillo in the final year of his contract, should the White Sox decide not to pick up his option for 2020, the White Sox could have an entirely different pair of catchers a year from now.

The move brings the White Sox 40-man roster to 40, which means any further offseason additions will require some maneuvering there.

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## **Did the Yankees just copy the White Sox in their quest to sign Manny Machado?**

By Vinnie Duber / NBC Sports Chicago | December 18, 2018

"It's a copycat league," you'll often hear. And now the White Sox are getting copied. Kind of.

The White Sox raised a few eyebrows last weekend with their surprising trade for Yonder Alonso. Alonso, acquired from the Cleveland Indians, brings a ton of positives to the 2019 and 2020 White Sox. Their lineup needed a boost, and he gives it one. Their clubhouse needed some more veteran leadership, and he brings that. He allows Jose Abreu to take better care of his body and could have long-term benefit as a positive influence on young players.

But everyone looked past all that and noticed that he also happens to be Manny Machado's brother-in-law.

Machado is one of the two free-agent superstars the White Sox are pursuing, along with Bryce Harper, and the popular opinion on social media was that the South Siders brought in Alonso to help with their pitch to Machado. Heck, they announced the trade just two days before Monday's meeting with Machado.

Rick Hahn shot down all that, saying this was a baseball move, and the benefits of Alonso's arrival, independent of his relationship with Machado, are listed above.

But now the New York Yankees, just two days before their meeting with Machado, have gone and done something similar, hiring Carlos Beltran as a special advisor to general manager Brian Cashman. Why is it similar to the White Sox acquisition of Alonso? Machado's agent used to represent Beltran.

According to a source, Carlos Beltran is expected to join the Yankees as a special advisor to GM Brian Cashman. Beltran was repped by Dan Lozano of MVP Sports Group, who also reps Manny Machado. Will be interesting to see if Beltran is part of the Machado recruiting process.

If it's not coming through, this all a bit joking, of course. Hahn had a laundry list of reasons the White Sox traded for Alonso, and Beltran has his own appeal to any team after his lengthy big league career and his recent role as a veteran leader with the Houston Astros during their championship season.

But the coincidences — or conspiracies, if you will — are a little fun to point out.

For those who love a good conspiracy theory, #Yankees hired Beltran, who had the same agent (Dan Lozano) as Machado, day b4 they are to meet with Machado. Does that top #Whitesox acquiring his brother-in-law (Alonso) 2 days b4 their meeting? #Intrigue

Alonso and Beltran are assets to their respective teams. But if they can help sway Machado, well that will go down as a nice added benefit.

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## **The long-term benefits of the White Sox short-term offseason additions**

By Vinnie Duber / NBC Sports Chicago | December 18, 2018

If everything Rick Hahn is trying to do this offseason is focused on the White Sox long-term future, why have all three of their additions to this point been guys on short-term contracts?

Alex Colome, acquired in a pre-Winter Meetings trade with the Seattle Mariners, is under control for two more seasons. Ivan Nova, acquired in a Winter Meetings trade with the Pittsburgh Pirates, is under control for one more season. Yonder Alonso, acquired in a post-Winter Meetings trade with the Cleveland Indians, is under control for two more seasons.

None of that exactly screams "long term" for a team that isn't expected to contend for a playoff spot in 2019 and a team singularly focused on turning their rebuild into a perennial championship contender for years to come.

But Hahn has talked about these kinds of moves before. Not only do the Colome and Nova additions, specifically, fill the announced needs of the team for the 2019 season, but all three of these guys could make long-term impacts on the team's fleet of young players. It's their influence over the next two seasons that could help the White Sox develop the kinds of players who will power those planned future contenders.

"It doesn't necessarily have a long-term impact in terms of Nova's stay with the White Sox," Hahn said after making the trade for Nova last week. "We do think he has the makeup and the presence that he will have a positive influence on some of our young players, which is something we have talked about, about having a longer-term impact through the mentoring or teaching and the effect it has on the young kids. There's benefit to that as well."

Nova had a reputation as a leader type while in Pittsburgh, someone who younger pitchers looked up to. And he'll be expected to play a similar role on the South Side, perhaps the 2019 equivalent of what James Shields during his time with the White Sox. Nova said last week that he was happy to be a role model in Pittsburgh and he's looking forward to helping the young pitchers in Chicago, specifically mentioning Reynaldo Lopez.

His now-former manager echoed that reputation.

"I shared with Kenny Williams and Ricky Renteria, they're getting a good pitcher and a good man," Pirates manager Clint Hurdle said last week. "He's continued to evolve and work and learn. It wasn't like he showed up and thought he was a finished product leaving New York. He had to embrace a different kind of game. A different style of game coming for to the National League.

"He was the definition of a pro. He added value to us in the clubhouse, on the field with all our players. During game time he'd be huddled up with a group at the end sharing comments, sharing thoughts. He'll be a good addition."

Colome isn't quite as veteran as Nova and Alonso, but he provides a long-term benefit, as well, in taking pressure off the host of young arms in the White Sox bullpen. Having an established closer like Colome — the major league saves leader in 2017 — prevents guys like Ian Hamilton, Caleb Frare, Ryan Burr, Jose Ruiz and Jace Fry from getting thrown into the fire.

Meanwhile, Alonso could provide a similar benefit to younger players that his good friend Jose Abreu has in recent seasons. In addition to the potential benefit he could provide in helping to lure mega free agent Manny Machado, his brother-in-law, to the South Side, Alonso is a veteran who's learned from some of the game's best and can teach the young guys about winning.

"Well, it's a great role," Alonso said Monday of being a clubhouse leader. "It's pretty much being myself at all times. But for me personally, I've been on teams where I've had great mentors and great leaders and veteran presences going all the way back to the Cincinnati days with Joey Votto, Scott Rolen, players like that. When I went to San Diego, it gave me a chance to have Mark Kotsay along my side to help me out. Throughout my years with Robinson Cano and Nelson Cruz and many guys along the way who have helped me throughout the years be the player I am.

"For me, it's do my part, go out there every single day, make sure I'm ready physically and mentally. If I need to say something, I think I will say something, but again I'm here to obviously learn from all these guys that are here. I think we have a really good team, and I have no problem being that guy. I have no problem helping out, I have no problem just making waves and facilitate the game as much as I can to all these players.

"I know we have Abreu there, who is an incredible leader, an incredible baseball player. He's a very talented player not only on the field but in the clubhouse and outside. We keep in touch, and I know he's helped out a lot of guys. I'm going to be the band aid where I can go and really help out and go to work every single day and at the end of the day, it's just putting 'W's' on the board."

So while these — and the reportedly imminent addition of backup catcher James McCann — might not seem like the long-term moves Hahn has been dedicated to making this winter, they could still have a long-term impact on this White Sox rebuilding process.

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## **Top White Sox stories of 2018: Matt Davidson's turn as the South Side Shohei Ohtani**

By Vinnie Duber / NBC Sports Chicago | December 19, 2018

As the new year approaches, we're counting down the top White Sox stories from 2018.

Shohei Ohtani was expected to be the talk of Major League Baseball during the 2018 season, the Japanese import who was going to pitch and hit for the Los Angeles Angels.

Little did the baseball world know when the season began that the White Sox would have their own two-way sensation.

Matt Davidson started the season with a relatively expected bang, hitting three of the White Sox six home runs in their Opening Day win in Kansas City. After smashing 27 bombs in 2017, another power surge didn't come as much of a surprise — though it was an early highlight in what was anticipated to be the toughest season of the team's ongoing rebuilding project.

What did come as a surprise was what happened beginning in late June, when Davidson entered a game against the Texas Rangers as a pitcher.

Position players pitching was kind of all the rage in 2018, so Davidson's trip to the mound didn't carry the same kind of novelty it might have in seasons past. But then he retired all three batters he faced, striking one of them out. He turned in another 1-2-3 inning of relief work a month later against the Toronto Blue Jays, and then it became clear this wasn't just another example of a position player coming in for some bullpen-saving mop-up duty.

Davidson was serious about doing this on a more regular basis. He regaled reporters with his childhood dreams of being a big league pitcher. He saw an opportunity to be a more valuable commodity: a slugger who could help out his team in another way as managers look for more and more ways to rest their taxed bullpen arms.

"To be honest, I would love to maybe explore that idea," Davidson said after his second appearance of the season July 27. "Pitching was a dream. As a young kid, everybody wants to hit that walk off homer, right? I was the guy striking that guy out. That's how I first loved the game. My favorite player was Randy Johnson and doing that.

"So, it's something I would be interested in. I don't know if the game would necessarily allow that or something like that. It's something that is really close to my heart is pitching."

Davidson got a third inning in early August, facing the New York Yankees. And once more, he shut down the opposition, retiring three of the five batters he faced — including a strikeout of 2017 NL MVP Giancarlo Stanton.

Davidson continued to be very serious about wanting to take on a bigger pitching role, though he'll have to do that elsewhere after the White Sox non-tendered him this offseason.



While he might not have reached the level of Ohtani — who won the AL Rookie of the Year Award for his stellar work in both facets — and he might not be able to edge out the host of actual major league relief pitchers out there, team's always find value in versatility and the ability to do multiple things.

Maybe after being one of the highlights of the White Sox season in 2018, he could bring this kind of stuff to a major league mound in 2019.

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## **As Cubs prepare their own channel, look for White Sox, Bulls and Blackhawks to stuck with NBC Sports Chicago**

By Phil Rosenthal / Chicago Tribune | December 19, 2018

Let's say the Cubs indeed are going their own way, launching a channel with Sinclair Broadcast Group when their partnership in NBC Sports Chicago with the White Sox, Bulls and Blackhawks expires in October.

It's not as though the Sox, Bulls and Hawks are going away.

Neither is NBC Sports Chicago, if it can help it.

That's why, despite some flirtation with other media concerns (including Sinclair, per sources), it has been widely presumed Sox and Bulls Chairman Jerry Reinsdorf and Hawks Chairman Rocky Wirtz, co-owners of the United Center, would enter into a new Cubs-less partnership for their teams with NBC Sports Chicago.

It only makes sense.

NBC Sports Chicago has the established brand equity, channel positions and — although the Cubs almost certainly will do some poaching — talent, sales and production personnel needed to operate a TV and streaming service.

Even with some people lured away by the Cubs, the transition would be seamless, which is why few have ever doubted that's the way it would play out.

Bruce Levine of WSCR-AM 670 reported Tuesday that a deal would be announced soon.

Sources did not dispute that but indicated the deal hasn't been finalized.

That the Cubs are bolting should surprise no one. They've only been talking about it for close to 10 years.

The Ricketts family has swooned in anticipation of cashing in on a channel of its own since acquiring the team in 2009 from then-Chicago Tribune parent Tribune Co.

It was just a matter of waiting out the original 15-year partnership with what was Comcast SportsNet Chicago when launched in 2004 and now is NBC Sports Chicago.

October 2019 has been circled on calendars for some time now.

Since the Rickettses began dreaming of a Cubs channel, the Dodgers cut a lucrative deal for their own channel, which pays them a bundle but as a result costs cable operators so much per subscriber that few have agreed to carry it.

The result has been a virtual Dodgers TV blackout for many Southern California fans over the last five seasons, save for the occasional national telecast or game on local broadcast TV.

In Houston, MLB's Astros and the NBA's Rockets set out on their own in 2012, breaking up with Fox Sports Network to launch a regional sports network with Comcast. It went bust in a little more than a year.

But the Cubs' confidence has never wavered.

Their partner is Sinclair and the channel will be called Marquee, according to the Sun-Times. Levine reported no Cubs-Sinclair deal is in place but said industry sources indicated Sinclair was a leading candidate to team with the ballclub.

Sinclair is a partner in Stadium, Reinsdorf's multi-platform sports outlet based at the United Center. Its holdings also include Tennis Channel.

While Sinclair owns and/or operates 193 TV stations around the country, it's probably best known in Chicago for its proposed \$3.9 billion merger with WGN-9 and WGN-AM 720 parent Tribune Media.

(It's worth noting Tribune Publishing, not Tribune Media, is this newspaper's owner.)

The Tribune Media deal fell apart earlier this year in the face of federal regulatory hurdles, despite Sinclair's strong support of the Trump administration and its policies.

But that shouldn't be a problem for the Cubs or their owners.

The challenge faced by the Cubs — and to a degree the Sox, Bulls and Hawks — will be to sell the public on their channel because it's consumers who are needed to make the add-on a must-buy commodity for cable systems as well as advertisers.

No matter how energized and undyingly loyal a fan base is, people aren't necessarily eager to spend more for TV or streaming than they already are.

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### **Hall of Fame-bound Harold Baines heads lineup for SoxFest 2019**

By Paul Sullivan / Chicago Tribune | December 18, 2018

Hall of Fame-bound Harold Baines heads the list of White Sox players and alumni scheduled to appear at SoxFest 2019.

Baines, voted into the Hall last week by a veterans committee, will be joined by several current Sox players, including Jose Abreu, Michael Kopech, Daniel Palka, Reynaldo Lopez and Tim Anderson.

Top prospects Eloy Jimenez and Dylan Cease also will be on hand, along with 2018 first-round draft pick Nick Madrigal.

Retired broadcaster Ken "Hawk" Harrelson returns, and Hall of Famers Carlton Fisk, Tim Lincecum and Jim Thome are scheduled to appear.

SoxFest will be held Jan. 25-27 at the Hilton Chicago.

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### **White Sox need Bryce Harper or Manny Machado to take a leap of faith**

By Rick Morrissey / Chicago Sun-Times | December 19, 2018

The White Sox need Jon Lester.

Not the flesh-and-blood Jon Lester. They need the idea of Lester, who, as a big-name free agent, took a leap of faith and a load of money when he signed with the Cubs in December 2014. Is Bryce Harper that big-name free agent? Or is it Manny Machado? Or is it a year early for the Sox and their fans to be bummed out if the franchise can't land a superstar?

Early? There's no such thing as early when it comes to a team that has averaged 92 losses the last six seasons. And there's no such thing as early when a great player is available.

Remember how Lester energized the Cubs' fan base four years ago? How he brought a presence to a franchise that had been lacking one for years? How the talk suddenly shifted from which prospect would be brought up when to what Lester meant in terms of victories in 2015?

The Cubs signed former Red Sox pitcher Jon Lester in 2014, a move that helped them win a World Series.

This is how I started my column the day of the signing:

An actual player. A big-time, winning pitcher. A dominant left-hander, for goodness' sake.

Not a hotshot prospect. Not a new manager. Not a shiny new brick.

A Somebody.

A Cub.

The next day, I had an on-air debate with an earnest radio host after Lester had stunned the baseball world by signing with a team that had gone 73-89 the season before. He argued that there had been joy in witnessing the Cubs' rebuild, that watching president Theo Epstein do his job was fascinating. He was offended by my apparent dismissal of the construction process at the minor-league level. Why, because I thought waiting for prospects to arrive in Chicago was like watching my toenails grow?

I wanted to watch real major-league players playing major-league games. Just as I want to do with the Sox.

No matter who was right, there was little doubt that Lester's signing was a turning point in Cubs history.

And this is where the Sox find themselves. If not this season, then next. What a signal it would be to the rest of baseball if either Machado or Harper were to pick the Sox in the next few weeks. It wouldn't be realistic to think the team could make a 24-victory jump, the way the Cubs did from 2014 to 2015. It wouldn't be a given that super prospect Eloy Jimenez would win Rookie of the Year honors with 26 homers and 99 RBI, the way Kris Bryant did in 2015.

But you never know. And that's the wonderful, delicious, hopeful part of this. The Sox have to convince Harper or Machado that the rebuild is about to turn a corner. The Cubs were able to sell Lester on the idea that he would forever be part of franchise lore if they won a World Series. He could be the one who finally put flesh on the bones of a dream. It was a crazy idea. Almost as crazy as the Cubs' 2016 World Series championship parade turned out to be.

That's what the Sox have to sell Harper and Machado on, while other teams sell more immediate objectives. Either can be the cornerstone of something big here. Either can be the man who took a chance on a franchise built on the promise of its minor-league system. And it certainly would be a chance, a gamble. What many people still fail to grasp is how fortunate the Cubs were that so many of their prospects succeeded. And there are no guarantees for the Sox that Jimenez, Dylan Cease, Luis Robert, Nick Madrigal, Dane Dunning and even Michael Kopech will turn into legitimate players. History tells us that.

Career-wise, it's a roll of the dice for Harper or Machado, but it's a roll of the dice worth taking. Also, one that will guarantee them about \$350 million each. Perhaps this is a good time to lose the risk-taking imagery.

Maybe the Cubs will rip out the Sox' heart by being the Chicago team that nabs one of the two superstars. It would be a shock, given that Cubs ownership has been sending out strong signals that Harper and Machado are too rich for its blood. A big signing would put the Cubs over the luxury-tax limit, which sounds like a terrible, horrible thing, until you realize that the Red Sox had to pay \$11.9 million for going over the

limit in 2018. Do you know what \$11.9 million is to deep-pocketed franchises like the Red Sox and the Cubs? A couple of Brandon Kintzlers and a season's supply of sunflower seeds.

The glare of Boston's World Series rings makes it hard to see if the Red Sox are upset about getting hit with the luxury tax.

Anyway, the White Sox. All it takes is one player to change everything. Lester showed the way for the Cubs. Any superstar out there want to take the wheel for the Sox? There's an immediate opening.

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### **White Sox announce signing of catcher James McCann**

By Daryl Van Schouwen / Chicago Sun-Times | December 19, 2018

The White Sox announced the signing of catcher James McCann Wednesday. The former Tiger joins the club as a complement to Welington Castillo on a one-year, \$2.5 million deal, first reported Friday.

McCann, 28, who should help control the running game with an excellent throwing arm, 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 — a .240/.288/.366 hitting line and .653 OPS.

The addition puts the 40-man roster at 40.

Castillo is under contract for \$7.5 million next season with an \$8 million club option for 2020. The Sox 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.

James McCann hits an RBI-double during the ninth inning of a game against the Royals. (AP)

"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 last 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 to the Sox 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. He has thrown out 33.3 percent (91-273) of attempted baserunners, the best rate among AL catchers since 2014 with at least 300 games caught. His blocking and framing numbers are below average, however.

While it remains to be seen how manager Rick Renteria will have Castillo and McCann 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.

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### **White Sox year in review: Solid jumping-off point or bad omen?**

By James Fegan / The Athletic | December 19, 2018

The White Sox have 12 more days to sign Bryce Harper or Manny Machado and forever mark 2018 as the year they signed the biggest free-agent deal in their history, and declared the seriousness of their effort to compete for all the world to see.

Otherwise, it was pretty clearly a bad year on the South Side.

But there were allowances for a bad year in the grand White Sox rebuild. Development isn't linear and all that, and the Sox bad year'd themselves all the way to the third overall pick this coming June, so the litany of bad events they endured did not destroy the grand decade-long outlook they have been putting together. Whatever holes continue to emerge in the great collection of prospect depth they've built can always be papered over by spending the payroll room they've created — maybe even in the next 12 days, still.

With all that silver lining and existing hope for the future established, it can be acknowledged that losing 100 games in a particularly sloppy fashion, noted by both the manager and general manager, was bad. Former No. 1 overall prospect and franchise cornerstone Yoán Moncada challenging the all-time single-season strikeout record is something that will drive him to improve, but was bad. He and his clubhouse mates setting a new team record was just bad. Avisail García felt something bad in his knee on Opening Day and his season never shook its hindrance. The pitching staff only had so many guys who can be expected to be on the next contending Sox team, and the few who can were very young and learning to compete at the big league level. But as a group, their results were bad. José Abreu is a great guy and player, so why did he have to go through something as bad as testicular torsion and a hair follicle infection in his final quarter of the season? There were other difficult seasons, too, but we don't have all day.

Prospects, the selling point of the organization and the solace for the fanbase, mostly get to struggle and triumph out of sight. Except for when they get hurt, which was frequent through 2018 and also bad. Top pitching prospect Michael Kopech had a tremendous year of personal and pitching development, but then he blew out his elbow after reaching the majors, which was bad. Luis Robert entering Year 3 of his pro career without ever being seen at the height of his powers because of various injuries is bad. Watching 2017 first-round pick Jake Burger doubled over in agony on the first base line of Camelback Ranch in February felt like a bad setback; hearing about his second tear in May was worse. Dane Dunning has been so consistent and reliably good on the mound since joining the Sox organization, so losing him for half the season to an elbow sprain was all the more bad. Alec Hansen is healthy again, but has gone from a possible 2018 September call-up to trying to put the whole season behind him, because it was bad. Micker Adolfo played great and took a developmental leap forward, and still had to get Tommy John surgery in the end. In between eviscerating every level of pitching he faced, even Eloy Jiménez dealt with a litany of minor soft tissue injuries that never drew that much concern, probably just because there wasn't enough left over to go around. Not promoting him to the majors at the end was also bad.

This is all within the realm of reasonable results to expect at the outset of the 2018 season. For example, when the Sox threw three rookies (or at least first full-year starters) at their starting rotation, a decent result would have been getting one solid major league season out of it. Reynaldo López delivered it, Lucas Giolito struggled mightily, and Carson Fulmer was sent back to the minors and shifted to relief. It was painful and difficult to watch the failures of the latter two and they face uncertain futures, but it was a standard hit rate for developing young players. An injury-heavy 2018 still saw the ascension of Dylan Cease, the addition of Nick Madrigal, a rebound for Blake Rutherford (because a bad 2017 was not the end), and the emergence of guys who weren't being talked about as future meaningful pieces this time last year like Jace Fry, Luis González, Jimmy Lambert and Ian Hamilton. Rick Hahn talking about Tim Anderson's defense being Gold Glove-caliber would not have been setting reasonable expectations before 2018, but now it is.

But Hahn doesn't talk about getting reasonable outcomes from this process. He doesn't say that back-to-back playoff appearances would be a breakthrough for this franchise, or talk about the median outcome for a full-scale rebuild, but rather tirelessly reiterates the goal of multiple championships. Such an audacious goal requires luck, development outcomes beyond expectations, or more than likely both. More often than not, the 2018 season found the White Sox straining to work through setbacks, not looking impervious to the difficulties of building a contender from the ground up.

That's all fine, potentially. One difficult year doesn't dictate the fate of an organization anymore than it does for a single prospect. Adversity is such a common feature in major league player development that some view it as a necessity, where down years are like the chickenpox: everyone has to go through it and the sooner they do, the better.

That may be true, and 2018 may be remembered not just as the year Daniel Palka entered our lives, but as the turning point for the organization and many players who will serve as parts of its future core. And the hope is that they decide they don't want to tolerate the difficulties of this season again ... because it was bad.

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## **Can a new TV deal help the White Sox land Manny Machado or Bryce Harper? Can Chicago supports two RSNs?**

By Jon Greenberg / The Athletic | December 18, 2018

With the Cubs going out on their own to find fortune in the TV business, the other teams in town, the Bulls, White Sox and Blackhawks, are finalizing a five-year TV deal to remain partners with NBC Sports Chicago after their current pact expires in 2019, according to The Athletic sources.

The Cubs are countering with an individual sports network called Marquee.

NBC and the four teams each hold a 20 percent share in the current network, with Bulls and White Sox chairman Jerry Reinsdorf the largest shareholder at 40 percent.

The Score's Bruce Levine first reported the teams were breaking up in a story published Tuesday afternoon.

The Sun-Times' Jeff Agrest broke a story of the Cubs calling their proposed network "Marquee." He reported the Cubs are partnering with Sinclair Broadcast Group, a large chain of local TV stations that nearly merged with WGN earlier this year, though Levine later reported the Cubs told him nothing was official and that "industry sources" said Sinclair was only a "front runner" to become partners. A Cubs source confirmed that to The Athletic on Tuesday evening.

In recent years, Sinclair has become known nationwide for its right-wing political slant as a company and forcing its individual TV stations to air hard-right commentary. While Joe, Marlene, Pete and Todd Ricketts are all heavily involved in conservative politics, a source told me earlier this year that any Cubs TV partnership would be for distribution, not content.

The name Marquee would be fitting because of the famous, landmarked marquee outside of Wrigley Field. In 2017, the Ricketts family created a holding company Marquee Sports & Entertainment for its "premier, group, meeting and event sales opportunities" in and around Wrigley Field.

While the Cubs have time to wait to finalize their agreements, the other teams don't because the 2019-20 hockey and basketball seasons start before the 2020 baseball one does. Their deal was expected to be done by the end of the month or just after the first of the year. While everyone knew this was happening, the big question right now is: how does it affect the White Sox's chase of Bryce Harper and/or Manny Machado?

Given that a source told us the shorter length of the deal — the teams signed a 15-year deal when the original station, Comcast SportsNet Chicago, launched in 2004 — it wasn't known if the teams will get any

kind of upfront money for a new contract, though one industry source said he would be surprised if they do, considering those teams have ratings issues. Furthermore, the RSN business doesn't look too rosy across the country, with Disney reportedly struggling to sell the Fox Sports Network stations it got in a deal with Fox.

But the teams owned by Reinsdorf will get a larger chunk of revenues from the station, given that the Cubs won't be a part of it and that the majority of their games will be on the station, rather than split up with over-the-air WGN. The games broadcast on cable TV are much more profitable for the teams.

Since the post-2019 NBC Sports Chicago station will miss the steady ratings they get from Cubs games, a Machado or Harper signing would increase ratings and boost the station's revenues significantly. Industry experts think that is part of the appeal for Reinsdorf, who has never spent more than \$68 million on a White Sox free agent. Albert Belle's \$55 million deal, signed in 1996, is still the fourth-largest free-agent contract ever given out by the team.

At midseason in 2018, White Sox games on NBC Sports Chicago were doing an 0.83 average rating. Only the Oakland A's (0.67) had a worse mark in baseball, with even the Marlins (1.01 rating) putting up better numbers. While ratings shouldn't matter to fans, they do mean a lot to teams who own their RSN and charge for advertising.

Without the Cubs, the White Sox, Bulls and Blackhawks are in a bit of a pickle when it comes to viewership right now. Last season, according to Sports Media Watch, "the Bulls had their lowest rated season on NBC Sports Chicago in a decade, averaging a 1.81 rating (-9 percent)." It's hard to believe those numbers haven't dropped as the Bulls are off to a 7-24 start dominated by organizational dysfunction.

Sports Media Watch also reported that the Blackhawks had a major ratings decline last season. They averaged a 2.39 rating on NBC Sports Chicago, a 28 percent drop from the previous season and the team's smallest average since their first playoff season under Joel Quenneville in 2008-09. Again, their TV audience isn't growing with the Hawks in next-to-last place in the Western Conference.

So the White Sox spending on Machado or Harper would make good business sense despite the sticker shock of their contracts. (The White Sox could obviously use the ticket sales revenue as well. They averaged 19,862 fans per game in 2018.) Then again, Eloy Jiménez, Luis Robert, Michael Kopech and Dylan Cease, among others, should help both ratings and attendance by 2020.

It had been reported the Cubs were talking to Sinclair about a distribution deal. Cubs president of business operations Crane Kenney had been touting the Cubs' looming TV independence for years.

"We have a big passion for controlling our own destiny," Kenney said at the 2018 Cubs Convention. "It's sort of like conversations about the real-estate market. We like controlling our own destiny. Some days, we think we actually know where we're going. You start adding partners and it becomes more complicated.

"I'd say Jerry (Reinsdorf) has been a great and amazing partner, as has Comcast. It's been a very successful thing. If it made the ultimate sense to stay together, we would. But I'd say at the moment, we're probably 80 percent inclined to do it on our own."

The Cubs hired Mike McCarthy — a former chief operating officer for the Milwaukee Bucks and vice chairman/CEO with the St. Louis Blues, who once ran MSG Network in New York — as a consultant over the summer.

The Cubs have been ramping up Cubs Productions, an in-house operation that gets the kind of unique behind-the-scenes access a local TV station could only dream about.

One question that will arise is who gets the on-air talent. Ubiquitous media maven David Kaplan hosts pre- and post-game shows for the Cubs and SportsTalk Live, the daily gabfest with local sports reporters. He also hosts interview shows and essentially serves as the face of the network. He would naturally fit with the

Cubs' plans. (Both his ESPN radio and NBC Sports TV deals are up after the 2019 Cubs season, which means he could conceivably jump ship to The Score, the radio home of the Cubs, for true synergy.)

A Cubs source believes Ryan Dempster, who currently works for the team and as an analyst on MLB Network, could also have a big role.

Then there is reporter Kelly Crull, who has been on Cubs broadcasts for years and is now doing the Bulls. Both stations could bid for Crull, who had NBA reporting experience in Oklahoma City before coming to Chicago. Behind the scenes are talented producers and bookers who should be able to garner raises as well. This split is certainly good news for local media.

But remember, with two RSNs in town, it's the fans with cable bills who will be paying for this split.

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### **MLB Winter Meetings wins big on supplier diversity in Vegas**

By Exavier Pope / Forbes | December 18, 2018

LAS VEGAS - Major League Baseball's annual Winter Meetings normally produces the biggest offseason signings and announcements of changes in the sport.

However, instead of dizzying reports of rumors and transactions, the halls of the 5-day event held this year December 9-13 at Las Vegas host hotel Mandalay Bay Hotel and Casino were just as quiet as the city's strip experiencing one of its slow tourism periods in December just before Christmas.

The endless streams of cowboy hats in Sin City for Wrangler's 60th National Finals Rodeo wound up roping in just as much attention as the convention hall media set ups attempting to fill space with content other than where Bryce Harper or Manny Machado might land.

But player contracts were not the only deals to be done in the desert.

Every year during Winter League Meetings, Major League Baseball, its 30-member clubs, and their 160 minor league clubs host a job fair and a trade show for companies seeking to do business in the sport.

Becoming a supplier with the \$10 billion revenue generating league could make or break a small business.

For diverse businesses owned by people of color, women, and LGBTQ+ talent, access to this business elevating opportunity is the biggest hurdle.

Businesses pitch themselves to Major League Baseball clubs at Winter Meetings in speed rounds Tuesday, December 11, 2018 at Mandalay Bay Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas, NV. ALEX TRAUTWIG/MLB PHOTOS

Access becomes more challenging in a sport that has seen a decline in representation on the field and fan interest in the African American community.

Major League Baseball has been feverishly trying to connect the dots with increasing returns.

During Winter Meetings, MLB held its Diversity Supplier Summit December 7 -12 within its Diversity and Inclusion programming which included an awards presentation commemorating 20 years of a formal diverse business supplier initiative.

Events included workshops of how to obtain supplier diversity certification, access to capital, effects of unconscious bias in the procurement space, and speed rounds where businesses presented 60-second elevator pitches to MLB clubs.

According to Major League Baseball's Senior Director of Diversity and Inclusion Corey Smith, out of the 15-20,000 vendors used across the sport, 700-1000 are diverse owned businesses.



In a sport where 7.8% its players are African American, 31.9% Latin American, and 42.5% total people of color, translating inclusion on the field to equity in opportunity in the stadium concourse is paramount.

Efforts to contract with diverse owned suppliers predates MLB's formal adoption 20 years ago. The Cleveland Indians have a joint supplier program with the NFL's Cleveland Browns and NBA's Cleveland Cavaliers. The Cincinnati Reds also had their own initiative.

"The biggest thing was creating a program and more importantly a process by which all the teams could adopt. Certain clubs were doing it in their respective cities on their own. We wanted to put something in place that could be adopted by the league," explains Smith.

"The owners got together at one of the [winter] meetings and said this is something that is important to us and had a conversation with the commissioner at the time [Bud Selig] and our head of diversity and inclusion at the time, and if this is something that's important to us as much as we're focusing on diversifying the workforce at MLB, we should be looking at diversifying our supply chain."

The latest annual report card released in April by The Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport at the University of Central Florida gave Major League Baseball an overall C+ in diversity hiring.

In the diversity supplier world, Major League Baseball is doing better on the base pads.

In 2017, MLB became the first sports league to win the National Minority Supplier Development Council (NMSDC) National Corporation of the Year Award, which recognizes exemplary achievement in the area of minority supplier development.

According to figures released by Major League Baseball, MLB and its member clubs have spent approximately \$2 billion with diverse businesses since MLB's Diverse Business Partners program was created.

For its efforts, The Institute of Diversity of Ethics in Sports gives Major League Baseball an A+.

The types of businesses who supply for MLB are vast. Suppliers could provide anything from bats, balls and gloves, food, cleaning solutions, business consulting, to fighting germs in and around stadiums.

James Mallard and Nancy Williams are a husband and wife team who are North American distributors of WeFresh, a company that markets and sells a product that is infused in the manufacturing process prohibiting the growth of mold, bacteria E. coli, and salmonella.

Mallard and Williams leveraged their respective roles in the procurement space to forge a new relationship with Major League Baseball this year. Williams worked with United Parcel Service for 31 years ultimately leading to a role as its Chief Procurement Officer and work with the National Minority Supplier Development Council (NMSDC). Williams work involved the Women's Business Enterprise National Council (WBENC), the largest certifier of women-owned businesses and advocate for women business owners.

"We have a brand, so we thought we can leverage those components to build a very sustainable business to seek more opportunities with Major League Baseball," says Mallard.

Even with the couple's work in the diversity supplier space, they had only recently become familiar with opportunities to work with Major League Baseball.

"I had no idea because a lot of times you can you see the player, you see that stands, you see the fans but you don't see the other side of it how do you get into as a concession," says Jonathan Burgess, part of a twin business dynamic who markets and sells "innovative" soul food items such as their signature "churwaffle," a dish made with a cornbread waffle.

Their first time at Winter Meetings, the Burgess twins were taken aback by the opportunities present they were wholly unaware of.

“Events like this provide an opportunity give us a seat at the table, and it's up to us and to take the next step and develop relationships to move it forward, possibly represent your organization, and pave the way for other businesses to get into major league ballparks and to do business with Major League Baseball,” says Matthew Burgess.

Having a “churwaffle” at a baseball game is a novel concept in a sport that prides itself on the standard fair of hot dogs, peanuts, cracker jacks and hot dog mascot races encompassing the fan experience.

“Certain markets get it. The clubs that have done the analysis and done the research to determine their core fanbase needs some diversity even in their experience at the ballpark,” says Corey Smith.

The Arizona Diamondbacks brought Phoenix-area Lo-Lo's Chicken and Waffles into Chase Field in 2015. In 2018 the New York Mets installed a Sweet Chick soul food restaurant franchise location at Citi Field called “Lil Sweet Chick.” Queens native hip hop artist and part owner of Sweet Chick Nas was instrumental with working with MLB to create the Sweet Chick partnership.

Connecting diverse businesses to Major League Baseball and integrating diverse fan experiences ultimately reintroduces the game to communities who may have left the sport.

“We expect the companies who do business with Major League Baseball to engage the communities they serve and leverage those relationships with customers to bring them to the game,” says Renée Tirado, MLB Vice President of Talent and Head of Diversity and Inclusion.

During the 2018 All Star Game festivities in Washington D.C. MLB launched a week-long pop-up “MLB Assembly” that combined baseball, entrepreneurship in technology, fashion, art, and music. The events included a sneaker panel with Kickstradamus, and music by hip hop artists Wale and BlocBoy JB.

MLB accomplished a dual objective of introducing new fans to the sport, while showcasing one of its diverse licensees Pro Standard, which makes MLB branded leather caps.

One of the clubs that “gets it” is the Chicago White Sox. Owner Jerry Reinsdorf flew into Las Vegas to accept the Club Appreciation Award for the team's dedication to supplier diversity.

The White Sox were one of the clubs other teams initially modeled their diversity supplier programs after. Major League Baseball formed a diversity oversight committee to look into supply chains and procurement processes and the White Sox were critical not only being a model other teams could follow, but assisting other teams to create a similar process.

Oversight of the diverse supplier process is not limited to direct business relationships with MLB. Large suppliers using subcontractors are asked in request for proposals to submit how they will potentially use diverse business partners.

The MLB platform for the right diverse business could even change the way Major League Baseball operates.

Ted Krober is Founder and CEO of Smoother, a year-old fan experience mobile app that allows fans to pre-order concessions and merchandise. The app tracks customer data for every fan in the stadium using the app, not just ticket purchasers. The app caters to personal preferences and provides various deals during a game based on the specific customer.

With an app like Smoother, fans receive the benefit of waiting in shorter concession lines and the MLB gets what's as good as currency in modern commerce: data. According to Marketwatch, the average age for an MLB fan is 53, 6 years older than the average NFL fan (47) and 16 years older than the average NBA fan

(37). Creating a modern fan experience is key to attracting and keeping new and younger fans and Smoother is well positioned to maximize that experience.

Colin Hinds, an African American former minor league baseball player who is Head of Strategic Partnerships at Smoother and friend of Krober's, believes the difference in success for diverse businesses comes down to access.

"People commonly will deal with other people around them, so very naturally the people on my block look like me. So if I'm doing business with the people on my block they're going to know some information that the people the block over don't know. The dynamic of really being able to allow for vendors to come into that space, to just to be on the same block and to be able to have those conversations is just good business," explains Hinds.

Diversity and inclusion as good business is a passion of Minnesota Twins Senior Procurement Director Bud Hanley, who won the Diverse Business Partners Advocate Appreciation Award at Winter Meetings.

"It may sound corny to say but the Jackie Robinson quote 'A life is not important except in the impact it has on other lives' is what I believe of my life. I like to be able to go out and help people," says Hanley.

Hanley's credits his 22-year veteran military background in shaping his attitude on diverse business advocacy.

"I came up an in environment where a person's got your back, without respect to race or religion. You see a human being," explains Hanley.

The same Chicago White Sox who won the team diversity and inclusion award were instrumental in helping Hanley create a model for their American League Central division rival Twins.

Hanley was instrumental in creating a diversity week for the franchise.

"With diverse businesses it's really great because these are businesses that are changing our community and economic foundations, not only in Minnesota, but the world now. So to have them come in it's a ripple effect. You bring in one company and they do business and they hire this one person, it just keeps compounding. It's America. It's our people. It's the way I want to live. It's the way I enjoy doing business."

Hanley invests in his team's diverse procurement initiatives by engaging local area diverse chambers of commerce and attending events within diverse communities.

"In order to give an opportunity, I have to know about them. Then meet them. We want to do business with our communities. We go to charity runs, pride parades, we're getting involved in these communities. These are our neighbors. This is not a handout. These are good businesses," says Hanley.

Bridging the gap between access and opportunity not only impacts businesses in diverse communities, they can change lives.

Holly Bachman is the Founder and President of Mixed Roots Foundation, a 7-year old nonprofit organization headquartered in Los Angeles that provides unique experiences for individuals in the adoption and foster care community.

Bachman was born in Korea but adopted as a baby and raised by a white Minnesota family. Mixed Roots currently hosts a foster care and adoption night at Los Angeles' Dodger Stadium, San Francisco's AT&T Park, and Target Field in Minnesota and in the 2019 season will expand to Yankee Stadium in New York.

The events host in upwards of 1500 individuals involved in the foster care and adoption system, many who have never been to a Major League Baseball game.

Bachman credits her mentor Michael Reagan, adopted son of 40th US president Ronald Reagan with helping guide her Mixed Roots Foundation to “critical mass” and Ken McNeely, President of AT&T West of helping get her into her first park with the Giants. McNeely has two adopted children of his own.

“Sports and entertainment have really been our greatest platforms to raise awareness and educate about the foster care and adoption experience and to provide post adoption resources, scholarships, grants, mentoring, and DNA tests,” says Bachman.

Bachman also has partnered in the NBA with the Los Angeles Lakers and Minnesota Timberwolves.

In her initial proposal to Major League Baseball, Bachman connected diversity and inclusion as a natural business decision.

“We’re all mixed. One in ten Korean Americans in the US are adopted. There are also 500,000 kids in foster care system. When I first ‘pitched’ to Major League Baseball, I told them 6 in 10 of your fans have some connection to the foster care and adoption system. That’s a lot of people.”

Stories at Winter Meetings like Mixed Roots may not win a team a championship or help fans win their fantasy baseball leagues next year, but the real-world impact is hitting the jackpot.