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Matty D hits 11th HR, Giolito battles as skid ends

By Scott Merkin / MLB.com May 13, 2018

CHICAGO -- The White Sox seven-game skid came to an end and visions of capturing the Crosstown Cup remained alive via a 5-3 victory over the Cubs on Sunday afternoon at Wrigley Field.

By rules of the Cup, given to the victor of the Chicago series, the team that won the previous year retains in case of a tie. The Cubs won in 2017 and would have clinched with a weekend sweep, although there are three games remaining at Guaranteed Rate Field from Sept. 21-23.

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"Today, I'm really proud of everybody the way they competed, the energy in the dugout," Nicky Delmonico said. "Hopefully we keep that going forward and build on it."

Added Matt Davidson: "It's fun when you see everyone on the team contributing and playing how we think we can play. It's pretty cool. Obviously, we come here to win every day, and after the last couple of losses we had, it's a good win."

Trailing by a 3-2 margin in the sixth, Jose Abreu singled and scored on Delmonico's triple to right-center at the end of a six-pitch battle with Cubs starting pitcher Kyle Hendricks. Davidson, who went deep for his 11th homer in the second, followed with a long sacrifice fly to center, giving the White Sox their first lead of the three-game set at 4-3.

Both Delmonico and Davidson used pink bats specially made for Mother's Day in producing the runs, and Delmonico planned to sign the bat and give it to his mom, Barb, as a gift.

Lucas Giolito earned the victory, which would not have been thought possible with the way he started the game. Giolito issued a trio of four-pitch walks and also went 3-0 on Javier Baez before he singled home two. The right-hander permitted four stolen bases in the first and five for the game, but the Cubs only scored the two runs in the first.

Giolito finished with three runs allowed on two hits and seven walks in 5 2/3 innings, striking out three. For the season, he has a Major League-leading 32 walks and 24 strikeouts over 41 2/3 frames. But he was effectively wild on Sunday.

"The one thing that was unwavering was my confidence in myself," Giolito said. "I knew that if I executed the next pitch, they were going to get themselves out. It was one of those really good team victories. Defense was fantastic behind me, really good timely hitting. We put some runs on the board, and then the bullpen came in and locked it down after I was done. Just one of those grinder victories."

Added Hendricks: "I've had games like that and you go out and you have nothing. He really battled through it and got better as the game went on. It was good to see from a young guy. He made some tough at-bats for us. He was effectively wild at the start. His stuff was moving. He dialed it in late."

Giolito and the White Sox bullpen trio of Jace Fry, Nate Jones and Bruce Rondon held the Cubs to one hit over the last five innings, with Jones making his first appearance since allowing four runs over a 10-pitch span during a ninth inning Pirates' comeback on Wednesday and Rondon recording his first save.

"We are always united. Win or lose, we have each other's back, and we won today, and it's good and we are happy," Rondon said through an interpreter. "It's really special to play here, I mean the fans and the adrenaline, you can feel it. It's a really nice experience."

MOMENTS THAT MATTERED

Caught at the plate: The Cubs put the first three runners on base in the fourth against Giolito but only scored once, with Addison Russell being cut down at the plate to thwart the rally. Russell had gone to third on Ian Happ's double scoring Kyle Schwarber, but he was thrown out by a good distance when he broke on contact on Hendricks' routine grounder to Davidson at third. Ben Zobrist's double play grounder ended the inning.

"Giolito did a good job staying off our barrel for the most part," Cubs first baseman Anthony Rizzo said. "We didn't hit him too well. We put pressure on him but came up short."

Second chance: Davidson's long home run in the second almost didn't happen. On an 0-2 pitch, Davidson hit a foul ball down the right-field line chased by both second baseman Baez and first baseman Rizzo. The ball eluded Rizzo's reach as he moved toward the tarp, and after taking two close pitches, Davidson connected on a changeup, with an exit velocity of 109.4 mph.

SOUND SMART

Giolito is the first White Sox pitcher since Dan Wright in 2001 to walk at least seven batters and allow two or fewer hits in an outing.

HE SAID IT

"He's definitely not a top prospect or has as much hype behind him for nothing. He's a great pitcher. He's nasty. He just has to get it over the plate. We know he can be in this rotation for a long time."

-- Davidson, on Giolito

UP NEXT

Reynaldo Lopez (0-2, 2.44) might be the Majors' best starting pitcher who has yet to pick up a win. Lopez opens a two-game set in Pittsburgh on Tuesday night, with first pitch at 6:05 p.m. CT. He will make his eighth start of the year, third of his career against the Pirates and second in a row. The Bucs will counter with Trevor Williams.

In My Words: James Shields

By James Shields / MLB.com / May 13, 2018

I know it is very important to have a guy with experience show the young players how to do things. Fortunately, when I was coming up, I had my cousin, Aaron Rowand. I trained with him a lot during the offseasons. He helped me a tremendous amount as far as dealing with the mental side of the game. He helped me handle all the trials and tribulations of playing baseball.

Aaron told me how to prepare for the 162-game grind. He stressed that you always have to be mentally prepared. You need to have a good routine between starts. Even as a starting pitcher, you have to prepare yourself every day like you're going to play. As long as you work hard each day, you've got a chance to succeed. That's the main thing where he helped me out.

When I got called up to Tampa Bay in 2006, we had a similar situation as to what we have with the Sox. We had such a young team. I remember they called me "Gray Beard" at the age of 25. I was the oldest guy on the pitching staff. We were in the middle of a rebuild. We lost 101 games in 2006 and 96 in 2007. Then we went to the World Series in 2008. No doubt, it shows you how quickly things can turn around.

The White Sox have a lot of great young talent throughout the entire organization. It's just a matter of these young guys believing in themselves, believing they can win. They're going to be fun to watch the next few years. For my role here, it's not as important to be the leader. It's more important to teach our staff to stick together, to be brothers. The atmosphere I try to portray to everyone in the clubhouse is that we're all in this together. We need to bounce things off each other, to help each other.

If I can help in any way, that's what I try to do. It all depends on the situation. If one of the young guys is going too fast in a game -- the game speeds up on you -- I might talk to them about that. I'll work with them on how to guide your way through a game.

I want them to feel supported, and I want them to support me when I'm out there. That's the kind of atmosphere I want to bring here. I keep going back to that brotherhood.

When I think about my career, it hasn't sunk in that I've played as long as I have. More than anything, it's my kids who are making me feel a little older. I have a 14-year old who is going to be a freshman in high school next year. That's hard for me to believe.

I've been fortunate to have a good long run in the big leagues. Hopefully, I can continue. As long as my body holds up, I'll keep playing.

I always go back to something Andy Pettitte once told me. We were working out in a gym, and I asked him for one piece of advice. He said, "You're never going to stop learning until you're done playing this game."

That was a long time ago, but it is so true. At this point in my career, I'm still learning something every day. I pass that advice on to the guys here.

This is a very humbling game. You have to keep working at it. That's why I enjoy every minute.

As told to Ed Sherman.

Rondon sent down with Moncada likely back

Infielder (hamstring tightness) could return from DL on Tuesday

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

CHICAGO -- The White Sox optioned infielder Jose Rondon to Triple-A Charlotte following the 5-3 victory over the Cubs on Sunday afternoon at Wrigley Field, presumably to make room for Yoan Moncada's return when the club begins a two-game set in Pittsburgh on Tuesday night.

Moncada went on the disabled list with left hamstring tightness on May 5 after the injury caused him to leave two games early that week. The second baseman ran, took grounders and batting practice pregame Sunday and said postgame he felt good. But no official announcement on the corresponding move will come from the team until Tuesday.

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"He's doing very, very well," White Sox manager Rick Renteria said. "We're hoping he'll be back in the lineup soon."

Rondon, 22, went 3-for-13 (.231) in six games with the White Sox after being recalled to take Moncada's roster spot.

Renteria remembers late mom on Mother's Day

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

CHICAGO -- At the end of Sunday's pregame media session, White Sox manager Rick Renteria was asked about spending Mother's Day for the first time without his mother, Angela. She passed away on April 25 at the age of 91.

The stoic, but exceedingly upbeat Renteria smiled, started to formulate an answer and then quickly grew emotional.

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"She was awesome," Renteria said, before excusing himself from the dugout.

Major League Baseball recognized the awesomeness of mothers across the country during Sunday's slate of games. The White Sox wore pink hats, pink warmup shirts and even pink sunglasses. Six of the starting nine used pink bats during a 5-3 White Sox victory over the Cubs at Wrigley Field, including Matt Davidson, who homered and drove in two, and Nicky Delmonico, who tripled home the tying run off of Kyle Hendricks in the sixth.

Louisville Slugger will donate proceeds from the sale of its pink bats, which will be stamped with the MLB breast cancer awareness logo, to Susan G. Komen and Stand Up To Cancer. MLB will again donate its licensed uniform royalties through Mother's Day apparel to Susan G. Komen and Stand Up To Cancer, which is celebrating its 10th season.

- White Sox Mother's Day gear

Delmonico struck out in each of his first two at-bats against Hendricks. But he plans to give the special pink bat to his mother, Barb, who will be in Chicago next weekend.

"My mom is the biggest thing in my life. It's pretty special," Delmonico said. "I wanted to get at least one so I can give it to her. I got that one for her."

"She was there with me through thick and thin. She was most proud of me after everything I've gone through. To get one hit with that pink bat was really big for me."

- White Sox Mother's Day gear Esther E. Sciammarella of Chicago was named the White Sox Honorary Bat Girl with one individual to be honored as part of Mother's Day and Breast Cancer Awareness Recognitions in MLB ballparks. She will be officially honored next Sunday at Guaranteed Rate Field, when the White Sox host to the Rangers.

Sciammarella, a two-time breast cancer survivor, has been working with the City of Chicago on the breast cancer campaign "Your Life is in Your Hands" since 1998. She is also a member of Chicago Cancer Health Equity Collaborative, a partnership between Northwestern University and the University of Illinois at Chicago. She serves as the executive director of the Chicago Hispanic Health Coalition, a non-profit organization she helped establish in June 1991 as a multi-disciplinary membership organization.

The organization promotes healthy behavior and prevents chronic disease in the Hispanic community. In addition to being on the board of the Chicago Hispanic Health Coalition, she is community co-chair of Partnerships and Community Engagement for Healthy Chicago 2.0, board member for the Catholic Charities' Latino Advisory Board, Community Engagement for Early Recognition and Immediate Action in Stroke (CEERIAS), Health Alternative Systems (HAS), the Hispanic Community Health Study/Study of Latinos (HCHS/SOL), the Illinois Alliance to Prevent Obesity (IAPO), the Telligent Learning and Action Network (LAN), the UIC Latino Community Advisory Council, and the UIC Urban Health Program.

"Obviously, it's her day and we always try to make it special, make sure she feels appreciated is the biggest thing," White Sox reliever Nate Jones said of his wife, Lacy, while also praising his mother, Debbie. "All those things can go unnoticed sometimes, but we try to celebrate that and make sure she knows she's loved. They work their butts off, too. I know I appreciate everything they do."

"She's amazing. She's probably the most important person in my life," outfielder Trayce Thompson said of his mother, Julie. "She's done so much for me. When I got drafted, she came to Chicago with me. When I first got called up, she was the first person I called. She's actually here right now, so I'm happy to spend the day with her."

Moving on up

Right-handed starter Jordan Stephens, the No. 20 White Sox prospect per MLB Pipeline, was promoted from Double-A Birmingham to Triple-A Charlotte. Stephens, 25, posted a 4-3 record, 2.95 ERA and 40 strikeouts in 39 2/3 innings for the Barons.

Sunday's top prospect performers

Stewart extends International League lead with 11th homer for Toledo

By Oliver Macklin / MLB.com / May 13, 2018

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

Opposing hurlers are having a tough time figuring out how to pitch to Christin Stewart.

The Tigers' No. 10 prospect, Stewart continued his home run barrage, crushing a pair of solo blasts to power Triple-A Toledo to a 10-4 win over Louisville. The 24-year-old outfielder's first multi-homer game of 2018 brings his season total to 11, most in the International League.

Stewart has now gone deep six times in 40 at-bats over his past 10 games while batting .300 over that span. The power display is nothing new for Stewart, who mashed 58 home runs combined over the past two years split between Class A Advanced Lakeland and Double-A Erie.

Here are the top prospect performances from Sunday's Minor League action:

- No. 12 overall prospect Brendan Rodgers (Rockies' No. 1) led Double-A Hartford to a 9-4 win over Bowie with a 2-for-4 day at the plate that included his seventh homer of the year. Sam Hilliard (No. 12) added three hits, three RBIs and two stolen bases in the Yard Goats' victory.
- No. 77 overall prospect Austin Riley (Braves' No. 5) tallied his first career three-homer game as he racked up eight RBIs in a 4-for-5 performance for Triple-A Gwinnett. No. 54 overall prospect Kolby Allard (Braves' No. 6) dominated on the mound for the Stripers, matching the longest start of his career with eight scoreless innings to lower his season ERA to 1.71. The 20-year-old southpaw allowed just two hits and a walk with a season-high eight strikeouts.
- No. 78 overall prospect Tyler O'Neill (Cardinals' No. 3) blasted his 11th long ball in 26 games for Triple-A Memphis. O'Neill has now gone deep in back-to-back games and has five homers in his last 10.
- Daniel Vogelbach (Mariners' No. 11 prospect) crushed his sixth homer to help Triple-A Tacoma edge Sacramento, 3-2, in Game 1 of the doubleheader before going yard twice in Game 2. A legitimate power source at the plate, Vogelbach's eight homers have come in just 18 games in the Minors this year.
- White Sox No. 18 prospect Luis Gonzalez homered for the second consecutive day, going 3-for-4 with 2 RBIs and a run scored in Class A Kannapolis' 7-5 victory over Asheville. Gonzalez, 22, is hitting a blistering .435 with six RBIs and eight runs scored over his past 10 contests.
- Jason Martin, the Pirates' No. 21 prospect, recorded his fifth straight multi-hit game in a 3-for-4 effort in Double-A Altoona's 7-1 win over Reading. The 22-year-old Martin hit his fourth home run in the contest and is now slashing .346/.405/.606 in 28 games this season for the Curve.
- Brewers No. 6 prospect Corey Ray picked up three hits -- including his third home run of the season -- for Double-A Biloxi. Ray, Milwaukee's first-round selection in 2016, drove in two runs and scored another two to bring his season totals to 21 and 14, respectively.

- Chris Shaw, the Giants' No. 2 prospect, bashed his 10th home run in his 34th game for Triple-A Sacramento. Shaw, 24, also singled twice to tally his third game of the year with three or more hits.
- Pablo Lopez (Marlins' No. 21 prospect) entered his fifth start of the year having not allowed a run in 2018. The 22-year-old righty allowed his first for Double-A Jacksonville in a tough-luck loss to Montgomery, but his season ERA is still a sparkling 0.35. Lopez completed a season-high seven innings in the outing while tying a season-best mark with seven strikeouts.
- Padres No. 25 prospect Pedro Avila tied his season high with seven innings pitched for Class A Advanced Lake Elsinore as he earned his second win. The right-hander allowed three runs (two earned) while striking out nine to beat Modesto.
- Braves No. 17 prospect William Contreras tied his career high with four hits, including his third home run of the season for Class A Rome. The prolific day raised the 20-year-old's season average to .286 and he is now batting .324 with eight runs scored over his past 10 games.

White Sox fight to finish, but unable to turn tide

Down 7 in 8th, club brings tying run to plate in 9th before taking 7th straight loss
By Scott Merkin / MLB.com / May 12, 2018

CHICAGO -- Manager Rick Renteria's White Sox did not quit Saturday afternoon against the Cubs at Wrigley Field. They also didn't win, dropping an 8-4 decision and falling for a seventh straight time.

They can take solace in bringing Jose Abreu to the plate in the ninth inning as the tying run against closer Brandon Morrow, after trailing 8-1 in the eighth. But it doesn't erase or even hide their worst 36-game start in franchise history at 9-27.

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"We're not playing the type of baseball we want to play," said White Sox center fielder Adam Engel, who had three hits and two runs scored while hitting in the leadoff spot for the second time this season. "Our expectation is higher than how we're playing.

"But we had a chance to tie the game there with one of our best hitters. This team fights and battles, and that's something we can take away from it."

Chris Beck and Aaron Bummer issued five walks combined during a three-run seventh, with Willson Contreras' two-run homer punctuating the rally and that seven-run advantage. Contreras has three home runs and 10 RBIs in two games against the White Sox.

That lead did not mark the end for the White Sox, who scored three times in the eighth off of Carl Edwards Jr. on Matt Davidson's 10th home run of the season. A Leury Garcia infield single and a missed catch error on right fielder Kris Bryant brought in Morrow to replace Mike Montgomery with nobody out in the ninth, and Morrow promptly struck out pinch-hitters Yolmer Sanchez and Daniel Palka.

Morrow walked Tim Anderson after getting ahead 0-2, loading the bases and giving Abreu a chance to complete the improbable. But that's not how things have worked this season for the White Sox, with Abreu's groundout dropping the White Sox to 1-11 in their last 12 and 0-6 in Interleague action. White Sox pitching has allowed five or more runs in each of its last eight games.

"It is tough to overcome, but sometimes when you're in that situation, you have to try to do it. There's nothing else you can do," Renteria said. "Nobody's going to lament the situation we're in. We have to keep scraping, scrapping, fighting, doing everything we can to put ourselves in a good position to try to win a ballgame on a daily basis."

James Shields set down 14 of the last 15 hitters he faced Saturday, but following a 2-hour, 15-minute rain delay before first pitch, it was the five-run damage done by the Cubs in the first two innings against the veteran right-hander that ultimately gave Jon Lester enough support. Shields took a perfect game into the sixth and a no-hitter into the seventh during his last start Sunday against the Twins, but he lost his no-hitter Saturday on Javier Baez's leadoff triple to right.

After a Bryant walk, Anthony Rizzo hit a three-run homer to left-center on the next pitch. David Bote added a run-scoring single to complete the first, while Contreras singled home a run in the second. From there, Shields didn't allow another hit until Bote's one-out infield single in the sixth, but it wasn't enough to keep the White Sox from dropping to 2-15 in their last 17 Interleague road games.

As the rebuild continues, the fight will have to sustain the White Sox.

"We're gonna put everything into a game," Shields said. "We're going to fight at the end of the day. We're going to keep doing what we're doing and grinding out."

"I know we fell short," Renteria said. "But if this can't build a little confidence in them, get them back on track, nothing can."

MOMENT THAT MATTERED

The White Sox had a prime scoring chance in the fourth after Abreu singled and Welington Castillo walked with one out. Jose Rondon worked the count to 3-1 but couldn't check his swing on the ensuing pitch from Lester. At 3-2, Rondon grounded into a 4-6-3 double play to end the threat. The exit velocity on the Rondon grounder was 101.4 mph per Statcast™.

SOUND SMART

The White Sox have allowed 36 runs in the first inning, the most of any inning for them this season. Nine of Shields' 29 earned runs allowed also have come in the first.

HE SAID IT

"We know that, as dismal as it might seem, there are better days coming. Even for the group that's here, there are better days coming and better days coming for the organization." -- Renteria

UP NEXT

Right-hander Lucas Giolito gets the call in the series finale at Wrigley Field, with a first pitch of 1:20 p.m. CT on Sunday. Giolito is 1-2 with a 9.00 ERA, 1.94 WHIP and .310 opponents average over his last four starts (one quality). The Cubs will counter with right-hander Kyle Hendricks.

Forget rivals, the White Sox should look at the Cubs as rebuild role models

By Vinnie Duber / NBC Sports Chicago / May 13, 2018

The White Sox and Cubs couldn't be in two more different places.

Well, both teams play in the same city, on the same CTA line. But let's stay metaphorical here, let's stay high concept.

The White Sox are rebuilding and in the dog days of that process, which even after Sunday's refreshing, change-of-pace win to avoid a crosstown sweep has them at 10-27, the worst record in the majors. There's no shortage of hope for the future, with a wealth of highly ranked prospects developing in the minor leagues, and even the most pessimistic observer would have to consider the rebuild on track for success.

The Cubs, meanwhile, are a team that has not only World Series aspirations but a team that has World Series expectations. Talk during spring training reflected a "championship or bust" attitude, one that was significantly bolstered by the big-money addition of Yu Darvish.

Certainly fans on the South Side would never admit a desire to be like their North Side brothers, but they should look above Madison Street to find a role model, to find a template for how a rebuild is supposed to play out.

It wasn't too long ago that Theo Epstein's front office executed the same strategy Rick Hahn & Co. are now employing. Epstein took over as team president in the midst of five straight fifth-place finishes in the National League Central, three of those under his watch. But the three seasons that followed saw the Cubs reach three NL Championship Series and win a World Series championship in 2016.

Building that champion took a variety of moves including trades (Andrew Cashner for Anthony Rizzo, Scott Feldman for Jake Arrieta, Ryan Dempster for Kyle Hendricks, Jeff Samardzija for Addison Russell), draft picks (Kris Bryant, Kyle Schwarber, Albert Almora Jr.) and big-time free-agent signings (Jon Lester, Ben Zobrist, Jason Heyward). It took player development, and it took a lot of losing at the major league level while that all occurred.

The White Sox are in the middle of that same process. They've traded Chris Sale, Adam Eaton, Jose Quintana and a host of others for what they expect to be cornerstones of future contenders: Yoan Moncada, Michael Kopech, Eloy Jimenez, Lucas Giolito, Reynaldo Lopez, Dane Dunning, Dylan Cease and Blake Rutherford. They've spent high draft picks on the likes of Tim Anderson, Carlos Rodon, Carson Fulmer, Zack Collins, Alec Hansen and Jake Burger. They've made two important international signings in Luis Robert and Micker Adolfo.

While there's no guarantee that all those guys will pan out the same way the Cubs had good fortune in their top prospects developing into the core that now powers a perennial contender. But that lengthy list shows where the White Sox have actually outpaced the Cubs, in a way, during their rebuilding process: depth. That list isn't going to be the White Sox exact 25-man roster one day, in all likelihood, but a significant number of those players should make up a core just like the one the Cubs boast now.

The step the White Sox have yet to reach is the one where they add high-priced free agents. Lester and Heyward got huge contracts once the Cubs opened their contention window (even though it took a leap of faith on Lester's part, considering he signed before many of those youngsters hit the big leagues). Zobrist signed for four years and ended up the World Series MVP in his first season on the North Side.

The White Sox should be approaching that point, be it this offseason or the next. With the ridiculous amount of free agents set to hit the market in the next two offseasons — superstars like Bryce Harper, Manny Machado, Josh Donaldson and Nolan Arenado — adding someone of that caliber would help the White Sox build a contender on what is expected to be a pretty impressive foundation.

The year before the Cubs made their first run to the NLCS, they finished in last place. This isn't saying that the White Sox are going to rocket to the postseason after a season in which they're currently on pace to lose more than 100 games. But timing the arrival of all that minor league talent alongside spending on free agents could rip that contention window wide open, just like the Cubs did in 2015. After Lester signed over the winter, Bryant and Russell hit the majors in April. And just like that ...

Despite Sunday's win for the South Siders, this weekend made it pretty apparent that the White Sox and Cubs are far apart from one another. The Cubs blasted White Sox pitching in the series' first two games, scoring 19 runs in two days. The final score on the three days at Wrigley: Cubs 22, White Sox 11.

But in that display, the White Sox saw what they hope to be over the next few years. The Cubs were once piling up losses and languishing at the bottom of the standings. That's how a rebuilding process works. The White Sox are going through that right now. And there's an argument to be made that their rebuild, spurred by trading the high-end major league talent the Cubs didn't have at the time, is moving along at a better clip than the Cubs' did. Of course, it doesn't matter how long it takes to get there, the destination is what's important, and the Cubs already reached the top of the mountain.

But baseball's mountaintop rarely has one occupant for very long. The White Sox are mid-climb and hope to reach the summit as soon as all that player development will allow. Thankfully for them, they can follow the path taken by the rebuilding success stories that came before them — including the Cubs.

White Sox see no reason to stunt development of Michael Kopech, Eloy Jimenez to boost current big league squad: 'I don't see us jumping the gun'

By Vinnie Duber / NBC Sports Chicago / May 13, 2018

The White Sox have the worst record in baseball, and giving up a combined 19 runs in the first two games of this crosstown series with the Cubs only sent social media into a further rage.

Fans with and without Twitter accounts are all asking the same question: Why not bring up two of the top 10 prospects in baseball and give this team a jolt?

The answer isn't difficult to come up with, even if it's a displeasing one to those making the query.

Michael Kopech and Eloy Jimenez are two exceptionally talented prospects. But there's simply no point in promoting them before their development in the minor leagues is fully complete. The ongoing rebuilding effort meant this was always going to be a tough season at the major league level, and while owning the worst record in the bigs is perhaps a little surprising, there's no pennant or playoff spot that Kopech or Jimenez would help the White Sox chase down.

Calling those guys up just to make a last-place team a little better? While taking away from their long-term development? Where's the logic in that?

"You can't cross that line," manager Rick Renteria said Sunday. "I think that you have to allow those guys that are in the system to continue to work through the things that they're working through. I don't think it would make sense, honestly, to push something because of what's occurring here at the particular moment.

"No one, neither as a staff or as an organization, expected that we would be at this particular point right now. But it is what it is. I think we have to continue to move forward. I don't see us jumping the gun and trying to do something to infuse, at this particular moment, something to take away from what's going on right now by having a young player come up right now. They have to still do some things down there before we get them here."

As the White Sox still search for their 10th win of the season in mid May, it's no wonder the fan base is upset. The team has scored the fewest runs in the American League and has the highest ERA and the highest walk total in baseball.

This is the extreme, of course, but there's a reason Rick Hahn called this "the hardest part of the rebuild." And the general manager has said repeatedly that prospects' development and the major league win-loss total will be completely independent of one another.

It's a waiting game, and at this moment a very uncomfortable waiting game, while all those prospects develop in the minor leagues. The major league games remain valuable for the development of young players like Yoan Moncada, Lucas Giolito, Tim Anderson, Reynaldo Lopez and Matt Davidson. But it might not mean a heck of a lot of winning.

Frustrating? Yes. Unexpected? Not really.

It all means giving Kopech and Jimenez and all those other prospects the time they need in the minor leagues. Just because Kopech is piling up the strikeouts another doesn't mean the process is complete. Just because Jimenez has a hit streak half a month long doesn't mean the process is complete.

For all those fans who, to their credit, so willingly bought into this rebuilding process, this is the tough part.

"I think that if there's anything I can say, it's that the one thing I can't lose sight of or our staff can't lose sight of, it's where we're going, the direction that we want to go," Renteria said. "I think that ultimately as we continue to move forward the one thing that these guys have to take from every experience that they have is to gain some knowledge from it. Obviously the growth will continue to occur. As frustrating as it might be right now, it is going to happen.

"I think that patience in this particular instance is a really important part of being where we're at right now. That may bring no solace to the fan at this particular time, but I can't lose focus on what we're trying to do in terms of developing guys to become the players that we want them to be and the team that we want them to be."

Did Rick Renteria just pick a new closer, or is this how White Sox bullpen was always supposed to work?

By Vinnie Duber / NBC Sports Chicago / May 13, 2018

Bruce Rondon threw a scoreless ninth inning Sunday and locked down a 5-3 win for the White Sox.

So he's the new closer, right?

It's no secret that the ninth inning hasn't been the strongest for White Sox relievers this season, and after Nate Jones' four-run implosion last week against the Pittsburgh Pirates, maybe it was time for Rick Renteria to turn to a new option at closer.

But look what happened the inning prior to Rondon's shutdown ninth, and you might see that Sunday was just an example of how Rick Renteria has wanted to use this White Sox bullpen all along.

Jones was the man on for the eighth inning, and he went 1-2-3 to keep the Cubs offense down. But while the ninth inning gets all the glory, it's very easy to argue that the three outs in the eighth were more difficult to get than the three in the ninth. After all, Jones faced the middle of the Cubs' order: Willson Contreras (he of the monster weekend against White Sox pitching), Javy Baez (the National League RBI leader) and Kyle Schwarber (kid's got some pop). Jones got those three to go strikeout, fly out, groundout.

A nice bounce back for Jones, perhaps once more being used in a "closer's" role, albeit a less traditional one than most folks are used to.

Rondon fared well and was pumped up after he struck out Addison Russell and Ian Happ, then got Ben Zobrist to fly out to end the game after Tommy La Stella's pinch-hit single.

For Rondon, the one-time "closer of the future" for the Detroit Tigers, he treated it like he was getting the game's three biggest outs.

"Every time that I go out, my mindset is the closer mindset, and I like it," Rondon said with the help of a translator.

But Rondon's manager wasn't keen to hand out a role to any of his relievers after the game. Instead, he talked about a plan he's discussed since spring training, one that has multiple guys as "high-leverage" relievers, no matter which inning they happen to pitch in.

"I think in terms of outs, it just happened to be the ninth inning and he got us the outs he needed to get," Renteria said. "I don't talk to our relievers about innings situations, I talk to them more about getting outs."

And the bullpen guys get that, too.

"Ricky just tells us to be ready after the seventh because when the situation arises we need to perform there and that's what we have been doing," Rondon said.

Unmentioned to this point is Joakim Soria, who was added this offseason as a potential closer and a guy who could potentially be flipped for a rebuild-aiding piece this summer. But he hasn't fared especially well, either, with a 4.38 ERA on the year. Jones has been used in big situations throughout the season to varying degrees of effectiveness. After Sunday's great eighth inning, he's got a 4.11 ERA. Rondon's 4.15 ERA doesn't exactly scream "new closer," but he's had flashes of brilliance, including Sunday, when he blew away a couple Cubs hitters.

But there's a strong case to be made that Jones got the three biggest outs recorded by a White Sox relief pitcher Sunday, and that might make him as much of a "closer" as the White Sox have.

Maybe Rondon does become the team's new ninth-inning man. Or maybe this was exactly how Renteria wanted things to play out from Day 1.

The White Sox rebuild is about the future, but the 2018 team has plenty it wants to accomplish: 'Next year is not here'

By Vinnie Duber / NBC Sports Chicago / May 12, 2018

The White Sox have baseball's worst record. But anyone who's paid any attention to the ongoing rebuilding effort knew this was part of the deal.

There might be surprise and disgust across the fan base over just how poorly things have gone for the South Siders in the season's first 35 games, but losing was always going to be part of the equation. Development and waiting for minor league talent to reach the major leagues was always the priority in 2018. It's why Rick Hahn called this "the hardest part of the rebuild."

White Sox fans, who have completely bought in to Hahn's plans for the future, know things are going to get better eventually, when the Michael Kopechs and the Eloy Jimenezes and the Luis Roberts and the Alec Hansens join the Yoan Moncadas and the Reynaldo Lopezes at the major league level.

But there's at least one guy who thinks "eventually" is sooner than it might seem.

Wait till next year? For Rick Renteria, next year isn't soon enough.

Maybe he's encouraged by the progress being made by young players like Moncada, Lopez, Tim Anderson and Matt Davidson. Maybe he thinks Kopech or other midseason call-ups could be transformational forces. Maybe he just has a feeling that the White Sox fortunes are going to turn around. Regardless his reasoning, Renteria believes that waiting for next year isn't the only left to accomplish in 2018.

And his players agree.

Solid stuff from Matt Davidson: "We are not just sitting here 'Oh, well. Next year is going to be better.' I think that's the worst mindset we can have. We are trying. We are not enjoying it either. We want to go out and win just as bad."

— Scott Merkin (@scottmerkin) May 11, 2018

"I've never said next year, never used that word," Renteria said Saturday after being told about Davidson's comments. "I think I've always spoken about these guys having successes this year. He's speaking accurately. He's not thinking about next year. He's thinking about now, I think we all are. I do believe that the only way you can take care of now is to live in a particular moment, which is today's game."

"I don't think that they go out there wanting to fail. I've said this many times: Nobody wants to go out there in front of 40,000 people and not do well. If that's the mindset that you have, wow, god bless you. I don't want to go out there and not have a good day, neither as a manager nor as a coach nor as a player, whatever. We all want to go out there and have good days.

"The really important thing is how are they dealing with what's going on at this particular moment and are they separating it enough so that they can just take care of today. ... They can only concern themselves and I can only concern myself with today and the moments available to us and we certainly are trying to win today. I think that's what he was probably referring to. Next year is not here. We've got to think about right now. We're trying to stay with that."

The fact that this team is in rebuild mode explains and even excuses all the losing that's happened over the first month and a half of this campaign. And that was, in some part, to be expected. But there were plenty of other things on the line when the season began that still remain. The "prove it" years are still unfolding for guys like Davidson, Anderson, Carson Fulmer, Yolmer Sanchez, Nicky Delmonico and Avisail Garcia. And major league development is still the most important thing for a lot of these players.

A sign of that development will be improved play. If the play improves for enough guys individually, it should improve team-wide, and that would figure to translate to more winning.

Renteria, for one, thinks his team is better — and will be better — than its current record shows.

"My expectation is that it is," he said. "If there was anything you can say about the men in there right now is they know that we haven't done as well as we would have wanted. That's a fact. There is no denying that. My job is to make sure they remain focused.

"As much as people want them to be negative and angry, I need them to stay positive and focused on the things they need to do to correct the things they're doing individually and collectively. And we have to move forward. This is a long season and there is a lot to be gained and learned from this season. And winning sure does help. Coming out with victories on a daily basis puts us in a more positive mentality, but there are things you need to do to accomplish that and that is to perform."

Rebuilds take time. Rebuilds take patience. Rebuilds are not meant to be judged on a daily basis, a hard current to swim against when the big league team provides daily results.

So much can happen between now and when the White Sox are planning their contention window to open, but even factoring in for plenty of variables, there's a large majority that believes this organization's future will be one worth celebrating.

"We know that as dismal as it might seem that there are better days coming," Renteria said. "Even for the group that's here there are better days coming and better days coming for the organization."

Benched for not hustling: Just one of the ways Rick Renteria is trying to build the White Sox identity

By Vinnie Duber / NBC Sports Chicago / May 11, 2018

Someone has to teach Ricky's boys not to quit. That someone is Ricky himself.

The rebuilding White Sox are trying to establish an organizational identity, and that has taken the form of "Ricky's boys don't quit," a four-word, bumper-sticker friendly way of summarizing the manager's desire for his players to play hard, from the start of the game to the end of it. The players wear shirts with the No. 27 on the back, symbolizing playing hard for all 27 outs of a game.

But on rare occasions, they don't do that, and that's when Renteria needs to step in.

He did it Wednesday, when the White Sox appeared to be on their way to a win against the Pittsburgh Pirates — before Nate Jones gave up four runs in the ninth inning and the South Siders dropped their fifth straight game. Leury Garcia attempted to bunt for a hit. It didn't work, the ball going right to the first baseman. Garcia was easily out before much of a play developed. But his lack of a sprint down the first-base line earned the frustration of his manager, and Garcia was yanked from the game.

"I didn't think I had a chance to make it, but that's the way he wants me to play so I can't say anything," Garcia said Friday before the start of the Crosstown series with the Cubs. "He wants everybody to play hard, give a good effort. I didn't do it, so he took me out. You learn every day. It's not going to happen anymore."

The White Sox could've used Garcia's versatility later in the game, as a two-run double bounced in front of Daniel Palka in that disastrous ninth. A defensive improvement could've been made, with Palka being swapped out for Trayce Thompson to give Renteria a better defensive outfield.

No matter. Renteria has already shown that certain aspects of development will be of greater value to the White Sox young players than wins in this rebuilding season. Perhaps building a cultural identity falls into the same category.

"At the end of the day, what we're doing, it's about trying to create the identity that we wish to have as far as who we are as an organization," Renteria said. "We will get to that point, I think we're nearing that point where conversations will be had where I don't have to remove someone from the ballgame, but the conversation has to be had during that ballgame to make sure someone understands that that's not something that is acceptable.

"Once you allow that line to be crossed and it starts spreading a little deeper and everybody feels that it's OK. It's about changing the mindset. Ultimately, you want your veteran players to be able to take that mantle and to be able to talk to a player and let them know what's going on."

It won't go down as some great controversy. Garcia was back in the lineup Friday, batting second and starting in center field. But it might end up having a significance in the long term, the most important term to this rebuilding organization. If Renteria and the White Sox go player by player, from top to bottom, establishing the identity they want to establish, then everyone will be on the same page — and playing the way the team wants them to play — when the contention window opens.

"It's kind of what you're trying to develop," Renteria said. "I don't think it's just established here at the major league level, I think it's established as the guys are going through the minor league system, as well. It becomes an organizational mindset as to how you deal with it.

"You don't need to be a 12-year vet to impart to a teammate, 'Hey, you've got to do a little better.' You can still be a young man and know that you're in an organization that wants to play the game a certain way and you can pull your teammate aside and have that conversation with him, which I appreciate because there's so many things going on. But as the manager, those are the things that I still have to make sure I take care of.

"Right, wrong or indifferent, we're trying to establish a certain way to go about doing our business. I know that I don't like it when I see guys not coming out the box hustling."

It was all about the 1st inning in the latest edition of the City Series

By Steve Rosenbloom / Chicago Tribune / May 13, 2018

The first inning was pretty much the City Series. That's all you needed to see. That's where wins were made or blown.

The Cubs ruined the White Sox in the first inning on Friday and Saturday and then piled on. That's what you do against bad teams.

Then the Cubs ruined themselves in the first inning Sunday when they seemingly had a chance to score two touchdowns before the Sox managed three outs, but no, it didn't happen, and the Cubs instead scored pretty much the fewest runs imaginable under the circumstances, and it cost them against the only major-league team that hadn't won 10 games.

In other words, the championship-caliber Cubs and rebuilding Sox both regret Sunday.

Truth is, though, whatever way these first three dates of the City Series were going to go, it remains true that the only dates that matter to the Sox are the draft and whenever Eloy Jimenez and Michael Kopech get called up and the only dates that matter to the Cubs are October.

And the dates Yu Darvish pitches.

The dates Darvish pitches at home, specifically.

Walks, hit-by-pitches and wild pitches are more likely to get a guy a trip to the minors than a win in the majors, but maybe Lucas Giolito decided has decided to channel his inner Tyler Chatwood.

I know that wins have become a denigrated statistic these days, but it's a hoot to note that the two pitchers who separated themselves from the pack to tie for the major-league lead in walks each picked up victories in the City Series.

Chatwood walked five and threw one wild pitch in five innings Friday, but still won his third game. On Sunday, Giolito walked seven, threw three wild pitches and hit one batter, but still beat the Cubs.

Remarkably for a guy with 32 walks, Chatwood's ERA is a respectable 3.35, below his career average somehow. As expected for a guy with 32 walks, Giolito's ERA stands at six-point-mommy-make-it-stop. And both guys picked up a win. And baseball makes no sense.

The Cubs had two runners thrown out at home in Sunday's two-run loss to the Sox, and Maddon called Addison Russell's out a "gaffe," but is there really anything wrong with daring a team with lousy fundamentals to execute?

Tom Brady is only the 19th highest-paid quarterback in the NFL, according to Spotrac. He has won five Super Bowls. The 18 quarterbacks ahead of him have won eight combined — none among the top five money-earners. No wonder Brady reportedly is cranky with the Patriots.

After spanking the Lightning in Tampa for the second straight game to take a two-games-to-none lead in the Eastern Conference Final, the Capitals are a stunning 7-1 on the road, but only 3-3 at home. So, if the underachieving Capitals can at least split on their own ice — few things define Alex Ovechkin's star-crossed postseason Capitals more than hoping for a split at home — and eventually move on the Stanley Cup Final, they would be fortunate not to have what for them is home-ice disadvantage.

Game-tying goal for the Capitals by Devante Smith-Pelly. We're big Smith-Pelly fans around here, you might recall.

What's up, Dick Ruthven?

Column: White Sox halt losing streak with 'huge' City Series win

By Teddy Greenstein / Chicago Tribune / May 13, 2018

Matt Davidson spotted Jose Abreu on the field after the game and gave him the green light. Jump.

The 6-3, 255-pound Abreu leaped into his arms.

That's not something you normally see when a team wins a game in May, on Mother's Day. But this was no run-of-the-mill victory.

What began as a clown show concluded, by 2018 White Sox standards, as an instant classic.

For a team that had lost 11 of its last 12 and stumbled around Wrigley Field for two days, this was grande.

"A much-needed win," the Spanish-speaking Abreu said through an interpreter. "We battled, we fought. It was special for us to give this victory to (manager) Ricky (Renteria), especially because he lost his mom a few weeks ago. So this victory has a special meaning for us."

The egoless Renteria never makes it about him, eagerly crediting his players when they perform.

"I thought the guys played great," he said, calling the White Sox's performance in the 5-3 victory "pretty clean."

There was nothing tidy about Lucas Giolito's start, though. He produced a pitching line that not even a mother could love: 5 2/3 innings, three runs, two hits, seven walks, three strikeouts, three wild pitches, a hit-by-pitch and five stolen bases allowed.

He became the first Sox pitcher since Dan Wright in 2001 to walk at least seven batters and allow two runs or fewer.

"Grind is a key word," Giolito said. "Obviously I was not really in sync. The one thing unwavering was my confidence. I knew that if I executed the next pitch, they were going to get themselves out."

The fact that he escaped the first inning with just two runs allowed was a stranger stat than LeBron James' plus/minus of -32 against the Celtics.

"To know the coaching staff has my back means a lot," Giolito said.

Indeed, Renteria credited pitching coach Don Cooper for delivering a chill pill during a first-inning visit to the mound.

Hey, Coop, what did you tell him?

"Just giving him his keys," Cooper said. "We keep fighting. Sometimes (the young pitchers) will trip and fall, but you know what? We will pick them back up. Because we know where we are and what we're trying to accomplish. We're trying to find out about people."

Giolito joined a select club: Only he and the Cubs' Tyler Chatwood have walked seven batters in a game this season.

"He had his good slider going," Cooper said. "Command was off here and there. To beat the best teams and the best lineups, you have to pour your (stuff) in. You can't be falling behind and leaving yourself susceptible. He did, but he got out of it."

After delivering just 10 strikes out of 27 pitches in the first, he threw a clean second and survived until the sixth. By then the Sox had a 4-3 lead.

Davidson homered and also took Kyle Hendricks to the warning track for a sacrifice fly that brought in the go-ahead run.

"He's nasty," Davidson said of Giolito. "He's not a top prospect or has as much hype behind him for nothing. We know he can be in this rotation for a long time."

The Sox are still at least three victories behind every other major-league team. But getting swept by the Cubs would have been a gut punch to their fans.

How big was this win?

“Huge, huge,” Renteria said. “Those guys are enjoying this victory, to say the least.”

Column: Struggling White Sox finally give their manager reason to smile on emotional day

By David Haugh / Chicago Tribune / May 13, 2018

Angela Renteria died April 25 in Austin, Texas, at 91.

Exactly 18 days later, her son, Rick, was preaching persistence Sunday in the visiting dugout at Wrigley Field before a 5-3 victory over the Cubs when a question about Mother’s Day caught the manager of the woebegone White Sox as off guard as a 3-2 changeup.

“You know, this will be the first ...” Renteria said, unable to finish his sentence.

This will be the first Mother’s Day without my mom.

Seven uncomfortable seconds of silence followed. An emotional Renteria looked away from reporters.

“She was awesome,” Renteria said, his voice trailing as he abruptly walked away. “That’s all I got.”

That’s more than a lesser man might have offered under the circumstances.

These have been trying times for the White Sox without even factoring in the family pain still present for Renteria, whose professionalism in the face of personal grief has underscored what makes him right for a job requiring so much perspective.

The Sox ended a seven-game losing streak with their best effort in weeks but still find themselves on pace to win 51 fewer games than the Cubs in 2018. Their second victory since April 29, and only 10th overall, didn’t alter their status as the worst team in the majors. But it mattered.

“Huge,” Renteria said postgame in a pink cap to commemorate Mother’s Day. “This is certainly a confidence-builder.”

He could have meant for Sox fans too. Faith among the masses has been harder to find than frustration because of so much shoddy baseball. The ire is understandable from just about everybody in Chicago. Some sports observers only a couple of months ago cheered every Bulls loss as a victory for tanking but now chastise the Sox for being so bad. BREAKING: This was by design too.

One small but significant detail helps explain the difference in reactions to Jerry Reinsdorf’s cellar-dwelling teams in different sports. The Bulls made it easier to see the arrow pointing up by developing a semblance of an identity and buying into a system. The Sox still too often look lost.

Like the Bulls, the Sox expected to lose regularly from the moment general manager Rick Hahn announced the rebuilding process in December 2016. They just weren’t prepared for the embarrassment, which has been too easy to spot this young season. That’s a half-step backward from 2017.

Before Sox starter Lucas Giolito settled down Sunday, the Cubs stole four bases, walked three times and advanced on two wild pitches — in the first inning. It felt like Saturday, when Sox pitchers walked four straight hitters, once throwing 13 straight balls. On Friday, Renteria failed to call for a review when Matt Davidson looked safe at second base after being picked off, and third-base coach Nick Capra recklessly

waved home Nicky Delmonico, who was thrown out by 20 feet. Sox apologists can't blame injuries for chronic brain cramps.

Individual mental lapses start to leave a collective impression. Ricky's Boys don't quit, as the ad says, but the team promoting its heart must remember to use its head like the Sox did in Sunday's City Series finale. Everybody knows the Sox roster will change gradually. Now the Sox need to show signs the overall approach will, too, immediately. That challenge of getting everyone to buy in falls on Renteria, the indefatigable optimist.

"I still believe completely and totally in guys we have here," Renteria said. "The one thing I can't lose sight of is the direction we want to go, and obviously we've had situations that haven't gone as well as we've wanted. Ultimately the growth will continue to occur, as frustrating as it might be right now, it is going to happen."

Getting injured second baseman Yoan Moncada back as early as Tuesday from a hamstring injury will help the Sox. So will reminding themselves that baseball's bottoming-out method worked for the Cubs, Astros and Royals — all teams that stayed the course despite doubts along the way. This remains the right one for the Sox, albeit with an unwelcome detour taking them a little further south than planned.

Their driver, Renteria, is undeterred. A 56-year-old manager who, as a player, overcame a broken jaw that required the insertion of plates and screws after a ball hit him in the face knows something about perseverance.

"Patience is really an important part of being where we're at right now," Renteria said. "That will bring no solace to the fan at this particular time, but I can't lose focus on what we're trying to do in terms of developing these guys. If you allow it to take control of you, you can bury yourself in it and it can be pretty tough to work through it."

Despite the temptation, the Sox vow to avoid calling up top minor-league prospects such as slugger Eloy Jimenez or future ace Michael Kopech for a morale boost. Their 2018 debuts still sound closer to if than when. For the organizations that rebuild the right way — which the Sox are — major-league standings have no effect on minor-league timetables.

"You can't cross that line," Renteria said. "You have to allow those guys in the system to continue to work through the things they're working through. I don't think it would make sense, honestly, to push something because of what's occurring here at the particular moment."

This particular moment on Mother's Day finally was one worth celebrating for the Sox, whose manager deserved a reason to smile.

Is Yoan Moncada ready to rejoin the White Sox in Pittsburgh?

By Teddy Greenstein / Chicago Tribune / May 13, 2018

The White Sox shipped infielder Jose Rondon to Triple-A Charlotte after Sunday's game, and it doesn't take an FBI agent to figure out the logical corresponding move.

Rondon took the place of second baseman Yoan Moncada, who was placed on the 10-day disabled list May 5 for tightness in his left hamstring.

Moncada is eligible to return for the Sox's next game, Tuesday against the Pirates in Pittsburgh, but manager Rick Renteria said the team's next roster move is "to be determined."

Moncada ran and took grounders before Sunday's game.

"He's doing very, very well," Renteria said, "and we're hoping he'll be back in the lineup soon."

The final out: Since Joakim Soria blew a save May 1 at St. Louis, the Sox haven't had many closing opportunities. Nate Jones coughed up a potential victory over the Pirates on Wednesday but worked a perfect eighth inning Sunday.

Up two runs in the ninth, Renteria summoned Bruce Rondon, once viewed as the Tigers' closer of the future until he fell out of favor in Detroit.

Rondon looked sharp in earning his first Sox save, allowing just a single to Tommy La Stella.

"Every time I go out," he said, "I have a closer's mindset."

Renteria indicated that his closing situation will be fluid.

"It just happened to be the ninth inning and Bruce got us the outs he needed," Renteria said. "I don't talk to our relievers about innings; I talk to them more about getting outs."

Added Rondon about the bullpen: "We are always united. Win or lose, we have each other's backs. We won today; we are happy."

On time: Matt Davidson easily leads the Sox with an on-base percentage of .383. Not bad for a guy who got on base at a 26 percent clip last season, walking 19 times. Already this season, he has 22.

"Timing is better," he explained. "I'm consistently more on time with every pitch and that allows me to make a better decision."

Cubs lose a game the White Sox tried to give away

By Paul Sullivan / Chicago Tribune / May 13, 2018

White Sox starter Lucas Giolito tried to gift-wrap a game for the Cubs on Sunday at Wrigley Field, but they politely refused his generous offering.

Despite seven walks and three wild pitches in just under six innings, Giolito managed to hang in long enough to let the Cubs beat themselves, which they eventually did in a 5-3 loss to the Sox before 40,537. "We scored early, but Giolito did a good job at staying off our barrel for the most part," Anthony Rizzo said. "I know he walked a lot of guys, but we didn't really hit him too well. Put pressure on him, but we just came up short."

"He was effectively wild, I think, at the start," losing pitcher Kyle Hendricks said. "But his stuff was moving. And he dialed it in late."

Still, this was a series the Cubs should've swept. They were playing a team that not only is the worst in baseball but is threatening to challenge for the unofficial title as worst in modern baseball history.

But manager Joe Maddon was satisfied with the series win, no matter the opponent.

"Any time you win a series, we'll take it," he said.

Most of the time two out of three ain't bad. But this was, after all, the White Sox.

"I know they're going through some issues, but I really like their team on the field," Maddon said. "There is a lot of offensive talent, and they're actually missing some people right now too."

The Cubs had scored 50 runs in the first five games of the homestand against the lowly Marlins and Sox, after averaging 2.5 runs per game in their previous 11 games.

On Sunday they managed only three hits off Sox pitching, which came in with a 5.41 ERA, the highest in the majors. But thanks to Giolito's wildness and five steals, they had plenty of chances.

"One baserunning gaffe on our part," Maddon said, referring to Addison Russell getting thrown out at the plate in the fourth on Hendricks' sharp grounder to third. "But for the most part I felt they played really good defense today."

Russell called it "just a bad read," adding he was "overaggressive" on the hard-hit ball. He probably could've scored from first base on Ian Happ's double to deep right earlier in the inning but was forced to hold up at third for Kyle Schwarber, who was just rounding the base.

"You can't overrun the guy in front of you," Russell said.

No one seemed too concerned about the offensive no-show, which followed a hot streak. Rizzo said the offense is "day to day," just like life itself.

"Some days (we) come out banging," he said. "And some days we come out cold."

At least Rizzo and Willson Contreras have come out of their slumps, and Javier Baez continues to mash the ball, as he did with a two-run single in the first on a 3-0 pitch.

"I can only imagine when we all click," Russell said.

One thing the Cubs will have to do is pick up the defense. Rizzo failed to make a scoop on Adam Engel's infield hit to shortstop in the third. Russell made a great defensive play, but his one-hop throw escaped Rizzo. It was a difficult play but one Rizzo usually makes.

Contreras then tried to pick Engel off first, but his throw sailed into right field, allowing Engel to advance to third, where Yolmer Sanchez's two-out single to center brought him home.

Maddon said he had no problem with Contreras making that throw. Contreras' ability to catch runners napping is part of what makes him such a valuable catcher.

"I encourage him to throw whenever he wants," Maddon said. "And I'll continue to do so."

Now the young-and-hungry Braves come to town for a makeup game Monday, followed by a three-game series in Atlanta. When asked if the Cubs knew how good they were, Rizzo replied: "We're playing good?"

Well, good enough to be among the leaders in the National League Central, where none of the four early contenders looks like they're planning to run away.

But perhaps not up to the high standards the Cubs set for themselves, or what fans expect from a core that dared to dream of a dynasty after 2016.

White Sox rally for 5-3 win to prevent Cubs sweep at Wrigley Field

By Paul Sullivan/Teddy Greenstein / Chicago Tribune / May 13, 2018

The White Sox came from behind for a 5-3 win over the Cubs in the finale of the City Series at Wrigley Field, snapping their seven-game losing streak before a crowd of 40,537.

Lucas Giolito (2-4) notched the win despite a hairy first inning and seven walks overall. Bruce Rondon, a surprise choice as closer, pitched the ninth for the save.

After a two-out single by Tommy La Stella, Ben Zobrist flied out to end it. The Cubs wound up with only three hits on the afternoon as their win streak ended at five games.

After being pounded in the first two games, the Sox grabbed their first lead of the series with a two-run sixth inning off Kyle Hendricks, who fell to 3-3.

Nicky Delmonico's triple tied the game at 3-3, before Matt Davidson's sacrifice fly put the Sox on top. Leury Garcia's run-scoring single off Brian Duensing in the seventh extended the lead to two runs.

Giolito walked seven over 5 2/3 innings, throwing only 50 strikes in 100 pitches. He threw three wild pitches and hit a batter, while yielding two hits.

The Cubs took advantage of Giolito's control problems to take an early lead. Giolito walked three, threw two wild pitches and allowed four stolen bases in the first as the Cubs scored in the opening inning for the third straight game.

Javier Baez's two-run single on a 3-0 pitch gave the Cubs a 2-0 lead. But the Sox answered with a solo home run by Davidson off Hendricks in the second, and tied it on Yolmer Sanchez's RBI single in the third.

A throwing error by Willson Contreras on an attempted pick-off play at first preceded Sanchez's hit, making it an unearned run.

Ian Happ's RBI double in the fourth gave the Cubs a brief 3-2 lead, but Addison Russell stopped at third and was then thrown out at the plate on a grounder to first.

Column: Rick Renteria trying to keep negativity, anger from White Sox clubhouse

By Teddy Greenstein / Chicago Tribune / May 13, 2018

From a White Sox perspective, what more can be said?

Despite ample evidence to the contrary, these guys are trying to win. They have personal pride. Scores of fans might not care if they lose 120 games during a rebuild, but the players do. The manager does.

"As much as I would want to say that we don't feel the angst of losses," skipper Rick Renteria said, "we do."

We know they're in a rebuild and have no shot for October.

They know they're in a rebuild and have no shot for October.

But it pains the players to carry the label of "worst team in baseball" at 9-27, losers of seven straight. And it should.

"We're not playing the type of baseball we want to play," center fielder Adam Engel said Saturday in the quiet, cramped visitors' clubhouse at Wrigley Field.

If you're dying to look for positives, start with Engel, an unlikely leadoff man considering he reached base in 23.7 percent of his 428 career plate appearances before Saturday. He went 3-for-4 and scored two runs in the 8-4 loss to the Cubs.

The other glimmer is even more obvious: Down 8-1 and with the ballpark emptying after a long rain delay, the Sox made it a game. Thanks in part to Kris Bryant flubbing a Trayce Thompson liner to right field, the Sox had Jose Abreu up in the ninth with the bases loaded. A homer would have tied it.

"They did fight and battle and just fell short," Renteria said.

Many Sox fans are saying: Wake me up in 2020. Is fighting and battling in an 8-4 loss enough to satisfy the ones who actually care whether the Sox win again this season?

Renteria mentioned that Saturday's result was better than Friday's 11-2 drubbing. And he's right. That game was a disaster, a breakdown in hitting, pitching, fielding and coaching.

Saturday's loss was a bummer. And sorry for the groaner, but part of the problem was reliever Aaron Bummer issuing a four-pitch walk with the bases loaded.

"I know we fell short, but if this can't build a little confidence in them, nothing can," Renteria said.

Maybe Mother's Day will bring a contest that will not feel like Groundhog Day.

This one felt like a replay of Friday's loss until Matt Davidson's seventh-inning blast off Carl Edwards Jr.: Gray skies over Wrigley Field. Cool afternoon temperatures. Willson Contreras bashing one to left-center off Chris Beck.

It would be nice to see the Sox not trail 5-0 after two innings, sapping the intensity from the ballpark.

But win or lose, the Sox can count on their manager to be the exact same guy. He'll greet them with a smile, a tap and a pleasantry when they arrive at the ballpark. They will hear familiar songs coming from his office — think John Mellencamp's "Small Town" or tunes from Marvin Gaye or Frank Sinatra.

"I'm a positive person by nature," Renteria told reporters before the game. "It's going to take a lot before one of you guys knocks me down. Listen, you guys are reporting on facts and things that are occurring right now, which is good. It's fair. The reality is that we as a team have to continue to try to chip away and improve. There are different ways of doing it, and controlling your emotions is the biggest part of it."

Don't expect anyone on this team to snap. Thankfully, there's no Jaime Navarro around to rip into his teammates as a "bunch of dead dogs."

Flipping over a spread won't help a team that, at 9-27, is off to the worst start in franchise history.

"As much as people want them to be negative and angry," Renteria said, "I need them to stay positive and focused on the things they need to do individually and collectively. This is a long season, and there is a lot to be gained and learned."

Cubs go up 2-0 in City Series with 8-4 victory over White Sox

By Teddy Greenstein / Chicago Tribune / May 12, 2018

Gray skies over Wrigley Field. Cool afternoon temps. The Cubs jump out to a 5-0 lead. Willson Contreras hits a bomb off Chris Beck. The Cubs win in a laughter.

It all happened Friday. It all happened again Saturday.

This final score was 8-4 as the Cubs further established a chasm between the two teams. The Cubs (21-15) won their fifth straight, unbothered by a 2-hour, 15-minute rain delay. The Sox (a major-league worst 9-27) lost for the seventh time in a row.

Contreras had another big day, going 3-for-5 with three RBIs. After driving in nine runs in his first 30 games this season, the Cubs' star catcher has 10 RBIs in his last two.

Javier Baez also thrived Saturday, smacking James Shields' first pitch down the right-field line for a triple in his first game of the season batting leadoff. He later beat out a grounder to first, sprinting to the bag before Shields could collect Jose Abreu's toss. And Baez contorted his body to avoid a Tim Anderson tag on a stolen base.

Anthony Rizzo hit a three-run bomb in the first, his sixth of the season. David Bote also had a nice game as a fill-in starter at second base; he went 2-for-3 with a walk.

Jon Lester (5 2/3 innings, 1 earned run, 4 hits, 3 walks, 5 strikeouts) pitched well enough to improve to 3-1.

Shields steadied the ship after allowing five early run but still fell to 1-4.

Beck and Aaron Bummer, who issued a four-pitch walk with the bases loaded, allowed the Cubs to extend their lead to 8-1.

Not many fans remained when Matt Davidson finally gave Sox fans something to smile about — a three-run homer off Carl Edwards Jr. It was Davidson's 10th.

The Cubs were closing in on an easy victory in the ninth when Trayce Thompson lined one to right field that Kris Bryant let glance off his glove for an error.

Manager Joe Maddon summoned closer Brandon Morrow, and he delivered by striking out Yolmer Sanchez and Daniel Palka. After walking Tim Anderson to load the bases, he induced a groundout from potential tying run Jose Abreu to end the game.

Composite score from the two games: 19-6. Varsity versus JV.

The Cubs will go for the sweep Sunday by sending Kyle Hendricks (3-2, 3.02) to the hill against Lucas Giolito (1-4, 7.25).

Adam Engel has 'uplifting' day as White Sox leadoff hitter

By Teddy Greenstein / Chicago Tribune / May 13, 2018

Adam Engel is not what one would call a prototypical leadoff guy, not with a career on-base percentage of .237.

But White Sox manager Rick Renteria gave him a shot Saturday for the first time this season, saying before the game: "Let's see if we can get him on base, create a little havoc with his speed. He can chop one, bunt one, do any number of things. And hopefully the left-handed matchup (against Cubs pitcher Jon Lester) will give us a little opportunity to shake it up."

Engel delivered, going 3-for-4 during the Sox's 8-4 loss. And his first at-bat, a flyout, nearly produced a double after Engel lined one to left that barely landed foul.

"(It) felt good," said Engel, who led off nine times for the Sox in 2017. "(I) saw it well today."

Renteria called it "an uplifting day for him."

Engel is an ace defender who still is trying to establish himself as an everyday player and a potential contributor to the Sox's long-term rebuild. What he showed Saturday was encouraging. He even fulfilled Renteria's forecast by bunting for a hit in the third inning.

"I noticed that (Javier) Baez was back," Engel said. "With runners in scoring position, I probably swing away. But with the wind blowing in and a runner on first base, it's tough to try to hit it (into) a gap to have a guy score from first.

"I'm just trying to get on base. I thought it was a good situation to try it."

Big-game Lucas? The Sox are desperate for a starter to stop the bleeding. Lucas Giolito will get his shot Sunday.

Giolito has a 7.25 ERA, and his 25 walks are tied for the most in the American League. Still, he said he will be up to the task of pitching before 40,000-plus at Wrigley Field.

"The more fans, the more noise, the better it is for me," he said. "It makes it more fun."

Giolito even noticed an increased intensity when the Cubs and Sox met in spring training.

"You could feel it because (the Cubs) pack their place," he said.

Delay of game: Miguel Gonzalez hoped to go on a rehab assignment this week, but the right-handed starter still is experiencing soreness in his shoulder.

Renteria said the pitcher took a "step back" after throwing Friday and that the team would continue evaluating his next move.

Column: These putrid White Sox should make you want to scream

By Teddy Greenstein / Chicago Tribune / May 12, 2018

White Sox reliever Chris Beck gave up a 435-foot blast to Willson Contreras and then reacted in the most appropriate way: He let out a primal scream.

"I didn't think it was that intense until my wife said, 'Hey, that was pretty out there,' " Beck said. "And one of my buddies sent a video of it and I was like, 'Oh, my Lord.' " Oh, my Lord, indeed.

It's about time someone got ticked off about a team that stinks worse than an unwashed jockstrap.

After stumbling around Wrigley Field for nearly four hours Friday, the Sox lost their sixth straight, a disheartening 11-2 decision that featured just about every screw-up imaginable.

Someone tweeted that a 100-loss season is on the horizon. They should be so lucky.

They are on pace to lose 120. They are the only team in the majors yet to win 10 games.

They have been losing mainly in anonymity. On Friday they got pantsed before all of Chicago.

If the Sox are bad in American League ballparks, they are woeful in National League parks where the sweet-swinging Daniel Palka cannot be stashed at designated hitter. Palka allowed a fly ball to drop in front of him in the fifth that resulted in a "double" for Mark Zagunis.

They are even worse in NL parks without regular second baseman/leadoff man Yoan Moncada (hamstring) and right fielder Avisail Garcia (also a hamstring). It also stings that Reynaldo Lopez, the only Sox starter with an ERA below 5.00, won't make his next start until Tuesday in Pittsburgh.

Right-hander Carson Fulmer gave up five runs in the first inning. He started by allowing a double to Ben Zobrist on a pitch that seemingly missed by feet, not inches. He plunked Kris Bryant. He served up juicy pitches to Anthony Rizzo and Contreras, who put a grand slam into the basket in left field.

"Didn't do my job," Fulmer said. "Extremely frustrating, and I take full responsibility."

Down 5-0 in the third, Matt Davidson strayed from second and Contreras fired a seed. He was called out, and the Sox didn't challenge, even though replays indicated he was safe.

"I thought I snuck in there," Davidson said.

Said manager Rick Renteria: "With the information that we were given, there was nothing there that told us that play would be overturned. ... We only have a certain amount of time to decipher it."

In the fifth, Nicky Delmonico tried to score from second on Jose Abreu's two-out single. Kyle Schwarber's throw beat him by four full strides. Renteria absolved Delmonico, saying, "He was being waved home."

As usual, Renteria had nothing negative to say about his team's performance, one that featured two errors and almost a third (a grounder Yolmer Sanchez mishandled that was changed to a base hit), seven walked batters and just five hits.

When I asked if this was an embarrassing performance, he replied, "I will let you guys qualify it."

I think that's obvious.

About the only good sign I detected was Beck's reaction to Contreras' bomb.

For one, he didn't do what some other pitchers or catchers (see: Perez, Salvador) would have — griped about Contreras being slow out of the box as his blast soared.

"If a guy hits one 480 feet off you, don't throw it there," Beck said. "That's my perspective on it. He's a good player, plays with a lot of energy. If I don't want him to skip out of the box, then I shouldn't throw there."

And Beck's guttural yell qualified as about the only moment of satisfaction for the Sox on a cold, damp day at Wrigley Field.

"If I put my head down, I'm in defeat," he said. "I'll let you know how I feel on the mound. I'll leave it all out there each time."

White Sox shortstop Tim Anderson reunites with his father at Wrigley Field

By Teddy Greenstein / Chicago Tribune / May 12, 2018

No matter the final score at Wrigley Field, Friday was going to be a good day for Tim Anderson.

His father, Tim Sr., watched him play. They also spent Thursday's off day together.

"Good, quality time," Anderson said. "Making up for some time that was missed."

Anderson's father spent most of the first 15 years of Tim's life in prison and was incarcerated again in 2017.

The younger Anderson declined to specify the offenses, focusing instead on the joy he's feeling after being reunited. Tim Sr. lives in California, and Tim suggested he visit for the Cubs series, which concludes on Mother's Day.

"Last year was tough, and I didn't have my dad there for me," said the younger Anderson, whose best friend, Branden Moss, was killed in a shooting last May in Alabama. "But he has been there every step of the way. He has always supported me, and it's great to have him back."

Rotation deliberation? Carson Fulmer recorded just five outs Friday, and his ERA jumped to 6.23. He lasted 3 2/3 in his previous start.

"I want to be a starter and I am a starter," Fulmer said. "This organization's given me an opportunity to go out there and prove that, and I have. I've pitched deep into ballgames."

Manager Rick Renteria pulled Fulmer after he struck out Javier Baez on his 59th pitch. Hector Santiago then fanned fellow lefty Kyle Schwarber.

Said Renteria: "With the matchup, I thought we could minimize the damage. (Plus I wanted to) keep us within striking distance. (Fulmer) finished well, with the strikeout. Let him remember that feeling. And let him be upset that I took him out because he probably felt at that point, 'Man, I can continue.'"

Renteria said Fulmer is slated to remain in the rotation but "we'll sit down and talk about it."

What time is it? Friday's 1:20 p.m. game started at 1:26 for reasons that went unexplained. Sox pitching coach Don Cooper was annoyed enough to ask home plate umpire Brian Gorman for an explanation.

"I've never seen a game that's supposed to start at 1:20 start at 1:26," Cooper said. "But we're not gonna use that as an excuse for anybody's performance."

Cooper said Fulmer "didn't throw well, didn't command. He was supposed to get a cutter in to (Ben) Zobrist (in the first). Threw it up and away. Didn't get a pitch away to (Willson) Contreras; it was in. He paid the price."

Giolito finds a way, Davidson finds the bleachers in White Sox' win over Cubs

By Daryl Van Schouwen / Sun-Times / May 13, 2018

Lucas Giolito was all over the place, but somehow he found a way to pitch around seven walks, three wild pitches, a hit batter and five stolen bases to give the White Sox a 5-3 victory Sunday against the Cubs at Wrigley Field.

How badly did the Sox need this one? They had hit rock bottom with a 9-27 start and came into the last game of a three-game series against the Cubs with seven consecutive losses and 11 in their last 12 games.

"I was just out of sync, and stuff was kind of flying all over the place," said Giolito (2-4, 6.91 ERA), who threw exactly half of his 100 pitches for strikes and missed his target by a foot or more on numerous occasions in 5% topsy-turvy innings. "But I just stuck with it. I kind of feed off that energy from the crowd, from my teammates, so it's definitely a really fun one. The Cubs-White Sox rivalry is pretty awesome, and it was cool to get my first experience of that."

Giolito labeled it a good team win, and it was with Matt Davidson hitting his second homer in two games and driving in the go-ahead run with a sacrifice fly against Cubs right-hander Kyle Hendricks and Nicky Delmonico belting a tying RBI triple off the wall and scoring the go-ahead run on the offensive side. Left-hander Jace Fry pitched 1., scoreless innings, Nate Jones pitched a perfect eighth and Bruce Rondon (two strikeouts) a scoreless ninth to nail it down and collect his first save.

"Huge, huge," manager Rick Renteria said. "Those guys are enjoying this victory, to say the least. It was certainly a confidence-builder, to say the least."

"It means a little more against the Cubs because there are two teams in the city, and we want to be the better team," Jones said.

Jones was still smarting from giving up four runs and blowing a three-run lead to the Pirates in the ninth inning in his last outing. He passed on using his sinking two-seam fastball and introduced a four-seamer, something he had been toying with on the side, against the Cubs.

"First time," said Jones, who struck out Willson Contreras and retired Javy Baez and Kyle Schwarber. "It worked like it's supposed to. We'd been working on it and got to showcase it today, and from the reaction of the hitters, it was good."

Renteria stopped short of saying Rondon, who had seven career saves with the Tigers and 90 in the minor leagues, is his new closer.

"Every time I go out there, my mindset is like a closer," he said.

Moncada set to return

Second baseman Yoan Moncada tested his hamstring with agility drills and running and took batting practice and ground balls to inch closer to a likely return from the disabled list when the Sox open a two-game interleague series Tuesday in Pittsburgh against the Pirates.

"He's doing very, very well, and we're hoping he'll be back in the lineup soon," Renteria said.

The Sox optioned infielder Jose Rondon to Class AAA Charlotte after the game to make room.

A bittersweet Mother's Day

Renteria teared up, smiled and politely ended his Mother's Day dugout session with media when asked about his mother, Angela, who passed away April 25 at 91.

"She was awesome," he said.

White Sox defeat Cubs to avoid series sweep

By Daryl Van Schouwen / Sun-Times / May 13, 2018

Matt Davidson homered for the second time in two games at Wrigley Field and drove in the go-ahead run with a sacrifice fly, and Lucas Giolito survived seven walks and three wild pitches over 5 2/3 innings Sunday as the White Sox avoided a series sweep with a 5-3 victory over the Cubs.

The Sox (10-27), who were off to their worst start in franchise history, snapped a seven-game losing streak and won for the second time in their last 13 games. The Cubs (21-16) had a five-game winning streak snapped.

Giolito, who threw 100 pitches with 50 for strikes, was especially wild in the first inning when he walked three and threw two wild pitches. Javier Baez drove in two runs in the first with a two-out single, one of only two hits allowed by the Sox right-hander.

After walking the first two batters and an RBI double by Ian Happ in the fourth, Giolito escaped with no further damage as first baseman Jose Abreu fielded Kyle Hendricks' ground ball and threw out Addison Russell at home, then retired Ben Zobrist on an inning-ending double play.

Davidson cut the lead to 2-1 against Hendricks with his 11th home run, and after Nicky Delmonico tied it with a triple driving home Abreu (single) from first in the sixth, Davidson hit a go-ahead sacrifice fly to the warning track in left.

In the seventh, Tim Anderson led off with a walk against left-hander Brian Duensing after falling behind 0-2 in the count, was bunted to second by catcher Omar Narvaez and scored on Leury Garcia's single to left, giving the Sox a 5-3 lead.

Nate Jones, after blowing a three-run lead in the ninth inning against the Pirates in his last outing Wednesday, pitched a perfect eighth, and Bruce Rondon struck out Addison Russell and Ian Happ in the ninth to collect his first save as a White Sox.

The Cubs (21-16) stole five bases against Giolito and Narvaez.

Chicago athletes, teams show love to moms on Mother's Day 2018

By Satchel Price / Sun-Times / May 13, 2018

With this Sunday being Mother's Day, professional athletes and teams from around the Chicago sports scene took the chance to celebrate the women who have been so important to their lives.

In one of the most endearing examples, Blackhawks winger Anthony Duclair bought his mother a Mercedes-Benz, to which she responded with "no no no no" in shock at her son's generous gift. "Do you like it," Duclair later asks, and his mom says, "No it's too much" while tearing up. (He adds in the caption that she eventually accepted the luxury sedan.)

Another one saw Bulls forward Bobby Portis give his mom a house. A house!

Lots of others from the Chicago sports world gave love to their mothers on social media, so let's round up the celebrations in one place.

Ah yes, who doesn't love their mom and their cable provider.

Happy Mother's Day!

Renteria to White Sox fans: Don't lose sight of where we're headed

By Daryl Van Schouwen / Sun-Times / May 12, 2018

Even in a rebuilding year, when White Sox fans seem to grasp what's going on and know losing will be part of the growing pains, there are limits.

A 10-27 start is not sitting well with all who expected to see signs of progress on the field after the Sox lost 95 games in the first year of a rebuild under manager Rick Renteria, general manager Rick Hahn and vice president Ken Williams.

"If there's anything I can say [to the fans], it's that the one thing I and our staff can't lose sight of is where we're going, the direction that we want to go," said Renteria, whose team's much-needed 5-3 victory Sunday against the Cubs to avoid a series sweep helped ease some frustrations, if only for a day or so. "Obviously, we've had situations that haven't gone as well as we've wanted on both sides, the hitting or the pitching."

Patience is key, particularly now, Renteria said.

"That may bring no solace to the fan at this particular time," Renteria said, "but I can't lose focus on what we're trying to do in terms of developing guys to become the players that we want them to be and the team that we want them to be. And I've got to remain positive. I've got to keep moving forward because if you allow it to take control of you, you can bury yourself in it, and it can be pretty tough to work through it."

The Sox put together enough good pitching, defense and timely hitting on Mother's Day to snap a seven-game losing streak and avoid being swept in a series for the sixth time this season.

While the farm system remains well-stocked with highly ranked prospects who figure to upgrade the roster substantially in the next season or two — a fact that elevated the mood at SoxFest to

unprecedented offseason levels after a bad season on the field — the April and early May performance on the field was kind of killing the mood.

And the Sox won't bring up their top two prospects — right-hander Michael Kopech and outfielder Eloy Jimenez — to rev it back up anytime soon.

"You can't cross that line," Renteria said. "You have to allow those guys that are in the system to continue to work through the things that they're working through. I don't think it would make sense to push something because of what's occurring here at the particular moment."

As former manager Robin Ventura warned when things were going bad, things can always get worse. Renteria knows it, which is why he's imploring his team to continue to grind."

As right-hander Lucas Giolito (2-4), a key piece in one of the tear-down trades, did at Wrigley Field. He worked through seven walks but kept his composure and got through 5th innings of three-run ball.

"Grind is a key word," Giolito said. "Obviously, I was not really in sync. Just trying to make pitches the best that I can. The one thing that was unwavering was my confidence in myself."

The Sox, as a whole, remain confident they're on the right path. They'll get Yoan Moncada back from his hamstring injury Tuesday and Avisail Garcia soon from his, but those are the only reinforcements on the way, at least for now.

"No one, neither as a staff nor as an organization, expected that we would be at this particular point right now," Renteria said. "But it is what it is. We have to continue to move forward. I don't see us jumping the gun and trying to infuse something to take away from what's going on by having a young player come up right now. They still have to do some things down there before we get them here."

Too little, too late for White Sox' James Shields in loss to Cubs

By Daryl Van Schouwen / Sun-Times / May 12, 2018

Moral victories aren't quite cutting it for the White Sox.

They did scrap against the Cubs, getting the tying run to the plate in the ninth inning of a game that seemed lost in the first. And right-hander James Shields did retire 14 of the last 15 Cubs he faced.

All well and good. All for naught.

"To settle in after that first inning is always good," Shields said. "Save the bullpen. But I needed to do a better job in that first inning."

Shields gave up a leadoff triple to Javy Baez and walked Kris Bryant before Anthony Rizzo's opposite-field homer made it 3-0.

"Wasn't hitting my spots, [although] honestly, the Rizzo home run was a really good pitch, down and away on the black," Shields said. "Good piece of hitting right there. I just wasn't hitting my spots in the first inning and had to settle in after that."

Throw out the first inning, and Shields, who went six, has been good for three starts in a row. He has worked six or more innings in four straight starts for the first time since 2016.

Alas, another moral victory that couldn't prevent the Sox from losing their seventh game in a row.

No relief

Right-hander Chris Beck gave up his second homer in two days to Willson Contreras and walked three Cubs in the seventh inning. Left-hander Aaron Bummer replaced him and walked two more — on eight pitches — as the Cubs built an 8-1 lead.

Davidson goes deep

Matt Davidson's 10th homer against Carl Edwards Jr. was his first since April 27 in Kansas City, and it broke a streak of 14 consecutive hitless appearances against the Cubs.

"He continues to have really good at-bats," manager Rick Renteria said. "That was a tough pitch he hit and where he hit it in this particular ballpark [with the wind blowing in] right now.

"We saw a lot of balls that were struck pretty well and knocked down by the wind."

Setback for Gonzalez

Help will not be on the way soon from right-hander Miguel Gonzalez, who had been progressing toward a minor-league rehab assignment Sunday.

"Miggy took a bit of a setback yesterday," Renteria said, "so we're going to continue to evaluate him and see where he's at."

Gonzalez went on the 10-day disabled list April 23 with inflammation of the right rotator cuff. Signed to a one-year deal during the offseason as a back-of-the-rotation starter, Gonzalez is 0-3 with a 12.41 ERA in 12 1/3 innings covering three starts.

Sox pick up Giavotella

The Sox signed free-agent second baseman Johnny Giavotella, 30, who will report to Class AA Birmingham.

Giavotella batted .214/.389/.250 for the Marlins' Class AAA team before being released by the Marlins on May 3. He batted .306/.368/.441 for the Orioles' AAA team last season. In seven seasons with the Royals, Angels and Orioles, Giavotella hit .255/.294/.359 in 1,344 plate appearances.

This and that

The Sox are 0-6 in interleague games.

*The Sox have allowed 36 runs in the first inning, the most of any inning.

Struggling White Sox better than record shows, Jose Abreu says

By Daryl Van Schouwen / Sun-Times / May 12, 2018

The beat goes on.

The losses mount, at a historic pace.

And the White Sox keep on keepin' on, keeping their chins up and insisting things will turn for the better as they slog through these trying, losing times.

These are bleak days indeed for the 9-27 Sox, who have lost seven straight games, 11 of 12 and 20 of 25 after an 8-4 defeat to the Cubs on Saturday at damp and chilly Wrigley Field, a loss that cemented the franchise's worst start after 36 games.

You begin to wonder how much more they can take.

A day after Carson Fulmer gave up a grand slam to Willson Contreras and fell behind 5-0 in the first inning of an 11-2 loss, the Sox waited out a two-hour, 15-minute rain delay only to see James Shields give up a three-run homer to Anthony Rizzo in a four-run first. The way the Sox are going, it felt like it was over, and it kind of was. Shields, however, found a groove, retiring 14 of the last 15 Cubs he faced, after the damage was done.

The mood was subdued in the visitors' clubhouse before and after this one. But the Sox insist they're OK.

"We're not playing the type of baseball we want to play," said Adam Engel, a .190 hitter who went 3-for-4 with a double and two runs scored as a first-time leadoff man. "Our expectation is higher than how we're playing. But we had a chance to tie the game there with one of our best hitters. This team fights and battles, and that's something we can take away from it."

Matt Davidson clubbed his 10th homer, a three-run opposite-field poke in the eighth against Carl Edwards Jr., to cut the lead in half. And a two-base error by right fielder Kris Bryant forced Cubs manager Joe Maddon to bring in closer Brandon Morrow.

Morrow struck out struck out pinch hitters Yolmer Sanchez and Daniel Palka but walked Tim Anderson to put the tying run at the plate in Jose Abreu, but Abreu grounded out to cue "Go, Cubs, Go" on the Wrigley sound system for the second straight day.

Abreu, for one, insists the team is not this bad.

"No. This team is much better than the record shows," he said through translator Billy Russo. "We have a talented group of young guys and a few veterans who still have fuel in the tank who can lead this team."

"They're good," hitting coach Todd Steverson said of his position players' collective mindset. "They're getting after it. You're not in the dugout, but they're in there every day [saying], 'Come on, we got this.' We might be down four or five but the feeling is we can come back."

The Sox rank in the bottom third of the American League in runs, slugging percentage, homers, average, on-base percentage, OPS and average with runners in scoring position. Steverson says "no excuse" — the Sox struggled when they were healthy, too — but he'd welcome a stretch of good weather.

"There have been some lulls with the snow, rain, weather and off days," Steverson said. "Nothing has been consistent as far as a routine. That's no excuse for anyone who is scuffling but you would like to continue to play."

"Other teams are dealing with the same," Abreu said. "We can only control what we can on a daily basis."

"Everybody knows we're passing through a difficult moment. [Manager Rick Renteria] always tells us to keep our heads up and keep working hard. Even though we're going through a frustrating time with [seven] straight losses, we always show up in a good mood trying to win."

Renteria does. As always, as trying as it might be, he keeps his head up.

"I know we fell short, but if this can't build a little confidence in them, get them back on track, nothing can," he said.

The Sox will try to avoid a series sweep Sunday.

Carson Fulmer 'extremely frustrated' after White Sox' hideous display vs. Cubs

By Steve Greenberg / Sun-Times / May 12, 2018

Everything about the White Sox' embarrassing 11-2 defeat against the Cubs on a miserable Friday afternoon at Wrigley Field screamed "new low."

In the interest of accuracy, though, we must point out that it wasn't. You see, this isn't the first 35-game rodeo for the Sox that ended in a twisted, painful 9-26 heap. The 1948 team also started 9-26. So these Sox have that going for them, which is, well, not very nice at all.

A dive into the history books shows the '48 Sox won Game No. 36 to move to a sparkling 10-26. That means Saturday's middle portion of a three-game set will bring the threat of a worst-start-ever outcome.

"Extremely frustrating," said starting pitcher Carson Fulmer, who failed to make it out of the second inning.

Fulmer was referring to his latest outing, not to the team's struggles at large, though these days it's difficult to tell the difference between one Sox problem and another. The 24-year-old right-hander was rocked by five first-inning runs, the last four dancing home on a grand slam by Cubs catcher Willson Contreras. His ERA soared to 6.23.

Is Fulmer long for the Sox rotation?

"As far as we're concerned, it would be premature for me to comment on that right now," manager Rick Renteria said. "He's slated to make his next start. ... We'll see what we can figure out and we'll see if we can put him back on track and continue to move forward."

Statistically, though, Fulmer's seven 2018 starts have represented a step backward from his handful of late-season starts in 2017.

He has logged time in previous Sox bullpens. He is getting what seems to have been a fair shake prove himself as a starter. The results so far leave a lot to be desired, though Fulmer insists, even after Friday's debacle, that he's a starter — and only a starter — and that his confidence remains high.

"I have a lot of belief in myself," he said. "I have a lot of confidence. I know my ability is good enough to be here and stay here. I'll never be discouraged in myself. That's not who I am."

Renteria bore an irritated expression when asked if he was embarrassed by a stumble-filled performance to open the high-profile Crosstown Showdown against the have-it-all Cubs.

"I will let you guys qualify it," he said tersely.

But it was ugly, even for these Sox. There was Matt Davidson getting himself picked off second base by Contreras to shoot down a third-inning rally. There was Nicky Delmonico — waved home by third-base coach Nick Capra — getting thrown out by a mile at the plate by Cubs left fielder Kyle Schwarber to end the fifth. There were multiple Sox errors, including the one by Davidson that paved the way to four Cubs unearned runs in the seventh.

"You never want to lose like that," Davidson said.

The Sox — owners of the worst record in the major leagues — have lost six straight games, 10 of 11 and 19 of 24. They are 0-5 in interleague play.

They've lost six of their last seven games against the Cubs, too, and four of their last five games at Wrigley Field. That's no way to hold up their end of the rivalry.

"This is a big series for us to go out there and win some ballgames," Fulmer said.

One down, two to go. If it doesn't seem like this season can get any worse, check back here on Sunday.

White Sox shortstop Tim Anderson, dad reunite after father's year in prison

By Madeline Kenney / Sun-Times / May 12, 2018

While most players catch up on rest on their days off, White Sox shortstop Tim Anderson spent his day off Thursday catching up on old times with his father, Tim Anderson Sr., who was out of jail after being incarcerated during spring training last year.

They passed the time hanging around Tim Anderson's house, watching TV and chatting about what each other had missed throughout the last year.

They also went to a store to buy a grill for a barbecue Sunday for Mother's Day.

"We didn't want to put one together, so we bought the one on display," Tim Anderson said with a laugh.

Despite the Sox' 11-2 loss to the Cubs on Friday, Tim Anderson's face lit up when he talked about his father.

"He's a good man," he proudly said. "It's cool. For him to come to the ballpark and see me play, it's been a minute. But it was a great moment."

The 24-year-old from Tuscaloosa, Alabama, gets more than just his looks from his father. He also attributes his athleticism to him. Tim Anderson Sr. played baseball growing up, but his off-the-field conduct hindered his success.

"It was a different lifestyle growing up for him because he spent most of his times in the streets," Tim Anderson said.

Tim Anderson's father was in jail for most of the first 15 years of his son's life. Despite the challenges, they always have maintained a relationship. Growing up, Tim Anderson's grandfather would routinely take him to visit his father in prison.

Now that his father is out, Tim Anderson wants to continue to build their bond.

"It's good to have him home, and I'm excited and thankful," Tim Anderson said. "He's been there every step of the way. He hasn't missed a beat. He just wasn't there, but phone calls and long talks, he's been my supporter from Day 1. So he gets it and understands, and it's just great to have him back."

White Sox' Leury Garcia accepts manager's criticism for not running hard on bunt

By Steve Greenberg / Sun-Times / May 12, 2018

Say this much for Leury Garcia: He owned it.

Two days after being yanked from a game by White Sox manager Rick Renteria for failing to run down the first-base line like his pants were on fire, Garcia offered a sheepish smile and promised it wouldn't happen again.

"He wants everybody to play hard, give a good effort," Garcia said. "I didn't do it, so he took me out. You learn every day. It's not going to happen anymore."

The Sox seemingly were on their way to a victory over the Pirates on Wednesday when, with no one on base in the seventh inning of a 4-2 game, Garcia attempted to bunt for a hit. The ball bounced directly to first baseman Josh Bell, who gloved it next to the bag.

Nowhere on this planet, nor on any other, did Garcia have a chance to beat out the play for a hit. Replays show him downshifting approximately halfway down the line, by which point the play was all but over, but that wasn't the crux of the matter in Renteria's mind.

"You come out of the box, you still give an effort going all the way down the line," Renteria said. "Right, wrong or indifferent, we're trying to establish a certain way to go about doing our business. I know that I don't like it when I see guys not coming out of the box hustling."

The Sox eventually blew a three-run ninth-inning lead and lost 6-5 — hardly Garcia's fault, though the team's fifth straight defeat and ninth in 10 games could only have left him feeling worse.

"He told me why he took me out, and I understood and [said], 'Yeah, that was right,' " Garcia said. "No, I don't think I would have been safe. But I can run a little bit harder."

Avi getting closer

Seventeen days after going on the disabled list with a strained right hamstring, right fielder Avisail Garcia ran fairly hard in the outfield during pregame activities at Wrigley Field. That checked another item off the list — well, sort of — for Garcia, who took live batting practice earlier in the week.

It's clear Garcia still has a ways to go before he'll return to the Sox lineup.

"He's feeling good," Renteria said. "We're going to still put him through some running, and he's getting closer."

The next key milestone likely will be a rehab assignment. Given how long Garcia has been on the shelf, expect his stint in the minors to last longer than a couple of days.

Pittsburgh feeler

Yoan Moncada has been out since May 4 with tightness in his left hamstring. After working up a sweat before Friday's game, the second baseman indicated he hopes to return to the lineup when the Sox open a two-game series in Pittsburgh on Tuesday.

Giolito pulls it together as Chicago White Sox snap losing streak

By Scot Gregor / Daily Herald / May 13, 2018

Already feeling depressed by the worst record to start a season (9-27) in franchise history, Chicago White Sox fans who did watch the first inning of Sunday's game against the Chicago Cubs probably tuned right out.

Why watch a rerun of a bad horror movie?

In Friday's series opener at Wrigley Field, starting pitcher Carson Fulmer allowed 5 runs in the first inning while throwing 39 pitches in the Sox's 11-2 loss.

On Saturday, James Shields allowed 4 runs in the first inning while laboring through 36 pitches in the White Sox's 8-4 loss.

On Sunday, it looked to be the same stuff from Lucas Giolito. Bad stuff.

"I was just out of sync and was kind of flying all over the place," Giolito said.

That is a painfully accurate description, as the Sox's right-hander threw 28 pitches in the first inning, allowing 1 hit and 3 walks. There also were 2 wild pitches and the Cubs stole four bases.

"Tough first inning, but we know he can pitch," third baseman Matt Davidson said.

It wasn't pretty, but Giolito managed to hold the Cubs to 2 runs in the first and he settled down and went 5⅔ innings as the White Sox rallied for a 5-3 victory while snapping a seven-game losing streak.

Earning his second win of the season, Giolito allowed 3 runs on 2 hits and 7 walks before exiting with two outs in the sixth inning when his pitch count reached 100 (50 strikes).

"It's kind of been like that all year," he said. "A lot more bad ones than good ones, I guess you could say. The one thing that I'm learning through this process is just have unwavering confidence in myself, in my ability.

"Trust my stuff no matter how it's feeling or how it's coming out that day. Luckily, I was able to do that for the most part today and we were able to get that victory."

It was arguably the biggest win of the season for the White Sox, who seemed to be setting records for futility with every loss.

"Huge, huge," was how manager Rick Renteria described it after the Sox became the final major-league team to reach 10 wins. "Those guys are enjoying this victory, to say the least. They said, 'Hey, we can still win a ballgame.' It was certainly a confidence builder."

After hitting a home run (No. 11) off Kyle Hendricks in the second inning to cut the Cubs' lead in half, Davidson's sacrifice fly in the sixth scored Nicky Delmonico to snap a 3-3 tie.

"Felt pretty good," Davidson said. "It's fun when you see everyone on the team contributing and playing how we think we can play. It's pretty cool. Obviously, we come here to win every day and after the last couple of losses we had, it's a good win."

Rozner: Perspective lacking as Chicago White Sox suffer

By Barry Rozner / Daily Herald / May 13, 2018

A few months ago, Rick Hahn was a hero, the architect of a rebuild moving ahead of schedule.

Today, the Chicago White Sox GM has no idea what he's doing and the plan has already failed.

You'll forgive Cubs fans for laughing at Sox fans' expense.

They remember the portion of Cubs Nation that hated the plan, didn't understand the plan, or simply weren't willing to wait for the plan to take shape.

They remember the anger directed at Theo Epstein after the trade of Jeff Samardzija and Jason Hammel for Addison Russell.

They remember losing 286 games the first three years under Epstein, and watching their friends jump off the rebuild bandwagon.

And they remember making the NLCS a year ahead of schedule and winning the World Series the next season.

Today, White Sox Nation is angry, at least a healthy portion of it, if you're to believe the response to this weekend's series at Wrigley Field, when the Sox played so much bad baseball.

A mere 17 months into the Sox teardown and five-year restoration, fans want to know what's taking so long.

Where are all the prospects? Why aren't they doing better? Why do draft picks blow out their Achilles? Why can't they win more games with a Triple-A team?

That sure escalated quickly.

Maybe it's the crosstown series that has some so upset, or maybe it's just the realization that rebuilds offer no guarantees beyond the pain and misery.

No, the Sox aren't going to contend in 2018, something that should have been apparent to everyone going into the season, but only now is reaching those who were delusional.

Maybe they have forgotten a game from 2012 when the two teams faced one another and the Cubs' starting lineup was as follows: David DeJesus, Tony Campana, Starlin Castro, Brian LaHair, Alfonso Soriano, Ian Stewart, Adrian Cardenas, Koyie Hill and Paul Maholm.

Others who played in that game for the North Siders include Joe Mather, Darwin Barney, Jeff Baker, Rafael Dolis, Shawn Camp and Casey Coleman.

Seriously, you can look it up, if you have the stomach for it.

That's what the Sox are going through now, and it may be another year or two before they add a veteran like Jon Lester, who arrived on the North Side in 2015 after the worst of it was over.

Now he sees the Sox just beginning the process.

"I see a lot of youth," Lester said of the Sox. "Really, any team you see rebuilding -- and you saw it with us -- they have a lot of young players trying to learn the game at the big-league level and that's hard.

"They're just so young and they have a lot of guys without a lot of minor-league experience just being thrown in there.

"They have some veterans, and those guys will help, but it's hard when your owners and your GM say, 'We're rebuilding.' It's hard to play every day, but they grind at-bats and they play hard."

The Sox salvaged a game against the Cubs on Sunday and maybe that will calm the waters for a few hours, but the reaction to a 10-27 start is a bit baffling.

Poor play is no surprise and losing 90 games instead of 100 only changes their draft position, not the year in which they're going to compete again.

The Cubs lost 89 games in 2014 and went to the NLCS in 2015. Houston lost 92 games in 2014 and reached the postseason in 2015. Kansas City went from losing 90-plus games four straight years, to 86 wins and then they reached two straight World Series.

Those are your last three champions.

So take a deep breath, Sox fans. The rebuild has just begun -- and you have more misery coming your way.

Sox overcome wildness, come back to beat Cubs

By Bruce Miles / Daily Herald / May 13, 2018

The Chicago Cubs scored early against the Chicago White Sox for a third straight game Sunday, but the Sox were able to overcome wildness by starting pitcher Lucas Giolito and come back to win 4-3 at Wrigley Field.

The Cubs won the first two games of the three-game series.

Giolito managed to last 5 $\frac{2}{3}$ innings despite walking seven and uncorking 3 wild pitches.

Cubs starting pitcher Kyle Hendricks worked 6 innings, giving up 6 hits and 4 runs, 3 earned.

The White Sox (10-27) snapped a seven-game losing streak while the Cubs (21-16) had their winning streak snapped at five.

The Cubs scored 5 runs in the first inning against the Sox on Friday and 4 in Saturday's first inning. On Sunday, they picked up a pair of runs in the first to take a 2-0 lead. Ben Zobrist led off with a walk, and after Kris Bryant flied out, Zobrist advanced to second and third on 2 wild pitches by Giolito. Anthony Rizzo walked and stole second base. Willson Contreras grounded into a fielder's choice, with Zobrist being tagged out at the plate. Contreras stole second base, and Javier Baez followed with a 2-run single.

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The White Sox (10-27) snapped a seven-game losing streak while the Cubs (21-16) had their winning streak snapped at five.

Ian Happ's RBI double gave the Cubs a 3-2 lead in the fourth.

The Sox got 2 in the sixth. Jose Abreu singled with one out. Nicky Delmonico tripled Abreu home, and Davidson hit a sacrifice fly.

An RBI single by Leury Garcia gave the Sox a 5-3 lead in the seventh.

The Cubs managed only 3 hits for the game.

Why Seby Zavala and Zack Collins believe they can bring their catching platoon to Chicago

By James Fegan / The Athletic / May 13, 2018

White Sox catching prospect Seby Zavala played third base in high school, waiting behind another older player on the team to vacate the catcher slot. He mixed in some first base in college at San Diego State, and when amateur scouting director Nick Hostetler first laid eyes upon him as a draft target, he was out in left field, playing with a broken thumb.

"I was just trying to do whatever I could to help the team win," Zavala said. "And me being in the outfield with my broken thumb was the best thing we could have done."

Yeah, but what about hitting with it?

"It hurt a lot. Took a lot of medicine."

Accordingly, the 24-year-old, who has dealt with Tommy John surgery on his throwing arm in addition to his thumb issues, does not view splitting time behind the plate at Double-A Birmingham with a first-round pick who has been dubbed the "White Sox catcher of the future," as a significant impediment. Instead, he and Zack Collins are roommates, both in Birmingham and on road trips. They break down opposing lineups together, discuss handling the pitching staff together, and when one of them is DH-ing while the other is catching, that just means one-on-one discussion time in the dugout with roving White Sox

catching coordinator John Orton. They make it work, and with the Sox generally preferring to limit their catching prospects to 90 games behind the dish per season, they see it as more of a two-man study group than a compromise.

Only 11 catchers in the major leagues started more than 100 games behind the plate last year, and that figure has been steadily falling over the last few years. As smoothly as the catcher/DH rotation is working for them in Birmingham — .257/.360/.531 for Zavala, who has slid a bit after a scorching April, and .238/.431/.436 for Collins, who is on the upswing — they both said they're willing to pick up first base mitts down the road to keep it together. They think it can become a regular arrangement in Chicago, where both of them could have fresh knees and long careers as a result.

"I don't see why not, especially that I'm a lefty and he's a righty," Collins said. "We're obviously both power-hitting catchers. I think that we could do big things together and I don't see why it wouldn't be a special thing for both of us to be the two, I guess, starters in the big leagues."

That they're both comfortable with the arrangement is nice, now they just have to do the part where they both earn their spot in the majors. Zavala jumped out with a huge early season power surge that has seen him grab hold of the Southern League lead with nine home runs, but Collins started the season 2-for-37. He still walked in over 25 percent of his plate appearances, but something was wrong.

Ever since Collins was drafted, there have been efforts to smooth out or reduce the "hitch" or "gather" in his swing, where his hands would draw down and his bat head would tilt toward home plate before coming forward. It's enough to where Collins said he wouldn't pay much attention to his 2017 stats because he was trying to install changes, many of which he shelved until the offseason. After the slow start in 2018, he's decided to shelve them indefinitely.

"My whole career from the time I was young until now, I've never really had a swing issue or anything like that, my swing's always been fine," Collins said. "I was trying to figure out a couple things. They weren't working, as the numbers I put up showed. I'm back to square one and kind of doing what I did in college, spread out the stance a little bit and putting balls hard in play and it's been working."

If we're going to judge the swing by the numbers, Collins promptly reeled off a 10-game hitting streak since that 2-for-37 start, and has hit .350/.524/.633 over the last 18 games, with more walks than strikeouts. Collins has thrown out 38 percent of basestealers as a professional, and Dane Dunning went out of his way to praise his improved framing. Yet between scouting reports that range from calling for more defensive development, or outright skepticism about his ability to stick behind the plate (Baseball Prospectus Double-A framing numbers put him as among the worst at the level), it's clear that his bat will need to still need to carry him, hitch and all.

"If you're to look at his swing, even going back to last year, I think he has cut down that move a little bit," Barons hitting coach Cole Armstrong said. "I know it was a focal point for him. When he's in the box and he's ready to hit, that move will happen on time and he'll be on time. It's just him staying in a constant state of mind of being ready to drive the fastball at all times."

If absolutely nothing else, he'll always walk. Collins' absurd 25.6 percent walk rate not only leads the minor leagues, but backs up his assertion that he'll fare better as he progresses up the levels and better umpires call strike zones that more closely match his astute batting eye. His most recent stretch is either a testament to his eye, or a stunning argument against lineup protection as a concept, because his walk rate has remained unchanged since Eloy Jiménez returned, despite Collins batting ahead of him. The fear of the best hitter in the league being behind Collins has not moved the needle.

"I don't think it makes sense either," Collins said. "Believe me, we've all been thinking the same thing. I guess it's just me not swinging at balls."

Zavala has always carried a reputation of an astute game caller, and has thrown out 40.5 percent of opposing basestealers since the start of the Arizona Fall League last year, despite priding himself more

on consistency than having “anything mind-blowing” in his times to second base. His approach to improving his control of the running game is typical for a player lauded for his communication skills.

“If the guy gets a really good jump there’s hardly anything a catcher can do,” Zavala said. “If I can work the pitcher to getting the runner with a bad jump or keeping him away from a good jump, I can throw out a lot of guys. I’m usually around the bag, so I think just my consistency there will help me throw out more runners here and there.”

Other than that, he’s seen to be in a similar boat, where his offense will be his carrying quality, even if there’s more confidence from scouts that he can stick behind the plate and his framing grades out better in public metrics. And because he’s wasn’t a college superstar like Collins, nor a high-round pick, and is a little old to be crushing on Double-A pitching (he turns 25 in August), he’s going to have to keep hitting and hitting until the numbers are too undeniable.

Zavala has been slow to find ways to keep weight on through the season and fine-tune his conditioning, per team officials. And while he still trots out Tony Gwynn phrases and sayings on a regular basis (most frequently, “Know who you is”), he says he’s also been slow to figure out his mechanics and what pre-game combination of flips and tee work best prepare him for game action. But he thinks he’s settled into a good place now, even if a 30.1 percent strikeout in Double-A casts concerns about whether he’ll make enough contact at higher levels.

“It’s hard to find true guys who drive the ball consistently for power that don’t have either high strikeouts and don’t go through rough patches,” Armstrong said of Zavala. “When your mentality at the plate is to drive the ball, sometimes pitchers execute pitches in spots you’re not looking. At times they do it more often than others, sometimes they don’t. With Seby I think he’s such a smart player, such a smart kid that whatever challenges are thrown his way, I think his raw determination to be a major league player is going to overcome all of that.”

The raw determination shows itself in an amusing mix of extreme confidence, but also a self-effacing attitude about the limitations that he has to work around to make it in the majors. He knows he doesn’t have a cannon, so he emphasizes being accurate in his throws. He knows he’s not Eloy, but tries to pick up how Jiménez responds to pitchers avoiding his power. And he certainly knows he’s not fast, but Rick Renteria keeps spreading a tale about Zavala boasting that he’s the best baserunner in the organization.

“That was kind of a joke,” Zavala said. “I was definitely just trying to make him laugh. He put me up against some guy, I don’t know who it was, but he was really fast. He [asked] who was faster and I just said, ‘I’m not faster but I’m the best baserunner you’ve got in this organization.’ I think we both knew it was a joke. I guess it did stick with him since he’s telling a lot of people. I do take pride in my baserunning. I’m not the fastest, obviously, but I know when I can go first to third or when to push it. Like I said, I know who I is, I ain’t fast but I can cut the corners and can get to where I need to get as quick as possible.”

There are hit tool concerns with both here, and there are defensive concerns that Collins will need to work through. In a few weeks, Georgia Tech backstop Joey Bart could drop to the White Sox at No. 4, and all of a sudden there would be a more highly regarded catcher in the system for them to contend with. Most perceived gluts at one position when it comes to prospects have a way of quickly working themselves out via attrition, and Collins and Zavala would have to be quite the special combination to be the exception. But they’re pretty convinced that they are.

Jordan Stephens is now a call away from the White Sox rotation

By James Fegan / The Athletic / May 13, 2018

When the White Sox sent right-hander Jordan Stephens back to Double-A Birmingham to start the season, despite him stringing together a 3.14 ERA with 83 strikeouts and 35 walks in 91 2/3 innings at that level in 2017, it didn’t give him much of an advantage from familiarity.

“I have a pretty bad memory so I don’t remember most of the stadiums or stuff,” Stephens said. “Once I get there I do, but I don’t ever remember anything about them. People keep asking me what I think about this stadium and that stadium since they haven’t been there yet and I’m like, ‘I don’t know man, I don’t remember any of that stuff.’”

It didn’t put much of a chip on his shoulder either. While he was hoping for an assignment to Triple-A Charlotte in the offseason, by the time spring came around, he saw it as simply a numbers game that would keep him in Birmingham for April. On Sunday, the White Sox announced that numbers game would now see the 25-year-old Stephens sent to Triple-A, where he’ll instantly become the second-most compelling starting pitching prospect behind Michael Kopech, with much less hoopla surrounding his potential Chicago call-up.

A torrid last four starts earned Stephens the promotion, as he struck out 25 batters in 23 2/3 innings — with opposing hitters managing a .222/.300/.247 line against him — and allowed just two earned runs. He mentioned that his hot streak aligned with reviewing pitch data and scrapping backdoor cutters to left-handed hitters, but he felt improving his changeup was crucial to taking the next step. It’s been a struggle to find a grip he was comfortable with since college; his goal for it doesn’t extend much beyond getting it near the plate; and he thinks the most times he’s thrown it in a game this year is eight. Yet he sees the benefits when he adds it to his typical fastball/curveball/cutter combo, provided he keeps his mechanics and angle to execute it.

“If you’re around 6-foot tall, there’s no reason to sink down any and be 5-foot-t10, so for me staying tall on the back side is really important,” said the 6-foot-1 Stephens. “It’s important on my cutter, the fastball, the curve, and even the changeup a little bit, because if I drop down on the back leg on the change, I usually drop the arm. So that’s a huge cue for me that I keep reminding myself of.”

Standing on the shorter and slighter side for starting pitchers (190 pounds), Stephens receives a lot of input from the similarly statured Richard Dotson, his Double-A pitching coach, about not collapsing on his backside and maintaining some measure of downward angle. But despite not being a physically imposing figure, Stephens loves pairing his high fastball with a hard curveball that starts out up in the zone and drops to fool hitters. He talks about his cutter the way most pitchers discuss their two-seamers, employing it when he feels like hitters are being too aggressive on early in the count fastballs, as they were in his first few starts.

With a bevy of average or better pitches, and a career 24.8 strikeout rate in the minors, Stephens’ factors to watch are command and health. Tommy John surgery cost him a year in college and forearm tendinitis cost him much of 2017, among other setbacks, and his offseason work could help him address both. He says he’s recovering better after starts than any point in his career after spending the winter throwing less and working with sports performance coach Ben Fairchild to increase the mobility and flexibility in his upper body. More fluidity in his delivery can help him avoid the pause in his path to home plate that his pitching coach says can mess him up.

“He has a move that gets him rotational,” Dotson said. “He kind of pauses and he turns a lot and he can get to where he kind of comes out of it that way. He’s just got to keep it in check. There’s that adjustment, when you’re doing that, man, you better fix it quick. Because that’s usually when the ball is up in the zone, it’s flat and it’s in the same swing plane.”

As with every pitcher, it will be something that requires constant maintenance, but Stephens is nothing if not self-analyzing, or open to outside analysis, since he lived with both of his catchers, Seby Zavala and Zack Collins, in Double-A Birmingham, where their pitching conversations were frequent enough to merit house rules that dictate they take a break from work chatter. He’s not going to arrive in Charlotte and draw future-ace excitement like Kopech, but he’s been the Friday night starter in the rotation before at Rice University, and was a star at Alvin High School in Alvin, Texas, so if the White Sox put him on the big stage to try to salve their rotations woes this year, he should be ready for it.

"I've always liked pressure situations," Stephens said. "My brother always says every time I pitch in a big game, I pitch better. I guess I thrive off of that, especially packed crowds and all that. But at this point, everyone here was a Friday night guy. We're all pretty damn good. I don't think it makes me stand out more than the next guy but it definitely helps me in pressure situations."

White Sox get badly needed win from the most unlikely source

By James Fegan / The Athletic / May 13, 2018

Can there just be a normal game? Something with clear themes and takeaways, and obvious prescriptions for how to move forward?

Eleven pitches into the bottom of the first inning, it seemed like the White Sox (10-27) had that. Their most walk-addled member of the most walk-addled starting rotation in all of baseball, Lucas Giolito, had given up free passes to two of the first three hitters, in deeply discouraging fashion. He missed with four straight four-seam fastballs to both Ben Zobrist and Anthony Rizzo, and by nothing that approached a small margin either. Combined with back-to-back wild pitches at one point and an incredible four stolen bases allowed in the first inning alone, it seemed like the day would end with even more questions about where the White Sox go from here.

"Grind" is a key word," said Giolito after the game. "Obviously not really in sync."

Instead of falter, the White Sox snapped a seven-game losing streak, beating the Cubs 5-3 to stave off having to watch a surely joyous Crosstown Cup celebration on the field, and Giolito getting to dwell a bit on the things he did well (10 swinging strikes, eight ground-ball outs, a mere two hits allowed), rather than the things he did very oddly (seven walks, three wild pitches, a hit batter, five stolen bases allowed on five attempts, 50 out of 100 pitches for balls).

"The one thing that was unwavering was my confidence in myself," said Giolito. "It's been a tough season for me, walking a ton of guys, way more than I should. To know that the coaching staff, especially Ricky and Coop have my back, they believe in me, just as much or more than I believe in myself, to go out there and put up zeroes despite not being in sync, not making the best pitches, it means a lot."

The embattled, or at the very least stressed Rick Renteria, went from fighting back tears before the game at the thought of his first Mother's Day since his mom passed, to executing one of his best games of the year. A sixth-inning double switch paid immediate dividends, as he called upon the recently recalled but razor sharp Jace Fry to relieve Giolito after a two-out walk put the tying run on, and swapped out Daniel Palka for Leury García in right to give his young reliever some help.

García immediately made a diving snag that would have been out of Palka's range to end the sixth, and Fry struck out Kris Bryant looking with a nasty sinker on the black amid a 1-2-3 seventh, after García's seventh-inning single brought in Tim Anderson for an insurance run. Sticking with Nicky Delmonico and his slugging percentage that had slid below .300 before his game-tying RBI triple in the sixth, and putting Adam Engel in the leadoff slot for the second straight game, paid dividends in the form of crucial runs. Even Bruce Rondón, non-tendered by the Tigers last offseason and handed the ninth inning in a close game against a playoff contender, worked out.

"Every time I go out, my mindset is a closer mindset and I like it," said Rondón through interpreter Billy Russo. "Ricky just tells us to be ready after the seventh because when the situation arises we need to perform there and that's what we have been doing."

Instead of a crossroads, instead of a breaking point, with Giolito or any element of a truly grueling start of the 2018 season in the White Sox rebuild, we have anything but that. For all the pitching setbacks and struggles the Sox have endured with smiles and optimism so far, they surely won't turn their noses on a hard-fought win, just because it looked as completely discombobulated as major league baseball gets for all of one inning.

"Tough first inning but we know he can pitch," said Matt Davidson, who launched his 11th home run of the season in the second. "He's definitely not a top prospect or has as much hype behind him for nothing. He's a great pitcher. He's nasty. He just has to get it over the plate. We know he can be in this rotation for a long time."

In the large scheme of things, talking about a rebuilding club needing a win in mid-May sounds patently ridiculous. But needed it the Sox did, and they got it, and will take everything they can from it.

Five observations: White Sox blown out in Wrigley again
By James Fegan / The Athletic / May 13, 2018

Another day, another quiet and anticlimactic loss in Wrigley Field.

Three batters into the bottom of the first inning, and James Shields was already reeling from a three-run bomb launched into the left field basket by Anthony Rizzo, almost in the same spot that Willson Contreras deposited his grand slam Friday, but having the same effect of setting the tone in a 8-4 loss. The Cubs jumped out to another big lead against a wild and struggling White Sox (9-27) starter, and sucked away almost all notion of a tense, tightly-played or remotely fun affair taking place on the North Side.

Matt Davidson launching a three-run opposite field bomb off a "just getting his work in" Carl Edwards Jr. in the eighth is the unquestioned White Sox highlight of the series so far. While it was a very good at-bat, it has not been a good weekend. They did get the tying run to the plate in the ninth, somehow.

"We're not playing the type of baseball we want to play," Adam Engel said. "Our expectation is higher than how we're playing. But we had a chance to tie the game there with one of our best hitters. This team fights and battles, and that's something we can take away from it."

1. Not particularly great territory

A 9-27 start is the worst for the White Sox in their franchise history. At a .250 winning percentage, they're not quite threatening the 1935 Boston Braves or 1916 Philadelphia Athletics yet, but they would be in danger of losing more total games than the 1962 New York Mets. We can say that losses don't matter in a rebuild, but in a locker room mostly full of guys playing for their job and long-term placement in the organization and the majors, and for the coaching staff, it's a distinction they would like to avoid as they would avoid the bubonic plague.

2. Shields provides innings, but not enough to be a hard luck loser

With the way White Sox starting pitching has struggled throughout the season, there's some real tension on whether to admire that Shields was able to settle in and retire 11 straight Cubs at one point and deliver six innings, or to just point at the four-run North Side barrage off him in the first inning essentially salted away the game. Four years ago with Kansas City, Shields had the sixth-lowest walk rate of any qualified starter in the American League. He came into Saturday with the ninth-highest, and issued three more free passes in the first two innings, two of which came around to score. Fears about dropping his arm angle being a sacrifice of control in favor of movement seem to be legitimate at this stage.

"I just didn't make any of my pitches in the first inning," Shields said. "Wasn't hitting my spots, honestly the Rizzo home run was a really good pitch, down and away on the black. Good piece of hitting right there. I just wasn't hitting my spots in the first inning and had to settle in after that."

3. Engel in the leadoff spot winds up working

Naturally, after all the pregame crowing, Engel out of the leadoff spot wound up being the most effective thing the White Sox had going offensively. He oddly popped a bunt into the perfect spot for a single to set up Tim Anderson with a runner in scoring position in the third, banged to the left field warning track in left to lead off the sixth, and flipped another single to center in the eighth. A couple of outs to the right side

were enough to manufacture that double into the Sox's first run of the day. He certainly doesn't have the most traditional looking swing, but after seeing his playing time crimped of late, it's the performance he needed to push his way back to the forefront.

"I think that situation there was dictated by his matchup," Rick Renteria said. "We also had good matchups for him believe it or not against the guys he faced later on in the ballgame. We ended up pinch-hitting for him with [Daniel Palka] at the end to give us another boost. But he did a very very nice job. It was an uplifting day for him."

4. Unclean baseball

Javier Báez's leadoff triple on a shank into the right field corner in the first inning was essentially a challenge of the White Sox defense, which they failed. Trayce Thompson struggled to cut the ball off, was slow to square himself up for a throw, and when José Rondón still had a chance to nail Báez with a strong throw, he dragged Matt Davidson three steps up the foul line. For a team struggling to miss bats, or reduce baserunners, losing bases on the margins from their defense frequently pushes them over the edge. Rondón lofting a throw from deep right in the seventh that turned a routine Kyle Schwarber groundout into a tight play probably also didn't go over well.

5. Willson loves the White Sox

Contreras has now hit three of his four home runs this season in this series against the White Sox and two of them against Chris Beck. He seems like he launches them out of the park pretty easily, and like he should be an NL MVP candidate, but perhaps my sample for watching him is not representative. He has seven hits in two games. It's a bit much.
