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Davidson keeps dream alive, set to take mound

Slugger to get in extra pitching work in case White Sox call on him

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

CHICAGO -- Perhaps the most exciting story of the 2018 season was Shohei Ohtani becoming baseball's first true two-way star since Babe Ruth.

More than anything, Ohtani proved that it is possible to succeed as both a hitter and a pitcher en route to winning American League Rookie of the Year.

White Sox third baseman Matt Davidson took notice.

The 27-year-old, who had three scoreless outings of emergency relief last season, will begin throwing in a couple of weeks to prepare for adding "occasional relief pitcher" to a White Sox resume already including third baseman, first baseman and designated hitter with 46 home runs over the last two seasons.

"We'll see what happens, depending on what happens this offseason and going into Spring Training," Davidson told MLB.com's Chad Thornburg during Davidson's charity event last Tuesday. "I think Spring Training will probably be a little bit more of a sign. If I do get some innings during Spring Training, then I think it might be a little more real. But if it doesn't, then that will be it, you know."

Davidson was speaking from Yucaipa High School, where he played when selected 35th overall by the D-backs in the 2009 Draft. He last pitched regularly in '09 for Yucaipa, almost exclusively pitching during his time there, but adding in a little third base as a senior.

A three-home run effort on Opening Day at Kauffman Stadium and a Labor Day walk-off blast against Detroit closer Shane Greene earned Davidson his greatest 2018 recognition. In terms of fulfilling a personal

dream, it was a trio of scoreless outings against the Rangers, Blue Jays and Yankees meaning the most to Davidson.

Featuring a fastball topping out in the low 90s and mixing in offspeed offerings, Davidson looked much better than the typical position player in mop-up duty. He struck out two, including the Yankees Giancarlo Stanton, walked one and yielded one Aaron Hicks single over three innings.

Whether Davidson's extra pitching work results in any mound appearances in 2019 is uncertain. The White Sox have not guaranteed any innings to Davidson, even during Spring Training, a point reinforced by White Sox general manager Rick Hahn at the recently completed General Managers Meetings with Hahn stressing Davidson's focus is on his offense.

Davidson's desire for double duty is part of a trend that is gaining steam across the sport, as 2018 saw more pitching appearances by position players than any season in baseball history. A year before Ohtani, the Padres attempted to use catcher Christian Bethancourt as a backup catcher/outfielder and occasional reliever, which is more in line with the role Davidson envisions, though Bethancourt -- who came up as a catcher -- struggled on the mound and was demoted to Triple-A after just four pitching appearances in April '17. Meanwhile, the Rays took pitcher/first baseman Brendan McKay with the No. 4 overall pick in the '17 Draft. He hit .214/.368/.359 across three levels this year, while posting a 2.41 ERA with 103 strikeouts in 78 1/3 innings.

Although the White Sox aren't going to step on Davidson's dream, they didn't use him in even low-leverage situations during September, which might give a hint at their 2019 plans for him. And part of that has to do with the realities of pitching.

Significant soreness arose for Davidson after his third and final appearance on Aug. 6, so building up arm strength and getting better prepared in the offseason is essential. It's still no guarantee, but he'll be ready if so.

"I'm doing the same stuff," Davidson said. "I'm getting prepared to not pitch almost, like what I usually do, and just adding a throwing program and probably a little more cardio and obviously some pitching mechanic work.

"To be honest, that's the first thing I wanted to do as a Major League Baseball player was to pitch. And then hitting kind of just took off and took it from there, but that opportunity kind of arose this year and we're just kind of going with it, and I'm really grateful to have that and we'll see what comes of it."

CSA continues quest to decrease city's violence

White Sox, Cubs, Blackhawks, Bears, Bulls host luncheon, panel discussion to raise awareness

By Scott Merkin / MLB.com | November 16, 2018

CHICAGO -- White Sox chairman Jerry Reinsdorf doesn't remember exactly what prompted his original idea eventually turning into the Chicago Sports Alliance, bringing together five Chicago professional sports teams in support of solutions to decrease violence in the city.

"It just popped into my mind one day," said Reinsdorf following Friday's luncheon and panel discussion concerning issues related to this organization at the MB Ice Arena. "I must have been reading about gun violence, or I saw something on TV. Just an idea. But it wouldn't go any place without the other four guys. So, I had the idea, but they made it work."

"Jerry approached me at one of the owners' meetings and said we should all get together and combine our efforts," Cubs chairman Tom Ricketts said. "It made a lot of sense. It was about the same time violence was really spiking in Chicago, and like we said during the program, if we all work together, we can raise more awareness for the programs we support."

Friday's program featured a special presentation by Jens Ludwig, the University of Chicago Crime Lab director, one of the programs backed by the Alliance. Chicago Police Superintendent Eddie T. Johnson, Chris Sutton, the Choose to Change program director, and Eddie Bocanegra, the READI Chicago senior director, made up the second panel and the question-and-answer portion.

Ricketts, Reinsdorf, Blackhawks chairman Rocky Wirtz, Bears chairman George H. McCaskey and Bulls president and chief operating officer Michael Reinsdorf, the men at the forefront of the Alliance, spoke eloquently during their 20-minute-session.

"I don't think the sports teams have ever come together like this here or anywhere else," Ricketts said. "Obviously we want to look for solutions. There's no one solution. You have to find the ones that you think are effective and give them support."

"Well, it's a significant opponent," said McCaskey, of the sports teams doing what they can together to fight against violence in Chicago. "But there's upsets all the time."

In a press release issued prior to the luncheon, the Chicago Sports Alliance announced it will "move forward in 2019 to lend the teams' collective reach and resources in support of finding innovative solutions to decrease violence in the city." This movement marks the second consecutive year of the Alliance and its contributions, following Reinsdorf's call to action early on in 2017.

The group is donating \$1 million in grants to continue supporting a partnership with the University of Chicago Crime Lab and Choose to Change (C2C), which combines Youth Advocate Programs (YAP), Inc's high-intensity mentoring and advocacy with trauma-informed therapy provided by Children's Home & Aid. The Alliance will fund the targeted transitional job training program, READI Chicago (Rapid Employment and Development Initiative), a new addition this year.

Last year, the Alliance provided a grant earmarked for analyst training at the Chicago Police Department's Strategic Decisions Support Centers (SDSCs). In 2018, additional support fully funded the training program and SDSCs. The support created the opportunity for the Alliance to direct investments toward the new program, READI Chicago.

The Alliance maintained the approach established in Year 1 by relying on data and expertise from the Crime Lab to direct the group's investments toward "programs and efforts structured to produce more actionable insights."

All these men in charge spoke about involvement from their specific players, past and present, ranging from the Bears' Matt Forte to Jimmy Butler and Michael Jordan with the Bulls to the Cubs' Kyle Schwarber and Jason Heyward, and Tim Anderson and Jose Abreu with the White Sox. They also addressed how the average fan could make a difference, with the bar being set by the Chicago sports teams they follow.

"These teams take so much out of their community. There's an inherent obligation to give back," Reinsdorf said. "Why do people go to Soldier Field when it's 10 degrees below zero, and 65,000 people are out here cheering for a team? None of the players on the team even know who is out there. Guaranteed Rate Field was paid for by the taxpayers. There's a tremendous obligation to give back. If we didn't do it, it would be a very bad thing. We would deserve more blame if we didn't do it than credit for doing it."

"It's an honor to be working with the other teams," Ricketts said. "Those are guys whom I've looked up to and respected for a long time. It's just the ability to get more attention to what is probably the biggest problem our city is facing."

Sox Drawer Q&A: Are the White Sox a hard sell for Bryce Harper?

By Chuck Garfien / NBC Sports Chicago | November 19, 2018

Thanksgiving arrives this week, and you know what that means? Spring training games are only three months away!

You can almost smell the cut grass, the Eloy home runs and the Double-A player off everybody's radar who will come out of nowhere to make the team. I've got a story and podcast about such a player tomorrow. Be on the lookout for that.

In the meantime, I can't give you Bryce Harper or Manny Machado, but I can give you this Thanksgiving edition of the Sox Drawer with many Harper questions from curious White Sox fans and many other topics.

Question: What if the Sox sign Harper and the Nationals curse strikes again like it did for Dunn and LaRoche? -- @YaBoiEloy

CG: I gotta admit, this did cross my mind. The White Sox haven't exactly had good luck when signing left-handed power bats away from the Nationals. But there's a reason why both of them struggled here, and why Harper would be different. Two letters. DH. Dunn and LaRoche could not adjust to being full-time designated hitters in the American League. In the end, I believe that's what did them in. The DH position is a whole different animal to begin with. Going from playing nine innings in the field to sitting on the bench for three hours and only getting 4-5 at-bats is a big adjustment. Not everyone excels at it. Dunn and LaRoche had never done it consistently before the White Sox signed them. Add the fact that they were in a new league, learning a lot of new pitchers, expected to win and live up to a contract, and things did not exactly go according to plan. For the record, I liked the signing of Dunn when it happened. I was lukewarm on LaRoche. LaRoche did play some first base backing up Jose Abreu (45 games at 1B, 74 at DH). How did that go? He slugged .438 when playing first base, and only .281 as a DH. For his career, LaRoche slugged .462. If the White Sox can sign Harper, the good news is he'll be playing right field and you won't have to worry about the DH factor.

Q: Let's be honest. We are a hard sell to Harper. Not saying it won't happen but the realistic side says no. -- @BeachlyBrent

CG: On paper, it does seem like a hard sell. You're asking Harper to sign with a team that lost 100 games last season and hasn't made the playoffs since 2008. Why would he commit the prime years of his career to the White Sox when he could take the easy way out and sign with contenders like the Yankees, Nationals, Cubs, etc.? First and foremost, this is going to come down to money. Whoever offers the most money and best contract will very likely be the winner of the Harper sweepstakes. Ask yourself this, if the White Sox are making a serious bid for Harper, why would they only go halfway? You're either all-in or you're not. Why waste the time and effort? As I wrote last week, the White Sox have a track record for being very aggressive when they choose specific targets. This might be one of those times. Second, Scott Boras knows baseball. As Harper's agent, I'd like to think he also knows what teams are best positioned to have success in the future. The White Sox have one of the best farm systems in baseball. They might have lost 100 games in 2018, but things are trending upwards and they have money to spend now and in the future. Boras can share all of that data with his client. And third, and this cannot be overlooked -- Harper is a unique cat. He doesn't exactly drive in the middle of the road. He's been trolling Chicago on social media for weeks. He took a photo of himself in a Bulls hat, he told TMZ that his favorite city for food is Chicago and a few days ago, while sitting in a barber's chair, he asked fans during a live Twitter session what hairstyle he should get. A perm won!

A perm?? Men stopped getting perms in the 1970's. Clearly, Harper is his own man and he likes to be the center of attention. That won't happen with the Yankees or Cubs. If he signs with the White Sox (or Phillies), he'll be the man, just like he's been with the Nationals. To me, whoever ends up getting Harper will not only connect with him on financial terms, but will let Harper be Harper. The White Sox have been in the shadow

of the Cubs for the last several years. Signing Harper will bring the spotlight and lots of attention to the South Side. Will it happen? I have no idea, but it may not be as far-fetched as you might think.

Q: At Thanksgiving dinner, if my great Aunt Doloris's eyes turn black and she mutters chants in Latin and summons the old gods, will the White Sox have a better chance at signing Bryce Harper? -- @tim_tucker92

CG: Yes.

Q: Hey Chuck, with the surplus of outfield prospects the White Sox have, if they land Harper, who is the odd man out? Jimenez and Robert are a lock to stay I imagine. But we still have Rutherford, Basabe, Adolfo and Walker. -- @Mtvrdik

CG: It's too early to say. Whether the White Sox sign Harper or any other free agent outfielder (how about Michael Brantley to a two-year deal?) there could be a log jam coming in the outfield in the future. It's a good problem to have. All four of the outfield prospects you mentioned still need seasoning in the minors and are 1-3 years away from reaching the majors. They could end up being traded or could force their way to Chicago. The White Sox have time to let that play out. By 2020 or 2021, they'll have a better idea about what they have in their organization and what they'll need. At that point, I could see the White Sox trading some of their outfield depth for other positions on the diamond if needed. But for now, enjoy watching those guys develop. I like all of them. Luis Gonzalez as well.

Q: Who was the last \$200M+ free agent that led the team they signed with to the WS? -- @stewart_errol

CG: Good question. There have been a total of 12 players who have signed contracts of \$200 million or more in MLB history. Most of them have not gone on to win a World Series with their respective teams. However, we just saw a major breakthrough when David Price won a ring with the Red Sox this past season. Price signed a 7-year, \$217 million contract with Boston before the 2016 season. Other than that, you have to go back to the Yankees signing Alex Rodriguez for \$275 million in 2008 (his second \$200 million contract). The Yankees won the World Series a year later in 2009. Some \$200 million contracts look terrible right now: Miguel Cabrera signed with the Tigers for \$248 million in 2016, Albert Pujols \$240 million with the Angels in 2012, Robinson Cano \$240 million with the Mariners in 2014, and Prince Fielder \$214 million with the Rangers in 2012. Fielder was forced to retire in 2016.

Of the 12 players who have signed \$200 million contracts, the only player who was close to the age that Harper and Machado are now (26) is Giancarlo Stanton who was only 25 when he signed his 13-year, \$325 million contract with the Marlins in 2014. If you're looking for a comp for Harper and Machado, taking into account baseball inflation and Scott Boras at the wheel, Stanton's contract might be the closest contract to compare what they might receive in the end.

Q: My dad's question "will the Sox be competitors this year?"

Sister 1: how can I get a date with Palka?

Sister 2: what will our starting rotation look like next year?

Mom (more of a statement): country night needs to be improved. -- @MikeyBudz

CG: Okay Mikey, let's go in order here:

Dad, I can't say if the White Sox will be competitors this upcoming season. Let's talk in spring training.

Sister 1, I don't know about swinging a date with Palka, but bring a couple of bird scooters around and he'll be amused by them for hours.

Sister 2, looks like the starting rotation will be Rodon, Lopez, Giolito and possibly two free agents, with Cease maybe coming up later in the season.

And Mom, sorry but I'm not sure what I can do about Country Night. Honestly, I didn't even know they had one. Sounds like a good idea, though.

Q: You're probably sick of talking about him, but IF the Sox signed Harper, would Sox fans be more excited for Harper's first game with them or Jimenez's debut? -- @DavidRHorning

CG: It depends. If the Sox sign Harper, his first game would be on the road in Kansas City, which wouldn't have the same effect if he was at home. Not sure where/when Jimenez will make his debut. Either way, both games would be off the charts in terms of excitement. But let's not get ahead of ourselves here.

Q: Given the extension for Ricky, and his insistence that his players hustle. The @whitesox can't seriously be pursuing Machado can they? -- @Jcmo34Mo

CG: How Machado behaved in the playoffs certainly conflicts with how Renteria wants his guys to play the game, but at the same time, I'm sure Renteria wouldn't mind Machado's 37 home runs and 107 RBIs in 2018 either.

Here's a quote from Machado's longtime manager Buck Showalter, a stickler for rules and fundamentals, about Machado from MLB.com earlier this season:

"Have I had my moments with him? Of course we've had our moments. But I never lost sight of how pure he is, what I call the pureness of his baseball heart. And you could never lose sight of the competitor in him. You push him into a corner, he'll come out firing. You throw at him once too often, he will come at [you]. He is as talented as they come."

The manager-player relationship doesn't have to be perfect. If there's mutual interest on both sides, I'm guessing they could find a way to make it work.

Q: What is taking place this off season to help Moncada develop? -- @DeonDinsmore

CG: A good sign for Moncada is that he decided to go to the White Sox spring training facility in Arizona this month to work out and take part in baseball activities. I was out there last week and saw it in person. He definitely wants to cut down on his strikeouts and become a more consistent player. For that to happen, it has to come from within. It certainly looks like he's putting in the commitment to make it happen.

Q: Is it fair to have similar expectations of Eloy Jiménez as we did of Yoan Moncada? -- @SultanofClout

CG: I think what we've learned from Moncada is that most prospects, even the best ones, don't figure things out right away. Some need more time than others. Not sure what your expectations were for Moncada, but let's not pencil in Jimenez for 25 homers and 100 RBIs in 2019. Let him adjust.

Q: Has there ever been a conversation about Moncada playing 1st? -- @whitesoxbiz

CG: Moncada is too good of an athlete to play first base.

Q: Calling it now, White Sox trade for Trout after the Angels start out slow and look to rebuild. -- @fletcherjack23

CG: Okay.

Q: It's gonna be 48 on Friday, should we get out on the course ?? ☐ -- @georgyj09

CG: Yes.

Q: Polish with Grilled Onions or 35th street tacos? -- @jurso90

CG: Polish with grilled onions for sure!

And finally!

Q: What is the meaning of life? -- @timmyhalfsmile

CG: From a White Sox perspective? Winning more of these:

7-17-white-sox-world-series-2005-party.png

Thanks for your questions, everyone! We'll do it again next week.

White Sox among a whole bunch of teams reportedly interested in Nathan Eovaldi

By Vinnie Duber / NBC Sports Chicago / November 19, 2018

The White Sox have already been linked to the two biggest names on this winter's free-agent market, Bryce Harper and Manny Machado. And now they've been mentioned as one of a host of teams interested in one of the top free-agent starting pitchers, as well.

The Boston Globe's Nick Cafardo listed the White Sox as one of the "early suitors" for Nathan Eovaldi. But they're not at all alone, with Cafardo including the Milwaukee Brewers, Philadelphia Phillies, Atlanta Braves, Los Angeles Angels, Boston Red Sox, Toronto Blue Jays, San Diego Padres and San Francisco Giants as other members of that group.

That's a lot of competition.

It's not terribly surprising to hear the White Sox have apparent interest in Eovaldi, as they've publicly stated starting pitching as a team need they'll be addressing this offseason. They have two holes in their 2019 starting rotation thanks to Michael Kopech's recovery from Tommy John surgery and James Shields' departure. One way or another, the White Sox will have to fill those holes, though their financial flexibility gives them the option of going with a couple one-year fill-ins and waiting for their young arms to fill out the group in 2020, or adding someone for both the short and long terms.

Eovaldi would fall into the latter category after his breakout second half and postseason with the Red Sox, who acquired him in a midseason trade with the Tampa Bay Rays. After coming to Boston, Eovaldi posted a 3.33 ERA with 48 strikeouts in 54 innings. In the playoffs, he allowed only four earned runs over six appearances totaling 22.1 innings. That postseason run was highlighted by his six innings of one-run ball in the marathon Game 3 of the World Series.

All that success in a Red Sox uniform will likely get him a nice payday this winter, and perhaps that success is why, as Cafardo reported, Eovaldi "would love to stay in Boston."

But it is worth noting that Eovaldi's numbers prior to last summer's trade were not nearly as wonderful. Before he missed the 2017 season while recovering from his second Tommy John surgery, he turned in a 4.42 ERA in 84 appearances, 81 of those starts, from 2014 to 2016 with the Miami Marlins and New York Yankees. His 8.2 K/9 and 1.6 BB/9 were good showings in 2018, but during that three-season stretch, those numbers were 6.8 and 2.5, respectively.

With Eovaldi coming off a career season, however — a season that saw him throw harder than he has at any other point in his career, a Tommy John success story — it's no shock that interest is high around the league. As is the case with any top free agent, the rebuilding White Sox would likely have to get Eovaldi to buy into planned long-term success versus the ability to win multiple championships right now.

But they're apparently interested, another potential example of their seeming willingness to land a big fish this offseason.

When it comes to Harper, Machado sweepstakes, can White Sox compete with teams that plans to spend 'stupid'?

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

The White Sox sure seem willing to spend and spend big this offseason if the right opportunity comes along. They're reportedly interested in Bryce Harper and Manny Machado, the two biggest names on this winter's free-agent market.

But other teams are interested in those guys, too. And at least one other team is being more vocal about its willingness to shell out big bucks — making no bones about the fact it's even willing to spend "stupid."

That was the word used by Philadelphia Phillies owner John Middleton, who told USA Today's Bob Nightengale: "We're going into this expecting to spend money. And maybe even be a little stupid about it."

That's a bit of a joke, of course — he added, "we just prefer not to be completely stupid" — but it shows how pricey this winter's bidding wars are going to get.

The White Sox have a ton of financial flexibility thanks to their rebuilding effort, but they're not alone. The Phillies are right there with them in terms of long-term financial commitments. Throw in the fact they're further along in their rebuilding process than the White Sox, and it makes them a prime candidate to hand out one of the biggest contracts in baseball history.

The Phillies — who Nightengale wrote just last week seem like a lock to land Harper — spent time in first place in 2018 and have an exciting roster of young players that already makes them a contender heading into 2019. Add Harper or Machado to that mix, and you're looking at a team that could win multiple championships starting in 2019.

The White Sox don't have that, and it seems to remain their biggest challenge in convincing one of the best players in baseball to sign up. They have a very bright future to pitch, but it's a planned future, not the demonstrable win-now roster of teams like the Phillies.

What could help to ease those concerns would be money and a whole lot of it. Obviously other teams are willing to spend, but few teams have the ability to spend and spend big that the White Sox have because of the ridiculously small amount of money they have committed past the 2019 season.

Rick Hahn has made a point that the White Sox have made a habit of shattering preconceived notions, doing the unexpected during this rebuilding process. But certainly no one expects him to do something "stupid."

In fact, Hahn's comments surrounding what deals the White Sox might or might not make this winter (or at any point in the last two years) seem to show the complete opposite of "stupid." His prerequisite for every potential move is that it's something that fits in with the team's long-term plans, given that there's still much player development to be done with the organization's stockpile of highly touted prospects. And signing either Harper or Machado, both 26 years old, would do that. Having one of the best players in baseball during their prime while the prospects come up and form the team around them? Yeah, that makes an awful lot of long-term sense.

But how much long-term sense does spending "stupid" make? Throwing more money than most of us can dream of at a player is a convincing argument in getting him to sign and make your team a heck of a lot better. But going overboard could handcuff what a team is able to do down the line. Harper and Machado are great players who can do a lot of things, but they're each just one piece of a 25-man roster. While the White Sox are expecting to have a lot of young, cheap players on those rosters of the future, there could be more than one "finishing piece" that's required to polish off this rebuilding effort. If you spend "stupid," are you able to afford those other pieces?

How stupid do you have to spend before the positive of acquiring a player is outweighed by the negative of not being able to acquire the next one?

Certainly the Phillies aren't going to hand Harper or Machado a blank check and bankrupt their long-term future either. They've got some smart folks over there, too. But it shows how financially competitive the bidding wars could be this winter — and what the cost could be of winning one of them.

Juan Pierre, Ted Lilly, Freddy Garcia and Jon Garland among first-timers on Hall of Fame ballot

By Mark Gonzales / Chicago Tribune | November 19, 2018

The Cubs and White Sox will be well-represented on the 2019 National Baseball Hall of Fame ballot released Monday.

Outfielder Juan Pierre, who spent three of his 14 seasons with the Cubs (2006) and Sox (2010-11), is among 20 first-time candidates. Others with Chicago ties are Cubs pitcher Ted Lilly (2007-10), Sox pitchers Jon Garland (2000-07) and Freddy Garcia (2004-06, 2009-10) and Sox infielder Kevin Youkilis (2012).

The list of first-time candidates is headed by all-time saves leader Mariano Rivera, two-time Cy Young Award winner Roy Halladay, former batting champions Todd Helton and Michael Young and Andy Pettitte, who holds postseason records for innings pitched (276 2/3) and games started (44).

To gain election, candidates must be named on 75 percent of ballots cast by members of the Baseball Writers' Association of America with at least 10 consecutive years of major-league baseball coverage. To remain on the ballot the following year, candidates must be named on 5 percent of ballots.

Edgar Martinez, who fell 20 votes short of election last year, is on the ballot for the 10th and final time. Others who fell short last year are pitchers Mike Mussina (63.5 percent), Roger Clemens (57.3) and Curt Schilling (51.2) and outfielder Barry Bonds (56.4).

First baseman Fred McGriff, who played for the Cubs (2001-02) during a 19-year career, is on the ballot for the last time.

Former Cubs slugger Sammy Sosa, who was named on 7.8 percent of ballots last winter, is on the ballot for the seventh time.

Results will be announced Jan. 22.

40-man roster deadline: There's 1 spot free for the Cubs, while White Sox have 5

By Mark Gonzales / Chicago Tribune | November 19, 2018

The Cubs' decision to protect infielder David Bote last November didn't get much attention, but it turned out to be one of their best moves of the offseason.

Major-league teams hope to make similar wise choices Tuesday, when 40-man rosters must be submitted.

Left-hander Justin Steele appears to be a lock to be added to the Cubs' 40-man roster, which has one spot open. Two scouts who watched Steele pitch in the Arizona Fall League were encouraged by his progress, especially since Steele underwent Tommy John surgery shortly after injuring his arm in August 2017.

Both scouts believe Steele, 23, eventually will regain his 95 mph fastball on a consistent basis with the chance to sharpen his changeup.

Right-handed pitcher Trevor Clifton and infielder Jason Vosler also are under consideration to be added to the 40-man roster, although the Cubs would need to remove players to make room for them.

The Cubs aren't required to add infielder Nico Hoerner, their first-round draft pick, because Hoerner has fewer than four years of professional experience.

Shortstop Addison Russell isn't on the 40-man roster because he is suspended 40 games without pay for violating Major League Baseball's domestic violence policy.

The Cubs must decide by Nov. 30 whether to tender a contract to Russell to retain his rights.

The White Sox have five spots open on their 40-man roster. Pitcher Dylan Cease is a lock to be added, and pitchers Jordan Stephens, Jordan Guerrero, Kodi Mederios and Spencer Adams and catcher Seby Zavala will receive strong consideration.

Outfielder Eloy Jimenez, the Sox's top prospect who has yet to play in the majors, was added to the 40-man roster nearly one year ago.

Players who signed their first professional contract at 18 years old must be added to a 40-man roster by the end of their fifth professional season, or they can be drafted by another team in the Rule 5 draft, which will be held Dec. 13 — the final day of the Winter Meetings in Las Vegas.

Players who sign at 19 or older must be protected on a 40-man roster by the completion of their fourth professional season.

Teams must pay \$100,000 to choose a player in the Rule 5 draft and are required to keep him on the major-league 25-man roster for the entire season or offer to return him to his original team for \$50,000.

Chicago sports teams donate \$1 million to combat gun violence: 'We want to be invested in it'

By Phil Thompson / Chicago Tribune | November 16, 2018

Maybe it was a crime story he read in the newspaper or perhaps a sobering local TV report, but whatever it was, it prompted White Sox and Bulls Chairman Jerry Reinsdorf to pick up the phone and call the other most influential team executives in the city to combine their activist efforts and form the Chicago Sports Alliance.

Together they donated \$1 million to fund training for crime lab analysts, and this week they announced plans to donate another \$1 million for more gun violence initiatives.

But there was side effect of working together he hadn't considered.

"At one point I said to (Sox vice president of communications) Scott Reifert, maybe I made a mistake with this thing because all of sudden you have five people used to running your own organization and now we have to agree with each other on everything. I'm not used to that," Reinsdorf said in a joking manner. "I'm used to just making the decisions but we were all very simpatico."

Reinsdorf and his counterparts — his son, Bulls President Michael Reinsdorf, as well as the Blackhawks Chairman Rocky Wirtz, Bears Chairman George McCaskey and Cubs Chairman Tom Ricketts — gathered to discuss their partnership to combat the city's gun violence Friday at a luncheon at the MB Ice Arena.

"I don't think the sports teams have ever come together like this, here or anywhere else," Ricketts said. "I think it does speak to the scale of the problem but it also speaks to the commitment of (ownership)."

McCaskey added that Reinsdorf said the "first thing we need to do is to educate ourselves about this problem, and that's what led us to the University of Chicago Crime Lab. And that was a huge turning point for us as a group, was to get their expertise and their input and their data to help attack this problem."

This year, the 2-year-old Alliance raised grant money to continue its support of the partnership of the Crime Lab and Choose to Change, which uses mentoring by Youth Advocate Programs and therapy by Children's Home and Aid.

New this year, the Alliance also is helping fund READI Chicago (Rapid Employment and Development Initiative), an 18-month job training and behavioral therapy program based on research that indicates the combination of therapy and jobs help participants make better decisions during high-stakes situations.

For Michael Reinsdorf, the more he learned about the programs and predictive analytics and how young Chicagoans fall into the trap of gun violence, the more he thought about the daily threats those children face that his own three children will know.

"These kids don't know when they go to school, the route they take, whether it's the last day of their lives," he said.

The Alliance grant helps expand the program to include more young men in the highest risk group for becoming involved in gun violence.

"We don't want to just write a check, get a photo op and walk away," McCaskey said. "We want to be invested in it, (and) not just financially."

The collaboration by Chicago's five major sports franchises also echoes a trend in some of the major sports leagues to increase their involvement in community activism and social justice efforts.

Tim Anderson, Jason Heyward, Jose Abreu and Kyle Schwarber are some of the players local team executives held up as doing activist work.

In March, McCaskey and Bears linebacker Sam Acho discussed prison reform as they toured the Louisiana State Penitentiary. And both were involved in an \$813,850 donation from Bears players and staff as well as the foundations of the Bears and the NFL to award grant money to five Chicago-area youth programs earlier this month.

"Sam has been educating me about some of these problems," McCaskey said. "We went on a ride-along with the Chicago police department and we're in the squad car for five minutes and sure enough (we hear) the 'shots fired' call and take off. That was a sobering experience."

"Sam and other players and I went down and spoke to the (Police Superintendent Eddie Johnson). He has been up to Halas Hall to talk to our players. Our guys want to be part of the solution and we're proud of them for doing that."

Will the 'real' Carlos Rodón show up in 2019? That's what the White Sox think will happen

By James Fegan / The Athletic | November 16, 2018

Carlos Rodón dropped a "big, if true" type comment in the middle of a surprisingly upbeat postgame interview for a guy who had been chased in the second inning of his final start of 2018.

"One-year anniversary was yesterday for shoulder surgery," Rodón said at that start in Minnesota. "They say the next year should be better. Hopefully find that command and build it up build that fastball command and start throwing sliders for strikes."

Rodón's 4.18 ERA in 120 2/3 innings in 2018 slide smoothly next a 4.01 career ERA that feels like it should be lower given the stuff he has, and what he looks like when he's pitching at the height of his powers. He showed some of that ability in 2018, like when he struck out a season-high eight in eight innings on July 24 in Anaheim.

But while pre-surgery Rodón flashed above-average strikeout totals that suggested more consistent success lay ahead with some more strike-throwing from a still very young pitcher, this past season saw career-low strikeout (17.6 percent) and swinging-strike rates (nine percent) and a velocity drop, albeit not a precipitous one.

That would all serve to raise the alarm about a diminishment in stuff after undergoing arthroscopic surgery to debride his left shoulder and relieve the bursitis he was experiencing at the end the 2017 season—unless it can be mostly waved away as a sort of natural down period for someone who was still completing his rehab process into June. That's a hard pivot because Rodón's successful August was inspiring many outside observers to anoint him as the stable anchor for years to come of a rotation that desperately needed one, but White Sox GM Rick Hahn says that was always the organizational view of his 2018 season.

“Any time you're going into a pitcher's shoulder, you've got to take the longer-term view of when he's going to come back,” Hahn said at the GM meetings. “The first real public major hurdle is him getting back and taking the ball every day at the big league level which we obviously saw him do. He was dominant at times and then toward the end he struggled a little bit, but it's really sort of that second year back, once the sort of health issues or health questions are behind him, that you really start seeing a return to form. So it was always projected that it was going to be let's get him back out there, let's get him performing regularly and ideally have no issues which we were fortunate to do. Now the next full year is the year where you hope to see that Carlos Rodón fulfilling that potential he has.”

That sound logic would be even more compelling if there were documented incidences of this effect, and weeks of nagging our Eno Sarris to run a search of Jeff Zimmerman's injury database was supposed to provide the centerpiece of this article. Instead, a full rundown of every pitcher with a shoulder injury from 2011-to-2017 found Rodón's path forward mostly incomparable. Since “shoulder surgery” is typically a succinct cause of a death for a promising pitching career, that fact is mostly a positive.

Rodón did not have a torn labrum like Miguel González, nor did need a capsule repair like John Danks, nor did he rip his latissimus dorsi clean off the bone like Jake Peavy. He did not need his rotator cuff repaired like Brandon Webb and Kerry Wood, or anyone who could provide a clear example that diminished results or just outright doom await the 25-year-old lefty. Instead, Rodón underwent a debridement (removal of damaged tissue, oft-referred to as a “cleanup”) with no structural concerns reported and with shoulder surgeries falling steadily in the game, finding direct comparables to a recovery that still looks to be smooth and problem-free is difficult.

White Sox pitcher Carlos Rodón didn't put up great numbers in 2018, but he showed some of the ability that made him a highly coveted draft prospect. (Kirby Lee/USA TODAY Sports)

Josh Tomlin, Ted Lilly and LaTroy Hawkins all underwent cleanups since 2011 with no structural damage beyond some labrum “fraying” found, all had productive seasons afterward even if they lacked sonic leaps forward in Year 2, but are also all somewhat bad comps for Rodón. Those pitchers were over 30 when they went under the knife (Hawkins was 38), so natural physical decline from aging is inseparable from their performances. Lilly and Tomlin were not hard-throwing lefties with top-of-the-rotation stuff and Hawkins is old enough to have played with Kirby Puckett.

And those were the best examples. Sergio Santos' labrum only had fraying when he underwent a cleanup in 2012, but blowing out his elbow the very next season makes his experience pretty different. Lefty Tom Gorzelanny pretty much never performed at a productive major league level again after getting a bone spur removed from his shoulder at 32, but again, something about comparing a fringe contributor with a career's worth of wear to Rodón feels just a bit off. The White Sox also do not think they are any adequate player comps to Rodón's progress, for what it's worth.

Hahn extolling the virtues of Rodón “taking the ball” consistently through 2018 might sound like throwaway praise, but it's an important separator from Rodón and the far more numerous cases of other pitchers who experienced similar soreness and stiffness. While Rodón was talking about how great he felt physically by the end of the year, other hurlers whose initial symptoms of stiffness and bursitis were similar to Rodón,

regularly ran into additional complications as they proceeded and were in far worse shape by the time they landed on a surgical table.

All of this seems better than being stuck in the shoulder surgery death cycle, but it still doesn't get us to the point of having a firm reason why Rodón should be better next season, or go back to being someone who could flash upper-90s heat at the end of games, rather than 94-96 mph. Rodón's agent Scott Boras got a lot more questions at the GM meeting trying to goad him into condemning new Mets GM Brodie Van Wagenen than he did about Rodón, but he hinted at a cause for decreased velocity, even while most rejecting the premise of my question.

"He was performing really really well at very high levels, so we've already seen what Carlos Rodón can do," Boras said in Carlsbad. "He got a little tired at the end, but he's going to be a top of the rotation starter for a long time."

Fatigue is not typically cited as an issue for guys that throw 120 innings, or naturally ramp up their velocity over the course of heavy 100-plus pitch counts the way Rodón does. But the Sox saw Rodón's 120 innings more as someone pitching two-thirds of a season after a draining eight-month rehab process than just someone pitching two-thirds of a season, and that would double as a reason they're faithful about the recovery of Zack Burdi from Tommy John surgery even while his velocity is off his previous peak this fall.

"You lose sight of it because, especially a guy who gets back to the big leagues or a guy who shows up in the Arizona Fall League after missing a year, we just see that performance or the fans just see that performance or the media just sees that performance and even sometimes in Chicago we just see that performance," Hahn said. "You don't see the months upon months of a throwing program that went into it, the leading up, the bullpens that led up to BP that led up to getting stretched out on rehab assignments that led to ultimately getting to that bigger stage, whether it's in the big leagues or in the Fall League. It's a long, arduous and challenging process, not just physically but mentally on these guys, done a lot of times in remote areas and alone. It can take a toll. So there's a burst of excitement when they first get back, and you can see a bit of a leveling off over time that could well be a byproduct of fatigue."

It takes a bit of a generous reading to perfectly fit Rodón's 2018 results into that idea, but it works well enough. His month of July where he made use of a long All-Star break saw him post a 24.3 percent strikeout over four starts, drag his FIP down to 3.54 and command his slider. This gave a vision of an above-average contributor before his positive indicators started to ebb away even while he continued to pile up quality starts in August.

There are some interesting trends in Rodón's game, like more high four-seamers and fewer sinkers, that will be interesting to parse when the focus shifts from whether or not he's back to his old self. Some league scouts feel Rodón's dip in swinging strikes is about making his delivery more upright and straight to the plate for the sake of his command than it is about stuff. But since Rodón just feels that dropping his slider in enough for strikes to generate more swings at his wipeout version is the key, he's likely to continue to lean into that approach.

Optimism is required to believe Rodón's ascent to the front of the White Sox rotation can smoothly pick up where it left off in 2016, but after a long search, there's no firm reason why it can't.

Bryce Harper: Why the Chicago White Sox should sign free agent

By Gabe Lacques / USA Today | November 19, 2018

Bryce Harper, a National League MVP at 23, is a free agent at 26, peddling his services in an industry that's grown to nearly \$11 billion in annual revenues. His combination of skills, age and marketing cachet make him an excellent fit for any major league franchise.

Including the Chicago White Sox.

Harper, who has 184 career home runs and a lifetime .900 OPS, rejected a 10-year, \$300 million contract offer from the Washington Nationals in September, and is a good bet to set a new standard for the most lucrative contract in North American sports history.

It may take weeks for that process to play out. In the meantime, USA TODAY Sports will examine why every team could use Harper's services – some more than others, certainly some better-equipped to procure them.

A case for Harper and the White Sox joining forces:

On the field

This would be so simple: Sign Harper, roll him out in right field and let the franchise coalesce around him. The White Sox have been peddling incumbent right fielder Avisail Garcia and may be inclined to simply non-tender the 2019 free agent if they can't find a taker.

Waiting for the kids on the farm to blossom will be the intriguing part.

The White Sox's once-reluctant teardown has gone in fits and starts, and a 100-loss season in 2018 saw its share of low points: Yoan Moncada's AL-leading 217 strikeouts, Michael Kopech's Tommy John surgery, shortstop Tim Anderson's aversion to getting on base.

A second wave of prospects is about to hit, however.

Leading the way is outfielder Eloy Jimenez, who is primed for a late-April debut once the White Sox have sufficiently robbed him of a year of service time. He was ready to roll by the end of last year, when he produced 22 homers and a .961 OPS in 108 games at Class AA and AAA.

Cuban signee Luis Robert is probably a year behind Jimenez but dazzled in a brief Arizona Fall League appearance and has the goods to hold down center field in Chicago. Nick Madrigal, the fourth overall pick in the 2018 draft, is poised to become a fixture at second base for the next decade. And the White Sox will add the third overall pick in 2019 to this mix.

Naturally, there will be growing pains with this group. Yet dropping Harper into the middle of the lineup would alleviate pressure on all of them – and perhaps give holdovers like Moncada and Anderson a chance to catch their breath and take the final steps in development.

Should most of the position players pan out, that would afford the White Sox significant cost savings to apply toward pitching if need be. Even still, Kopech should be ready to roll by 2020, with fellow right-handers Dylan Cease and Dane Dunning knocking on the door in the high minors.

Meanwhile, Harper could age gracefully at Guaranteed Rate Field, with the option to serve as designated hitter in the latter years of his deal.

Off the field

Signing a big-bucks free agent still in his prime would be a new experience for the White Sox, who certainly do not skimp on bronze: 11 statues of franchise legends dot the Guaranteed Rate Field grounds. Most are native White Sox (such as Luis Aparicio, Frank Thomas, Harold Baines) or came into their own on the South Side (Nellie Fox, Paul Konerko).

Harper would be joining Carlton Fisk as a potential Hall of Famer shifting gears mid-career. But nine of Fisk's 11 All-Star Game nods came as Red Sox.

Harper conceivably has many of his best years ahead of him and would give perpetually star-crossed White Sox fans someone to believe in.

Is it hard to imagine his hair flips playing among the South Side denizens? Not really. Put Harper in the silver and black and make him the heel-turning alternative to his blue-eyed pal on the other end of the Red Line.

Indeed, the pregame bro hugs would be ample should Harper and Kris Bryant square off a half-dozen times a season.

Why they could pull it off

With a franchise value of \$1.5 billion and annual revenues of \$266 million, as estimated by Forbes, the White Sox certainly have the wherewithal. Thanks to a bevy of trades to accelerate this rebuild, they have less than \$6 million committed to the 2020 payroll and only Anderson is guaranteed money beyond that.

Yes, the war chest is deep – but probably not as deep as, say, the Philadelphia Phillies, who sound willing to commit nearly a billion dollars for both Bryce Harper and Manny Machado.

The White Sox probably won't go that crazy, and perhaps would prefer Machado over Harper. Either way, the prospects in the pipeline and the cash on hand create ideal conditions for a significant free agent strike.

Will it happen?

Possibly. The White Sox need a jolt: Attendance fell to 1.6 million last season, their meekest turnout since 1999, and TV ratings on NBC Sports Chicago can only go up. Their 2005 World Series championship bought them significant leeway – they drew nearly 3 million in 2006 and stayed above the 2 million mark through 2011.

Now, it's time to regain some of that relevance. Ultimately, winning is the only panacea. Harper would be a key part of that formula – and in the meantime, make the White Sox matter again.