



### **WHITE SOX HEADLINES OF OCTOBER 24, 2018**

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#### **Cooper: 'Old-school ways' won't bar evolution**

Pitching coach partial to starters, but willing to look at newfangled strategies

By Scott Merkin / MLB.com / October 23, 2018

CHICAGO -- The 2005 White Sox won 11 of 12 postseason games, including a four-game sweep of Houston in the World Series, to claim their first championship since 1917.

White Sox starting pitchers worked at least seven innings in 11 of those 12 games (Freddy Garcia went just five in Game 3 of the ALDS), including four straight complete games in the ALCS.

Jose Contreras threw 17 1/3 innings over two starts in the '05 ALCS. But times have changed: in the 2018 NLCS, three Milwaukee starters combined to throw 20 1/3 innings over the seven games.

Don Cooper oversaw that amazing White Sox rotation effort, and even in the world of the opener and bullpen-reliant contests, the White Sox pitching coach remains partial to his starters 13 years later.

"Why do you pay them all the money? They are still the guys who go out there and take the bulk of the work," Cooper said. "What we did that year was an amazing thing. I said it maybe 10 years ago, 'This will never be matched.' And now, with how they are doing stuff, that's a shoo-in.

"It holds a personal satisfaction for me to be able to have watched all of that and to have gone through it and seen it all. Again, I'm still a believer in those guys are the ones."

Milwaukee, often working for lineup matchups, sustained the starters' lack of depth via an elite bullpen featuring Josh Hader, Corey Knebel, Jeremy Jeffress, Joakim Soria and Corbin Burnes. It was a bullpen somewhat akin to the '17 Yankees or the '14 and '15 Royals, as Cooper noted. Cooper added the White Sox played the matchup game themselves with a young bullpen during the final month of their rebuild's second year.

There have been no talks between Cooper and others in the organization concerning changes of focus on the staff such as using an opener, but Cooper isn't against that idea on certain days, if the team is set up for the following games as well. Cooper believes the foundation starts with a '19 White Sox rotation presently featuring Reynaldo Lopez, Lucas Giolito and Carlos Rodon, with Dylan Cease, MLB Pipeline's Pitcher of the Year, on the way.

"I'm not looking for a reason to take them out," Cooper said. "I'm looking for ways to have starters go deeper in the games. But there are some who seem to be able to do that. It has to do with what you have personnel-wise.

"Pitching up, spin rate, vertical movement -- I'm into all that, but my eyes can see a lot of that stuff. I'm trying to find ways and look at it in how it will be able to help me or anybody, how is it applicable to me on a daily basis.

"There are certain things that make me laugh. Like when they say the last couple of years, elevating a fastball is good. We've been elevating fastballs for the last 18 years. Higher than higher was our term. Lower than low, farther than far off the plate. But I'm all for numbers. I'm all for looking at stuff, and I'm not going to let my old-school ways get in the way of newfound stuff."

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### **A.J. Pierzynski is bothered by Manny Machado: 'What do you mean you don't play hard every day?'**

By Chuck Garfien / NBC Sports Chicago / October 23, 2018

A.J. Pierzynski knows what it's like to be Manny Machado.

Thanks to his cutthroat personality and ornery disposition during his playing career, the former White Sox catcher was Public Enemy No. 1 in baseball stadiums all across America.

So Pierzynski can relate to the Machado hate. He thrived at getting under the skin of his opposition.

But if you want to get under Pierzynski's skin, don't play the game hard everyday. Or even worse, publicly admit you don't, like Machado did when he told The Athletic's Ken Rosenthal he's not going to be "Johnny Hustle" on the baseball field.

"The fact that you're in the playoffs and you come out and say that you don't play as hard as you can, that bothers me," Pierzynski said on the White Sox Talk Podcast. "I'm fine with him running over the first baseman's (Jesus Aguilar) foot. OK, you're mad. I get it. He threw a bat at a guy (Fernando Abad in 2014). OK, I get it. He threw a helmet at a guy (Josh Donaldson in 2014). OK, you're mad, you're emotional. I get that. But to come out after the game and say, 'I don't play as hard as I can all the time,' to me as a player, as an ex-player and as a fan of the team that's going to spend \$300 million on a guy, what do you mean you don't play hard every day? That would bother me more than the other stuff."

He added, "It's just called being a professional."

Pierzynski isn't the only former player to take offense with Machado's words and actions. Baltimore Orioles legend Jim Palmer, also a longtime broadcaster for the club, tweeted after Machado didn't run out the groundball in Game 2 of the NLCS: "Too tired to run hard for 90 feet. But wants the big \$\$\$. #pathetic."

Pierzynski's response to that tweet?

"Jim Palmer's in the Hall of Fame. He might know what he's talking about."

Brewers outfielder Christian Yelich roasted Machado during the NLCS, calling him "a dirty player." Pierzynski wouldn't go that far, but he inched close to it.

"Did (Machado) go outside the rules? Yeah. Did he kick Aguilar's foot? Yeah. But is he dirty? Was he trying to hurt the guy? For me, the definition of dirty is when you're trying to hurt a guy. I don't think he was trying to hurt him. He was more trying to send a message to him like, 'Get out of my way,' which I understand. I don't know if you can call that dirty. I'd just call that dumb," said Pierzynski, who later backed off the "dumb" comment saying, "I didn't mean to call Manny Machado dumb at all, but you know the rules sliding into second base. He's a middle infielder, so he knows what he can do and what he can't do."

Brewers fans despise Machado for his actions during the NLCS. Red Sox fans feel the same way after Machado spiked Dustin Pedroia on a slide in 2017. Pedroia has barely played since.

Most people want to be loved. Pierzynski didn't seem to care. He flourished despite the hate. Machado is doing the same thing.

"The old saying is there's no such thing as bad publicity," Pierzynski explained. "Look, I played different than most people. I had to have an enemy and I had to play with hate. No matter who it was on the other side, that's the way I had to do it. That's what got me going everyday. Maybe Manny Machado is that way, and the Brewers lit him up for what he said. Now the Dodgers are in the World Series with Manny Machado and he's been great ever since that moment."

And a big payday is coming. Machado is set to be a free agent. He'll likely sign a contract worth \$300 million, possibly lots more.

You also have third baseman Nolan Arenado set to hit the free-agent market next winter. Either player would look great in a White Sox uniform.

If given the money and the choice, who would Pierzynski sign?

"I'd sign Arenado," Pierzynski said without hesitation. "I wouldn't give him \$300 million, but I'd sign him in a second. I believe Arenado is a better defender. I believe Arenado is more clutch, and I also believe that Arenado hasn't had the (on-field) issues that Manny Machado has had."

It's possible that the White Sox could be in pursuit of Machado this winter. If they ended up signing him, Pierzynski wouldn't complain.

"Why wouldn't you sign the guy? He's as talented as anybody in baseball, maybe other than Mike Trout. His value is off-the-charts, talent wise."

It's the other stuff that gives current players and former players, like Pierzynski, pause when talking about Machado.

Pierzynski knows from experience, because he used to be that same guy.

"I've been there. Each organization is going to sit down (with Machado). Say the White Sox want to sign him. He's going to have to sit down with Jerry Reinsdorf, Rick Hahn and Kenny Williams and Ricky Renteria and they'll say, 'This is what we need out of you,' and if he answers the questions right, then maybe the White Sox go for it. Would he look good in a White Sox uniform? Absolutely. But he'd look good in any uniform."

The opinions about Machado, however, are clearly not uniform.

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### **A White Sox fan's guide to watching the World Series**

By Vinnie Duber / NBC Sports Chicago / October 23, 2018

The White Sox are not playing in the World Series. A 100-loss season will do that.

But just because the South Siders aren't playing doesn't mean White Sox fans shouldn't pay attention to the Fall Classic. There's plenty to take from this matchup between the Boston Red Sox and Los Angeles Dodgers that applies to South Side baseball past, present and — most importantly — future.

Chris Sale

The guy who will throw the first pitch of the 2018 World Series is one of the greatest White Sox pitchers of all time.

Sale's been grabbing headlines the last few days for an alleged belly-button ring, but the only body part of his that matters come Tuesday night is his left arm. Since the White Sox traded Sale away in the deal that kick-started the rebuild, he's been arguably the best pitcher in baseball, putting up a 2.56 ERA in 59 regular-season starts, with 545 strikeouts in his 372.1 innings. He's made five postseason appearances with the Red Sox and hasn't fared quite as well, the overall numbers ugly thanks to a seven-run outing against the eventual-champion Houston Astros last year. But this fall, he's given up just four runs and struck out 14 batters in 10.1 innings.

Sale's status as one of the game's best hurlers is a reminder of a couple things for White Sox fans watching him wear differently colored Sox this fall: 1. why they liked him so much in the first place, and 2. what kind of price it took for Boston to get him. The K Zone can be reborn, if only briefly and in the comfort of White Sox fans' own homes, for Sale's appearances in this World Series. But more importantly to the future of the South Side franchise, Sale's continued excellence is a reinforcement of the potential of Michael Kopech and Yoan Moncada, the two biggest names in the return package. It took those guys and their incredibly high ceilings to get a pitcher as good as Sale, and that's still a good sign for the White Sox future.

This is how you rebuild

The Red Sox have a reputation as one of baseball's biggest spenders, but their roster is rife with the fruits of player development, something the rebuilding White Sox are trying to yield in their contending team of the future.

Boston has a couple big-ticket players in David Price and J.D. Martinez, but they're two of just four free-agent signings on the Red Sox World Series roster. Meanwhile, a whopping seven were drafted by Boston, including the entire starting outfield: Andrew Benintendi, Jackie Bradley Jr. and likely AL MVP Mookie Betts. The left side of their infield is a pair of international signings in Rafael Devers and Xander Bogaerts, so that means five of the Red Sox starting nine position players (five and a half if you count Christian Vazquez, one half of the Red Sox catching tandem) have never known another organization.

The Red Sox might not win this World Series, but their roster makeup isn't dissimilar from the last two teams that hoisted a trophy, the Cubs and Astros, who boasted their own groups of homegrown stars. And here's something you might not realize: Boston had back-to-back last-place finishes in the AL East in 2014 and 2015, during which they rid themselves of veteran contracts and earned a couple high draft picks. They made the No. 7 pick in the 2016 draft for all that losing. The result? Benintendi.

And so it's another October with a team proving that the tear-down-and-rebuild method can work wonders. White Sox fans might not be rooting for the Red Sox this fall, but their victory would be another for the rebuilding strategy — and should give plenty of hope to South Side fans envisioning their own group of homegrown stars leading a championship run one day.

Manny Machado

The World Series will allow White Sox fans to do a little bit of scouting on some free agents that the South Siders could pursue this winter, and there's no bigger name in that category than Machado, the Dodgers shortstop expected to receive one of the biggest contracts in baseball history this offseason.

Many a Twitter-using White Sox fan have had Machado on their wish list for years, though that number might be declining following some of Machado's words and actions during the NLCS. He didn't run to first on a grounder, then ignited a PR disaster by saying hustling wasn't his "cup of tea." He interfered with a pair of double-play turns by sticking his hand up while sliding into second base (the same play that, during a Crosstown game last month, ended with White Sox shortstop Tim Anderson screaming at umpire Joe West). And Machado most notably dragged his foot over Milwaukee Brewers first baseman Jesus Aguilar's leg in a play Aguilar's teammates called dirty after the game.

So with all that in mind, Machado and his extreme amount of talent — he's at the end of a career year that saw him slash .297/.367/.538 with 37 homers and 107 RBIs during the regular season — will be on the game's biggest stage for all to see. That includes his future team, whichever that might be. Those White Sox fans still hoping he lands on the South Side to help kick the rebuild into overdrive can watch this World Series to see just how good he is with the bat and with the glove. On the latter, should the White Sox be willing to rearrange their infield for Machado, who is insistent on playing shortstop despite his two Gold Gloves at third base? Watch and see.

Other free agents to be

But Machado's not the only player in this matchup who'll be hitting the free-agent market this winter.

Before either of these teams punched their tickets to the Fall Classic, I wrote about a pair of pitchers who will be free agents this offseason and who could make sense for the White Sox, and lo and behold they're both going to make starts in this World Series. Hyun-Jin Ryu is slated to get the ball for the Dodgers in Wednesday's Game 2, and though yet to be announced, we'll likely see Nathan Eovaldi go for the Red Sox when the series shifts to Los Angeles.

Rick Hahn said the White Sox will be looking to add pitching this offseason, and Ryu and Eovaldi will both be available. Either would be an upgrade in a South Side rotation that led baseball in walks this season. Eovaldi walked just 20 guys all year, 12 in 54 innings with the Red Sox and only eight in 57 innings with the Tampa Bay Rays. That's compared to a season strikeout total of 101, for a better than 5:1 strikeout-to-walk ratio. Ryu, meanwhile, walked only 15 batters in his 82.1 innings, compared to 89 strikeouts. His ERA was a pencil-thin 1.97, significantly lower than Eovaldi's still quite good 3.81 number, which was 3.33 after the midseason trade from the Tampa. Could either one be a future White Sox starter? Maybe.

Boston closer Craig Kimbrel is also heading to free agency and could be of interest to White Sox fans who don't see a future closer among the team's crop of young relievers. He's going to cost a lot, though, a seven-time All Star with a 1.91 career ERA and eight straight seasons of at least 31 saves (40-plus in five of those).

Other bullpen guys who will be looking for jobs this winter: Joe Kelly of the Red Sox (one earned run allowed in 5.1 innings this postseason) and Ryan Madson of the Dodgers (one run allowed in 6.1 innings this postseason).

Oh, and Dodgers Game 1 starter Clayton Kershaw could be a free agent, too, if he opts out of his current contract. The White Sox would figure to be quite a longshot to lure him away from Southern California, but if Kershaw were to go somewhere else, that could shake up the whole market and open up other possibilities for teams like the White Sox. Something to keep in mind.

The next important trend

The World Series and the postseason in general have been ground zero for some of the game's latest sweeping changes in recent years.

Specifically, the emphasis on relief pitching has dominated the last couple Fall Classics, and teams like the Brewers and Rays showed how good a team can be while leaning as heavily on the bullpen as any team ever has. While this World Series might not feature teams practicing "bullpenning" to those extremes, the relief corps again figure to play starring roles. If that happens, how does that impact the White Sox rebuild? Does a heavy focus on starting-pitching depth need to shift to a bigger focus on relief-pitching depth? Or do the lists of future free-agent relievers become of greater interest than players at any other position?

Or perhaps an entirely new trend is born this fall that the White Sox will have to react to while constructing their teams of the future. You won't know unless you watch the World Series.

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**Chris Sale labors in World Series opener for Red Sox**

By Dan Santorimita / NBC Sports Chicago / October 23, 2018

When Chris Sale was with the White Sox, fans dreamed of seeing him headline a postseason playoff rotation.

That never materialized in his time with the White Sox, but Sale is headlining a World Series rotation for the Red Sox. The 29-year-old pitched Game 1 for the Red Sox against the Dodgers on Tuesday.

Sale didn't last long, making it into the fifth and getting pulled before recording an out. In those 4+ innings, Sale gave up three runs while striking out seven.

One of the key plays of the game featured Manny Machado getting an RBI single against Sale in the third inning to tie the game at 2-2. Machado later had an RBI groundout to again tie the game in the fifth before Boston regained the lead in the bottom half of that inning.

Was that a meeting of the White Sox past (Sale) against the White Sox future (Machado)? Machado will be a highly sought after free agent this winter and the White Sox have been connected to the former Orioles infielder since last offseason.

Game 1 featured a stellar pitching matchup of Sale against Clayton Kershaw, but it didn't materialize as it looked on paper. Sale labored while Kershaw gave up five runs in 4+ innings.

This postseason hasn't been a standout one for Sale. The lefty has a 4.40 ERA in 16 1/3 innings over four appearances (three starts and a relief appearance).

The longer Chris Sale is with the Red Sox, the less this will feel relevant to the White Sox, but it is still something to see the longtime White Sox ace on the mound starting a World Series opener.

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### **When is Eloy Jimenez coming up? Can Yoan Moncada shake off his 2018 season? 5 offseason questions for the White Sox**

By Paul Sullivan / Chicago Tribune / October 23, 2018

This is the first in a series of position-by-position analyses of the White Sox entering the offseason.

#### 1. When's Eloy coming?

Waiting on the arrival of Eloy Jimenez will be the White Sox's biggest storyline entering the 2019 season, which figures to be another challenging one for their fans.

When we last saw the Sox's top prospect he was crushing Triple-A pitching, hitting .355 in 55 games at Charlotte with a .996 OPS. But the Sox opted to end his season instead of making him a September call-up, prompting criticism from his agency and some fans who wanted to see a glimpse of the next big thing. In hindsight, the decision was a no-brainer for Sox general manager Rick Hahn, who simply is playing by the rules of the collective bargaining agreement, which allow teams to retain rights to a player for seven years instead of six by manipulating service time and calling them up a few weeks into a new season.

What good would it have done for Jimenez to spend a month on a 100-loss team?

So look for the Sox to take the heat early in 2019 while ensuring Jimenez remains under their control through 2025. The question then is whether Jimenez can have the same kind of effect on the Sox that Ronald Acuna had in 2018 with the Braves, helping lift his team from 90 losses to 90 victories in one season. The Sox won't be ready to contend in 2019, but Jimenez should provide the offense with a much needed shot in the arm and give fans hope for the future.

#### 2. Is Daniel Palka the real deal?

Who would have dreamed Palka would be the Sox's best power hitter and one of their more popular players before 2018 ended? The Twins castoff wound up with a team-leading 27 home runs in 417 at-bats, leading all rookies, and a .484 slugging percentage while playing mostly right field and designated hitter.

It seems like the DH spot was invented for Palka, but with Matt Davidson still around the Sox will have to stick him in right half the time at least and cross their fingers. He still needs to cut down on his strikeouts, but that could be said of almost everyone in the Sox lineup as they set a major-league record in that category.

Palka's emergence, and the imminent arrival of Jimenez, could lead to the departure of Avisail Garcia only one year after a career-best season. Missing time with a hamstring injury, Garcia's average dropped nearly 100 points, from .330 to .236, though he still wound up with 19 home runs in 356 at-bats. He will become a free agent after 2019, so the Sox may want to find a taker this offseason before his value slides even more.

Nicky Delmonico and Leury Garcia are likely to stick around in part-time roles, but center field is a spot the Sox can upgrade. Adam Engel had another solid year defensively, highlighted by some over-the-wall catches to rob the Yankees of potential home runs. The Sox still are waiting on his bat to come around. Though Engel hit .260 after the All-Star break he also added just five walks for a .287 OBP in the second half.

### 3. Is Welington Castillo expendable despite a young pitching staff?

In hindsight, Welington Castillo's PED suspension turned out to be a blessing in disguise. The Sox found out Omar Narvaez can handle the starting job, leaving Castillo in a backup role when he returned. Narvaez will be the starter again, but whether Castillo's experience and defense are needed with such a young staff is something Hahn will have to decide this offseason. The Sox may have to eat part of Castillo's \$7.25 million salary in 2019 to get a deal done, but they could be motivated sellers after the veteran let the team down with his PED usage. Kevan Smith proved to be an adequate backup, though a veteran may be the answer to help develop the pitchers.

### 4. Can Yoan Moncada shake off his 2018 season?

Yoan Moncada was the top prospect in all of baseball only two years ago. But he has hit .234 in 203 games since coming up from Triple-A in the summer of 2017, and led the majors with 217 strikeouts last year. The switch-hitter was particularly weak batting right-handed, hitting .209 with two home runs in 148 at-bats. Moncada's defense at second was also hit-and-miss, with 20 errors at second, leaving some to wonder whether a switch to center field could be in his future. Moncada did show glimpses of what everyone expected from him, but seldom in a prolonged stretch.

Either way, it's too soon to give up on his future.

Shortstop Tim Anderson progressed more than any young Sox player in 2018, and with 20 homers and 26 steals he joined Mookie Betts, Trevor Story and Jose Ramirez as the only big-league players with 20-plus home runs and 25-plus steals. Anderson still has a way to go to become an All-Star caliber player, as should be expected of a first-round draft pick, but at least he's heading in the right direction.

Yolmer Sanchez provided some laughs in another otherwise grim season, and his inventive celebration of a teammate's walk-off home run — dumping the cooler on his own head at home plate — may have been the season's highlight. But Sanchez still has to prove he's an everyday player, and may be better suited for the super-sub role at second, third and occasionally short.

The Sox have the resources to sign a Manny Machado, but does anyone believe they would outbid contending teams for a talented player many deem a head case? Don't count on it.

### 5. Can Jose Abreu rebound?

First baseman/DH Jose Abreu is entering the final year of his contract and as usual will be discussed in offseason trade rumors. While he was selected as the starting first baseman on the American League All-Star team, Abreu wound up having a subpar year, at least for him, fighting off injuries and watching his OPS drop from .906 to .798.

At 32, this will be a crucial season for Abreu, who most have labeled semi-untouchable by most because of his ability to mentor Moncada and other young Latino players. He repeatedly has said he wants to remain with the Sox and wait out the rebuild, but if the Sox don't intend to pay him after 2019 there's no reason to keep Abreu around to be a father figure in the clubhouse for one more year.

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### **A theoretical White Sox free agency wish list**

By James Fegan / The Athletic / October 23, 2018

If there's a takeaway from watching the Los Angeles Dodgers, other than their incredible amounts of money and thundering crotch chops, it's being astounded by their endless depth and their willful accrual of more, even as managing it grows daunting.

Sure, they leaned on a rookie to start Game 7 of the NLCS, but it was a choice rather than a necessity after they moved two starters to the bullpen for the playoffs and managed Walker Buehler's innings throughout the year. They legit rotate six different guys through their outfield — including paying Matt Kemp over \$21 million per year to be a situational corner bat — and have a top-50 prospect lying in wait who didn't even break that rotation. But they'll probably never fret too much about blocking guys, since their roster is staked on versatility that allows them to smoothly adjust to injury and attrition.

The traditional view for a free agent signing is banking on their best production coming in the first year and deteriorating from there (hopefully slowly), and the White Sox still aren't yet in a position where those types of acquisitions make the most sense for them. Even Avisail García's final year of arbitration (estimated at an affordable \$8 million) carries some doubt of drawing a tender offer if the Sox cannot envision him contributing somehow to the future beyond 2019.

But what the White Sox do have is the least money committed to their 2019 roster of anyone in baseball — albeit with José Abreu's final year of arbitration coming their way — so there's room for them to hunt for long-term solutions while filling their 2019 needs. It's a question of how aggressive — or how inventive — they want to be in each area.

Let's run down some compelling options for each need, on each tier of excitement level. Another depressed market would provide the most opportunity, but let's mostly assume prices will return to normal.

A multi-use positional talent who improves the quality of the lineup, hopefully for years to come  
The most interesting area of need isn't really an area of need. The White Sox could return in 2019 with Yolmer Sánchez, Adam Engel, Matt Davidson, Daniel Palka and Nicky Delmonico all in regular roles and continue about their gradual progression toward a contending lineup. It's just a moment of possible opportunity, so there's fleeting purpose to make a non-impact move.

Manny Machado: Franchise shortstop/Johnny Hustle

Likely damage: 10 years, \$350 million, legitimately three opt-outs

Excitement level: Leading all the locals! (Unless there's like, a huge crash on the Kennedy)

If a 30-year-old Derek Jeter at shortstop wasn't enough to dissuade the Yankees from pursuing Álex Rodríguez, Tim Anderson's defensive progress is not sufficient reason for the Sox to not be in on Machado, as the next team with too much up-the-middle talent will probably be the same one that has too many starting pitchers for its rotation. A recurring theme across the free agent market is that the Sox will have to



crush the bidding to get either Machado or Bryce Harper to sign onto (hopefully) the tail end of a rebuild, but they're elite talents in their 20s and their fit into the team's window for contention is obvious enough for some effort to be put into landing them. I don't think they land either but I included this tier so you all wouldn't yell at me for immediately ruling out top-tier targets. Machado's integration into the Ricky's Boys Don't Quit culture would be a daily fascination.

Marwin Gonzalez: Everything but pitching and catching

Likely damage: Four years, \$70 million, club option for a fifth year at \$18 million

Excitement level: They're breaking into Bernstein & McKnight to carry the press conference live

Ideally, Gonzalez posting a combined 112 wRC+ over the last five seasons has more to do with pushing his name to the forefront than hitting .333/.389/.576 in eight playoff games. Either way, Gonzalez is an ideal fit for a team that doesn't know exactly where the chasm will be in their lineup over the next few years, whether it's the long-term third base picture being murky because a first-round draft pick tore his Achilles twice, or if the glut of center field prospects doesn't produce a corner bat immediately. The downside is that every team in every spot in their contention cycle could use a player like this, his cost will reflect that and the Sox could be dragged into largest-contract-in-franchise-history territory for a fancy insurance policy. It's good to have a quality big league bat and glove to slide over to nearly any position, though.

A.J. Pollock: A center fielder for now, a decent outfielder for later

Likely damage: Four years, \$68 million

Excitement level: The most robust ticket sales for Notre Dame Alumni Night since the Jeff Samardzija days (Do they have a Notre Dame Alumni Night?)

The only time Pollock played over 150 games, he was a bonafide star, and all the times he played more than 12, he was a solid starter. He would immediately provide a more compelling center field option than Adam Engel's slow progression to acceptable offense, and the whole point of targeting up-the-middle talent in free agency is the hope for a graceful aging to the outfield corner for a guy who will be 31 come Opening Day 2019. While Pollock has the pop to carry productivity into his 30s, a lengthy injury history (his only full season came in 2015) is why he would be this affordable. After Chris Young and Adam Eaton, it only feels natural to keep the White Sox-Diamondbacks center fielder exchange going.

Josh Donaldson: Third baseman/veteran masher who does not really fit in the window

Likely damage: One year, \$18 million, mutual option for 2020 at \$21 million

Excitement level: His stylish mohawk becomes the hottest new hairdo in Beverly

No free agent market is especially predictable, but it's a total mystery for the soon-to-be 33-year-old Donaldson, who looked diminished and hurt for almost the entire season before about three weeks of mashing with Cleveland. Does he dare waste another season on a make-good deal at this age? Does he try to get his last — and first — big contract ever after such a murky 2018 season? The former seems like the best chance for him to find his way to Chicago if his market crashes, but a hampered corner bat in his mid-30s does not seem like a long-term piece this team would sink money into.

A starting pitcher who could be part of the rotation on a contending team

You cannot really land a decent starting pitcher in free agency without committing multiple years, so might as well try to find someone who projects to be an asset to the rotation in 2020, or dare I say it, even beyond. Finding starting pitching in free agency is a total minefield, but the White Sox need a lot of innings with Michael Kopech out, and have budget room to take a risk.

Nathan Eovaldi: Maybe, possibly, by some chance, the mid-rotation production is permanent

Likely damage: Four years, \$58 million

Excitement level: "Eo-ballsy!" headline gets surprisingly far along in Tribune newsroom meeting before being ultimately vetoed. The team Twitter account will use flame emojis a lot when promoting him

Whether's it's Patrick Corbin coming off a career year despite declining velocity, Dallas Keuchel capital-P Pitching his way toward another strong 200-inning campaign despite declining everything, or hoping that Eovaldi's absurd 100+ mph-fueled stuff means there's upside left as he continues to refine his command, it's just choosing between different types of deaths when it comes to signing a free agent starter. There's no guarantee Eovaldi can be effective when his velocity slides down to merely above-average, just like Keuchel being able to thrive in the high-80s doesn't mean he can do the same at 86-87 mph. Going with the big-stuff, big-velocity guy who looks like he's turning a corner would seem like the most Sox route of the three. If only he had not started turning the corner on such a high-profile stage and upped his price.

Drew Pomeranz: A "good when healthy" option who has never cleared 180 innings in a season

Likely damage: One year, \$8 million with a club option for 2020 at \$12 million

Excitement level: Everyone on the on the conference call sounds very optimistic

He made a playoff start for the Red Sox just last year after they shipped out one of their top pitching prospects for the former fifth overall pick just a year before, but losing two miles on your fastball and getting kicked to the bullpen in between disabled list stints for bicep tendinitis and an elbow flexor strain is a good way to slip under the radar. There's no guarantee Pomeranz has a bounce-back in him, and the 6-foot-6 left-hander struggled to rediscover his mechanics last year, but he can spin it and has enough talent where it's conceivable he would be helpful in 2020.

Garrett Richards: Maybe the best way to find a rotation solution for 2020 and beyond is to sign someone who can't pitch in 2019

Likely damage: Two years, \$14 million

Excitement level: Multiple blog posts about how smart this is

Tommy John rehabilitation contracts are all the rage, even for pitchers not nearly as accomplished as Richards. Having undergone surgery in July, chances of Richards providing any innings in 2019 are so remote it would be prudent to gear everything toward preparing for spring training 2020. This obviously doesn't help much for 2019, but it's certainly a get if it works out.

There are innings. Lord, there are always innings. Meet this man, who will eat some of them as we watch.

James Shields: He literally fulfilled this role just last year

Likely damage: One year, \$5 million

Excitement level: A seemingly endless gauntlet of clubhouse brohugs await Shields

It won't make anyone forget Fernando Tatis Jr., and there's not much potential of flipping him for anything two-thirds of the way into the season, but last season's innings-absorbing positive clubhouse presence is a decent bet to be an innings-absorbing positive clubhouse presence this season.

Jeremy Hellickson: He throws strikes, but sometimes they get hit

Likely damage: One year, \$6 million

Excitement level: Throwing all your pitches for strikes isn't about excitement, it's about discipline

He ended 2018 on the disabled list with a sprained right wrist, and he started it by settling for a minor league deal with Washington near the end of spring training. But before that, his command/control act was enough to draw a qualifying offer from Philadelphia in 2017 that they...likely regretted. He averaged a shade under 90 mph on his fastball last year and is probably better suited for the National League, but again, he throws strikes. That's a good start.

Brett Anderson: Also throws strikes, but to less reliable effect

Likely damage: One year, \$4 million

Excitement level: He's got a pretty good Twitter account

His stint with the Cubs in 2017 blew apart pretty quickly and he did not miss many bats for an Oakland team that was entirely constructed to put as little on his plate as possible. He's also been beset by injury throughout his career, but Miguel González is not available this time.

Jaime García: He's been solid in the past, but not last year

Likely damage: One year, \$3.5 million

Excitement level: Sahadev Sharma will be thrilled to see him during the crosstown series

He uncharacteristically could not find the zone all season for Toronto, to the point of getting released at the end of August. When the Cubs picked him up and put him in the bullpen for September, it got worse. Before then he was a decent back-end starter, albeit one with his fair share of injury problems. The thing about back-end starters over 30 is that when they decline, they are no longer starters.

It's probably not time to sign a relief ace for the 2019 season and hope their performance holds up for the good times. But you know, it's not like the young guys don't need some help.

Cody Allen: A formerly elite closer who could be affordable now that he was bad in 2018

Likely damage: Two years, \$24 million

Excitement level: They'd be taking a big piece of a dominant division rival and people are mostly unaware how much Allen struggled last year, so, very high

A 27.7 percent strikeout rate is good enough to hold down a job in a major league bullpen and reason to hang on to optimism, but Allen lost a tick of velocity last year and seemingly a couple more ticks of command. He's 30 and elite reliever runs aren't built to last forever, but his stuff is worth someone taking the risk and the White Sox have the budget room to take it. He would be flippable if they got him rolling by midseason. If it was just one bad year, they have a steal.

Trade Spencer Adams for Brad Boxberger: Absorb an arbitration salary of veteran reliever who misses bats, but is coming off a bad season

Likely damage: Around \$5 million, and Spencer Adams

Excitement level: It's dealing a prospect for a potentially declining veteran with one year of control left, so it's negative excitement

Figuring out a trade for the White Sox is difficult because their most available asset is the salary they can absorb, as shown by the Joakim Soria deal last January. Also displayed in that deal was how giving anyone beyond a truly fungible prospect is too counter to their goals of stacking future assets to make sense. Jake Peter's 2017 was likely a mirage (it was) and he had no reasonable path to a big league role, and all Soria had to do was maintain his previous performance level to be flipped for a prospect who fit better into the Sox's competitive window. But if the conditions are not perfect like that, the Sox always have the compelling option of just spending money instead, or doing nothing and tolerating poor results in what is already a non-contending season.

Boxberger struck out over 30 percent of opposing hitters last year, but also saw his average fastball velocity dip below 92 mph in addition to his command problems that produced a nightmare season the Diamondbacks might choose to put in the rearview mirror. For my money, it's a less compelling performance profile than Soria, but at a lower price that could draw more than just nominal offers. I probably wouldn't offer Adams for him, but that seemed like a good example of someone it would be painful to lose, thereby raising questions on whether trading for veteran relief help is worth it at all.

Adam Warren: A competent major league reliever

Likely damage: Two years, \$9 million

Excitement level: No one really knows who he is but when the Sox list out all their offseason acquisitions, he will help the list look longer — an underrated role

He's 0-for-2 so far in his career attempts to pitch well for a team that is not the New York Yankees, but outside that curiosity, he has a decently long track record of being a big league right-handed reliever who is OK at his job. He sits low-90s, he will probably not compete for a closer role, he will probably not fetch much in trade (unless you're after international bonus pool money), and his exciting spike in strikeouts this past season dissipated when he was dealt to Seattle. However many guys in the Sox bullpen last year made you think "Oh no, not him!" will be one fewer in number, should he be replaced by Adam Warren, who is just fine.

Héctor Santiago: Why not just bring him back

Likely damage: One year, \$2.5 million

Excitement level: He's just the nicest guy ever, but he also self-admittedly walks a lot of guys and gives up home runs, so call it a push

He delivered over 100 decent, albeit not aesthetically pleasing innings, and did so not only without complaining but also while coming out to "Here Comes the Hotstepper" most of the time. Also it would keep the Santiago-Nate Jones marriage together, provided the Sox take a \$4.65 flier on getting Jones back to his old self. With their financial room, they don't need to get squeamish about Jones' salary if they still believe in him, or paying Santiago to undertake the stress they don't want to put on other arms.

Randall Delgado: Ouchie reliever reclamation project du jour

Likely damage: An incentive-laden minor league deal that probably pays him \$2 million for a full season

Excitement level: Heavily dependent on how good the spring training features about him are

Delgado was the glue of the Diamondbacks bullpen for years, but between shoulder problems, multiple cortisone shots and lost velocity, the 2018 season saw him not just fall back from previous performance levels, but straight up designated for assignment. The White Sox have leveraged their belief in their shoulder maintenance program for outside acquisitions before, and would have an interesting swingman if they salvaged Delgado. They will have probably five or six dudes of his ilk they're trying to turn around come spring.

It's a rebuild and the lack of necessity to step into the ever-treacherous free agent market should temper expectations. But the White Sox have made it clear they need arms, and have the room on their roster and in their budget to get more interesting should they so choose.

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