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White Sox free-agent focus: Patrick Corbin

By Vinnie Duber / NBC Sports Chicago / November 15, 2018

This week, we're profiling some of the biggest names on the free-agent market and taking a look at what kind of fits they are for the White Sox.

Much of the conversation around the White Sox and free agency has focused on the two biggest fish in this winter's pond: Bryce Harper and Manny Machado. But as good as those guys are at baseball, there's one thing they definitively cannot do: pitch.

Maybe it's because the White Sox have the potential to field a homegrown rotation of the future just one year from now, but making a big-splash pitching addition hasn't seemed to be as exciting a talking point as the possibility of adding Harper or Machado. And that's weird because the White Sox have said they're going to go out and get a pitcher, multiple pitchers most likely.

Certainly there are vocal fans out there who want the White Sox to bring this winter's best available starting pitcher to the South Side. Patrick Corbin is just 29 years old and coming off a remarkable season in which he posted a 3.15 ERA and struck out 246 batters in 200 innings. That was good enough to place him in the top five in this year's NL Cy Young vote.

Prior to this campaign, the numbers weren't nearly as good. In his first five major league seasons, he posted a combined 4.12 ERA and averaged 130 strikeouts a year. But the contract year rarely disappoints, and Corbin took full advantage, hitting the free-agent market on one heck of an upswing. He's going to be a very popular man as the winter wears on because everyone's always in the market for premium starting pitching. Given that he's two years younger than fellow free agent and 2015 AL Cy Young winner Dallas Keuchel, Corbin is as premium as it gets on this year's free-agent market.

Of course, the White Sox have starting pitching as a stated need, with two holes in their rotation thanks to Michael Kopech's recovery from Tommy John surgery and James Shields' departure. And because of the flexibility this rebuilding process has created, they have multiple ways they could go about filling those holes. They could add a couple one-year fill-ins and simply wait for Kopech to get healthy and for pitching prospect Dylan Cease to reach the majors. Add those two guys to the trio of Carlos Rodon, Lucas Giolito and Reynaldo Lopez, and you've got a homegrown starting staff heading into 2020. Or, they could provide a safety net in the form of a longer-term deal for a bigger-name. That guy would help anchor the rotation as the team plans to transition from rebuilding to contending on an annual basis.

Corbin would fall into the latter category, though he'll likely be in such high demand across the league that the same challenges facing the White Sox in a pursuit of Harper or Machado would apply. They'd have to outbid some of baseball's biggest spenders — including the New York Yankees, who have been mentioned as a likely landing spot for Corbin — and convince a young star to pick planned future success over the ability to join up with a roster capable of winning multiple championships right now.

Corbin is a great pitcher who would line up nicely with the White Sox long-term plans. But like Harper and Machado, there's a big difference between wanting to add an All-Star player and convincing them to sign.

Luis Robert highlights White Sox prospects as Arizona Fall League concludes

By Dan Santorimita / NBC Sports Chicago / November 15, 2018

The Arizona Fall League wrapped up on Thursday for White Sox prospects and the overall results were mixed.

Perhaps the most important thing from the seven-week season is that Luis Robert began to show his potential. After injuries limited him to just 50 games in 2018, his first season playing in the U.S., Robert added 18 games and 79 plate appearances against much more experienced players in Arizona.

Robert, still just 21 and the second-youngest hitter on the team, hit in his first 14 games in the AFL and tallied a hit in 16 of his 18 games. He did this while missing over a week in the middle of the season due to a hamstring injury. The Cuban outfielder's final numbers are .324/.367/.432. He had five walks, which isn't an inspiring total, but he kept the strikeouts down at 13.

One of the things that still hasn't shown in games very often is Robert's power. He didn't hit a home run in the 2018 minor league season, but it's possible his thumb injury was affecting his ability to hit for power. Robert's power didn't come through much in the AFL, but there was definitely improvement. He hit two home runs and had two doubles, but this home run last week was definitely seductive.

The AFL isn't make or break for prospects. Adam Engel hit .403/.523/.642 in the AFL in 2015 and hasn't shown the ability to hit in the majors yet. Still, Robert showed flashes of his potential with the bat while also causing chaos on the base paths with five stolen bases in five attempts.

Robert was one of seven White Sox minor leaguers who played for the Glendale Desert Dogs. Glendale finished the season 12-18.

The next biggest hitting prospect on Glendale was Luis Alexander Basabe. Basabe struggled in his time in Arizona, but did show some of what makes him an intriguing prospect.

Basabe hit just .180, but did draw 12 walks in 63 plate appearances. The 22-year-old isn't known for hitting for average. He is a career .258 hitter in six minor league seasons, including a .251 mark in Double-A in the second half of 2018. However, if he can draw walks at a high rate while bringing good speed in the outfield, he can have some value.

Overall, hitting .180/.333/.180 is a disappointing stint, but there was at least one positive with the walk rate.

Laz Rivera rounded out White Sox hitters with a line of .215/.271/.246. Rivera had solid stints at both levels of Single-A in 2018, his first full season of pro ball, but the AFL showed he may find the adjustment to Double-A a tough one.

On the pitching side the only marquee name was Zack Burdi, but he got shut down early in the season. He made only five appearances (4 2/3 innings, 3 unearned runs, 5 strikeouts, 1 walk, 2 hits), but Rick Hahn said there's nothing to be concerned about.

Tanner Banks (4.43 ERA, 10 strikeouts, 5 walks, 30 hits in 22 1/3 innings), Zach Thompson (2.70 ERA, 15 strikeouts, 6 walks, 10 hits in 13 1/3 innings) and Danny Dopico (6.57 ERA, 15 strikeouts, 12 walks, 10 hits in 12 1/3 innings) also pitched for Glendale. All three will be 25 or older when 2019 rolls around.

White Sox free-agent focus: Josh Donaldson

By Vinnie Duber / NBC Sports Chicago / November 15, 2018

This week, we're profiling some of the biggest names on the free-agent market and taking a look at what kind of fits they are for the White Sox.

The White Sox third baseman of the future is?

That's a question without an answer at the moment, with the long-term prognosis for the hot corner a mystery in the wake of a pair of Achilles tears suffered by 2017 first-round pick Jake Burger earlier this year. There were already questions floating around, though not necessarily inside the White Sox organization, about whether the heavy-hitting Burger could play third base on a regular basis. Now, thanks to those injuries, those questions have been amplified.

Yolmer Sanchez is coming off a disappointing season offensively and doesn't appear to be a long-term solution. Yoan Moncada might move over there this spring considering that middle infielder Nick Madrigal (this year's first-round choice) could be quickly making his way toward the majors. Past that, though, there's not a surefire third-base prospect like there are at many other positions throughout the White Sox farm system.

And so attention has naturally turned to external solutions. Colorado Rockies MVP candidate Nolan Arenado is a free agent next winter, and plenty of fans have their sights on adding him as the finishing piece this rebuilding effort needs to vault the White Sox into the realm of perennial contenders. But this winter has its own multi-time All-Star third baseman in Josh Donaldson. Any takers?

The focus has been on the South Siders' reported interest in Bryce Harper and Manny Machado, the two biggest fish in this free-agency pond, but don't forget Donaldson is just three years removed from an MVP campaign with the Toronto Blue Jays, when he slashed .297/.371/.568 with 41 home runs and 123 RBIs. Donaldson's got four top-eight MVP finishes to his name, including the win in 2015. Harper and Machado have three top-eight MVP finishes combined, including Harper's win in 2015.

In an insanely productive four-year stretch from 2013 to 2016, Donaldson slashed .284/.375/.518 with 131 homers and 413 RBIs.

But it's the last two seasons, heretofore unmentioned, that have made Donaldson less attractive than the Harpers, Machados and Arenados of the world. He played in only 113 games in 2017, still smacking 33 home runs and driving in 78 runs in that injury-shortened season. Then last season, he played in only 52 games, getting dealt from Toronto to the Cleveland Indians late in the summer. Though 52 games is hardly enough to judge a season on — let alone a player's future performance — his numbers plummeted, his slash line dipping to .246/.352/.449 and his home-run total to just eight.

Whether or not teams believe Donaldson's best days are behind him thanks to a pair of injury-riddled seasons remains to be seen. But one inarguable fact is his age. He'll be 33 on Opening Day 2019. Does that line up with the White Sox long-term plans? Not as well as the 27-year-old Arenado, of course. But Arenado's going to be a popular guy next winter, so would it be wise to put all the eggs in the Arenado basket?

Donaldson might not fit in the White Sox contention window, but he's got one heck of a track record and could bring some big-time production to whichever lineup he joins for 2019.

If this matters at all, Bryce Harper says Chicago, New York have the best food

By Madeline Kenney / Sun-Times / November 15, 2018

If superstar slugger Bryce Harper's free-agency decision comes down to which city has the best pizza, it's about to get really saucy.

TMZ recently caught up with Harper at the baggage claim area of the Los Angeles airport and asked him which city he's recently visited had the best food.

"Favorite food? Probably Chicago," Harper told TMZ. "They got great food. I like this place called Steak 48, it's really good. Deep dish of course."

Shortly after raving about the Windy City's food scene, Harper threw in a curve ball.

"Anywhere in New York ... you can always go out there and eat good food," he said. "That's huge for us."

It's important to note that, Harper, who praised Chicago's deep-dish pies, never said anything about New York's flimsy thin crust pizza.

While food most likely won't be a del breaker for Harper, who is reportedly looking for at least a 10-year deal, worth \$400 million, his comments hint that the Cubs, White Sox, Mets and Yankees may have a food edge on other cities. That's unfortunate for the Phillies and Dodgers, both of whom have also reportedly shown interest in Harper.

This offseason, Harper, who turned 26 last month, has remained mum about what uniform he'll wear in 2019. His agent, Scott Boras, told YES Network in October that he and Harper "already know who the team is. It's already been completed."

It seems like there's a good chance the Nationals are out of the mix for Harper's potential landing spots. According to multiple reports last week, Harper declined a 10-year, \$300 million contract to stay with the Nationals.

Harper is a six-time All-Star with 184 homers, 521 RBIs and a .900 on-base plus slugging percentage over his seven-season career. Last season, he hit .249 and led the Nationals in RBIs (100), home runs (34) and walks (130).

Chicago sports teams donate another \$1 million to curb violence

By Associated Press / November 15, 2018

CHICAGO (AP) — Chicago's major sports franchises are teaming up to donate another \$1 million to programs addressing violence in the city.

The Cubs, White Sox, Bears, Bulls and Blackhawks announced Thursday they will keep the Chicago Sports Alliance going in 2019 and match the \$1 million they donated in its first year. The Alliance was formed to support Choose to Change, a mentoring and advocacy program aimed at reducing violence, and also works with the University of Chicago's crime lab to measure the impact of the teams' efforts.

The Alliance will also begin funding a job training program called READI Chicago (Rapid Employment and Development Initiative) for boys and young men at the highest risk of being involved in gun violence.
