



WHITE SOX HEADLINES OF September 24, 2018

"Hawk bids farewell from Sox booth: 'He gone'" ... Scott Merkin, MLB.com

"White Sox fall to Cubs as Hawk says goodbye"... Max Gelman, MLB.com

"Always-polarizing Hawk Harrelson goes out the same way he came in — as himself" ... Vinnie Duber, NBC Sports Chicago

"Cubs' status as championship contender is the light that awaits at the end of the White Sox rebuilding tunnel" ... Vinnie Duber, NBC Sports Chicago

"Watch Hawk Harrelson's sign off from his final broadcast" ...Vinnie Duber, NBC Sports Chicago

"Selling fans on the White Sox in 2019 will be no easy task" ... Paul Sullivan, Chicago Tribune

"For Hawk Harrelson, a loss, tears, a touching Cubs and White Sox gesture and 'He gone'" ... Phil Rosenthal, Chicago Tribune

"3 things we learned from the Cubs-White Sox series" ... Mark Gonzales, Chicago Tribune

"Early exit leaves White Sox' Rodon in foul mood" ... Daryl Van Schouwen, Chicago Sun Times

"He gone: Ken Harrelson calls final game for White Sox" ... Daryl Van Schouwen, Chicago Sun Times

"Cubs pounce on White Sox, Rodon early, take series" ... Daryl Van Schouwen, Chicago Sun Times

"Carlos Rodón makes no excuses as rough September continues" ... James Fegan, The Athletic

"Do Matt Davidson's offensive improvements open up pitching as a possibility?" ... James Fegan, The Athletic

Hawk bids farewell from Sox booth: 'He gone'

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

CHICAGO -- When Ken "Hawk" Harrelson is no longer on this Earth, the iconic White Sox television broadcaster already knows how his headstone should read: Here lies a man who adored his family. Here lies a man who adored his White Sox.

"And he gone," said a smiling Harrelson as he talked to the media prior to Sunday's game, a 6-1 loss to the Cubs. "So that's that."

"He gone" fit into Sunday's festivities as the theme of Harrelson's last broadcast of a 42-year career and 33 years with the White Sox, even though Harrelson will stay on as a White Sox ambassador. He was joined by analyst Steve Stone, with an entertaining stop-in by A.J. Pierzynski. Harrelson's son, Casey, his daughter, Krista, his grandchildren and other family members joined him in a crowded broadcast booth at Guaranteed Rate Field during his final inning of work.

Before the bottom of ninth began, fans gave Harrelson a rousing ovation, as did a few Cubs players on the field. Harrelson was moved to tears and felt the same emotions moments later after the White Sox collectively came out of the dugout to tip their caps following the final out.

"Everybody loves him," White Sox manager Rick Renteria said of the hat tips in defeat. "It was the right thing to do to stay out there and at least tip our cap to a guy who's been doing it very well for a long time. White Sox fans paid video tribute to Harrelson on the center-field scoreboard, not to mention countless supporters throwing out their favorite moment or favorite catchphrase from his colorful career on social media. Harrelson once again pointed to Mark Buehrle's perfect game against the Rays on July 23, 2009, as his favorite individual memory in what also might be his most spine-tingling moment as an announcer.

- Sox fans quote favorite Hawkisms for farewell

Although the time is right for the 77-year-old to spend more time watching his grandkids in their sporting endeavors, Harrelson recently admitted to telling his wife, Aris, retirement isn't what it might be cracked up to be. There's only so much "Walker, Texas Ranger" Harrelson can watch, which just happens to be one of his favorite shows.

"I guess the biggest hurt I have right now is the fact [of what] I told Jason [Benetti], who is going to be sitting in my chair for a long time. He's a wonderful young man and a terrific announcer," Harrelson said. "I told him sit back, relax and strap it down because you are getting ready to go on the wildest ride you've ever been on because our club in two years is going to be a monster.

"It's going to be fun to watch and it's going to be fun because the Cubs, they are good and they are not going anywhere. So, it's going to be fun to watch these two clubs butt heads. It has the chance to be the greatest decade in Chicago baseball history."

The finality of Sunday's broadcast would set in as the day progressed, according to Harrelson. When he talked to the media 30 minutes before first pitch, his focus was on the White Sox winning and kicking the Cubs in the rear.

- In My Words: Reinsdorf on Hawk

There was never a time when Harrelson has been afraid to speak his mind, about the Cubs, any other opponent or even the umpires. Joe West, the crew chief of this series, has been a target of Harrelson's raw honesty in the past, but the two natives of the Orlando, Fla., area remain friends.

"Everybody thought we were mortal enemies," West said on Sunday. "That's the furthest thing from the truth. He's loyal to those people that are in his circle and you can tell that by the way he announces his games. He pulls wholeheartedly for his team. You have to respect that. He's all White Sox. And if he has to take a shot at Joe West, he'll do it even though I'm his friend."

Cubs manager Joe Maddon frequently chatted with Harrelson when Maddon managed in the American League with the Rays, and the two discussed hitting Friday before the series began. Maddon likes the fire and spice Hawk adds to the Cubs/White Sox rivalry and paid tribute to Harrelson after the Cubs' series victory. Len Kasper, the television voice of the Cubs, used a few of Harrelson's famous catchphrases in tribute during his Sunday broadcast.

Friendships mean the most to Harrelson, with White Sox chairman Jerry Reinsdorf who Harrelson describes as an older brother, at the top of that list. But in his entire career, Harrelson always was true to himself.

"Well, I get a lot of letters every year," Harrelson said. "I get close to 100 maybe from the young college aspirants who seek to become an announcer. And they ask 'Is there any advice Hawk you can give us?' I tell them, yes be yourself."

White Sox fall to Cubs as Hawk says goodbye

Rodon surrenders 6 runs over 2 1/3 innings in Crosstown finale

By Max Gelman / MLB.com / September 23, 2018

CHICAGO -- In Ken "Hawk" Harrelson's final game in the broadcast booth, the White Sox would have liked nothing more than to send out the iconic broadcaster with one more win. Instead, the hosts sent him off with an on-field ovation Sunday at Guaranteed Rate Field.

Carlos Rodon turned in his shortest outing of the year and gave up a season-high six runs as the visiting Cubs took the Crosstown Cup finale, 6-1, from the White Sox. The overall season series between the intracity rivals ends with the Cubs winning four of the six games.

"I got my butt whupped today," Rodon said. "It just sucks, especially with a big series and Hawk's last day announcing. I wish I could take all this back and do it over. I went out there and did the best I could and just definitely came up a little short."

"He had good stuff, but he was obviously getting hit around a little bit, pitches out over the plate. They came out very aggressive," manager Rick Renteria said. "And when I took him out, at that point there was no need for me to allow him to work through it, it just wasn't going to happen, where we were going to have to stop a big inning as quickly as possible."

Rodon appeared to have nothing working in his 2 1/3 innings, surrendering nine hits. The Cubs scored in the first inning, collecting three runs largely thanks to Anthony Rizzo's RBI double.

Following Kyle Schwarber's deep RBI double in the third inning, Renteria came out to get the left-hander, who did not appear happy. Rodon said the frustration came from his performance on Harrelson's last game rather than being angry at Renteria for the third-inning hook.

That frustration manifested in a clubhouse talk between the two immediately after Rodon exited.

"As a competitor, you want to stay out there. But I'm not going to lie to you, the right move was made to bring in another arm," Rodon said. "I just wasn't getting it done. Me, being the competitor, I want to stay out there. He's not wrong. He's right."

"He's upset because he's trying to do well, especially against the Cubbies," Renteria said. "They're the ones competing. I understand it. One has to be the parent, one is the child, you have to understand it, you take into account everything that's going on, you talk to them about it, you explain to them who the enemy is and who the enemy isn't, bring it back into perspective, very calmly and very succinctly."

Overall, Rodon said he felt like his command was good but the Cubs' approach was impressive and they were able to adjust quickly to his pitches.

"[Daniel Murphy] made me scratch my head a little bit, just taking the ball the other way, right over short," Rodon said. "That second at-bat he did it again on a slider, I looked at him and he gave me a shrug. I tipped my cap to that. It was impressive. Good at-bats. I just got beat today."

Offensively, the White Sox could not get anything going against Cubs starter Kyle Hendricks. The South Siders managed just four hits off the righty, with Wellington Castillo and Tim Anderson both recording a double and single each. Anderson drove Castillo home from second with a ground-rule double in the fifth for the only White Sox run.

The White Sox came out of the dugout after the final out and saluted Harrelson in the broadcast booth with a team-wide tip of the cap.

"We had resolve to go ahead and do it, regardless, win or loss," Renteria said. "In a loss, it's obviously very difficult, but in a situation like this, it's someone who's near and dear to everybody's heart. He's been here a long time doing it, and everybody loves him. It was the right thing to do to stay out there."

MOMENTS THAT MATTERED

Ryan Burr and Thyago Vieira proved the highlights of an impressive bullpen-wide effort after Rodon's exit. Both relievers contributed two scoreless innings and worked out of multiple jams.

"They ate up some outs. [Burr] looked very good," Renteria said. "I know he got into a little trouble, but he ended up doing a nice job and getting out of it, managed more outs than we would've thought. ... Both did

a nice job of containing the opposition, with the Cubs, who have a pretty good lineup. But everybody did."

HE SAID IT

"We see it not only in the Cubs, we've seen it with the Astros, the Indians, a multitude of clubs that have gone through that process. The Braves. It took the Braves four years. It took the Astros four or five years. It's a process that if you get frustrated along the way -- which it can become frustrating because you want to win more games than not -- if you really keep perspective of what you're trying to do in the long term and really understand and appreciate what we have coming and the guys that are here working to try to remain with us, it's hard for me to explain to the fans other than my own belief that what we have coming is going to be something that is going to be very fruitful in the near future." -- Renteria, on viewing the Cubs as a potential model for success for the White Sox rebuild

- Kanye West, son throw out first pitch

UP NEXT

The White Sox begin their final home series of the season by welcoming in the Indians for three games starting Monday at 7:10 p.m. CT. Dylan Covey (5-13, 5.33 ERA) makes his third start since rejoining the rotation. He struggled in his first outing back but then threw six scoreless innings in his last start. Corey Kluber (19-7, 2.93) goes for Cleveland.

Always-polarizing Hawk Harrelson goes out the same way he came in — as himself

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

Very few Chicago residents have no opinion on Hawk Harrelson.

Baseball fans — and those who don't pay attention to the game, an example of how transcendent Harrelson is — either love the guy or hate the guy. His supporters marvel at his passion for the White Sox, how much he's given this team and how he lives and dies with every pitch, and they can't imagine what comes next, an era of White Sox baseball without Harrelson as the narrator. His detractors decry what they believe to be a lack of professionalism in the booth and have been counting down to this day for some time.

Whether you loved it or hated it, the Hawk Harrelson Era is over, given its final sendoff with the finale of this weekend's Crosstown series Sunday afternoon on the South Side. And whether you were sad or joyful, Harrelson doesn't care. What's important to him — and what is an inarguable point no matter what side of the fence you sit on — is that he was always himself through every minute of his decades in the booth.

"I get a lot of letters every year," Harrelson told an assemblage of reporters before Sunday's broadcast. "I get close to 100, maybe, from the young college aspirants who seek to become an announcer. And (they write), 'Is there any advice, Hawk, you can give us?' I tell them, 'Yes, be yourself.'

"Curt Gowdy and Howard Cosell both told me exactly the same thing: Don't try to please everybody because you can't. The guys who try to please everybody really don't last a whole bunch of time. I've been behind the mic for 42 years: seven with Boston, two with the Yankees and 33 with my Sox here. And I don't try to please everybody. There are a lot of people out here I piss off.

"It doesn't bother me because of the fact that I'm going to say what I think. Always have and I always will.

"Especially about the Cubs."

Yes, it's fitting that Harrelson's final game came with the White Sox facing off against their Crosstown rivals. He's had a particular sore spot for the North Siders, going as far to say that he'll never again set foot inside Wrigley Field. And this was his pregame thinking as he prepared to wrap up an incredible,

highlight-filled career Sunday: "Right now, the only thing I want to do is take this game and kick the Cubs ass."

But the Cub fandom that invaded the South Side these last three days can serve as a nice foil to Harrelson as he rides off into the sunset. So many of them have been Harrelson's most vocal critics. He hasn't changed a bit for them or any other critics, regardless of their rooting interests, and because of it he's going down as one of the game's great characters.

That character of course came out again Sunday before he even went on the air, with some Hawkisms of a more recent vintage joining the oldies but goodies during his media session. When asked a serious question that had a bit of a serious answer, Harrelson had to lay another one out there.

"Last week was the first time it popped into my mind," he said asked if he's had any thoughts of regret over calling it a career. "I told my wife, I said, 'Honey, this retirement issue might be overrated.' All I've been doing is watching 'Walker, Texas Ranger' and turning a lot of Smirnoff into urine."

Mercy.

One of Harrelson's oft-repeated lines this year has been his prediction that the city is in for some of the best baseball it's seen in the next several years, with the Cubs one of the game's perennial contenders and the White Sox boasting the young talent throughout the organization to eventually reach that status, too. He said it again Sunday, relaying it as what he told Jason Benetti as he takes over play-by-play duties full time starting next season.

"Jason, who is going to be sitting in my chair for a long time, he's a wonderful young man and a terrific announcer. I told him sit back, relax and strap it down because you are getting ready to go on the wildest ride you've ever been on," Harrelson said, "because our club in two years is going to be a monster.

"It's going to be fun to watch, and it's going to be fun because the Cubs, they are good and they are not going anywhere. So it's going to be fun to watch these two clubs butt heads.

"I think it has the chance to be the greatest decade in Chicago baseball history."

Here's hoping that's the case. But no matter how good it gets, it will be a little less entertaining without Harrelson to call it.

Cubs' status as championship contender is the light that awaits at the end of the White Sox rebuilding tunnel

By Vinnie Dube/NBC Sports Chicago/ September 23, 2018

Cubs Twitter and talk radio feature a lot of discussion of panic levels and fretting over playoff pitching scenarios. It's hard for the North Siders to live up to the immense expectations they brought upon themselves by going from Lovable Losers to World Series champions.

But on the other side of town, that qualifies as a really good problem to have.

The White Sox dropped the second Crosstown series of the 2018 campaign, one that's been dubbed the "toughest part of the rebuild." The White Sox will once again have a very high draft pick. The Cubs will once again be playing in October.

But while they aren't fond of complimenting the team from the North Side, White Sox fans can look at the Cubs and see what they hope to see from their own team in a few years' time. The team that they simply do not care for is the perfect embodiment of a rebuild gone right. It's the light at the end of the White Sox rebuilding tunnel.

“That’s a good team, man,” Carlos Rodon said after the Cubs’ offense jumped all over him Sunday and forced him into his shortest outing of the season. “Hopefully, throughout this rebuild when we get to the end of it, all the pieces start falling together and we can be a championship club like that, because that’s a good team.”

The Cubs aren’t the only team the White Sox have seen this season that qualifies as a rebuild success story. The Houston Astros are the reigning champs. The Cleveland Indians are American League Central winners again. The Kansas City Royals are down again but had their own brief time as baseball’s phoenix.

But with the Cubs so close by — and the fan bases constantly jabbing one another — it’s noteworthy that the White Sox are following such a similar path. For the Cubs, five straight fifth-place finishes turned into three straight trips to the NLCS. The Cubs went from hodgepodes of veteran fill-ins to homegrown stars like Kris Bryant, Javy Baez, Kyle Hendricks and Kyle Schwarber.

The White Sox have their own list of future stars, one not dissimilar from the list Cubs fans followed for years. Yoan Moncada, Lucas Giolito, Reynaldo Lopez and Michael Kopech have already reached the South Side. The waiting game is still on for Eloy Jimenez, Luis Robert, Dylan Cease, Dane Dunning and so many more.

The White Sox would obviously prefer fighting for a division title and playoff positioning to playing out the end of a losing season. They believe — and the Cubs are as good an example as any that there’s good reason for South Side optimism — that once all these youngsters finish their development and reach the major leagues, that that’s exactly what they’ll be doing on an annual basis.

“We see it not only in the Cubs,” Rick Renteria said, “we’ve seen it with the Astros, the Indians, a multitude of clubs that have gone through that process. The Braves. It took the Braves four years. It took the Astros four or five years.

“It’s a process that if you get frustrated along the way — which it can become frustrating because you want to win more games than not — if you really keep perspective of what you’re trying to do in the long term and really understand and appreciate what we have coming and the guys that are here working to try to remain with us, it’s hard for me to explain to the fans other than my own belief that what we have coming is going to be something that is going to be very fruitful in the near future.”

The Cubs have been through this process. They’ve been through these losing seasons. They’ve been through the waiting game with highly ranked prospects. They’ve been through it all — including watching those prospects turn into All Stars and waving to millions of celebrating fans during a championship parade.

The White Sox are in the thick of their own rebuilding process, and confidence about the future abounds. Perhaps because it’s a template that’s worked so well for several teams, including their Crosstown rivals.

“The similarities are simply that we’re going through a transition,” Renteria said before Sunday’s game. “We do have, not only these guys who are working here to try to show everybody what they’re capable of doing and what part they may play in us moving forward, but we certainly have a lot of young men who are coming up through the season that are hopefully going to be a part of who we are here in the near future.

“In that regard, that is very similar (to what the Cubs went through). I do think that some of the men that we have coming are going to be just as impactful of some of the guys they have on the other side.”

Watch Hawk Harrelson's sign off from his final broadcast

By Dan Santaromita / NBC Sports Chicago / September 23, 2018

Hawk Harrelson has been the voice of the White Sox for decades, but Sunday was his last broadcast as the play-by-play announcer of the team.

As the bottom of the ninth took place on the field, Hawk started to get emotional in the booth. He began to thank the fans for listening to him in the booth.

"The big thing is I want to thank the fans," Harrelson said. "I love our White Sox fans and I always will."

Later on, Hawk continued: "I want to thank Sox fans for giving me all those 35 years of their time."

After the game ended, players and staff from both teams came out on the field to tip their caps to Hawk.

Hawk sent it to break with one more "this ballgame is ova" call. After returning from break, Hawk gave a final thought.

"I love you all and I always will," he said. "I'll go to my grave with that. Thank you."

Watch the video above for all the memorable moments from his final broadcast.

Selling fans on the White Sox in 2019 will be no easy task

By Paul Sullivan / Chicago Tribune / September 23, 2018

Reading into their final three home games against the Indians, the White Sox rank 24th in the majors with an average attendance of 20,103 per game.

Thanks to a pair of weekend sellouts against the Cubs, their first two of the season, they'll finish in the same vicinity as 2017, when the Sox ranked 27th at 20,626 per game.

That's only about 500 fewer fans per game, which is amazing when you think about it.

The Sox were coming off a 95-loss season in '17 and didn't spend any money in the offseason, with the exception of a two-year, \$15 million deal for free-agent catcher Welington Castillo.

General manager Rick Hahn purposely avoided the usual spring training narrative that anything could happen in 2018, admitting Year 2 of the rebuild would be "very challenging" and the Sox were unlikely to contend.

READ MORE: Rick Renteria says his White Sox still have plenty to play for in the season's final week »

The focus was on the prospects, particularly Michael Kopech, Eloy Jimenez, Luis Robert and Dylan Cease, all of whom were on full display in camp and during Cactus League games in March. Kopech and Jimenez, in fact, got as much attention as any of the players slated to make the team, though neither had a shot at making the opening-day roster.

NBC Sports Chicago, which is partly owned by Sox Chairman Jerry Reinsdorf, added more minor-league games to its schedule to showcase the future stars, and Hahn relayed a humorous story of downloading the MiLB app onto Reinsdorf's computer so he could see the progress for himself.

The message was clear: The future was at Triple-A Charlotte, Double-A Birmingham and Class A Winston-Salem and Kannapolis.

Knowledgeable Sox fans knew there wouldn't be much to see at Guaranteed Rate Field, yet the same ones came out anyway. This hard-core base will likely be there again next summer, no matter what happens this winter.

Otherwise, selling 2019 isn't going to be easy.

White Sox prospect Eloy Jimenez

Photos of the White Sox outfielder and No. 4-ranked prospect by Baseball America.

Before his final broadcast Sunday, Ken "Hawk" Harrelson said he told his replacement, Jason Benetti, that in two years the Sox are going to be a "monster." But they clearly aren't at monster stage yet.

The challenge for the Sox is to grow that base, knowing 2019 figures to be another difficult season, especially now that Kopech is out after Tommy John elbow surgery and that Yoan Moncada has struggled through his first full season.

Jimenez and Cease should be up at some point, but Robert had mixed results in an injury-plagued start at two Class A stops, with no home runs and a .256 average in 45 games at Kannapolis and Winston-Salem. He's obviously a ways from joining the Sox.

Assuming they can't market the 100th anniversary of the Black Sox scandal in 2019, how do they grow their base next year?

I asked Sox postgame analyst Bill Melton for the bright side of the 2018 season, and he gave a typically blunt response.

"I'm not going to talk about numbers, but the growth, starting from the beginning of the season, in (Reynaldo) Lopez and (Lucas) Giolito was very important," Melton said. "We've got some young guys like Dylan Cease, a great find, who was a player of the year.

"I think the four (returning starting pitchers) are really good, but I'd like to see them work on that bullpen in the offseason. Go ahead and use a few of the guys we brought up. It would be nice to add a veteran fifth starter if (James) Shields leaves, a guy 28 or 29, and solidify that starting staff, and then the rest of the stuff will kind of fall into place."

Melton wasn't going to pretend "next year" will be the one the Sox start to contend, saying we won't know anything until we see if they make any offseason moves.

He compared the Sox to the Braves, who lost 95, 93 and 90 games in the first three years of their rebuild before winning the National League East this season.

"I'm not saying we have the same type of players, but it took them a few years to get to a certain point, and then you can go out on the free-agent market and start picking guys up," he said. "I think by 2020 they'll be very competitive."

Kopech will have missed a valuable year of development by the time he returns in 2020, but Cease hopefully will have established himself by then, and Lopez could turn into an elite starter.

Still, if the Sox rebuild is going to be a success, Moncada has to turn a corner next year. He's hitting .232 with a major-league-high 210 strikeouts going into the final week. That can't be repeated.

Melton pointed to Mike Trout's difficult start in the majors, though Moncada is far from where Trout was in his first full season.

"I run into a lot of fans, and they're pretty honest," Melton said. "They say: 'The Sox suck. But you know what? We're kind of liking what's going on.'"

"They're starting to buy in. I think they're behind every player out there, knowing there are going to be some moves, and they've accepted (the losing)."

Patience persists among the hard-core Sox fans, but it will take winning to add more fans to that base.

It's a long way to 2020.

For Hawk Harrelson, a loss, tears, a touching Cubs and White Sox gesture and 'He gone'

By Phil Rosenthal/ Chicago Tribune / September 23, 2018

When it was “ovah,” it was Ken Harrelson’s silence more than his words — the great gaps between sentences coupled with audible sniffles as he stood and waved to well-wishers — that said everything Sunday.

“I’ve enjoyed, very much I have enjoyed, I have loved it and I will never forget it,” he said after the final out on his final official day as a White Sox announcer after 33 seasons, struggling to utter the words. “Oh man. Oh man. Oh boy. Wow.”

The tears couldn’t have been more predictable if Tom Skilling’s WGN-9 Technicolor radar showed them bearing down on the South Side.

What was unexpected, and doubly moving as such, was that both the Cubs and Sox emerged from their dugouts, turned toward the NBC Sports Chicago booth and joined the fans bidding adieu to Hawk after the Cubs’ 6-1 victory.

Moments earlier in Hawkspeak the Sox had, as always, been the “good guys” and the Cubs “bad guys.”

Now they were just a reminder of one of the last yarns Harrelson repeated Sunday about how opposing players were always his enemy, at least until the final out.

Harrelson’s last game — as if he’ll never score an invite to return as a guest announcer — was nothing special in and of itself.

It was just another Sox loss, peppered with Hawk talking about better days to come for the rebuilding franchise and guests to remind everyone of the more pressing personnel change.

Ald. Ed Burke gave Harrelson a proclamation from the city in his honor, the presentation interrupted by a home run by the Cubs’ Kyle Schwarber, eliciting a groan from Hawk.

NBCSCH’s Chuck Garfien gave him a framed poster of the “Hawk” documentary special the channel co-produced with the Sox.

Former Sox catcher Hawk favorite A.J. Pierzynski stopped in to energize Harrelson.

And members of Harrelson’s family were with him during the final half inning.

Mostly, it was typical Hawk. He said “he gone” a bit. He recalled meeting legendary football coach Vince Lombardi once. He asserted former Sox manager Robin Ventura knows baseball as well as anyone, but a leader of players has to “know how to get what’s in them out of them.”

Cubs 6, White Sox 1

Photos from the Cubs’ 6-1 win over the White Sox at Guaranteed Rate Field on Sept. 23, 2018. (Nuccio DiNuzzo / Chicago Tribune)

Hawk canceled the postgame show — not really, of course — on Sox catcher’s Welington Castillo’s single at 1:52 p.m., with two out in the second inning.

Alas, there were no rants about umpiring. But he spoke about what a great city Chicago is, though of course he doesn’t live here.

You know, typical Hawk stuff.

There has been a lot of discussion over the last few days — actually the last few years of reduced workload building up to this swan song for Harrelson, 77 — about how he has embraced his role as a “homer,” the nicknames he coined, the old-timey terminology he kept alive, catchphrases he employed and how people seemed either to love or loathe him.

What’s truly unique about Harrelson in vacating his perch is how he is doing it in a way that has enabled his departure to be so celebrated, including the loving TV special, Hawk Day at the ballpark and all the other buildup.

Harrelson may have talked not so long ago about trying to hang on to this job until 2020, but the way this long farewell was orchestrated proved to be quite a pageant.

Try to think of the sendoff, say, Jack Brickhouse, Bob Elson, Harry Caray or other beloved Chicago announcers might have merited under similar circumstances.

“I love our White Sox fans and I always will,” Harrelson said, tearing up in the bottom of the ninth inning. “It’s like I said on Hawk Day, when you take a man’s money, you take a man’s money, but when you take a man’s time, you take a part of his life. And I want to thank the Sox fans for giving me almost 35 years of their time.”

Hawk almost didn’t make it to the ninth. Analyst Steve Stone tugged on his emotions a tad early, asking Harrelson what he planned to do next.

It was an innocent question but left Harrelson overcome and at a loss for words, forcing Stone to broadcast solo for a moment or two while Hawk composed himself.

The answer, incidentally, was spend time with the grandkids and watch Sox games on his iPad through MLB’s At Bat app, which he said is quite good. Not exactly the stuff sobs are made of, but the seventh-inning stretch apparently hit him hard.

What Sox fans will do without Hawk is an open question. Jason Benetti fully assumes the play-by-play role he has had part-time in recent seasons, but will he apply a more objective eye to proceedings?

When Ryan LaMarre on Saturday night misplayed Daniel Murphy’s fifth-inning line drive into a double — running in, then having it sail over his head — enabling the Cubs to go ahead en route to an 8-3 victory, Stone laid out what occurred in a straightforward way.

Harrelson said only “Wow” twice while characteristically going out of his way to avoid ripping LaMarre.

“Well that’s one of the first rules ... you gotta catch the ball,” Harrelson said, as if merely amused by the costly mistake. “If you don’t catch the ball, you’re probably going to get beat.”

Harrelson did suggest that there ought to be “team errors” so pitchers aren’t penalized when an error is committed without the fielder touching it.

Meanwhile, Harrelson told Garfien in an interview carried during Sunday’s pregame show what he wants on his tombstone.

“Here lies a man who adored his family,” he recited. “Here lies a man who adored his White Sox. But he gone.”

He may be gone, but he’ll be long remembered. And on a day in September, he brought the “good guys” and “bad guys” together to say farewell. For the Hawk, after circling for seasons with his talons on the mic, it was time to fly away.

3 things we learned from the Cubs-White Sox series

By Mark Gonzales/ Chicago Tribune / September 23, 2018

There are three things we learned from last weekend's Cubs-White Sox series, which the Cubs won 2-1.

1. The Cubs looked refreshed.

Maybe it was the dip in temperature or feeling comfortable sleeping in their own beds, but the Cubs played much sharper in the final two games — and that will be essential down the stretch. From Anthony Rizzo to Terrance Gore, the Cubs were aggressive on the base paths without running recklessly.

2. Kyle Schwarber has regained his hitting stroke.

Schwarber could make a huge difference in the final week, especially since he's driving the ball to all fields with authority and drawing walks. Schwarber's power adds another a dimension to an offense that has relied on Javier Baez and Ben Zobrist most of this season. And his improvement in left field has been a bonus.

3. White Sox left-hander Carlos Rodon learned a couple valuable lessons.

Rodon was victimized by the Cubs' aggressive attack that resulted in his early knockout on Sunday. Rodon will use this as a learning tool for the future.

His frustration was understandable; he missed a chance to put more pressure on the Cubs' playoff chances. It was wise of manager Rick Renteria to follow Rodon to the clubhouse after Rodon showed displeasure at being pulled. A young team, no matter how talented, must show respect for their leaders.

Early exit leaves White Sox' Rodon in foul mood

By Daryl Van Schouwen / Chicago Sun Times / September 23, 2018

In a start he couldn't wait to make against the Cubs, one afforded him when manager Rick Renteria altered his rotation last week, White Sox left-hander Carlos Rodon couldn't finish the third inning.

Rodon got peppered for nine hits and was charged with six runs in the Sox' 6-1 loss Sunday. When Renteria had seen enough, Rodon somewhat harshly handed the ball to him without making eye contact, which prompted Renteria to follow him into the clubhouse for a "father-son"-type talk.

Tweets during the game from Rodon's wife suggested he'd rather have had someone other than Wellington Castillo, who was catching him for the first time, behind the plate.

"As a pitcher in this game, it shouldn't matter who is out there behind the plate catching," Rodon said. "I don't think that's really a big effect, and I should be able to throw to anyone who's back there."

As Rodon said, "I got my butt whopped today."

Seven of the first 11 Cubs to face him reached base. Daniel Murphy and Ben Zobrist led off the first with singles, Anthony Rizzo doubled in a run and Albert Almora Jr. and David Bote knocked in two more runs with a groundout and an infield single. Kyle Schwarber, a left-handed hitter, led off the second with 444-foot homer, and he dealt Rodon the knockout blow with an RBI double in the third.

Enter Renteria, and exit a steamed Rodon (6-7, 3.61 ERA), who's 0-4 with a 6.90 ERA in his last five starts.

"It's something I probably should work on, harnessing the frustration and the emotion," Rodon said.

“As a competitor, you want to stay out there. But I’m not going to lie to you: The right move was made to bring in another arm. I just wasn’t getting it done. Me being the competitor, I wanted to stay out there. He’s not wrong. He’s right. It’s his decision.”

Rick Renteria takes the ball from Carlos Rodon in the third inning. (AP Photo/Nam Y. Huh)

As Renteria pointed out, Castillo guided four relievers to “six zeros,” so he wasn’t the issue. He talked to Rodon right away.

“Yeah, he’s upset because he’s trying to do well, especially against the Cubbies,” Renteria said.

“When those guys are out there and they have a particular action or you see body language, they’re the ones competing. I understand it. One has to be the parent; one is the child. You have to understand it; you take into account everything that’s going on. You talk to them about it, you explain to them who the enemy is and who the enemy isn’t and bring it back into perspective, very calmly and very succinctly. We had a really good conversation, and he’s fine. He’ll be ready for his next outing.”

It will be his last one, Saturday against the Twins.

“I just haven’t been throwing it well, and the results aren’t there,” Rodon said. “Hopefully in this last start, it all comes together, and I can build off that going into next season.”

This and that

The Sox’ second sellout crowd of the season (39,449) came the day after the first one. The Cubs won both games after the Sox took the series opener before 34,027 Friday.

† First-round pick Nick Madrigal will visit Monday and meet the media.

† Kanye West and son Saint were surprise guests to throw out the first pitch.

He gone: Ken Harrelson calls final game for White Sox

By Daryl Van Schouwen / Chicago Sun Times / September 23, 2018

You can put it on the board.

Ken “Hawk” Harrelson has called the last game of an illustrious career.

After 33 years in the White Sox’ broadcast booth, the colorful and iconic play-by-play man whose catchphrases and nicknames became household words, whose unabashed homerism and love for the Sox knew no bounds is retired.

He gone.

“Hawk’s gone,” Harrelson said. “In fact that’s what I want on my grave, I told you that. I want to be known as, ‘Here lies a man who adored his family, here lies a man who adored his White Sox, and he gone.’ So that’ll be that.”

It didn’t end the way Harrelson, a diehard Sox fan to the end, wanted it.

“Right now, the only thing I want to do is take this game and kick the Cubs’ [butt],” he said before the game.

It was the Cubs who did the butt-kicking, though, knocking out Carlos Rodon in the third inning Sunday en route to a 6-1 victory.

Former Sox catcher A.J. Pierzynski, who arrived unannounced in the booth during the fourth inning with the Cubs leading 6-0, was there to soothe Harrelson's pain through one last defeat.

"We should be crying, the way this game is going," Pierzynski said.

Pierzynski, who mixed it up with the Cubs' Michael Barrett in 2006, longed for those days when the Sox (61-94) and Cubs (91-64) were competitive.

"Don't you miss the days when both teams were good?" he said to Harrelson. "It was so fun. Those six games were almost better than a playoff game. There would be fights in the stands. People cared. The best six games of the year."

The Cubs — whom Harrelson spoke of respectfully to the end, his disdain for Wrigley Field notwithstanding — took two of three in the series at Wrigley and two of three at Guaranteed Rate Field. Preaching Sox gospel as always, Harrelson has been telling his audience happier days will be here again after he's gone.

"I told [play-by-play successor] Jason [Benetti], 'Sit back, relax and strap it down because you are getting ready to go on the wildest ride you've ever been on because our club in two years is going to be a monster,'" said Harrelson, convinced the Sox' farm system will produce championship-caliber talent soon.

Harrelson, 77, has eased into retirement with two seasons calling mostly games on the road, a limited schedule this season and a celebration of his career this month with a "Hawk Day" on Sept. 2 and a release of the documentary "Hawk."

"It's very satisfying, mostly for his family," Sox chairman Jerry Reinsdorf said at the documentary sneak preview earlier this month. "Whatever anybody achieves in life, it really doesn't mean as much for him as for the family. They can have wonderful memories."

Fans paid tribute on the video scoreboard to Harrelson, who in the seventh inning said he was just then beginning to feel the emotion of the end being close.

"I am just starting to feel it now, during the seventh-inning stretch," he said after his broadcast partner Steve Stone asked him how he'll be spending his time in retirement.

Harrelson needed a few moments to gather himself and said he would spend the time with his family.

In the ninth, with his family with him in the booth, fans from both sides of town among the sellout crowd gave him a standing ovation. The Sox joined from the dugout, and after the game, they stepped on the field, tipped their caps to him in the booth and applauded some more. Some Cubs, including manager Joe Maddon, joined in on the other side of the field.

"And this ballgame is ovah," Harrelson said after the last out. "I've enjoyed this game very much, and I've loved it. And I'll never forget it."

After a commercial break, it was time to thank Sox fans one last time as he and Stone, partners one last time, signed off.

"I love you all, and I always will," Harrelson said, putting his head down and wiping away tears.

Cubs pounce on White Sox, Rodon early, take series

By Daryl Van Schouwen / Chicago Sun Times / September 23, 2018

The Cubs pounced on White Sox left-hander Carlos Rodon early and then rode the right arm of pitcher Kyle Hendricks to a 6-1 victory Sunday at Guaranteed Rate Field.

The result gave the Cubs their second win in a row after the Sox took the series opener on Friday. It reduced the Cubs' magic number to clinch the NL Central to five.

Anthony Rizzo doubled in a run and the Cubs added two more on an RBI groundout by Albert Almora and RBI single by David Bote in a three-run first. Kyle Schwarber led off the second with a 444-foot home run and doubled in a run in the third that spelled the end for Rodon, who threw 66 pitches in a season low 2 1/3 innings. Rodon allowed six runs on nine hits and no walks.

Hendricks (13-11), who allowed one run on four hits and no walks while striking out five over 7 1/3 innings, left to a standing ovation from the many Cubs fans in the crowd of 39,449 at the Sox' ballpark, their second sellout of the season. The other sellout was Saturday night for the Cubs' 8-3 victory.

Kyle Schwarber of the Cubs hits a one-run double against the White Sox during the third inning on September 23, 2018 at Guaranteed Rate Field. (Getty Images)

Rodon was hit hard but didn't appear happy with manager Rick Renteria, who took the ball from him and replaced him with lefty Aaron Bummer with one out in the third. Rodon went into the clubhouse, and Renteria followed him moments later after making the change.

The four Sox relievers who pitched after Rodon did not allow a run. The Cubs had 15 hits.

The Cubs won four of six games in the Crosstown series this season.

The game was the final broadcast for Sox play-by-play announcer Ken Harrelson.

Carlos Rodón makes no excuses as rough September continues

By James Fegan / The Athletic / September 23, 2018

The first-ever pairing of Carlos Rodón and Welington Castillo as a battery was not one for the storybooks. At the tail end of his worst month of a season that saw him return from arthroscopic surgery on his left shoulder, Rodón shrugged off the walks problems that plagued him over his past four outings during Sunday's Crosstown finale, and he hit 95 mph on his third pitch of the game despite a slow ramp up to his top velocity being a hurdle throughout the year.

And yet the Cubs chased him before he finished the third inning, leaving six runs on his tab and raising his season ERA to 3.61 in a 6-1 loss. He has a 6.83 ERA in September after holding down a 1.84 mark in July and August.

"I got my butt whooped today," Rodón said after the game. "I felt good in the 'pen. Fastball felt good. Slider was good. They just hit the ball. Good hitting team."

Anthony Rizzo scooped and roped a low slider at the bottom of the zone for an RBI double down the right-field line to key a three-run first. Kyle Schwarber ambushed a first-pitch fastball to lead off the second with a 444-foot home run to right, and came back and banged another heater for an RBI double in the same direction the next inning to end an afternoon in which Rodón, known for his great stuff, was hittable throughout.

Rodón's day ended with him briskly stalking off the mound as manager Rick Renteria pulled him, tossing his glove onto the bench as he entered the dugout, and immediately pacing down the tunnel to the clubhouse, with Renteria in close pursuit. A conversation followed, away from prying eyes, and both parties involved gave it rave reviews afterward.

“He’s upset because he’s trying to do well, especially against the Cubbies,” Renteria said. “After I spoke to him, he wanted to do well, and he was frustrated that he didn’t do well. When those guys are out there and they have a particular action or you see body language, they’re the ones competing. I understand it. One has to be the parent, one is the child, you have to understand it, you take into account everything that’s going on, you talk to them about it, you explain to them who the enemy is and who the enemy isn’t, bring it back into perspective, very calmly and very succinctly. We had a really good conversation, and he’s fine. He’ll be ready for his next outing.”

Rodón’s career-low 17.7 percent strikeout rate has been a specter all season, hanging over even his dominant run of nine straight quality starts earlier in the year. The concern was ameliorated by the fact that he was still getting outs and some patience with his recovery process would allow for the possibility that his stuff would continue to tick up the further he got away from surgery, even if a regression in results was likely to arrive eventually this season. Left-handers like Rizzo and Daniel Murphy squaring up Rodón’s slider in good locations is a sign that uptick hasn’t come yet, but both Rodón and Cubs manager Joe Maddon gave more credit to the North Side offense than to vulnerable starting pitching.

“Today I felt like command was not bad,” said Rodón, who had an excellent 16.7 percent swinging-strike rate on his four-seam fastball. “It was definitely better than the previous starts. I feel like I had feel for most of my pitches. They were just hitting the ball, man. Really were.”

After a dominant July and August, Carlos Rodon is 0-4 in five starts this month. (Nuccio DiNuzzo/Chicago Tribune/TNS via Getty Images)

All of that, and a full month of Rodón not being happy with his command, comes to mind first when explaining his struggles on the mound. But the surprise of a first-time pairing with Castillo in his second-to-last start of the season — in the rubber match of the most well-attended series of the year — was a topic of discussion among some Sox players in the clubhouse Sunday morning. Before this game, Omar Narváez had caught each of Rodón’s previous 16 starts, and their 37 pairings is the most Rodón has with any catcher. Renteria does not maintain strict personal catcher pairings, and Kevan Smith caught Rodón’s first two starts in the majors this year after he returned from the disabled list. A switch in routine like that can certainly ruffle some feathers for baseball players, who are creatures of habit if nothing else, but Renteria dismissed the issue.

“I don’t know, Wely threw up six zeroes after he came out, so I don’t think that had anything to do with it,” Renteria said. “You would have to ask him, but with all things being equal, you take a guy like Wely who’s been around a long time and you see what happened over the last six innings, you’d be kind of hard-pressed to make that assertion.”

Rodón said adjusting to a new catcher is no reason for poor performance.

“It doesn’t matter who I throw to and it shouldn’t,” he said. “As a pitcher in this game, it shouldn’t matter who is out there behind the plate catching the ball. I don’t think that’s really a big effect and I should be able to throw to anyone who is back there.”

So here the White Sox and Rodón are near the end of a season that’s final line looks reasonably like a success for a guy who got his pitching shoulder operated on about this time a year ago. But given the recent results, it’s ending with the focus squarely on the areas of Rodón’s game that still need improvement. Some more 95 mph in his finale in Minnesota would do plenty for optimism, and some more high-80s sliders clipping the bottom of the strike zone would help too, provided they don’t get hit again.

“We’re still getting paid to play the game so it shouldn’t be too hard to stay sharp, just haven’t been throwing it well and the results aren’t there,” Rodón said. “Hopefully this last start I have it all comes together and I can build off that going into next season.”

Do Matt Davidson’s offensive improvements open up pitching as a possibility?

By James Fegan / The Athletic / September 24, 2018

Through the end of May, Matt Davidson was still garnering well-earned publicity for a seemingly unprecedented turnaround. In those first two months of the season, he had dropped his rate of chasing pitches out of the strike zone by nearly 10 percentage points, from 33.4 percent to 23.6 percent, which equaled the greatest improvement in chase rate by anyone in Major League Baseball in five years.

Davidson's improvements were clearly very real, but it's always more likely that you're not watching the greatest one-season improvement in plate discipline in five years. With one week left in the season, Davidson is sitting at a 29.5 percent out of zone chase rate, an improvement of 3.9 percentage points. It's not an unbelievable transformation, just a significant and important one that's taken Davidson from someone who could lose his spot in the majors if he continued to struggle, to establishing himself as someone who belongs.

2017 Davidson: .220/.260/.452, 84 wRC+

2018 AL average first basemen: .241/.311/.419, 98 wRC+ (It's not been a good year for AL first basemen)

2018 Davidson: .236/.329/.436, 111 wRC+

2018 AL average designated hitters: .254/.329/.463, 114 wRC+

"As long as you're improving every single year, I think that's a good place to be," Davidson said. "I think I still chase a little bit. I think I'm pretty happy with the walks and how much my on-base percentage has gone up. That's something I want to improve on as well, to have the walks keep on going up."

If Davidson's chase rate being amazingly improved over two months, and sliding down to just significantly improved by the end of the year, makes you wonder what happened after May, you're looking in the right spot. A disabled list stint for back spasms that began on May 25 and kept him out of action until June 4 robbed him of his rhythm at the plate, and sent him into a difficult search to re-find his approach and discipline upon his return.

That sounds like an understandable cause and effect for Davidson's chase rate ballooning up to 35.2 percent from June through July. Injuries derail the timing of hitters all the time and there's a reason rehab stints are viewed as necessities, but his struggles upon his return to the lineup stand out as Davidson's biggest regret of the season, and where he feels he can improve.

"I tried to do too much too soon and didn't let it slowly come back," Davidson said. "That could make you kind of tumble into a longer stretch of that. Rather than knowing that I'm probably going to be out of whack a little bit for a week so, coming back from that because I haven't seen pitching for weeks. Instead of kind of letting it ride, kind of panicking and just trying to do too much. The next thing you know you're kind of wondering 'Where am I at?'"

Davidson has hit .258/.321/.391 since Aug. 1, which won't conjure any memories of his nuclear month of April, but has kept his head above water by taking the ball the other way, whereas last year he would struggle to contribute in any way if his power stroke was not in sync. His manager Rick Renteria thinks an improved conception of the strike zone (less chasing low and away) allows him to cover and top-hand balls elevated in the zone that he used to swing through when he was an all-or-nothing uppercut swinger.

"He's trying to get to the top end of the zone a little better," Renteria said. "He's trying to get down through the ball a little more. He's understanding there are zones, everybody has weaknesses and strength in their zones, he's trying to make adjustments to at least battle a little higher in the zone without chasing and being disciplined in the area he's trying to cover."

Davidson's April power production resembles the start he had in 2017 and he clearly has top-level raw pop, so it's not like some fluke stretch or anything. But we're so far removed from his hottest stretch of the season, that it probably surprises that his wRC+ for the year is higher than that of fellow corner bats Daniel Palka or Nicky Delmonico, whose 2018 has been similarly marred by injury.

That the 27-year-old is holding his own offensively is ultimately what makes Davidson pitching an interesting concept, and possibly something that separates him from the group when the Sox are determining who makes way for Eloy Jiménez next year. Failed position players converting to pitching happens all the time. Established big league corner bats being able to provide anything on the pitching side is obviously high unprecedented in recent memory.

The White Sox are currently carrying 12 relievers on the active roster. Thyago Vieira pitched Sunday for the first time in over two weeks, so the team certainly hasn't had cause to push Davidson in for his fourth mound appearance, but he's been making sure to get his long toss in down the stretch and stay ready in case it comes. While the coaching staff has beat back any notions of Davidson's pitching role becoming even semi-regular in the immediate future, before a more substantive effort to prepare his body for the workload takes place, Davidson is unconcerned about the difficulty of incorporating more throwing and arm care into his offseason routine.

"We've kind of talked just a little bit," Davidson said of discussions with the team about pitching in the future. "I think we'll formally kind of do it more in the offseason, just kind of see maybe if that is a legit option to maybe do. They know I can pitch and if we're ever in those situations, I'm the guy to do it. We'll see what we come up with it."

With Davidson's bat producing, he's not going away any time soon, and thus, neither will his desire to expand his role.

"I would love to do it," Davidson said. "I love pitching, so I would enjoy doing that."