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White Sox eye fast start to combat tough schedule

Say momentum will be key in early part of season
By Scott Merkin / MLB.com | April 3rd, 2016

OAKLAND -- The schedule-makers did the White Sox no favors at the outset of the 2016 season.

One off-day in April, 19 games in 19 days starting after that off-day on April 12 in Minnesota and 10 road games out of the first 13 played, not to mention 16 contests away from home in April. Getting off to that rare good start could be a challenge for the South Siders, even with the positive vibe they take away from Spring Training.

"I'm confident that this group can go out and win games. That's the point right now," said White Sox manager Robin Ventura, prior to Sunday's team workout at the Oakland Coliseum and Monday's Opening Day contest with the A's. "It's not, 'Don't stub your toe.' It's just, 'Go out and play.' "

"That can work in our favor," said White Sox pitcher Chris Sale, who makes his third career Opening Day start Monday. "If we do start off hot and we get rolling, sometimes you don't want an off-day. Sometimes you just want to keep going, so hopefully that's the case for us. Get off on the right foot starting tomorrow [Monday], and just never look back."

Those strong starts have been elusive of late for the White Sox.

In 2015, the team stood at 8-11 after April and 23-26 after May, already seven games out and in fifth place. The White Sox stayed alive with a seven-game road winning streak going into the non-waiver Trade Deadline and via a second American League Wild Card where nobody took charge.

Their 2014 campaign featured a 14-15 April ledger and a 28-29 mark after May, leaving them 5 1/2 games out of the division lead. The 2013 season produced a 10-15 April and a 24-28 standing after May.

Even in 2012, when the team sat atop the AL Central for 117 days, it still managed to break even at 11 - 11 in April before taking off to a 29-22 record and first-place standing at the end of May.

Ventura likes this group assembled -- the sort of salty, experienced veterans mixed with the young talent as part of general manager Rick Hahn's revamping-while-contending program. He believes they've done the work needed for a good start, even if it's not an 18-8 or 17-9 standing when April closes.

"I wouldn't mind it all, and I don't think they would either," Ventura said. "But again I like the vibe they have. I like the energy and the confidence they come out of Spring Training with and you just go from there."

"Momentum is big in any sport," third baseman Todd Frazier said. "You get on a run, you see it in a basketball game. Same in baseball, you get on some runs and you expect that you're going to win."

After solid camp, Ventura confident for '16

Manager says pitching will be key to any success

By Scott Merkin / MLB.com | April 3rd, 2016

OAKLAND -- Robin Ventura knows the White Sox are ready for the 2016 season as the team went through Sunday's pre-Opening Day workout at the Oakland Coliseum.

There's no prediction of playoffs or championships: Just a confidence that his charges did what was needed and then some during Spring Training. But in regard to this squad being in September contention, it won't come down to that one more move from general manager Rick Hahn in April or at the non-waiver Trade Deadline, in the mind of the White Sox manager.

"It will always be pitching," Ventura said during a recent interview with MLB.com. "With our guys at the top and you know four and five, those guys have to pitch well for us. I don't think it's different for anybody else in the league.

"We need to pitch well to be able to do this. We are going to score more runs than we did last year and we are going to play better defense than we did last year. But I like where these guys are at. I like the way they are thinking."

Gonzalez signs minors deal with White Sox

By Scott Merkin / MLB.com | April 3rd, 2016

OAKLAND -- The White Sox added depth to their starting-rotation options by agreeing to terms on a Minor League deal with right-hander Miguel Gonzalez on Sunday.

The Orioles had placed Gonzalez on release waivers Wednesday after a dismal Grapefruit League showing in which he allowed 21 earned runs on 35 hits over 19 1/3 innings. That performance came on the heels of a 4.91 ERA amassed over 26 starts last season.

He cleared waivers on Friday and was officially released. According to the Baltimore Sun, the Orioles made Gonzalez a competitive offer on a Minor League deal and the Yankees also were involved. But the White Sox had the strongest interest.

Gonzalez, 31, has a 39-33 career record with a 3.82 ERA over 101 games, of which 95 were starts with the Orioles. He is not a strikeout pitcher, with 417 K's and 190 walks in 580 1/3 career innings.

Chris Sale, Jose Quintana and Carlos Rodon anchor the first three spots in the White Sox rotation, followed by Mat Latos and John Danks, where there is a bit less certainty. Danks finished strong in Cactus League action, while White Sox manager Robin Ventura thought Latos made his best spring effort Friday night in San Diego.

Nonetheless, Latos gave up 15 runs on 23 hits over 13 innings in three Cactus League starts. Spring Training results are not exactly indicative of regular-season results to follow, but Gonzalez gives the White Sox another option for the back end of the rotation if needed.

Jacob Turner, Scott Carroll and Chris Beck also are in that mix with Gonzalez, who will open at Triple-A Charlotte. And don't forget Carson Fulmer, the team's top pick in the 2015 MLB Draft and eighth selection overall, who impressed everyone with his Spring Training effort. Pitching coach Don Cooper stated that Fulmer could help the big league team this season, with Fulmer opening as part of the Double-A Birmingham rotation.

No financial terms of the White Sox deal with Gonzalez were announced. The release waivers saved the Orioles approximately 75 percent of the remainder of his \$5.1 million salary for 2016.

Latos joined the White Sox via a one-year, \$3 million deal, while Danks stands in the final season of a five-year, \$65 million extension.

White Sox hope fun approach to tedious work pays off

By Dan Hayes / CSN Chicago | April 3rd, 2016

OAKLAND, Calif. - Even as spring training lingered in its final week, the White Sox continued to make noise on Camelback Ranch's backfields in their morning workouts.

Rather than simply go through the motions of yet another practice, players hollered or cheered each other on in friendly skills-based competitions.

Team A faced off against Team B to see which could make more plays during infield drills. Or the outfielders might see who could come closest to landing a throw in the ball bin just beyond second base. The stakes normally ranged from the losers fetching the victors a Gatorade from the refrigerator or serving them lunch. Another competition resulted a championship wrestling belt being awarded.

In the process, a group of veteran White Sox players encouraged their teammates to remain engaged in what is normally a monotonous part of camp. Whether fueled by the desire to win or avoid the payoff, players focused on producing quality work and forging important bonds. There's also a hope those sessions created a foundation that helps the White Sox - who open the 2016 season at 9:05 p.m. CST on Monday at the Oakland A's - get back on track after three consecutive losing seasons.

"You've got to find some way," third baseman Todd Frazier said. "Whether you miss a ball you do 15 pushups, or you get my Gatorade today. Something as simple as that. You owe me a Wendy's burger later on or something."

“It makes for a little more competition, and it builds character and builds game-ready situations.”

The White Sox added plenty of character this offseason. Before Sunday’s workout, manager Robin Ventura described his team as a “saltier” bunch with much more experience than in the past.

In an attempt to fill in the holes around a talented young core, the White Sox added veterans wherever they could. Free agents Dioner Navarro and Alex Avila were the first to join. Frazier arrived next from Cincinnati in a December trade. Jimmy Rollins joined the club in late February and Austin Jackson soon followed.

Collectively, the group has played for 21 division winning teams and made 23 postseason appearances.

The White Sox are intrigued to combine a veteran group of winners with a hungry young core that includes Chris Sale, Jose Abreu, Adam Eaton and Jose Quintana.

“That’s the kind of formula it takes to do special things,” pitcher Zack Duke said. “You have superstar players in their prime and you build around that, you complement those guys, to give them a situation where they can be best equipped to succeed. They’ve done a great job of that. It’s pretty nice to see the way its shaping up here. It gives us a lot of hope and motivation to go out there and make it happen.”

General manager Rick Hahn said he hoped to add some experience when the front office constructed its offseason plan. He didn’t expect to land Rollins and Jackson when he did. But, they fit the bill, as Hahn desired players with postseason experience.

“There is an element of what guys bring to the clubhouse and guys who do have a history of being integral parts on winning teams bring a little something extra,” Hahn said. “Being able to add guys with that much experience is a big positive.”

The group’s collective know-how helped sooner than the White Sox originally expected and perhaps in a way they never could have foreseen after the mid-March retirement of Adam LaRoche.

In the days after LaRoche abruptly quit, Ventura felt as if his club would be better-suited to handle the tumult. Soon thereafter, the White Sox were back to their boisterous ways and they haven’t slowed down. Rollins said he senses a winning vibe.

“I don’t know what it was like last year, but I hear we’re in a better place already and we have guys that have played on winning teams and you need that,” Rollins said. “It’s important to have guys that know what it’s like to win. When you know what its like to win, when someone or things are going the other way, when you’re not doing things that are conducive to winning, it stands out and you make a correction because you know better.”

Avila has played on winning teams in each season of his career until 2015. He said an attitude and belief that the Tigers would win persisted from the first day - they just knew how to carry themselves - in each of the five winning seasons.

While that same feel wasn’t there last season, Avila senses it once again with the White Sox.

“You have to have a business attitude when you come in every single day,” Avila said. “You have fun, you have a good time, you’re playing a game. But it’s only fun when you win. So when the guys come in, you’ve got to get your work in. You’ve got to make sure you prepare because if you’re not, you’re going to get eaten alive in the league. This is a very professional group right now and that’s half the battle.”

They’re a tight-knit group, too.

Duke credits Hahn for investigating the all-around package of each player. He said the combination of players has led to positive attitudes and “crisp” work.

Sale has noticed that many of his new teammates have brought a winning attitude to the mix, that they act as if they’ve been there before.

“They know how to handle it,” Sale said. “They know what it takes to get there.”

Eaton said that confidence and attitude made a big difference at the end of camp, a time of the spring where things get stale. The daily competitions have allowed players to stay upbeat and have fun while they remain focused on improving as a club.

“It’ll allow spring training to go by a little bit quicker, but at the same time you’re getting good work in,” Eaton said.

And that’s all that matters in Frazier’s mind.

With six weeks of pitcher’s fielding practice, grounders to take or fly balls to track, things can get tiresome. But the White Sox found a way to make it enjoyable when they recently had to go through rundown drills again after several mishaps on the field.

If they can take their work seriously yet still have fun, the belief is that will carry over when the results really start to matter - as if they haven’t already.

“We won a competition (last Sunday),” Frazier said when asked about the wrestling belt above his locker. “The corner infielders and catchers beat out the middle infielders and outfielders in this agility game. It was fun. I don’t know how we did it, but we came out on top. It was concentration.”

Frazier admitted infield work is tedious. But he and his teammates found an engaging way to take it seriously, knowing that it’ll pay off when the season starts Monday.

“We’ve got something to prove.”

White Sox agree to minor-league deal with P Miguel Gonzalez

By Dan Hayes / CSN Chicago | April 3rd, 2016

The White Sox have agreed to terms on a minor-league deal with right-handed pitcher Miguel Gonzalez.

The 31-year-old starter posted a 9-12 record with a 4.91 ERA and 109 strikeouts in 26 starts last season with the Baltimore Orioles, where he spent the first four years of his MLB career.

He signed a minor-league deal with the Orioles in March 2012, and worked his way into the rotation full-time by July of that same year.

Gonzalez, who carries a career record of 39-33 with a 3.82 ERA, was cut by the Orioles last week, which made him an unrestricted free agent.

Chance the Rapper to throw ceremonial first pitch at White Sox home opener

By Dan Hayes / CSN Chicago | April 3rd, 2016

Baseball season on the South Side begins Friday, so it is fitting that a South Side celebrity will be getting things going.

Chance the Rapper, who grew up on the South Side at 79th and Princeton, will throw out the ceremonial first pitch ahead of the White Sox home opener against the Indians on Friday.

While it might not be as unique as collaborating with Kanye West or Madonna, Chance the Rapper's collaboration with the White Sox ought to be a thrill.

And Chance the Rapper won't be the only celebrity music artist involved in the pregame festivities, as Goo Goo Dolls lead singer John Rzeznik will sing the National Anthem before first pitch.

The White Sox first game of the season at U.S. Cellular Field begins at 3:10 p.m., and you can catch all the action on Comcast SportsNet.

Chris Sale on 2016 White Sox: 'We have some grit'

By Colleen Kane / Chicago Tribune | April 3rd, 2016

No offense to the prediction-makers of the world, but Chris Sale doesn't care what you see in his future, even if it's an American League Cy Young Award.

The White Sox pitcher said from the start of spring training that his focus is on helping his team make the playoffs. So as he geared up for his third opening-day start Monday against the Athletics, he wasn't much concerned with those who think this might be his year to win an award.

"That's somebody who just threw a bunch of numbers into a computer, and that's what it spit out," said Sale, who finished third in 2014 and fourth last year in Cy Young voting. "Honestly, with the arms that are in the American League, it's up for grabs. It would be silly to say anybody's a favorite for it, especially since no one's thrown a pitch in a real game. I'll leave that up to you guys to debate, and I'll put my head down and keep working."

The Sox are ecstatic that work will come on the field at the Oakland Coliseum against A's ace Sonny Gray on Monday rather than in the training room, where Sale spent most of last spring with a fractured foot on the way to missing the 2015 opener.

As the team trots out a retooled offense that will include five new names in the starting lineup, they're happy to have the 27-year-old left-hander at the forefront to set the tone for a year they hope breaks a stretch of three straight losing seasons.

"There are a lot of teams that try to build around a rotation without that kind of No. 1 guy, but you need that type of guy," catcher Alex Avila said after Sale's last spring start. "No matter how the team has been playing recently, when he's out there you've got a shot. ... We have aspirations to be in the playoffs. I expect to be in the playoffs. When you have a guy like him that's able to start those types of series, it makes a big difference."

Sale said his only personal benchmark this year will be staying healthy enough so he can make all of his starts and throw 200 innings.

Manager Robin Ventura hopes his new offense can help Sale put up even better numbers than he had in 2015, when he was 13-11 with a 3.41 ERA and a team-record 274 strikeouts.

Additions like Todd Frazier, Brett Lawrie, Jimmy Rollins and Austin Jackson helped the Sox crank out 51 home runs on the way to a 17-13-1 spring record.

"If we score runs, he's going to be better," Ventura said. "As far as him individually, just let him go out and pitch. He's talented enough to go out there and do it. ... We're happy to have him going out on opening day this year. We're ready to score some runs for him."

Sale likes what he has seen from his new teammates, some of whom have brought a veteran perspective and a "salty" attitude, according to Ventura.

"We have some grit," Sale said. "We have some guys that aren't afraid to show emotion and play hard and grind. And that's half the battle. When you have tough guys, that prevails. Sometimes you don't need to be the most athletic or the most talented, but if you want it more than the other guy, I'll take that guy."

Robin Ventura remains unflappable, determined to right the White Sox ship

By Paul Sullivan / Chicago Tribune | April 3rd, 2016

The first thing to understand is Robin Ventura doesn't care if he's perceived as being on the proverbial hot seat, whether it's really hot or just lukewarm.

Ventura enters the final year of his contract with a .458 winning percentage in his four years at the helm of the White Sox. They're a combined 62 games below .500 since 2013, finishing fifth, fourth and fourth, respectively, in the American League Central.

Like potholes on Ashland Avenue, there never will be a shortage of those calling for a new manager, especially if the 2016 season gets off to a rocky start.

"Whatever," Ventura said. "I mean, I enjoy (managing). I'm having fun doing this. You could ask the players if I'm any different. They would see it more than I would anyway. I don't think I'm much different (this season) as far as what I care about getting done.

Nothing beats a day at the ball park, but finding the right tickets at a fair price can be tough. SeatGeek takes the hassle out of finding a great deal on tickets to any game.

"These guys are going about doing their business, and it has been good. I don't wake up every day thinking, 'Oh my gosh, I have to go save my job.' It's baseball. Eventually I won't be here. That's just the way the game works."

Ventura had a hard act to follow in Ozzie Guillen, his former Sox teammate who was colorful, talkative and had a championship ring to boot. Guillen finally has been reunited with the Sox organization after a cold war with top baseball executive Ken Williams, and there are some who pine for his return.

The chances of that seem minuscule, but as long as he's not managing in the majors again, Guillen's long shadow will hover over Ventura, at least until the Sox start winning. Guillen was even at Sox camp a couple of days during spring training, entertaining the media like the old days.

"That doesn't bother me," Ventura said. "I'm going to be fine."

The Sox players like Ventura, as Chris Sale stressed during the Drake LaRoche saga, saying Ventura should have been allowed to handle the decision on the clubhouse time allotted Adam LaRoche's son instead of Williams.

The criticism of Ventura as being too dispassionate and too close to his players to discipline anyone isn't going to change because he's not going to change.

He won't fake being a hothead. And he insists he does get in a player's grill if he sees him playing the game the wrong way. Ventura says he just prefers to do it out of sight.

"It's handled," he said. "(Critics) probably just want to see a little more flesh out there."

Perhaps Ventura can be more like a certain Coach Ditka and show when he's perturbed at his team's play?

"Dikka?" he said, using the preferred "Saturday Night Live" moniker for Mike Ditka, the former Bears coach. "Everybody has a way to go about it. I'm not going to change that because I'm in the last year of my deal and (people would) rather have some of that.

"For me, we're a better team right now, and I'm going to let this group dictate that."

This is going to be a fork-in-the-road year for the Sox, who had a nice spring despite the mishandled LaRoche episode, which turned into a national story. General manager Rick Hahn appears to have upgraded the lineup, albeit with several players on one-year contracts and no starting position players from the farm system.

If the Sox disappoint again, who knows what will happen.

"Any time the organization goes through the last few years like we have, you could've just kept everything the way it was," Ventura said. "But the way Rick did it, he flips the switch. Our catchers are different. Our infield is pretty much different.

"It is (an important year) because if it doesn't work with this, where does it go? What are you going to do?"

Blow it up?

"I don't know if that's the answer or not," he said. "There's a pretty good mixture of young guys and older guys and in-between and on the way out. So it's a good little collection of everything."

Ventura said he liked the "vibe" in camp, which is easy to say in spring training when everyone's in a good mood and the team hasn't lost a game yet.

When it was suggested he's in charge of a bunch of mercenaries, Ventura didn't disagree.

Robin Ventura on wanting to get off to a good start

White Sox manager Robin Ventura discusses the importance of starting the season strong.

"A little bit," he said. "They're here to help themselves and help us at the same time. First and foremost they're here to play, and they understand how to play to win, so it's not quite as selfish as (being mercenaries) just here for their own sake.

"There are a lot of people in the league who are like that, but these guys have really hit it off. It's about the group instead of 'I'm here to do my own thing and try to get myself a contract for next year.'"

Of course, Ventura would appear to need a contract for next year as well, and it would be difficult for management to grant him an extension if the Sox aren't at least contenders. Whether his seat is hot or not, Ventura probably will have to deal with that fact during the course of the season.

Only one word is necessary to describe the way Ventura undoubtedly feels about that.

Whatever.

White Sox add pitcher Miguel Gonzalez on minor-league deal

By Colleen Kane / Chicago Tribune | April 3rd, 2016

White Sox general manager Rick Hahn said last week that the team is "always going to be looking for more depth" on the pitching side, and they added another arm Sunday.

With questions remaining about the strength of the back end of their rotation, the Sox agreed to a minor-league deal with right-hander Miguel Gonzalez, whom the Orioles released last week.

Gonzalez, 31, is 39-33 with a 3.83 ERA in four major-league seasons with the Orioles. He posted a 4.91 ERA over 1442/3 innings in 26 starts in 2015.

Gonzalez gives the Sox another option behind right-hander Mat Latos, who posted a 10.38 ERA in three starts this spring.

New start: New Sox third baseman Todd Frazier will make his fourth opening-day start Monday, but his first with a team other than the Reds.

He said he thinks the Sox should be able to carry over a solid spring into the opener against the Athletics on Monday.

"We're already in that flow," Frazier said. "In spring training Robin (Ventura) set up a good plan for everybody to get your innings, get your at-bats. ... Everybody wants a good start. It's not going to kill us if we don't, but at the same time, let's get some W's on the road and show them we're going to do just as good on the road as at home."

In the lineup: Ventura said he expects to go with Jimmy Rollins in the No. 2 hole in the lineup to start the season, while Melky Cabrera will likely bat fifth.

"I like (Rollins) there," Ventura said. "He can move. Just because he's a switch hitter and can handle the bat, he can go to a couple of different places."

Opening activities: The Sox announced that John Rzeznik, lead singer of the Goo Goo Dolls, will sing the national anthem before the home opener against the Indians on Friday. Chance the Rapper, who grew up on the South Side, will throw out the first pitch.

Cubs, White Sox making historic shifts—on radio

By Ed Sherman / Chicago Tribune | April 3rd, 2016

Farmer, the White Sox play-by-play radio voice, wrapped up a spring training broadcast by saying, "This is Ed Farmer for WSCR..."

He hesitated and let out a muffled chuckle in realizing his mistake.

"... For WLS," he said.

Change will require adjustments this season, not only for Farmer and his crosstown colleague, Pat Hughes, the radio voice of the Cubs, but also for fans. The Cubs are moving from WBBM-AM 780 to WSCR-AM 670, their third station in three years, while the Sox depart WSCR for WLS-AM 890.

The shifts are historic. The Cubs and White Sox are switching radio stations for the first time in the same year since 1944.

The Cubs were on WGN-AM 720 from 1959-2014. CBS Radio then came in with a higher offer, and the Cubs went to WBBM in 2015. While it wasn't announced at the time, it was anticipated that after the Sox deal ran out with CBS-owned WSCR last season, the Cubs would be moved to the sports-talk station for the remaining six years of the contract.

Cubs radio

It makes sense. The Cubs weren't an ideal fit for WBBM, especially weekday games that required the station to deviate from its successful all-news format. There won't be any issues at all-sports WSCR,

where operations director Mitch Rosen said the station plans to treat every game as a "prime-time broadcast."

The expanded coverage features a pregame show that will run 35 minutes, including segments with manager Joe Maddon and pitching coach Chris Bosio. The postgame show, hosted by Mark Grote, will stretch to 45 minutes and perhaps longer.

"If there's a huge game or series, we can expand the postgame show," Rosen said. "That's the big advantage of being on a sports radio station."

This will be the Cubs' first taste of having their games on an all-sports station. WSCR won't give the same kind of boosterish treatment they mostly enjoyed from WGN during non-game hours. Sports-talk radio hosts have a different agenda, and it could be open season at times on the Cubs.

"We will respect them," Rosen said. "But if there are critical plays or moves, of course, we're going to weigh in. We're in the opinion business."

Airing baseball and the White Sox will be a completely new experience in the long history of WLS. Peter Bolger, the operations and program director, hopes the relationship will help both parties.

"There's a good match," Bolger said. "WLS has had a tough couple years, and the Sox have had a rough couple years. I think we can help each other."

Bolger said WLS has created a sports staff with Connor McKnight and Rachel Brady to ramp up the coverage with the addition of the Sox and beginning with the 2016-17 season, the Bulls. McKnight will serve as host of the Sox call-in, postgame shows.

Bolger also expects more Sox talk throughout the day. Afternoon host Steve Dahl, a Sox fan, already has had Farmer on his show.

Bolger is counting on the Sox and Bulls "to broaden our appeal."

"We're in the business where success depends on how many people we have in our tent," Bolger said. "The Sox (and Bulls) brings us a whole new group of people."

Ultimately, WLS' baseball ratings will be affected by how the Sox fare on the field. As always, winning takes care of everything.

"I know (WLS) isn't a traditional button for sports fans to push," Bolger said. "Your avid Sox fan is going to be listening regardless because they are fans. If the team does well, other fans will find us."

A Cubs-White Sox World Series, the end of the universe and waffle fries

By Steve Rosenbloom / Chicago Tribune | April 3rd, 2016

Just taking 'em one blog at a time:

Predictions are useless without money riding on them, and if I knew what was going to happen, I wouldn't be writing this.

So, I'm sorry, you guys, for not knowing what the future holds, although I continue to predict that the Bears will go 16-0 this season.

Instead, I root for stories, and here's what I'm rooting for this season:

- Cubs-Cardinals in the National League Division Series (well, duh, who wouldn't want that again?)

- Then Cubs-Giants in the National League Championship Series (your Giants starter for Game 3 in Wrigley Field: Jeff Samardzija)
- And then Cubs-White Sox in the World Series (apocalypse, thanks for coming, everybody)

But I'm not sure how the Sox get to the playoffs without Drake LaRoche's leadership?

Short-term, however, the Sox have the same goal as the Blackhawks: Be relevant in June.

Does Jake Arrieta have a Superglue endorsement yet?

Ryne Sandberg, Fergie Jenkins and Billy Williams will throw out ceremonial first pitches at the Cubs home opener on April 11. This brings me to the biggest reason that Theo Epstein needs to get it right: So the Cubs eventually can have ceremonial first pitches thrown out by players who actually won.

The only thing that explains why Epstein doesn't already have a contract extension is that he can't decide which rooftop he wants.

New Cubs starter John Lackey pitches like he just got off the phone with Comcast.

Sox slugger Jose Abreu said he wants to limit his designated hitter appearances because "when you are playing, you can go 0-for-4 and still do something in the field, make some good plays and help the team in some way." Or, I don't know, don't go 0-for-4.

New Sox second baseman Brett Lawrie looks like the high schooler voted Most Likely to Kneecap Someone.

Sox fans who don't like new TV play-by-play man Jason Bennett are simply fans who haven't heard him. He's professional, wry and an easy listen, part Skip Caray, part Gary Thorne.

Suggestion for a Joe Maddon stunt: During a slump, bring in Jeffery Ross to roast everybody in the clubhouse.

Did anyone get the mime's wins above replacement?

Dexter Fowler presented Maddon with two bottles of Johnnie Walker Blue. One bottle is engraved with "Embrace The Target." The other remains blank, perhaps ready for "World Champions" or, sadly, "Wait Till Next Year."

The Braves are offering a hamburger that uses two personal pizzas as buns. Anything to distract people during at-bats by Tyler Flowers and Gordon Beckham.

The Wrigley Field bleachers will feature a "replica ivy wall perfect for photo opportunities." I think it's also available for weddings, birthday parties and bar-mitzvahs.

I trust that no bathrooms were harmed in this year's Wrigley renovations.

Wrigley's Nuveen Investments Suite Level allows fans to buy the "Sommelier Wine Tasting Experience." Tell me, Pierre, do you recommend a Gewurtztraminer with fruity notes or a Sauvignon Blanc with a snotty, little bouquet when having the waffle fries?

Pirates pitching coach Ray Searage is NL for Don Cooper.

There's a family of four living in Noah Syndegaard's hair.

I can't wait for Jason Heyward's first trip to St. Louis when the so-called "best fans in baseball" can embarrass themselves the way they did when the Cubs signed him.

“Did everybody make?” -- now asked before every Mets bus ride.

Veterans for Ventura: Additions a boost for lame-duck manager

By Daryl Van Schouwen / Chicago Sun-Times | April 3rd, 2016

OAKLAND, Calif. — General manager Rick Hahn's No. 1 offseason priority was to upgrade the worst offense in the American League.

Trades for infielders Todd Frazier and Brett Lawrie and a handful of other moves later, that goal was checked off.

Manager Robin Ventura's top spring-training priority was to bear down on defensive, baserunning and fundamental deficiencies without changing his style or demeanor and becoming a killjoy.

If the mood in the clubhouse and results on the field last month are an indicator — the White Sox' spring execution probably deserved a B grade, and they posted their best spring record since 2003 — that goal also was checked off.

The Sox mashed spring-training home runs like never before, leading all of baseball with 51, and, among those on the 25-man Opening Day roster, five errors were committed over 31 games. They didn't play flawless baseball, but overall it was clean. When it wasn't, Ventura's coaching staff went back to the field to get it right.

Or in some cases — with veterans Jimmy Rollins, Austin Jackson, Alex Avila and Dioner Navarro added to the roster along with Frazier and Lawrie — some “get it right” issues were handled promptly by the players.

“I couldn't be more pleased with what's going on,” third-base coach Joe McEwing said Saturday before the Sox left San Diego, after winning their last two preseason games, for Oakland to open the season. “Energy-wise and chemistry-wise in that clubhouse and on the field. It's kind of like a ballet, everything working together. Everything is in sync.”

McEwing said the best thing about this group is if a mistake is made, it gets fixed without delay.

“What's great about these guys,” he said, “is if [it goes wrong on the field], they come in like, ‘We'll straighten it out.’ They're getting after it for 27 outs; it's refreshing. We have such a great thing going on.”

That's what bringing in heady players such as Frazier, Avila and Rollins, to name three, can do.

“We made a lot of great [personnel] moves,” McEwing said. “The good thing is, there are individuals in there [nodding to the clubhouse] that will make everyone else accountable. It's nice to see.”

This is a good environment for Ventura, who's running the show as a lame-duck manager in the last year of his contract and under the most scrutiny he has faced. Coming off three consecutive losing seasons, he knows he has to win now.

He hasn't dodged any questions about being in the final year of his deal.

“It's not like it's a secret,” Ventura said. “Guys know it in [the clubhouse], but I don't find myself trying to do things because it's in my last year. That's part of the job. Having been in the last year of a contract as a player, it helps doing this.”

When he was hired before the 2012 season with no experience, he was viewed as a reluctant devotee to chairman Jerry Reinsdorf. What has developed since is a desire to continue managing and to make it work.

Ventura's status "is what it is, but I enjoy doing this, and I'm not going to change that kind of enjoyment level, stop keeping it fun, just because it's the last year of a contract. It's unfair to do that to the team, to the players."

Veterans, to a man, while stopping short of rallying the troops for a "win it for Robin" campaign, respect him for how he treats them as a former player himself and, as Avila said, how he supplies the necessary preparation and environment "to win games."

They know he's under pressure.

"When you're a manager that is expected to lead a team to a winning season and the playoffs, there is a lot of pressure," said Avila, who added that Ventura "did a great job" navigating the clubhouse through the extraordinary Adam LaRoche retirement saga.

That was some kind of pressure, but it has been dealt with and checked off.

Now it's on to the last item — to win games, starting Monday night.

White Sox sign Miguel Gonzalez to a minor-league deal

By Daryl Van Schouwen / Chicago Sun-Times | April 3rd, 2016

OAKLAND, Calif. – Short on starting pitch depth going into the season, the White Sox addressed it the day before the season opener by agreeing to terms on a minor-league deal with right-hander Miguel Gonzalez.

Gonzalez, 31, experienced groin, elbow and shoulder problems last season and posted a 4.91 ERA after he had established himself as a solid rotation piece by pitching to a 3.45 ERA from 2012-14. A popular player in the Orioles clubhouse, Gonzalez cleared release waivers Friday and became a free agent, following a shaky spring that concluded on a good note Tuesday when allowed a run in five innings against the Atlanta Braves.

With Mat Latos, signed to a one-year, \$3 million deal in February, making three so-so starts this spring – and he may turn out to be what they're looking for when all is said and done — but the Sox don't have much major-league ready depth behind Latos in the minor leagues besides Erik Johnson.

Gonzalez is expected to report to AAA Charlotte, but he could make his way to the majors before long. Manager Buck Showalter said the Orioles were hoping to sign Gonzalez to a minor league deal. By releasing him before Opening Day the O's were on the hook for only \$1.275 million of the \$5.1 million he received in the arbitration process in the offseason.

'Excited' White Sox work out in advance of opener

By Daryl Van Schouwen / Chicago Sun-Times | April 3rd, 2016

OAKLAND, Calif. — There's an excitement in the air, and why wouldn't there be? Opening Day is around the corner.

The Sox arrived at the Oakland Coliseum, where they open the 2016 season on Monday night, for a Sunday afternoon workout. A successful spring training is behind them, followed by two wins in San Diego against the Padres in final preseason exhibitions.

“We like where they are at and we are ready to go,” manager Robin Ventura said as his team stretched on the field.

“I like the vibe they have. I like the energy and the confidence they come out of spring training with and you just go from there.”

Every team is excited about getting the season under way, especially after six long weeks of spring training, and Ventura must have used the term a dozen or so times talking about the opener. He said he was feeling “normal” excitement, “but you know every group is a little bit different,” he said.

“As far as confidence going in, ready to play, this is a different group or a little bit older,” Ventura said. “It’s a little saltier group that has been around a little bit. There are guys that have been around a long time and guys who haven’t been around very much and a lot right in the middle.”

The expected line to face Cy Young candidate Sonny Gray is Adam Eaton RF, Jimmy Rollins SS, Jose Abreu 1B, Todd Frazier 3B, Melky Cabrera LF, Avisail Garcia DH, Brett Lawrie 2B, Austin Jackson CF, Alex Avila C. Left-hander Chris Sale starts on the mound.

Monday’s game will be broadcast on Comcast Sports Net. Ken Harrelson, who is cutting back his workload and doing road games and select home home games including Friday’s home opener, will be on the call alongside Steve Stone.

White Sox notes: Sale, Rollins, Frazier, Ventura

By Daryl Van Schouwen / Chicago Sun-Times | April 3rd, 2016

OAKLAND, Calif. — Manager Robin Ventura said Sunday his 2016 roster is “saltier,” and Chris Sale, who will make his third Opening Day start Monday night against fellow Cy Young candidate Sonny Gray, agrees.

“Yeah, we have some grit,” Sale said Sunday after the Sox worked out at Oakland Coliseum. “We have guys who aren’t afraid to play hard, show emotion and grind. That’s half the battle. When you have tough guys, that prevails.”

Sale’s individual goals are short and sweet: Don’t miss a start and pitch 200 innings.

“Staying healthy, that’s not really a stat but it is the name of the game in this league,” he said.

Manager’s corner

Discussing Opening Day, Ventura, usually one of the least excitable guys in the room, said “exciting” or “excited” nine times during a five-minute media session in the visitors dugout.

The Sox were 76-86 last season but are confident their offseason additions will make them postseason contenders.

“We like where they are at and we are ready to go,” Ventura said.

“I like the vibe they have. I like the energy and the confidence they came out of spring training with.”

Homecoming for Rollins

Jimmy Rollins, 37, who won the Opening Day shortstop job after signing a minor league contract during spring training, grew up in Alameda, Calif., and was a huge fan of former Athletic Rickey Henderson. Rollins played down the significance of this homecoming all last week, though.

“Just another Opening Day,” he said Sunday. “Get past the home team’s excitement, go out there put up some runs.”

Rollins said Henderson to this day is his favorite player.

“An entertainer, popping the collar, ran to left field, the way he would snatch the ball on a routine fly ball, the way he would steal and mess with the pitchers,” Rollins said Sunday. “Other times he wouldn’t steal, doing the walking lead and I couldn’t take my eyes off him and I liked that value. The field is full of baseball players when the game is going on but he brought that extra entertainment package.”

Out of town goes Frazier

This will be the first out-of-town opener for new Sox third baseman Todd Frazier, who played every other one in the Cincinnati Reds’ traditional opener at home.

“It’s like a new year, a feeling you can’t really explain,” Frazier said.

“You hear your name announced and it’s one of the coolest things in the world because you’re a starter in the biggest venue in baseball, you’re among the best of the best and when your name is out there it’s go time.”

Chance the Rapper to throw out first pitch at White Sox opener

By Daryl Van Schouwen / Chicago Sun-Times | April 3rd, 2016

Music artist Chance the Rapper will throw out the ceremonial first pitch, Goo Goo Dolls lead singer John Rzeznik will sing the national anthem before the White Sox’ home opener against the Cleveland Indians Friday, the club announced Sunday.

Chance the Rapper is a West Chatham native debuted “Angels” on “The Late Show with Stephen Colbert” in December wearing a White Sox hat.

Gametime Friday is 3:10 p.m., with left-hander John Danks pitching for the Sox at U.S. Cellular Field. The game is sold out except for a limited number standing room tickets.

The Sox open their season in Oakland starting with a four-game series against the Athletics on Monday night.

Here is more info on the home opener, courtesy of White Sox media relations:

- Giveaway: White Sox 2016 Magnetic Schedule presented by Miller Lite (all fans ages 21 and over)
- Opening Day Drive Around, presented by Your Local Ford Stores
- National Anthem by John Rzeznik, lead singer of the Goo Goo Dolls
- Presentation of the flag by the Navy Recruiting District Chicago and the Naval Service Training Command Great Lakes
- Flyover by U.S. Navy F/A-18E Super Hornets and F/A-18C Hornets from Virginia Beach, Virginia
- Ceremonial first pitch by Chance the Rapper, music artist

The Opening Day Drive Around, presented by Your Local Ford Stores will kick off the season by introducing 2016 White Sox players and coaches as they arrive on field in Ford mustangs. Fans are advised to be in their seats by 2:15 p.m. CT for the opening ceremony.

Goo Goo Dolls Lead Singer John Rzeznik will perform the National Anthem. The Goo Goo Dolls are a multi-platinum, Grammy-nominated American rock band that has sold more than 10 million albums worldwide. After nearly 30 years, they have released 10 albums and had 14 top radio hits, including

“Name,” “Slide” and “Iris.” Their newest single is scheduled for release on the White Sox home opener, with the forthcoming album, “Boxes,” currently available for preorder at googoodolls.com.

Music artist Chance the Rapper will throw out a ceremonial first pitch. Chance, who grew up on the South Side of Chicago at 79th and Princeton, became the first independent recording artist to perform on Saturday Night Live in December 2015, when he debuted his song “Somewhere in Paradise.” He has collaborated with music artists, including Kanye West, Justin Bieber and Madonna as well as earned headlining slots at Pitchfork and Lollapalooza.

Saturday, April 9, 1:10 p.m. vs. Cleveland

- Giveaway: White Sox Winter Hat, presented by Comcast SportsNet (first 20,000 fans)
- K Zone For Sale (Pitching rotation subject to change.)
- Rock the Sox performance by NBC’s The Voice finalist Joshua Davis
- National Anthem by White Sox anthemist Gerald Chaney
- Ceremonial first pitch by Super Bowl XLIX Champion linebacker Darius Fleming

The K Zone For Sale returns for its third season as a ballpark promotion with an expanded seating area in Sections 154-156 – a total of more than 1,100 seats. When Sox ace Chris Sale starts, fans with tickets in these sections receive a “K Zone For Sale” T-shirt and strikeout card, which can be picked up at the #SoxSocial Lounge before the end of the first inning. “K Zone For Sale” tickets are available \$20 for most games at whitesox.com/kzone, with the exception of Family Sundays when the tickets are \$15 and the Crosstown Cup games (all subject to availability). Please note that the pitching rotation is subject to change.

National recording artist Joshua Davis will perform a pregame Rock the Sox acoustic performance. The Michigan-based musician was a finalist on the eighth season of NBC’s The Voice, when he became the first contestant to perform an original song on the show. His new single, “Always Going to be Here,” will be available online on Friday, April 8. Videos from past Rock the Sox performances are available at whitesox.com/rockthesox.

Super Bowl XLIX Champion linebacker Darius Fleming will throw out a ceremonial first pitch. Fleming is a South Side Chicago native who played collegiate football at Notre Dame before being drafted. This January, he rescued a woman who was unable to exit her smoking vehicle by kicking in the passenger window and pulling her to safety. Two days and 22 stitches later, Fleming helped the New England Patriots in their divisional round playoff victory.

Sunday, April 12, 1:10 p.m. vs. Minnesota

- Family Sunday
- National Anthem by Abigail Tomblin, a young girl from Northwest Indiana

Family Sunday offers tickets as low as \$5 in the Upper Level and \$15 in the Lower Level with \$10 parking. Entertainment includes children’s running the bases postgame (weather permitting), face painters, balloonists, a caricature artist and magnet art. Kids ages 10 and under eat free off the kids menu at ChiSox Bar & Grill on Family Sundays.

Eleven-year-old Abigail Tomblin is a sixth grade honor roll student who began singing the National Anthem acappella for her older sister’s varsity basketball games nearly five years ago. The Northwest Indiana resident is performing the National Anthem.

Broadcast Information

Friday and Sunday's games will be televised on Comcast SportsNet Chicago and WGN-TV will broadcast Saturday's game. All three games will air on WLS AM 890, the White Sox flagship radio station, and WRTO-AM 1200/Univision Radio, the White Sox Spanish-language radio affiliate.

Ticket Information

Friday's home opener is sold out except for a limited number of tickets in Standing Room Only sections and those remaining as part of season ticket plans. Tickets to games on Saturday and Sunday are available at whitesox.com, the U.S. Cellular Field ticket office (Monday-Friday from 10 a.m.-6 p.m.; Saturday-Sunday 10 a.m.-4 p.m.) or by calling 866-SOX-GAME. Season ticket packages are available for purchase by calling 312-674-1000.

Real (and imagined) pessimism abounds for Cubs, White Sox

By Rick Telander / Chicago Sun-Times | April 3rd, 2016

Like a bulldozer without a driver, the baseball season approaches. Nobody knows if it will plow a road to the World Series or grind off into the wilderness. Herewith, some concerns for the Cubs and White Sox:

Cub who will have a sophomore slump: Ben Zobrist. Oh wait, he's a freshman.

Past gimmick that will come back to haunt the Cubs: Bill Veeck planting ivy along the outfield walls in 1937. Addison Russell will hit a ball into that thicket, and his two-out triple will be declared a ground-rule double, sending runner Dexter Fowler back to third in the ninth inning of the seventh game of the World Series, a 1-0 loss to the Blue Jays.

Future Joe Maddon stunt that will go horribly wrong: I know my colleague across the page, Rick Morrissey, would love to see more mimes. But let's say Joe calls on the Jesse White Tumblers and they bound over home plate during practice, with the super-springy guy who goes last cannonballing into a seated Anthony Rizzo, who is playing with a pair of muzzled zoo hyenas. The bruised kidney plus fang lacerations, caused when a muzzle comes loose, puts Rizzo on the disabled list.

Weird injury that will do in the Cubs' season: I would have said multiple bee stings to a star outfielder, but that already happened to Jason Heyward. So let's go with a hot-foot to Kris Bryant's pivot shoe, lit by a mischievous, recovering Rizzo. The resulting inferno fuses Bryant's second and third toes as if epoxied.

Weird injury that will do in the White Sox' season: Obviously, Adam Eaton will attempt a flying belly slide many yards from second base, skid over the bag and suffer a sports hernia as well as a painful "manhood" bruise.

Jon Lester has a bone chip in his (left) throwing elbow, so, yeah, nothing to worry about there: No problem. Lester's home-run swing should be unaffected.

Date when the full implication of the Drake LaRoche leadership vacuum will hit the Sox: When it occurs there is nobody around to fix their Xbox settings, nor is anyone small enough to crawl through the ceiling vents and retrieve Todd Frazier's rumored-to-be-corked bat from the locked umpires' room.

The Drake LaRoche Curse — laugh through your uneasiness, Sox fans: This will haunt the Sox when only single men with no known offspring or only those with vasectomies and unwilling to adopt will play for the team. Plus, all children who enter the Sox' clubhouse will be cursed with rotator-cuff tears before puberty.

Weakness for Cubs that could derail season: Slugger Kyle Schwarber not having the fielding chops to be a major-league catcher or left fielder, and the National League, sadly for Schwarbs, not having a designated hitter.

Weakness for Sox that could derail season: Ken Williams and Chris Sale meeting by accident in a dark pizzeria.

Future Donald Trump statement that will shake the Ricketts family to its core: "I was a terrific player at my prep school. There was nobody better, just ask my recently indicted-for-assault campaign manager. I'll force these Nebraska cow farmers to sell me the Cubs and install myself because I am richer than them, and then build a wall from Chicago to Omaha. And make them pay for it!"

Next new-age quote from Maddon that will have a fed-up Jon Lester and John Lackey tuning up their bow-hunting equipment: If you're going to San Francisco, be sure to wear some flowers in your hair.

Muscle or tendon most likely to be torn on one of Schwarber's mighty swings: The groin of a passing Uber driver, who dives from his or her car in pursuit of the ball that just shattered the Honda Civic's windshield.

Pilates-loving Cubs pitcher most likely to come back to earth after Cy Young season and why: I don't know why my fellow columnist thinks things such as Pilates and Richard Simmons and Shake Weights are funny. But if we're talking Jake Arrieta, yes, I worry he will be returning to earth. Due to gravity.

Skinny Sox pitcher with the funky motion whose arm will finally give in to the laws of nature and fall off, probably in the ninth inning after 125 pitches: Drake LaRoche?

Strange occurrence that will unsettle the Cubs: Collector Grant DePorter successfully bids on Hector Rondon's brain in mid-August.

Pitcher fielding fundamental that will cost the Cubs Game 7 of the World Series and bring darkness over the land: Lester throws toward first; ball ends up buried for years in right-field vines next to Russell's "triple."

Act of God that brings down the huge video board at Wrigley Field: Trump's orange hair is lifted off by a tornado that causes a rain of frogs to destroy all.

.176-hitting catcher who will cost the Cubs a title: I can't figure which Cubs catcher is hitting that high.

Uber-talented Jason Heyward on a huge stage for the first time; you're right to worry: Naturally.

What could go wrong for Cubs, Sox? Let's count the ways

By Rick Morrissey / Chicago Sun-Times | April 3rd, 2016

By now, almost every English word meaning "great" or "dominant" has been attached to the 2016 Cubs, whose only remaining chore is to decide what to wear on the World Series parade buses. Would jammies be over the top?

This indeed figures to be a wonderful team. But at the risk of a public stoning, I'd like to point out that the 2003 team was great, too. If you're a Cubs fan, you remember what happened that year, the way you'd remember a shark swimming at you with its mouth open and its eyes rolled back into its head.

The White Sox were supposed to be good last season and weren't. So we've seen love stories turn into slasher films.

What could go wrong with Chicago's teams? I'm glad you asked.

Cubs player who will have a sophomore slump: The worst-case scenario is that Kris Bryant, Addison Russell and Kyle Schwarber all struggle, a baseball version of multiple organ failure. But let's go with Schwarber because his major-league sample size is smaller and because everything he does is spectacular.

Past gimmick that will come back to haunt the Cubs: Any time you introduce a mime to the proceedings, as the team did for "entertainment" purposes during spring training, you're asking for disaster. That is one of life's great truths.

Future Joe Maddon stunt that will go horribly wrong: Something involving a Shetland pony and John Lackey.

Weird injury that will do in the Cubs' season: Bryant strains a dimple.

Weird injury that will do in the Sox' season: A blister on Carlos Rodon's finger deploys like an SUV air bag.

Jon Lester has a bone chip in his throwing elbow, so, yeah, nothing to worry about there: That little gem of information arrived during spring training and was quickly dismissed by the Cubs as nothing. Sure. I picture the bone chip emerging from Lester's arm like the creature did from the host's chest cavity in "Alien." Only in Game 5 of the World Series.

Date when the full implication of the Drake LaRoche leadership vacuum will hit the Sox: Within the first two weeks. A losing streak will have Adam Eaton looking for inspiration from the 14-year-old, but he'll only find an unfinished home-school essay on how to properly snap someone with a wet towel in a clubhouse.

The Drake LaRoche Curse – laugh through your uneasiness, Sox fans: Early on, people used to laugh at the Billy goat curse, too.

Weakness for Cubs that could derail season: Inability to ignore 100 tons of history, what with it resting on their chests.

Weakness for Sox that could derail season: Inability to get over the fact that nobody cares, including most Sox family members.

Future Donald Trump statement that will shake the Ricketts family to its core: "I have photos!"

Next new-age quote from Maddon that will have a fed-up Lester and Lackey tuning up their bow-hunting equipment: "Let your mind take you to a place of tranquility, where the inner warrior meets the shaman. You know, when I was managing in Idaho Falls in 1981 ..."

Muscle or tendon most likely to be torn on one of Schwarber's mighty swings: Ever seen someone try to walk back to the dugout without the use of either Achilles? Pull up a seat.

Pilates-loving Cubs pitcher most likely to come back to earth after Cy Young season and why: Jake Arrieta. The Cubs will ban muscle shirts, and Arrieta, who hasn't seen a shirt he believes needs sleeves, will be thrown off his game.

Skinny Sox pitcher with the funky motion whose arm will finally give in to the laws of nature and fall off, probably in the ninth inning after 125 pitches: Chris Sale. Somehow, it will be Ken Williams' fault.

Strange occurrence that will unsettle the Cubs: The fact that everyone, including me, thinks they'll win the World Series this season.

Pitcher fielding fundamental that will cost the Cubs Game 7 of the World Series and bring darkness over the land: This is a tough one. Will it be Lester trying to hold a baserunner at first base? Or will it be Lester trying to throw out a baserunner at first base? Either way, the ball ends up in the stands.

Act of God that brings down the huge video board at Wrigley Field: The mind can't conceive of the plague of locusts that, even now, is on its way.

.176-hitting catcher who will cost the Cubs a title: David Ross. The veteran is "good in the clubhouse," keeping his teammates loose. Unfortunately, he is not "good in the batter's box."

Uber-talented Jason Heyward on a huge stage for the first time; you're right to worry: The Braves? The Cardinals? Amateur hour when it comes to pressure. Not even Maddon's shoulder massages will calm down Heyward.

Hawk Harrelson back where he belongs—with Chicago White Sox

By Scot Gregor / Daily Herald | April 3rd, 2016

OAKLAND, Calif. -- Something was missing from the Chicago White Sox this spring.

And no, sigh, it was not erstwhile designated hitter Adam LaRoche and son Drake.

It was Ken "Hawk" Harrelson.

"The Hawkster," said starting pitcher John Danks, who is entering his 10th season with the Sox and is the club's longest tenured player. "It was the first time I didn't see him around."

Scaling his TV broadcasting schedule back to mainly road games this season, Harrelson also took a complete pass on spring training.

"It was the first spring I've missed in 56 years," said Harrelson, who has been a part of major-league baseball as a player, general manager and broadcaster since 1963.

As he reacquainted himself with members of his White Sox family during Sunday afternoon's workout at the Oakland Coliseum, the 74-year-old Harrelson said the spring withdrawal didn't shake him up too much.

"It was OK, it really was," Harrelson said. "I got to do some things ... living on the 17th tee at Bay Hill (Club & Lodge in Orlando, Florida), I got to watch the (Arnold Palmer Invitational) golf tournament for the first time in years and years."

That's not to say Harrelson wasn't itching for another season of Sox baseball, which opens Monday night against the Athletics.

"I was telling my wife (Aris), you get to where you want to hear the sounds and smell the leather," Harrelson said. "I was able to stay on top of most everything with my iPad here. The only thing I did really miss is, the majority of my time in spring training I spend on the fields watching the kids that we signed.

"I like to see the kids that have a chance to come up and help the ballclub. So I did miss that."

Not surprisingly, Harrelson has a good feeling about this season's White Sox. He is fired up about the addition of cleanup hitter Todd Frazier and his ability to protect Jose Abreu out of the cleanup spot after LaRoche failed last season and Adam Dunn failed the year before.

Harrelson raved about the needed energy new second baseman Brett Lawrie brings, he can't wait to watch Austin Jackson patrol center field, and he's high on the quality experience catchers Alex Avila and Dioner Navarro and shortstop Jimmy Rollins bring to the Sox' roster.

But Harrelson -- who will give way to Jason Benetti for most Sox home games -- is not making any predictions.

"I've said this a thousand times, and hopefully I won't have to say it too much this year," Harrelson said. "The first rule of baseball is catch the ball.

"It's not pitching; it's not hitting. If you're going to get 27 outs at the major-league level and you're going to give another major-league team 30 or 31 outs, you're probably going to lose. And the last few years, we just stunk catching the ball.

"You can't do that. Kansas City catches the ball. In the first three weeks last season, we lost five games because of defense. That's hard to overcome. I don't give a bleep how good your team is."

Harrelson says White Sox broadcasts are going to be really good when Benetti, a Homewood-Flossmoor High School graduate, joins Steve Stone for most home games.

"Jason's going to be terrific," Harrelson said. "He knows who he is and he knows he can do it. Fans are going to like him for a very long time. He's a South Side guy with White Sox blood flowing in him. Once he settles in and gets that feeling, he's going to be here a long time."

Sale thrilled with Chicago White Sox's toughness, grit

By Scot Gregor / Daily Herald | April 3rd, 2016

OAKLAND, Calif. -- Earlier in spring training, ace starting pitcher Chris Sale showed little fear when he tore into Chicago White Sox vice president Kenny Williams for his role in the Adam LaRoche bombshell retirement.

Going after your boss does not usually end well, but Williams has always been a fan of fire, even the unfriendly variety.

Sale said there are more players on the Sox' revamped roster that have the same trait.

"Yeah, we have some grit," Sale said after Sunday's workout at Oakland Coliseum. "We have some guys that aren't afraid to show emotion and play hard and grind, and that's half the battle. When you have tough guys, they prevail. Sometimes you don't need to be the most athletic or the most talented, but if you want it more than the other guy, I'll take that guy."

Sale was on the disabled list with a fractured right foot at the start of last season, but he is healthy and looking forward to making his third opening day start for the White Sox.

"It's fun," Sale said. "I love it. It's the first day of a beautiful thing, really, baseball season."

Favored by many to win the American League Cy Young Award this season, Sale wasn't looking for any early votes on the eve of the season opener.

"Honestly, with the arms that are in the American League, it's up for grabs," Sale said. "I think it would be silly to say anybody's a favorite for it, especially since no one's thrown a pitch in a real game. I'll leave that up to you guys to debate and I'll put my head down and keep working.

"Make all my starts and throw 200 innings. Just stay healthy. That's not really a stat, but staying healthy is the name of the game in this league."

Sox sign Gonzalez:

General manager Rick Hahn confirmed the White Sox agreed to a minor-league contract with Miguel Gonzalez on Sunday, but he can't comment until the right-handed starting pitcher passes a physical.

The Gonzalez move adds more pitching depth to the Sox' system, and the former Orioles starter is good insurance as Latos carries his spring struggles (10.38 ERA in Cactus Leaguer starts) into the regular season.

Baltimore placed Gonzalez on waivers Wednesday after he also struggled in exhibition play, posting a 9.78 ERA.

From 2012-14, Gonzalez was 30-21 with a 3.45 ERA in 69 starts with the Orioles. While dealing with groin, elbow and shoulder issues last season, the 31-year-old pitcher slipped to 9-12 with a 4.91 ERA.

Spring tuneup:

The White Sox went 17-13 in exhibition play this spring, their highest win total since 2009.

Now, they'll try to extend the success into the regular season.

"I like the vibe they have," manager Robin Ventura said. "I like the energy and the confidence they come out of spring training with and you just go from there."

Imrem: Late, late show for openers? Absurd

By Mike Imrem / Daily Herald | April 3rd, 2016

Oh, what beautiful weather for the baseball season to begin in Chicago.

Chilly and blustery.

Clouds don't matter because on Opening Day the sport shines brightly anyway, the players do too and hope certainly does.

Baseball generates it's own heat at season's start, even in those years when snow has to be shoveled out of the Wrigley Field and/or Comiskey Park dugouts.

The only problem this year is not that the high temperature might be under 40 degrees here but that the Cubs are in Anaheim and the White Sox in Oakland.

The Sox don't come home until Friday and the Cubs won't arrive until next Monday, rendering both local openers relatively anticlimactic.

Even worse, Monday's season openers are scheduled for 9:05 Chicago time, with work and school lurking in the morning.

Major League Baseball might as well take a Louisville Slugger and whack Chicago across the knuckles.

Fans of the Cubs and Sox don't agree on much, but they should agree that the schedule maker is a boob.

Who knew that the guy had a morbid sense of humor? Who knew that he drank himself silly before mapping the season? Who knew that he still resents that a cop once gave him a speeding ticket on Lake Shore Drive?

Scheduling the Sox and Cubs to open at night on the West Coast is disrespectful, forcing the faithful to catch a few innings between tucking the fans of the future into bed and dozing off themselves.

This treatment of Chicago must mean that when the Cubs and Sox meet in the World Series this October -- a lock, of course -- Game 1 will be played on the moon during a lunar eclipse.

Seriously, this is no way to begin a season, any season, especially a season when the Sox and Cubs have high hopes.

Both Chicago teams beginning on the road, at night, in the Pacific Time Zone is like scheduling Round 1 of the Masters at 9:05 p.m. in the Twin Cities on New Year's Eve.

It's difficult enough to stay awake through an entire baseball game without the ninth inning creeping past midnight.

What's the saying, that nothing good happens after midnight?

Well, don't be surprised if the games drag on until something bad happens early Tuesday morning, like the Sox game ending with Jose Abreu striking out with the bases loaded and the Cubs game ending with Hector Rondon yielding a walk-off grand slam.

The only good news would be that not many fans back here would be awake to witness the dual disappointments.

The schedule maker insists that the timing is favorable because the Cubs and Sox get to start in warm weather.

First, no law prohibits our teams from opening at a watchable hour in Florida or a dome. Second, big leaguers representing Chicago should appreciate playing in a meat locker.

Yes, Jorge Soler, we're talking about you.

My goodness, players are paid millions of dollars, often 10s of millions, to play a game that kids of all ages play for the fun of it.

Meanwhile Chicago fans have to pay big bucks to attend some sports events in frigid weather.

It stinks that the Cubs and White Sox open on the road ... at night ... in the Pacific Time Zone.

The only plausible explanation is that the schedule maker must have always hated Ernie Banks and Minnie Minoso.

McKnight: Postseason history has Sale's full attention

Connor McKnight / Daily Herald | April 3rd, 2016

1908 was a long, long time ago. Ask anyone in town.

Baseball has as a way of bringing back its history, however, and through Chris Sale, the game did exactly that in the 2015 season. On Oct. 2, in his final start of the year, Sale struck out seven Detroit Tigers en route to breaking the Chicago White Sox single season strikeout record.

For 107 years, Ed Walsh had held the mark at 269.

It took Sale 18 fewer starts, 213⅔ fewer innings and 901 fewer batters than Walsh to tally his 274 strikeouts. That's both a testament to the modern game -- the power and importance of pitching -- and to Sale's incredible talent.

Sale is one of three American League pitchers to top the 270 mark since 1972 (David Price, 2014 and Randy Johnson in 1993, 1995 and 1997). Sale and Pedro Martinez are the only pitchers to sit down 10-plus hitters in eight consecutive games. Sale and Sandy Koufax are the only two, since 1900, to fan 12-plus with one or no runs allowed in three straight starts.

Price, Johnson, Martinez, Koufax. That's good company to keep.

In many ways, Sale is unique in baseball. His delivery induces squirms from batter and fan alike. When Sale pitches, it seems the baseball hooks around first base before it gets to the hitter. His left arm cares nothing about concern over an inverted W.

There was another moment in history, on a road trip to Cleveland in 2012, when the White Sox moved Sale back to the bullpen. Concerned about a sore elbow, the team moved Sale into the closer role. On May 8, he blew a save against the Indians. By the end of the season, he had started 29 games and finished sixth in the Cy Young voting.

He has finished in the top five every year since but would gladly trade in the personal achievements for a chance to start a playoff game.

Sale's focus is different this year. With an infield defense behind him that's vastly improved over 2015, he says he'll focus more on getting hitters early with ground outs -- there's less of a need for him to do it all by himself. Plus, with Todd Frazier, Brett Lawrie and even Jimmy Rollins, there's more pop in the lineup.

Chris Sale has already made history for himself. What he wants now -- what everyone in the White Sox clubhouse wants -- is for that history to live into October.

Even in what looks to be a crowded AL Central, the White Sox have made the adjustments to help their franchise starter gather even more elite company -- perhaps the postseason kind.

•Connor McKnight is the pregame and postgame host for Chicago White Sox games on WLS 890-AM. He also can be heard on sports reports for WKQX, WLUP and WLS-FM. Follow him on Twitter @C1McKnight.

The Bernstein Brief: On Opening Day, it's hurry up and wait

By Dan Bernstein / CBS Chicago | April 4th, 2016

(CBS) By the time Opening Day for Chicago baseball is in the books, it will be tomorrow.

These west coast starts are for you only if you are the type of fan that relishes anticipation more than anything, with the Cubs breaking the seal on their 2016 season in Anaheim at 9:05, and the White Sox doing so at the same time in Oakland.

We'll finally see Jake Arrieta and Chris Sale in action around halftime of the NCAA Championship game, so that works out.

In a way it's good practice, or at the very least a reminder for patience when it comes to what is still by far the most gradual of our majorsports. Waiting for something to happen today is a microcosm of baseball's next six months, after which something else much more important may or may not lie in store.

Any truths will reveal themselves over time, in accumulated individual outcomes and growing sample sizes of data and visual evidence. Bad teams will go on winning streaks, good teams will go on losing streaks.

And what is perhaps the most eagerly awaited Cubs campaign of our lifetimes is set to begin, carrying no promises — merely the very active embrace of expectation that suffuses the action with extra energy and some fans with more of their unique mixture of hope and worry.

The long, slow walk begins. Later.

Ask Sahadev: What would you do with Adam LaRoche's money?"

By Sahadev Sharma / The Athletic | April 3rd, 2016

The Athletic baseball columnist Sahadev Sharma was kind enough to answer some questions from editor Jon Greenberg. And Jon has a lot of important questions.

Hey Sahadev,

It's your boss Jon Greenberg. While I'm busy making a Drake LaRoche shadowbox, I wanted to ask you some White Sox questions. What will you miss most about the erstwhile Sox leader? ... Just kidding, I'm sure he's a cool kid and all, but I don't think anyone outside the clubhouse will miss his father Adam, who was a major disappointment in his one season with the team. Given his spring training back problems, I wasn't too confident in Adam's 2016 season either. What should the Sox do with that \$13 million they owed him? And don't say build another Paul Konerko statue.

SAHADEV SHARMA; There really isn't a viable way to use that money right away, but if they're in contention come July, I'd like to believe the White Sox will be aggressive in adding some payroll via trade. Of course, that means their farm system will have to take a step forward, unless they're willing to part with either Tim Anderson or Carson Fulmer. I could see pitcher Spencer Adams being a guy who steps up and is used to build a trade around. But they'll also need other players to develop. Guys who have that type of potential are third baseman Trey Michalczewski and their big international free agent acquisition from 2013, outfielder Micker Adolfo.

JG: Give me some projected dates when we'll see shortstop Tim Anderson and pitcher Carson Fulmer this season? And give me their projected major league stats while you're at it.

SS: I think Fulmer is up and in the rotation sometime in May. Probably on the road and after they've given Danks and Latos a solid look, I'm gonna go with May 26 in Kansas City. (This was written before the Sox signed former Baltimore pitcher Miguel Gonzalez.) Pitching coach Don Cooper said on a White Sox broadcast earlier this spring that Fulmer's more advanced than Carlos Rodon was at this stage.

That's almost crazy to think about, considering Rodon tossed nearly 140 innings at the big-league level just a year after being drafted by the White Sox. Whether Cooper's assessment is hyperbole or not, if Fulmer is even close to the same level as Rodon development-wise and someone at the back of the rotation isn't getting the job done early, look for the former Vanderbilt star to arrive at 35th and Shields as quickly as Rodon did.

Anderson is a little bit of a different story. He's the exact type of prospect you don't want to rush. He's a tootsy kid who doesn't have the luxury of college experience to help fine-tune those skills. However, he is knocking on the door and if he has a strong first half in the minors, whether Jimmy Rollins is struggling or not, I expect Anderson to be up by the All-Star break. How about right after in Anaheim on July 15.

I'm gonna go about 120 innings for Fulmer with a 3.50 ERA. I could see Anderson with a slash line around .280/.330/.400 while stealing nearly 20 bases in just half a season.

JG: How about a hot White Sox trade that you can take credit for later if it happens?

SS: With the freed-up money, Rockies outfielder Carlos Gonzalez seems like an obvious fit if he stays healthy. But how about something a little more random? Maybe A.J. Preller gets aggressive again if the Padres are out of it. Would a healthy Wil Myers become available at the right price? He'd slot in nicely as a young DH who could also handle first base and the outfield corners if needed. It doesn't make perfect sense because if he's productive and healthy, he'd likely be someone the Padres can build around, but perhaps Preller will look for more controllable youth and start another rebuild in San Diego.

JG: If the Sox have a bad April and May, I'm thinking no major injuries and they're still six games under .500, do you fire Robin Ventura?

SS: In a normal situation, I think so. I doubt it would really be his fault here, but the optics would just be really bad after a poor start following an offseason in which the organization is clearly in win-now mode. With Rick Renteria sitting on the bench, they have an easy candidate to slide right into that manager's role, so it really would make a lot of sense. (Editor's Note: Give me manager Don Cooper or cancel the season.)

Of course, chairman Jerry Reinsdorf's dogged loyalty has to be factored into this situation. That makes it a little less clear that Ventura would really be fired midseason, poor start or not.

JG: Does Chris Sale win, or finish in the top three, of the Cy Young this year? And how do you think Carlos Rodon fares in his second season?

SS: Sale wins the Cy Young and cements himself as the best pitcher in baseball not named Clayton Kershaw. I keep going back to it, but the strikeout and walk rate numbers from last season were historically good for Sale. If he can come even close to matching those, his ERA won't be nearly as high as it was last season with a stronger defense behind him and perhaps a little more luck on his side as well. That all adds up to a dominant summer for the Sox ace.

Rodon has ace potential, it all comes down to consistency with the fastball. Oddly enough, an added crow hop that he used during side sessions may be what brings that consistency for Rodon. CSN Chicago's Dan Hayes shared that Cooper made the suggestion in hopes it would add extension to Rodon's delivery. Rodon has shown he has one of the most devastating sliders in the game and a quickly developing changeup, if the fastball command sticks, the sky could be the limit for the Sox young stud.

JG: Give me five Hawk Harrelson superlatives you think he'll say this season. Like, "Jimmy Rollins moves runners over from first better than anyone I've seen since Tadahito Iguchi."

SS: "Adam Eaton is the heart and soul of this team. I haven't seen this much grit since Tony Graffanino."

(After Francisco Lindor steals another hit from a White Sox batter) "I tell you what Stoney, Lindor might be better than Jose Iglesias. But neither is better than the greatest shortstop I've seen in the past 20 years, Juan Uribe."

(In Boston, after the broadcast shows some of the things David Ortiz has gotten during his farewell tour, Ortiz homers and admires the ball all a little longer than Harrelson appreciates. Hawk is silent for a while, then clearly a little agitated, starts talking again with no specific reference to Ortiz.) "You know who had the classiest farewell tour of all time? Mariano Rivera."

(After Javier Baez hits some screaming line drives against the White Sox.)

Stone: "When he finds a pitch to his liking, he can create the type of bat speed that allows him to hit it as hard as anyone in the game."

Silence

Hawk: "Julio Franco hit the hardest line drives of all time."

(Stone points out that Chris Sale is using his sinker more to be more economical with his pitches and get groundballs.)

Hawk: "Chris already had that Pedro-like demeanor on the mound, now he's made his arsenal as formidable and deep as my former teammate Sam McDowell."

White Sox sign with Coke after 15-year run with Pepsi

By Danny Ecker / Crain's Chicago Business | April 4th, 2016

Chicago White Sox fans will be sipping Coca-Cola products at games beginning this season after 15 years of drinking Pepsi on the South Side.

The team and its official soft drink partner cut ties this off-season, paving the way for the Sox to sign a new multi-year deal with Coke as the beverage brand served at U.S. Cellular Field.

The new deal marks the return of Coca-Cola to the South Side, where it had pouring rights for Sox games from the opening of new Comiskey Park in 1991 until 2000, when the Sox switched to Pepsi.

As a result, brands like Pepsi, Sierra Mist, Mountain Dew and Aquafina water will be replaced by Coke, Sprite and Dasani water at Sox games.

Coca-Cola will also have a mix of signage at U.S. Cellular Field under the deal. Pepsi had the rights to one of the largest ads on the center field scoreboard, though that scoreboard was replaced by a new video board that will make its debut this season.

In that vein, Coke will become the first brand to have "takeover" advertising across all three of the Sox's new outfield video boards at once. It will also sponsor "Snap a Coke," in which fans can post photos that will be shown on the new video boards.

Another piece of the deal is the entitlement to the White Sox's "Family Sundays" promotion the team launched in 2013 with cheaper-than-normal tickets and parking for their home Sunday games. Those will be re-dubbed as "Coca-Cola Family Sundays" under the new partnership.

Financial terms of the Coca-Cola deal were not disclosed, but the term is longer than five years, according to a source familiar with the agreement.

"We definitely feel like the Sox line up well with our consumer base (in Chicago)," said Jeff Laschen, CEO of Great Lakes Coca-Cola, a Rosemont company formed just 10 months that handles distribution and marketing of Coca-Cola in the region. "You take two great brands like the Sox and an iconic brand like Coca-Cola—we're very excited about the partnership."

A new Coca-Cola sign is installed at U.S. Cellular Field. - Facebook.com/Weaver Media

Photo by Facebook.com/Weaver Media A new Coca-Cola sign is installed at U.S. Cellular Field.

That Coke's marketing braintrust was locally-based was a key factor for the Sox in making the jump to Coke, said team Vice President of Sales and Marketing Brooks Boyer. The opposite, he noted, has happened at Pepsi, "whose marketing decisions are being made nationally."

"We had a terrific run with Pepsi, they're really good people. But (their) goals and objectives were going to be different than what they had in the past," said Boyer. "Over time, (Coke) will be more aggressive locally in their sports partnerships, which is what we need—pushing our brand and ballpark experience."

A spokeswoman for Pepsi confirmed the end of the brand's partnership with the White Sox, but did not respond to a request for comment on the matter.

Pepsi's departure from the Cell also comes in the wake of its renewed partnership with the Chicago Cubs, a deal that included naming rights to the Wrigley Field batter's eye section in center field.

For Coke, adding the Sox to its local marketing mix also gives the brand a chance to play the Chicago sports marketing game year-round.

"Coke gets the opportunity to have basically a summer venue in Chicago once things are done at the United Center." said Jim Andrews, senior vice president of Chicago-based sponsorship consulting firm IEG.

Coca-Cola has a joint beverage deal with the Chicago Bulls, Blackhawks and the United Center, while the Chicago Bears ended their long-standing Coke partnership in 2012 in favor of Dr Pepper Snapple Group.