

White Sox attempt to change their identity from a power team to a speed club



4. Chicago White Sox: Have the Chicago White Sox' moves the past few years really paid off at all? Let's think about it for a moment. They got Roberto Alomar in the middle of the season a couple years back and still missed out on postseason action. Despite Frank Thomas missing over half of the season, the White Sox were able to go 83-79 in the dreadful American League Central. Of course, it again resulted in another 162-game campaign and no playoffs. From a statistical standpoint, the White Sox .268 average was two points under the league average, their 4.91 ERA was in the bottom half of the Majors and their 100 errors committed was just marginally better than mediocre fielding. Ozzie Guillen, in year two, is out to fix some of those things.

Ken Williams' decision to deal Carlos Lee to Milwaukee for Scott Podsednik (105K 70SB) is one that raises eyebrows. Lee was a power threat in the middle of that batting order and Podsednik really doesn't offer home-run trots (just 12 in 154 games). What he does bring to the plate is speed, something Chicago could use since the stole only 78 bases in 2004. I guess their thinking is we'll part ways with Lee to get a speedster and make up for that lost power with Jermaine Dye, who belted out 23 dingers and drove in 90 runs with the A's one season ago. Again, Dye struck out 128 times, which is more than Lee in fewer contests.

Another interesting proposition that has been brought up is will they deal for a left-handed hitter before the all-star break? They've got a switch swinger in Carl Everett, 33, though his production has dipped the past couple of year (likely due to age). Juan Uribe, Thomas, Aaron Rowand (.310AVG 24HR 69SB) and 41-homer man Paul Konerko are all right handed guys. How positive is the addition of catcher A.J. Pierzynski? Many question whether or not he is a clubhouse guy and if he'll be able throw out base runners with consistency. Granted, he swung the bat pretty well with the Giants and before that as a member of the Minnesota Twins. Without him they'd be looking at Ben Davis, who has an extremely limited offensive game, behind the plate. Thank goodness for the White Sox sakes they don't have to use Davis except for occasional days off for Davis and as a defensive replacement. **One interesting note about Davis is did you know he broke up a no-hit bid by Curt Schilling years back with San Diego?** We know Podsednik and Uribe are going to get in scoring position, question is can Thomas, Everett, Konerko and Dye be there [healthy] to drive them in?

Let's face facts, the White Sox aren't expected to get much production at all out of Jon Garland (gives up way too many long shots) and Dustin Hermanson, both of whom may be on the downward slide of their careers. Garland has much more upside of the two and may be able to put something together since he's relatively young. A good start by him could spark a nice season for him, if not then uh-oh. Pressure is on a couple of ex-Yankees - Orlando Hernandez and Jose Contreras - to perform when Mark Buehrle (injuries questions to begin the season) cannot. Freddy Garcia has to be the best flame thrower on this team and in this division for Chicago to make the playoffs in my mind. Throws a nice fastball, curve, too, but the relationship with Guillen is his best thing.



Reliever Damaso Marte can be used as a middle relief, man, setup guy, or emergency closer. Marte's slurve is extremely hard to make contact with for lefties or righties. (Jonathan Daniel/Getty Images on si.com)

Scouts are raving about closer Shingo Takatsu. He reminds me a little of the former Mariners closer Kaz Sasaki, who was just as tough to get a piece of as Mariano Rivera (NY Yankees) for about a season and a half. Takatsu, who pitched in 59 games in a relief role, closed 19 of 20 save opportunities. In addition, Takatsu went 6-4 and had an ERA under 2.35. It's hard to tell if Takatsu will be a strikeout closer or not, only time will tell. What we do know is that the man known as "Mr. Zero" threw 26.2 scoreless innings at one point last year. Personally, I question the nucleus of this bunch. Do they want to be a team like the Twins that manufactures runs by virtue of speed, instincts, etc. or one that hits the long ball? Nothing looks overly special, course this is a weak division to put it nicely.

Bottom Line: Don't really know what direction this franchise is going in at this time. It would be huge for them to make a run for the first half of the season by cranking out some homers and getting a nice strikeout-to-walk ratio via starters Garcia, Buehrle, Contreras and Hernandez. Because if they are close come All-Star time then they can maybe go out and get that extra piece. Otherwise, good luck!

**Projected Order: LF Scott Podsednik
CF Aaron Rowand
1B Paul Konerko
RF Jermaine Dye
DH Carl Everett/Frank Thomas (Inj.)
SS Juan Uribe
C A.J. Pierzynski
3B Joe Crede
2B Willie Harris/Tadahito Iguchi**

**Projected Staff: R Freddy Garcia
L Mark Buehrle
R Jose Contreras
R Orlando Hernandez
R Jon Garland/R Dustin Hermanson**

Pick: 4th in AL Central; short on left-handed hitting = fewer than 80 wins