

BASEBALL UNDER GLASS

A.J., Omar will talk good game at different Sox levels

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A.J. Pierzynski a Sox ambassador-turned-broadcaster? Stay tuned. Photo credit [Keith Allison](#).

Love the White Sox appointments of A.J. Pierzynski as team ambassador and Omar Vizquel as Class-A Winston-Salem manager.

As usual, there are more to the stories.

Pierzynski, baseball's top agent-provocateur during his South Side days, is a natural for the glad-handing job. Remember, the Sox had to restock ambassador positions after the deaths in recent years of Minnie Minoso, Billy Pierce and Moose Skowron. A.J. can tell endless versions of his feat as the only man to ever legally "steal" first base, victimizing the Angels in the 2005 American League Championship Series.

Better yet, when Pierzynski is back in the organization, other roles must be considered. Interesting that A.J. endorsed Hawk Harrelson for the broadcaster's wing of the Hall of Fame, and could team with Hawk for one game in the latter's farewell season in 2018.

That's the toe-dip into a logical role. Pierzynski already has acquitted himself well as a Fox Sports baseball analyst. He proved he knew the rule book inside-out as a player – often as good as the umpires. Then he proved he could talk a good game on TV.

Let's do the math. Hawk will fly into his own ambassador's role post-TV. That means Jason Benetti and Steve Stone will be the full-time video announcers. But Stoney will be 71 next year. Announcers in their 70s have been given the privilege in recent years of cutting back their schedules, such as doing home games only. The cagey Stoney already has ensured he'd skip some trips into less-desirable American League road cities.

If Stoney starts easing out, could Pierzynski, an automatic audience lure, take his place on the missed games? It all depends on how much travel Pierzynski, based in the

Orlando area and still with young children, wants to undertake. But A.J. in the Sox booth makes too much sense.

The dugout? That's another story. In the interim while the eventual Sox broadcasters' schedule shakes out, Pierzynski's baseball IQ would be a waste just in celebratory events. He could start counseling players with a course in umpire lobbying. Otherwise, he could teach anything. Sharp-edged in his prime, I think he has mellowed enough to coach at least part-time.

Don't ever rule out A.J. as a manager

I once advocated Pierzynski as a potential manager. Many of his then-Sox teammates rolled their eyes at the prospect. His special personality as a player just did not appear to be good in handling players.

Many pundits in the early 1970s did not think Frank Robinson as the likely first African-American manager. He was perceived as too intense as a player to tolerate others under his charge to live up to that standard. Willie Mays and Ernie Banks were mentioned as the color-line breakers as managers. Neither managed a full day in the big leagues. As a fill-in manager after Whitey Lockman was ejected, first-base coach Banks directed the end of a Cubs extra-inning victory in San Diego in 1973. Meanwhile, Robinson ended up piloting four teams.

Rick Renteria will likely be allowed to see through the Sox rebuilding program as manager. Pierzynski is no threat. But he does have potential to run a team. The thread will be one to watch in coming years, especially if A.J. gets into a coaching role.

One of Renteria's strengths in welcoming the boomlet of top prospects to the Sox is his bi-lingual talents. That's another strength in Vizquel taking over a key stop in the Sox development process, at the high-A level.

To be sure, all-time shortstop Vizquel would be a huge addition to Renteria's big-league staff. He probably could manage in the majors, too. But with the emphasis on prospects amid a revived Latin program under Marco Paddy, the native Venezuelan could have a huge impact right where he'll be in North Carolina.

High-A is where the men are separated from the boys. Those fated to be under the microscope for callup to the Sox will thrive there, as Eloy Jimenez did after his trade from the Cubs, and move on to more challenges at Double-A Birmingham in the pitcher-oriented Southern League. Others will wash out. If players master Birmingham, they might skip Triple-A Charlotte altogether and go directly to G-Rate Field.



Omar Vizquel could be just the right teacher for Latin players at a key time of their development. Photo credit [Barbara Moore](#).

High-A key level for Latin players

Latin players are just adapting to the language and culture, only a couple of years out of their native countries, at Winston-Salem. A potential Hall of Famer like Vizquel commands their respect while understanding their personalities. Something will be terribly wrong if he's not emphasizing defense and fundamentals.

A Sox extra man in 2010-11, Vizquel was an 11-time Gold Glove shortstop. He owns the second-highest career fielding percentage (.985) all-time among shortstops (minimum 1,000 games played) and ranks first in career games played as a shortstop (2,709). He also ranks among the major-league all-time leaders in games played (12th) and at-bats (17th). He has, in English or Spanish, gravitas.

After their flurry of trades for prospects starting late in 2016, the Sox are taking a relative breather. But their off-the-field appointments of Pierzynski and Vizquel are important in their own right.

Somebody has to do the talking and teaching. A.J. and Omar can do both.