



## ***Hype won't peak for Anderson until he actually makes Sox – and avoids letdown***

*By George Castle, CBM Historian  
Posted Tuesday, February 2, 2016*

The hype is already enveloping Tim Anderson.

The top position player prospect in the White Sox organization, shortstop Anderson already is drawing attention because of his singular status.

The Sox are in the same position the Cubs found themselves 10 or 15 years ago with the likes of Corey Patterson and Felix Pie. Without a group of everyday players filtering their way up together or coming in savvy trades from other organizations, the focus is firmly on the one guy who stands out. Sometimes he's unfairly branded a "savior."

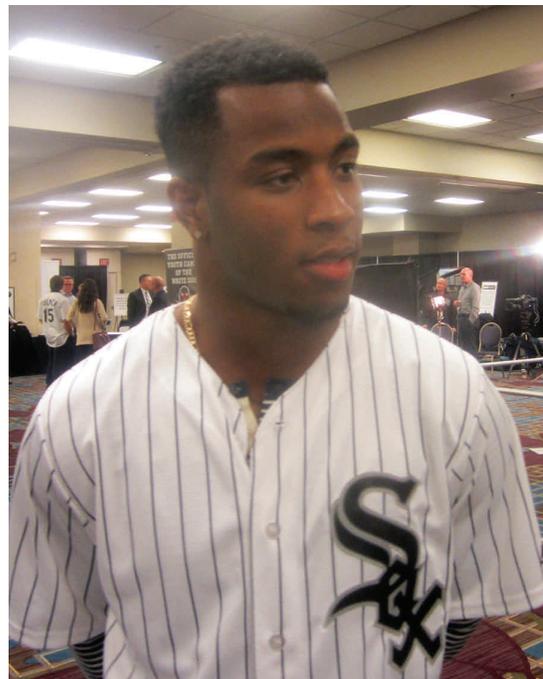
When the Cubs finally got the talent flow moving upward and inward from other teams, a hitter like Kyle Schwarber could develop in relative peace and quiet, and almost surprise the masses when he was promoted to the majors. But there's no sneaking up for Anderson.

"I try not to pay too much attention to that," said Anderson. "Just stay within my lane and don't worry about anything."

Sox general manager Rick Hahn doesn't know if hype is a factor at this point for Anderson. But he's far more sure of what could happen if a young player is called up – and then has to go back down.

"When you have failure in Chicago and that's the first time you've had failure, that could make things more difficult once he's up," Hahn said.

That's why Hahn, manager Robin Ventura and other Sox development and instructional types must calibrate Anderson's promotion – sooner or later – carefully. At some point



**Tim Anderson at SoxFest. The shortstop hopeful is not fazed by mounting hype as the Sox's top position player prospect.**

those position player prospects will have to take the place of free agents and products of trades on which the Sox have concentrated in an effort to contend annually. Grooming your own players not only saves payroll in the short term, but it cuts down surprises in both on-field and character issues.

### **Kids must be prepared when called up**

“Everything becomes an issue when you have a young guy coming up,” said Ventura. “You never want to bring a guy up if you don’t think he’s armed with the capabilities of being able to withstand playing up here in the big leagues on a daily basis. Eventually it gets exposed.

“You don’t want him to lose any momentum he has or confidence to go through it. It’s a failure-based game. You have to have guys with the tools to withstand that.”

Ventura almost possesses the personal caution light for a top prospect breaking in. Early in his rookie season in 1990, he is now famed for going 0-for-41 and 6-for-75. As we know, Ventura possessed the talent and mental toughness to turn it around and salvage a respectable outcome. But many players would get buried by such failure.

Anderson did his best to force himself into consideration at shortstop, where Tyler Saladino and Carlos Sanchez are the early projections to keep the seat warm for him starting off this season. He batted .312 with 49 steals at Double-A Birmingham of the Southern League. Last year was in effect his first full season in the Sox organization after being drafted in the first round out of a Mississippi junior college in 2013 and suffering an injury-shortened season in 2014.



**Tim Anderson made a big leap forward with a big year at Double-A Birmingham.**

“We have had a pretty clear development plan in place for Timmy since he signed,” Hahn said. “We expected him to go year for year at each level because he was somewhat raw in terms of his baseball ability. The fact is the good ones tend to do, he had such success at a young age at the Double-A level, he seems to be pushing the time frame a little more quickly.

“He just has to keep what he’s doing and everything else is going to take care of itself. He knows there’s certain elements in his game he’s going to have to work on and continue to improve, and things are going to become a little more challenging as he gets up the ladder.”

Anderson passed one important test at Birmingham. Pitchers improve as you move further up. The Southern League has had a long tradition as a pitchers’ league.

“Guys are better,” he said. “They’re hitting their spots. They’re more in the strike zone, which is really helpful to a hitter compared to low-A. You never know where (in the low minors) he is going. Guys have a better chance of getting ahead or making contact at a higher level because they’re in the strike zone a lot.”

Ventura said even bigger jumps are ahead at the plate for Anderson.

## **Hard throwers challenging for young hitters**

“It’s just the onslaught of pitchers,” he said. “At no (other) time in the game have there been as many pitches thrown with the velocity there is today. You’re going to the plate with the odds against you to be able to survive. Guys are strikeout pitchers. For a guy to go through it, you have to be equipped with everything to withstand it. The season is so long and enduring, you have to have everything under control to do it.”

Anderson, who said he “loves to hit,” said he works on defense the majority of the time. Shortstops are expected to pick it anyway as the most active defensive infielder. There is defensive excellence at shortstop in Sox annals ranging from Luke Appling to Luis Aparicio to Ozzie Guillen to Alexei Ramirez. The hit-first, field-later types like Alan Bannister and his 40 errors at short for the 1977 South Side Hit Men are anomalies.

“Just control the field, stay focused and never try to get caught napping,” Anderson said of fielding.

He has several role models in the middle infield: Brandon Phillips and Jose Reyes, the latter “kind of similar to my game with speed and contact.”

The lords of baseball should be thankful Anderson is on a diamond and not a basketball court. Basketball was his love going into high school in Tuscaloosa, Ala. He was heading on the same path as so many minority athletes in the millennium, about to leave baseball behind.

“I wasn’t a big baseball guy,” he said. “I was more of a basketball guy. I was kind of in love with basketball.” Basketball injuries put his baseball time on hold earlier in high school.

But he “fell back in love” with baseball as a senior. His one collegiate baseball offer, with East Central Community College, is where he attended.

“I put in work and learned a lot from my coach,” he said.

Anderson can say the same about everyone he’ll encounter in the Sox organization going forward. He’ll have no other choice if he wants to come up – and stay up.