

MLB Winter Meetings

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Chicago White Sox

Manager Will Venable

Press Conference



2025 BASEBALL WINTER MEETINGS ORLANDO

Coverage Presented By

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Q. We've talked to you a couple times in the offseason. But still you've had some time to kind of look back, which maybe you didn't have during the season. What do you take away from 2025 just team-wise and as your first year in managing?

WILL VENABLE: Yeah, you know, team-wise, obviously it starts with the record, and obviously not happy about where we are, wins and losses, but I think certainly happy when we talked at the beginning of the season and talked about the importance of our young core getting in the big leagues and developing, really happy about the progress they've made.

We had a bunch of young guys come up and play well. You see, I think, all the time these young guys come up and struggle. And feel really good about our guys coming up and feeling comfortable and producing right away. So we're looking for those guys to take the next step forward.

But, yeah, I think that's the biggest takeaway, that we set out to kind of move this group forward through the year in a positive way and we're able to do that.

Q. It might be too early to even ask this because you're still assembling the team, but how much better can you be in 2026?

WILL VENABLE: I think significantly better. That's the plan. A lot of that is I'm going to be dependent on our ability to move this young group to the next level and take steps forward, which is something that is really hard to do. Guys come up and you're able to get some success early. The league knows you and you have to adjust to another plan.

So, yeah, we're excited about supporting these guys to do that and certainly going to be kind of important piece of it.

Q. What did you kind of learn about yourself throughout this first year as a manager? Did you kind of identify along the way anything that you just kind of wanted to improve upon going into year two?

WILL VENABLE: Yeah, as far as what I learned, it's like endless, every single day, whether that was with pregame stuff, messaging, talking to you guys, in-game stuff. I think there was a lot of learning every day, there was a lot.

For me, it was about learning our players, learning the organization, figuring out how can I best support them, how can I best challenge them to get the best out of them, and that wasn't just the players, that's the front office, everybody involved, just had a lot of new people to learn. So it was a great experience to try and figure that out and now I'll get a chance to sit back this offseason, kind of recalibrate and figure out a better way to do those things.

Q. How different has this offseason been from last year now that you have that year under your belt?

WILL VENABLE: A lot different. Like, especially because we were hiring so many people early and trying to figure out that process. So a lot of Zoom calls, a lot of phone calls, which was -- I was on the other end of that last offseason leading up to this. So certainly different. Also have like much better relationship with all the players, too. So kind of the check-ins with them and communication with them is a little different also. So much different feel this year.

Q. Me personally, I never knew if you were a tough love guy or straightforward guy with your players or how their communication went. You were always pretty straight with us all the time, but from that perspective, how much did you feel you grew that part of the job? And did you see results at the end of the year when you put instructions and knew ways of them doing things out there? Were you satisfied with results by the end of the year, some of the teaching that you were doing?

WILL VENABLE: Yeah, I think there was progress in that way. And kind of naturally, my approach, I think I'm very relational-based in that I want to build a relationship with you and communicate with you as a person that you know and trust and know that that leads to the opportunity to

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have really direct conversations that aren't going to be as challenging because we have the relationship.

And that's good in theory, but we don't have time for that sometimes during the year. So I had to figure that out and how to be direct, up front, I guess, and certainly as we went through the season and there was opportunity for different guys, that communication style needed to change, and so, yeah, I'm happy with my own personal adjustment through that and knowing that that's something that's never going to stop and with each individual guy we're going to need to continually recalibrate that approach.

And I think in general, yeah, I was happy with when the group was challenged with things, I was happy with how they responded.

Q. Coaching staff is not finalized you talked about going through that process, what were you looking for, what were the goals you wanted as far as adding attributes to your staff and what do you feel positive about now being close to being finalized?

WILL VENABLE: You know, not every coach is perfect and everyone will have their different skill sets. So you can draw up the exact version of a coach you want, but you know you're probably not going to find that person.

So as we were evaluating and kind of the two big areas that each of the guys that we have hired so far have hit, one, their ability to communicate and build relationships with players, I think that's probably the most important thing. You could be the smartest dude in the world, but if you can't build that connection with players and get them to buy into what you're saying, it doesn't really matter. That's a big one.

You look at Zach Bove and Derek Shomon, those guys are very good with connecting with players. And the second piece is just the competency and being able to use information to find adjustments to make with players and be able to execute that. And certainly really excited about our coaches being able to do those things as well.

Q. Chris mentioned that Walker is going to be taking over catching a lot more. Does that necessitate other coaches competencies to help out some of the traditional bench coach responsibilities knowing that Walker is going to be really focused on Kyle and Edgar and those guys?

WILL VENABLE: That might show up in some of our executing some things in-game. Walker was always free to kind of move around and get a player ready or go get on the bullpen phone and he might be busy with the catching

staff and not be able to use that, that kind of stuff, but I think mainly he functions the same.

This guy's got a massive capacity for work. So adding catchers to his plate is not going to take him away from other things. There just might be some logistical things in-game that might look different for him.

Q. You had quite a bit of experience last year working with Kyle and Edgar and then Corey came up. Assuming you have those guys again how do you approach it with having almost two starting catchers and other guys working other stuff during the offseason, trying out other areas?

WILL VENABLE: No other positions, and yeah, similar to this year, towards the end, we'll find spots. Knowing that Kyle and Edgar are probably going to get the bulk of the at-bats there and being creative, looking at, there's a DH spot, the position is so demanding, you're not going to have Kyle Teo catching 140 games. So there's still going to be plenty of opportunity. And once we get to the finish line, the offseason, Spring Training, we'll be able to better answer how it's all going to fit together.

Q. Chris at the GM meetings talked about Benintendi

possibly DH-ing, being more in the field at this point in his career. How does that affect the calculus when it comes to, you played (indiscernible) at catcher and DH plenty in the second half, how would Benintendi DH-ing more play to the capital in that regard?

WILL VENABLE: It's a puzzle we'll have to figure out. That's the case every year. Just trying to make sure that guys are getting the exposure to the game that they need. But the biggest thing is, what's your best lineup that day that can help you win this game? Yeah, we'll take that into consideration every day, knowing that it might not be perfect from one day to the next, but overall, especially because we were able to execute it this past year, we feel confident we can find guys at-bats and figure how to mix that correctly.

Q. Personally, how important is it for you to have, with all due respect, when you have a professional first baseman that knows how to play the position? It seemed, by my casual look at it, that it was lacking in the defensive part many times during the year, how central do you think that is for you this year?

WILL VENABLE: We value defense for all of our players and certainly think they're capable of continuing to improve, and that's something we want to pour into defensively.

There's going to be positions on every team in which there is some turnover and some mixing and matching. That was one of our spots last year, where you saw Vargas over there, Sosa, Elko came up, and yes, we'd like to have somebody that is a mainstay there that is a good offensive player and a good defensive player, but we're going to be able to go run out there who best fits for that night and that could look a lot different ways.

Q. When it comes to continuing to develop players, specifically with Colson, just what's that next step for Colson Montgomery?

WILL VENABLE: I think obviously there's a ton of power at the plate. I think he's going to continue to take steps forward at the plate and continue to control the zone, making contact, I think defensively that was something that was surprising for me that he performed so well defensively, not that I thought he was a poor defender, but he exceeded my expectations, so wanted to push in that area. I think a real opportunity for Colson is to make progress in his base running, couple mistakes out there that I think he wants back, but with as natural an athlete he is and as instinctual a baseball player he is, he should be an excellent baserunner in my opinion. That's another area where I think we can take steps with Colson.

Q. Managers are thinking about the ball/strike challenge system. Do you have any early thoughts on strategizing? Couple of veteran managers said they're not going to let their pitchers challenge because every pitcher thinks everything is a strike. Any early thoughts on strategy for that?

WILL VENABLE: Not to the degree that we're going to put a stamp on our philosophy at all. We do think it's obviously going to be very interesting and think that there will be some guidelines that we'll put into place as we talk and talk to players and talk to players who have used it in the minor leagues and see what we can come up with.

But right now, no, I don't think that there's any real strategy that we're going to implement.

Q. But by end of Spring Training you'll have something?

WILL VENABLE: Yeah, for sure. I think you have to go into it with some kind of strategy and understanding. We're still in kind of that talking about it, collecting information.

Q. How would you describe your relationship with Gus and getting the know you part of last year and now the communication level moving forward?

WILL VENABLE: I would say it's great. I would say it's great. I think during the course of the year, there's communication throughout the day that was very positive. For me, what really stuck out was the postgame communication where those guys come down, whether it's Gets (phonetic), Barfield, Jin Wong. And we have healthy conversations about what happened in the game, where I think we're all learning a little something from our conversations.

And really just gives me confidence that we're going about this the right way, that we're communicating the right way, we're sharing ideas the right way. We're sharing feedback the right way, and really making real progress. So, yeah, I'm really happy with the relationship, where it's at and where it's grown to.

Q. At this point, do you see Miguel Vargas as your first baseman, third baseman or a little bit of both?

WILL VENABLE: I think the versatility is important. Again, as we worked through the offseason we talked with him about being prepared to play both. As we get through the offseason and through Spring Training, we'll have a better idea of how to slot in some of our more versatile defenders. But I think that will come in time.

And I think the great thing is that Miguel's having an outstanding offseason so far. He's in constant communication with their hitting guys, with our SEC group, and has done a nice job this offseason.

Q. How would you characterize your outfield?

WILL VENABLE: With everything still developing early in the offseason here and I know that we have some work to do. Bringing Derek Hill back is great. Obviously signing, picking up Luis' option. We have Benintendi in the mix. Obviously we lost Tauchman for the time being.

But just we have some moves still to be made and look forward to seeing how it all rounds out. But really happy with some of the guys we have.

Q. As it stands with the outfield, if Opening Day were tomorrow, Brooks Baldwin, but as the depth chart fills in, do you see someone who can handle regular outfield duties or a matter of see who comes into the roster and then plug in whatever gaps necessary?

WILL VENABLE: That's a good question. It's a bit of a trap with Brooks because he's so versatile you can say, okay, you can slot him into spots that need help. But I do prefer him in the outfield. I think that he did a nice job especially in center field. Still working on some things in



the corners.

But I think he's somebody that would go in, knowing that he's versatile and keeping his defensive versatility at the forefront, finding him some consistency I think would be important too.

Q. On one hand, last year you developed some younger leaders -- Mike Vasil, Jordan Leasure had a good second half, tile and Grant Taylor, who Chris talked about at the GM meetings -- during multiple innings. You also lost a lot of close games, more close games than you would want. Is that something that you will talk to Chris about getting a set closer, not necessarily saying the top of the line guy, but a veteran guy who has done it, has some experience and let other guys slot in?

WILL VENABLE: I think the idea of a traditional closer is great, if you have the six-, seven-, eight-inning guys also. Leverage aside, you just want to have good players and good pitchers. And so that's certainly something that gets you into groups working extremely hard to get.

I also don't think that the one-run games are just because of the bullpen. Every single phase of the game contributes to those one-run losses. So I think we just look at it holistically as we need to get better in every area and are excited to do it.

Q. Why didn't Luis Robert hit better? And secondly, what are some of the solutions that you can look at as a manager and coaches to help him refine the hit tool?

WILL VENABLE: That's a good question. I know we're all searching for answers to help Luis be at his best. I can tell you he is too. That's probably one of the biggest takeaways for me this year is how committed Luis Robert is to being great and finding that best version of himself. He works extremely hard. He's always in the cage. He's always doing the right thing in the weight room, in the training room.

It's just really about finding the right recipe to keep this guy on the field. That's something we're working extremely hard to figure out. He's a part of that.

So for him to be a great hitter, he needs to be on the field. That's number one. And we know that there's adjustments that every hitter has to make that he's locked into and willing to make also, but it really is about him being on the field.

Q. The bullpen threw a lot of innings last season. They were taxed especially towards the second half of

the season. Just kind of how would you assess the rotation today? Just kind of what's the next steps for guys like Burke and Jonathan Cannon who hit a wall or struggled last season?

WILL VENABLE: We're going to have to have these guys take a step forward. I think you look at our arms, specifically potentially starting rotation, I feel like we have a number of guys who could fill that starting role. But we need guys to take steps forward. We need guys to take advantage of the opportunity and continue to progress and grab some of those spots.

So that's what we're looking forward to is, this winter, this spring, really having an open competition for our starting position, our starting roles and challenging these guys to come take it.

Q. You have some ground ball pitchers on the staff, and maybe adding some one pretty soon. You mentioned Colson and (indiscernible) rated out pretty well. Seems struggles were on the corners where you were mixing stuff up. Do you feel better performance can happen with the guys you have on hand, or is it more looking out for more opportunities, better defense, how do you see the road to improvement?

WILL VENABLE: I think in every way. For right now, the focus is on the guys that we have. And you look at some of our defenders are on the corner and there's specific things from prepitch setup, first step stuff that we think we can continue to get some improvement on from these guys. That's what our focus is going to be. Everything that we can do to help the group we have continue to get better is what we'll do.

Q. There was a ton a turnover in managerial ranks this winter. As someone who just recently went through the process of interviewing, what do you think makes a good managerial candidate in the modern game, in today's game?

WILL VENABLE: Number one, the first thing that sticks out is there's just a lot of different types of people you need to communicate with, where maybe 30 years ago, it just wasn't the case, with the performance and medical groups and R & D presence. There's a lot of bodies and a lot of people you have to communicate with.

I think, really, it's just your messaging to the group and being able to connect with the group. I know some of those guys that got hired this offseason, it's what they do really well is communicate with people.

I think if you can communicate with your players well and

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set up a good environment, you've got a chance.

Q. You said, I think at the end of the season, that throughout the year you were just kind of tried to simplify the message more. How did that apply to this offseason with talking to players, saying what you wanted to them over the winter?

WILL VENABLE: We got more simple. I think that was one of the things I learned, that I thought the messaging was simple. And I think I realized probably midway through the year, that there was another layer of simplicity. And so as we've gone to the offseason identifying things that we want our guys to get better on, we kept it really, really simple. We're going to lean into the simplicity of it all.

Q. Can you give an example or two?

WILL VENABLE: Yeah, for defenders, for example, there's obviously like a long list of attributes and things that you need to be able to do to execute plays. For some of our guys -- for most of our guys, but for some of our guys was pre-pitch setup. Things that we weren't able to get to and make in-season improvements, are things we're talking about this offseason. Where it's not after the ball is hit and your footwork to corral a ground ball, that's not our focus. The focus is the pre-pitch and making sure that's dialed in first before we move on to other things.

Q. You mentioned Jonathan Cannon. Do you see him still as a starter, do you see maybe better suited as a reliever?

WILL VENABLE: Starter, absolutely. We're challenging him to come in, earn a starting job right out of the gate. I think that's how we view him. He knows he's got work to do and we're going to support him in doing those things. But definitely confident that he can be a starting pitcher for us.

Q. Mentioned competition for the starting rotation spots. How much does that factor in some of the prospects you have debuting or come in later in the season?

WILL VENABLE: I think going to Spring Training open minded, knowing we want to get off to a good start, and that the best thing for us to do that is to take the best group with us, but knowing that these guys making an impact can happen later on in the season also.

We're going to be open about the fact that there's opportunity to win a job. But that doesn't mean necessarily you're on the Opening Day roster, but you'll have a chance

to impact us.

Q. Have you talked to Drew Thorpe in the offseason about his recovering process and how he's coming in his timeline?

WILL VENABLE: I don't have an update. I texted him right after the season because he was around a little bit and then wanted to check in with some of the guys that were banged up. I haven't talked to him in the last couple of weeks.

Q. Do you think the roster will be just as volatile as it was last year where you're running a lot of guys in and out quite often again, like you did with the last two years having some of the most transactions of any team in baseball?

WILL VENABLE: Do I think we'll have as many transactions?

Q. Using the minor leagues as much as you guys did, moving guys up and back.

WILL VENABLE: I think part of surviving a Major League season for every team is utilizing your farm system and being open to waiver claims and doing everything that you possibly can to improve your roster. I will say I feel good about the number of guys that we probably are confident we're taking with us out of camp. Some of these young guys they did a nice job establishing themselves last year that were question marks and maybe didn't make our team last year are likely going to be on the team this year. So I think out of the gate in numbers, we'll probably have more certainty in some of our position players at least coming with us.

Q. Do you have an understanding how you'll be impacted Spring Training with the World Baseball Classic? Do you know how many players committed?

WILL VENABLE: We have a couple of guys talking, it's a short list. There's a couple guys talking to guys, but I don't know -- no commitments to this point. So we're not exactly sure how that's going to impact us.

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