

As the MLB postseason edges closer, now would be a good time to reflect on how Chicago baseball has performed this year.

On the Northside, the Cubs started the season with a lot of questions. Would new additions like Cody Bellinger and Dansby Swanson succeed in blue and red? How big of losses are Willson Contreras and Jason Heyward? If the Cubs flounder, is skipper David Ross on the hot seat?

The beginning of the year seemed to display yet another season of growth, as the team lost the opening series and began their 2023 campaign 1-3. But, the team picked it up and hovered around .500 through the middle of May before taking a losing skid and flaunting a 42-47 record at the All-Star break.

After more mediocre games, a switch flipped on July 21 against the Cardinals. The Cubs went on an eight-game winning streak to put them back above .500 and have taken all but one of their last 11 series. As the Oct. 1 regular season ender against the Brewers approaches, they're battling for the top spot in the division and a plethora of contenders for a wild card spot.

At the Aug. 1 trade deadline, the Cubs brought in National treasure Jeimer Candelario, a third baseman from Washington, in what looks to be their best trade of the season. Since the acquisition, Candelario has been on fire, batting .300 in his first 25 games as a Cub, becoming a key contributor to the team's offensive success.

On the bats, Bellinger has revived his excellent hitting, leading the team in batting average, on base percentage and home runs. Nico Hoerner and Ian Happ, who each got extended this year, have also done well on both sides of the ball. And, with the breakout seasons from Christopher Morel and Seiya Suzuki, the team can put up double-digit runs on any given day.

The Cubs have also finally improved their pitching rotation, a problem that always reared its ugly head in big moments. It's been seven years since the World Series rotation of Jake Arrietta, Jon Lester and Kyle Hendricks. While the current

rotation isn't as dominant, the future defensive potential is high with successful pitchers like Marcus Stroman and Justin Steele.

As for the Southside, White Sox success is a much different story. The collapse of the team has been so spectacular, their stadium should be renamed "Guaranteed (second) Rate field."

To start the season, the White Sox set their hopes high, tightened their caps, split their opening day series against the Astros, and then promptly went 7-20 in the month of April.

Coming into the season, their only notable transactions were the loss of first baseman Jose Abreu, and the signing of Royals' bench coach Pedro Grifol to be the new manager, Andrew Benintendi, who has led his team in batting average, on base percentage and hits, and a polarizing Mike Clevenger, who's signing was a disaster from the start.

Clevinger, who was signed by the Sox after a stint with the Padres, has made a name for himself as a good pitcher in the league, holding a career 3.38 ERA. He played well with the team on the field, but his off-field antics were what led to his departure. After beginning his one-year, \$12 million deal, his wife accused him of domestic violence, child abuse, drug addiction and being "a truly evil person".

Their team roster is a resounding "meh". Sure, they have Luis Robert and Tim Anderson on offense, Dylan Cease and Michael Kopech on the mound, but that's pretty much it. The rest of their talent was traded away at the deadline for peanuts. There isn't too much going for them, and Sox fans should be concerned for the team's unpromising future.

Their season can be defined by the Tim Anderson fight with Guardian Jose Ramirez; they talked a lot of trash, made expectations high and then got dropped on their butts. No wonder chairman Jerry Reinsdorf fired 11 season veterans general manager Rick Hahn and executive vice president Ken Williams on Aug. 22. All the while, the whispers for Reinsdorf to sell the team have become a

deafening roar. It doesn't help that Reinsdorf hired Chris Getz to fill both vacant roles, the team's head of player development from one of the worst farm systems in the league.

The Cubs have won the battle for Chicago baseball this year, an honor subject to change every season. Cubs fans have a lot to look forward to, with more white "W" flags flying in the future. However, sound the alarm for the White Sox; they may be in baseball purgatory sooner than they think.