LOMBARDI LINEUP:

Breaking down the White Sox historic collapse

by Ryan Lombardi
CAMPUS CORRESPONDENT
HE/HIM/HIS
ryan.lombardi@uconn.edu

The Chicao White Sox were the biggest surprise of the MLB this season, going from setting the record for most regular season losses in 2024 to becoming an 84-win playoff team in just two years.

However, things were trending down for Chicago starting in September, entering the postseason after squandering the AL Central division title to the Cleveland Guardians after a late slump cost them a first-round bye.

It seemed like the White Sox put their struggles behind them after convincingly sweeping the Houston Astros in the Wild Card round. That set them up with a chance for revenge against the very team that stole the division from them, an ALDS matchup with the Cleveland Guardians.

Chicago made a statement to begin the series, shutting out Cleveland with five pitchers allowing just three hits. First baseman Munetaka Murakami blasted a two-run home run for the lead, which was all the bullpen needed to lock down a game one victory.

The White Sox found themselves down early in game two, after a bases loaded throwing error allowed Cleveland to plate two in the first inning. Despite a dominant 11 strikeout outing from Gavin Williams, Chicago broke through against the Guardians bullpen. A sixth inning two-run double from rookie outfielder Braden Montgomery put the White Sox up front. Once again, the pitching staff held off the opposing hitters to secure a 2-0 series lead.

Just one win away from a trip to the American League Championship Series, and returning home to Chicago, hopes were high for White Sox fans. Their bullpen silenced Cleveland's bats, especially due to the work from Grant Taylor and Sean Burke, who came in after an opener in game two.

The White Sox took an early 1-0 lead in game three, but things began to collapse from there. The Guardians drove in four runs in the third inning off a bases loaded triple by Jo Adell. The Chicago offense seemed to fall asleep setting a record for most strikeouts in a nine-inning postseason game with 19. Cleveland took game three in dominant fashion, 9-3.

It was a similar story in game four, as the White Sox struck first with two runs in the third inning. The Guardians responded with two fifth inning home runs by Patrick Bailey and José Ramírez, going ahead 3-2. This time, however, the Chicago offense put up a fight, plating two of their own in the bottom of the frame. Then came a sixth inning meltdown by the pitching staff, allowing six runs off five hits and two walks, putting Cleveland in firm control. The White Sox offense had no answer, besides a ninth-inning solo shot from Miguel Vargas. Suddenly, the series was knotted up at 2-2, setting up a winner-takes-all game five.

With their season on the line, game five was the nail in the coffin for the White Sox offense. The pitching staff did its best to hold off opposing hitters, but Ramírez continued his impressive series with a go ahead two-run home run in the fourth. That was all the Guardians needed, as Chicago went three for 30 at the plate with 21 strikeouts, breaking the record they had just set three days earlier. A 2-0 Cleveland victory sealed the series, as the White Sox fell short of the Guardians for the second time this season.

White Sox hitters struck out 75 times over five games, shattering the previous division series record. They became the fourth team in major league history to lose a best-of-five series after going up 2-0, ironically the last time being Cleveland in 2017.

Despite ending on such a sour note, the White Sox still have plenty to be excited for. After improving 24 wins since last season, and building a talented young core, they will hope to build off their regular season success. Meanwhile, the Guardians will take on the Tampa Bay Rays with a trip to the World Series on the line.



The Chicago White Sox's season comes to an end on Oct. 10. The White Sox lost to the Cleveland Guardians.
PHOTO COURTESY OF CHICAGO WHITE SOX ON FACEBOOK



The Chicago White Sox at Rate Field. The White Sox's season came to an end after a loss against the Cleveland Guardians.
PHOTO COURTESY OF CHICAGO WHITE SOX ON FACEBOOK

IS THE CHASE THE RIGHT FORMAT FOR NASCAR?



Denny Hamlin's team changing tires and refueling his car during the Bank of America 400 at the Charlotte Motor Speedway. Hamlin's performance has gone downhill after his initial Chase races.
PHOTO COURTESY OF DENNY HAMLIN ON FACEBOOK



Kyle Larson racing in the Bank of America 400 at the Charlotte Motor Speedway. Larson has had great finishes in NASCAR's Chase
PHOTO COURTESY OF KYLE LARSON ON FACEBOOK

by Alex Klancko
CAMPUS CORRESPONDENT
HE/HIM/HIS
lvb24001@uconn.edu

The first year of the "new" Chase is almost at its end with four races left in the 2026 season. So, how has it been so far and what are the standings looking like?

Starting with the Cup Series, Kyle Larson leads the standings by 49 points to Denny Hamlin and 51 points to Christopher Bell. Behind Bell is Chase Briscoe, who is 65 points back, and Ryan Blaney, who is 85 points behind first.

Then there is Joey Logano at -92, Tyler Reddick at -114, Austin Cindric at -145, Ty Gibbs at -156 and Carson Hocevar at -180.

The final six drivers in the Cup Chase are Bubba Wallace, Chase Elliott, William Byron, Daniel Suarez, Chris Buescher and Ryan Preece.

Overall, the Cup Chase has had a lot in store. Some of the favorites have shined while others have fallen further and further back.

Hamlin hasn't been nearly as good as he was earlier in the season. Six races ago he looked great, top of the standings, 25 points clear of Ryan Blaney in second and the clear best driver in the series. But since then, he's gone downhill.

He finished 18th at Darlington, ninth at Gateway, eighth at Bristol, third at Kansas, 16th at Las Vegas and now fifth at Charlotte; Hamlin hasn't looked particularly good in any of those races. And top 10 finishes don't cut it in the Chase.

On the other end, Larson has come alive in the Chase. After starting the Chase in seventh, Larson has worked his way up to the lead with great finish after great finish. Fifth in Darlington, first at Gateway, second at Bristol, first in Kansas, second at Las Vegas and sixth at Charlotte.

Another driver who has made major moves up the standings is Cindric. Cindric started in 15th place and now sits in eighth after some wonderful performances. Cindric would need an insane amount of luck to win the title, but he has been elite in these first six races. He finished 13th, 10th, 11th and 17th at Darlington, Gateway, Bristol and Charlotte respectively, but a second-place finish at Kansas and a fourth-place finish at Las Vegas has proven to be the difference for Cindric to move up the standings.

Meanwhile, Gibbs has fallen a ton since the start of the Chase. Gibbs started in fourth and looked like a legit contender entering the final 10 races. But after some middle of the pack finishes, the 24-year-old has fallen back to ninth. He started the Chase off well, finishing second at Darlington, but beyond that, four finishes below 15th including a 34th place finish at Charlotte that saw him get only three points. The Chase hasn't been kind to him, but he still has speed, he just needs to find it.

Then there is Chase Briscoe, who has been on a tear these past two races. Briscoe started the Chase in fifth and is only in fourth now but with four to go he looks like the driver to beat. After poor finishes at Gateway and Bristol, Briscoe has opened the door with three straight top fives including wins at Las Vegas and Charlotte. Briscoe now sits only 65 points back from the championship lead and with how he has raced, it is very possible that we could see an upset.

But has the Chase been good? Has it been bad? Well, it looks to be a poor decision by NASCAR, especially when the fans want the sport to go back to a full-season points format.

And unlike the Chase, if NASCAR had a full season points format, Denny Hamlin would still be leading the standings by quite a large margin. The same goes for the O'Reilly and Truck Series. Both Justin Allgaier, who sits fourth in the O'Reilly Series, and Layne Riggs, who sits second in the Truck Series, would be dominating their respective championships.

And NASCAR's "Playoff" gimmick only makes things worse when you look at the previous format. Motorsports is not about just a one or 10 race stretch. Motorsports is about the grueling and long-winded seasons that makes it so every race matters. In the current format, that isn't the case for NASCAR.

You can win the first 26 races of the season, and in the Chase, if you falter just a little bit, you won't win the title. The same went for the "playoffs." If you won the first 35 races of the season, but you finished below another final four driver, you didn't win the title.

So, NASCAR should just bring back a full-season points format. The fans want it, the drivers want it, the teams want it, everyone wants it. Everyone, apparently, except for NASCAR.