



CHICAGO CUBS DAILY CLIPS

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April 15, 2018

- ESPNChicago.com, **How the Cubs and Braves combined for best terrible inning ever**
http://www.espn.com/blog/chicago/cubs/post/_id/46631/how-the-cubs-and-braves-combined-for-best-terrible-inning-ever
- ESPNChicago.com, **We know it's early, but let's dig into these inconsistent Cubs**
http://www.espn.com/blog/chicago/cubs/post/_id/46621/we-know-its-early-but-lets-dig-into-these-inconsistent-cubs
- NBC Sports Chicago, **With miserable weather and a bonkers comeback, this was the craziest game these Cubs have ever played**
<http://www.nbcsports.com/chicago/cubs/miserable-weather-and-bonkers-comeback-was-craziest-game-these-cubs-have-ever-played>
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<http://www.nbcsports.com/chicago/cubs/unbelievable-cubs-erase-eight-run-deficit-insane-nine-run-eighth-inning>
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ESPNChicago.com

How the Cubs and Braves combined for best terrible inning ever

By Bradford Doolittle

CHICAGO -- This is why you don't leave a baseball game early. Never. There is no clock. Hope is a vampire in this sport. It cannot die.

Not even in a mid-April blowout game at Wrigley Field on a mist-filled afternoon with wind chills dipping into the upper 20s. Not even when the home team has less than a one-in-a-hundred chance of winning. And especially not when the visitors show little inclination toward finishing a sure victory.

You don't leave early because you don't know if you will miss the best terrible inning in recent baseball history.

By the time the bottom of the eighth between the Chicago Cubs and Atlanta Braves rolled around Saturday, the crowd at the Friendly Confines had thinned considerably. The attendance was announced at 36,788, but a fraction remained near their dark-green stadium seats. Yes, near the seats, not in them. For many, the incessant blowing mist meant that the seats were too wet to actually sit in. The wind-chill temperature had dropped to 28 degrees by the middle of the game.

"I thought the 2008 World Series game [with Tampa Bay] was the worst weather game I ever participated in," Cubs manager Joe Maddon said. "I think it just got surpassed. That's not baseball weather. I don't know what the intent is. I really don't. The elements were horrific to play baseball. It's not conducive."

It was Bears weather. That's an old saw that suggests a cold baseball game is played in football conditions. It fits this one, though, and not just because of the eventual gridiron-like, 14-10 final score in the Cubs' favor. Bears coach Matt Nagy, who once played arena ball for Atlanta's team (the Georgia Force), threw out the first pitch.

Atlanta had a 10-5 lead. The Braves had at previously led 9-1 and then 10-2, so the Cubs had actually gotten closer. But according to the play logs at FanGraphs, Chicago still had just a 2.3 percent chance of winning when its half of the eighth began.

"We've been there before," Maddon said. "We've taken advantage of wild pitchers, wild pitches, passed balls."

No one would have blamed the Cubs for folding. It was miserable out there. Truly. They were five runs down. The game was already about three hours old. The Atlanta bullpen entered the game having surrendered only seven runs all season. A few quick at-bats and everyone would have gone home and forgotten about it.

Then, to start the eighth inning, Braves reliever Luke Jackson hit Jason Heyward with a pitch.

The Cubs had lost three of their first four home games of the season, with their pitching staff often serving as punching bags for the hot offenses from Pittsburgh and Atlanta. Chicago had dropped to 6-7 on the season.

When the game began, with the wind blowing in, everybody wondered how those hardy fans out there could possibly sit through the whole thing.

"Craziest weather [I've played in]," said Cubs second baseman Javier Baez, who made an error in the game. "The weather really got to me today. No excuses on my error."

A quick game seemed likely because, after all, who could hit in those conditions?

Well, Ozzie Albies could, for one. If you haven't seen Albies yet during his brief big league career, make a note to do so. In two days against the Cubs, he has already shown there isn't much he can't do on a baseball field. And everything he does, he does with panache.

"The Braves are swinging the bat as well as you possibly can," Maddon said. "I don't care if the weather is 80 or balmy or whatever it was today. They have been really impressive."

Albies homered to start the game on a looping drive toward the left-field foul pole that didn't look like it could have possibly stayed fair. But it did, and Cubs starter Jose Quintana found himself in an early hole he never dug out of.

Albies added two more hits on the day and drove in four runs as Atlanta built its big lead, one that saw their win probability climb better than 99 percent at several points during the contest. He became the youngest visiting player with a three-hit, four-RBI game at Wrigley since a rookie from the Braves did it Aug. 22, 2010.

That rookie was Heyward, now a Cub, who was taking a lead off of first base when Kyle Schwarber struck out for the first out in the eighth. But Heyward moved to second when pinch hitter Tommy La Stella looped a single to left.

Cubs win probability: 4.0 percent.

You just don't leave a game early. Things can turn on a dime. You look at win-probability charts and you know the odds are against it. But when it happens, you'll have a memory for life. Or, if it happens to you and not for you, it's an unwelcome trauma. That's the life of a baseball fan.

Jackson left the game early, or at least earlier than he would have liked. After La Stella singled off him, Braves manager Brian Snitker pulled Jackson and put in Jose Ramirez, a hard-throwing righty who has been up and down in the early going.

Right from the start, he looked down. The wind had kicked up even stronger. The mist was a little thicker, blowing directly toward home plate and coating the press box windows. In the broadcast booth, frozen Cubs broadcaster Jim Deshaies looked like a guy who could use a warm bath. Meanwhile, Ramirez seemed to have no idea where his pitches were going.

"We were making mistakes in the infield," Maddon said. "They were making mistakes on the infield. And these are really good teams. I think to a certain extent their wildness was attributed to the horrible weather. Whatever. We're going to do what we're asked or told to do. But I'm just here to tell you, those were the worst elements I've ever participated in in a baseball game. Ever."

In the clubhouse, Cubs reliever Eddie Butler was in the training room. He was getting a rubdown after putting up 3 $\frac{2}{3}$ key innings of relief, picking up Quintana, who was knocked out in the early innings. By the end of Butler's outing, he had given up trying to be precise with his pitches. In those conditions, it just wasn't possible.

"At the end of the outing, I ended up telling [catcher] Willson Contreras], 'You know what? Just sit down the middle,'" Butler said. "You kind of had an idea where the ball was going to go, but you had no real pinpoint control."

Ramirez would certainly agree. After striking out Efen Navarro, he hit Kris Bryant with a pitch to load the bases. There were two out, though, and still the Cubs had not dented the Atlanta lead.

Back there in the training room, Butler's rubdown continued. It would last for a long time. Why? Baseball superstition. A rally had started.

"The training staff was like, 'Everybody keep doing what you're doing,'" Butler said. "Do exactly what you're doing. I was getting the same thing stretched out for 20 minutes. I was like, 'I'm super loose now!'"

Watching Ramirez fight his command was like watching a spider in a toilet bowl trying to swim its way to safety. It was painful. But he got Contreras to hit a little nubber out in front of the plate. That didn't do it, with Atlanta's luck at that point being what it was. The ball went just far enough to allow the Cubs' athletic catcher to beat the throw to first. A run was in.

The bases were still loaded, but there were still two out. Now, though, the lead run was coming to the plate. The Cubs' win probability more than doubled. It was 7.6 percent.

"How about our guys?" Maddon marveled. "Easy to pack that game in."

As miserable as this week has been for the Cubs during their first homestand, it's been exhilarating for Baez. In the first four games at Wrigley, he homered four times -- going deep twice in back-to-back games against Pittsburgh -- and put up six RBIs and five runs.

Given Ramirez's wildness, you might not want the swing-from-your-inner-soul Baez up there. But with the bases loaded, and with Baez's flair for the dramatic, who else would you want?

"I just wanted to hit the ball on the barrel," Baez said. "I've faced him before, and he throws the ball hard. I mean, back to the weather. [I was] trying not to get jammed and feel my hand get numb."

Baez battled Ramirez to a full count and stayed alive on one of his customary big swings after which he nearly lost his balance. Then he lined a 107 mph double into left-center that skipped over the wet grass all the way to the wall. The bases cleared. The game was tied.

"We don't really give up, ever," Baez said. "The energy in the dugout was pretty pumped. [Anthony Rizzo] was joking around and stuff. I took good ABs even going 0-for-4. But we didn't give up."

The Cubs' win probability at that point was 58.1 percent.

"How about Javy again?" Maddon said. "Javy might have been 0-for-4 to that point, but all of a sudden, it mattered, and here comes an absolute lean drive to the gap, perfectly placed to score everybody."

Given the extreme weather, you don't want to be too hard on the Braves or Ramirez, Jackson, Snitker, Hulk Hogan or anybody else associated with the city of Atlanta. Still, there were two teams dealing with the same stuff. One of them was able to fight through it. One was not.

"That was the craziest," Bryant said. "It's freezing cold, what was it 10-2? I think we scored all nine runs with two outs. Give credit to the fans for sticking that one out with us. It was one of the craziest wins that I've been a part of."

It felt like there wasn't any doubt about what would happen after the Cubs tied the game. Addison Russell was walked intentionally, and Snitker went to lefty Sam Freeman in a last-ditch effort to keep the game tied. It wasn't to be. Freeman had no idea where the ball was going, either.

The inning got worse and worse until it finally came together with the sort of illogical unity you might find in a Van Gogh masterpiece. Freeman walked Heyward, who reached base twice in the inning without putting the ball in play. Schwarber walked, putting the Cubs in the lead and putting their win probability at 87.5 percent. La Stella walked in another run. Win probability: 94.2 percent.

Snitker was back out to the mound again, this time summoning Peter Moylan. But the veteran had no better luck and, certainly, no help behind him.

This is where the inning reached tragicomedy brilliance. Moylan uncorked a pitch that can only be described as "wide right," and while the ball was bounding off the brick behind home plate, Heyward scored. However, La Stella was caught off second in what should have become a rundown. But catcher Kurt Suzuki threw it away, and Schwarber scored. La Stella almost did, too, when a throw home skipped away.

And that's how we arrived at our football score: 14-10. Win probability for the Cubs was then 98.7 percent.

Finally, Navarro struck out to end the most beautiful ugly inning you'll ever see, or at least one of the most memorable. The Cubs had scored nine runs, all with two out, on three hits. The Braves threw 55 pitches in the inning.

The ninth was mercifully quick. After Brandon Morrow got Suzuki for the final out, 3 hours and 43 minutes after first pitch, the probability ticker finally reached 100 percent.

Maybe Maddon was right. Maybe they shouldn't have played. But when you do, anything can happen. Afterward, there was a smattering of cold, wet Cubs fans, fresh off singing an unexpected round of "Go, Cubs, Go!" who wandered out into the early evening of Wrigleyville. They were the ones who stuck out it and now will never forget.

They are the ones who will also tell you: You don't leave early.

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ESPNChicago.com

We know it's early, but let's dig into these inconsistent Cubs

By Jesse Rogers

CHICAGO -- It happens every April.

Is what you're seeing on the baseball diamond indicative of what's to come for the entire season, or will it be erased -- good or bad -- by the next five months? New York Mets fans are hoping the first month sets up the rest of the year, while the Chicago Cubs are just hoping to escape April without trailing by too many games.

Some slow starts are more understandable than others. A year ago at this time, no one blinked when the Cubs basically went through the first month a .500 team, finishing at 13-11. In fact, it was viewed as a success, considering the team was coming off its historic World Series victory and essentially used April as another month of spring training.

This year? The slow start makes a bit less sense.

At 7-7, they take the field Sunday against the Atlanta Braves trying to win their second series of the season. Considering the Cubs had about as "smooth" a spring camp as one could imagine -- while stressing that the hunger for a championship had returned, and speaking loudly about getting off to a fast start -- the play on the field hasn't exactly followed the game plan.

Then again, they just came back from an eight-run deficit Saturday, in the worst possible weather conditions, so it's not as though the Cubs are rolling over and playing dead.

Good teams -- even World Series contenders -- get off to uneven starts all the time, particularly those who know they're good. But sometimes those bad beginnings continue, and if the Cubs finish any worse than two games over .500 in April, it'll be their worst start since Joe Maddon took over in 2015. Again, it's particularly noteworthy because this team was convinced it was ready for 2018 after the hangover of '17. So it's in that vein we play the "I know it's early, but" game. What has meaning, if anything? Let's take a look.

I know it's early, but the Cubs are showing the same propensity they did last season: to score a lot of runs in a given game and then shut it down for a day or two.

After plating 10 in a game in Miami, they were shut out the next two nights. After scoring 13 against Pittsburgh on Wednesday, they scored a total of one over the next two games. What will Sunday bring after their dramatic, 14-run victory over the Braves on Saturday? It was a weirdly consistent trend last year, and it has continued into this one. It didn't happen all the time, but enough that even Maddon recognized it.

"We have to do better clumping runs together," he said earlier this week. "We will."

I know it's early, but the overall offensive struggles -- and successes -- of last season have continued.

While the Cubs have tons of firepower, they once again haven't showed the ability to drive in runs at the most opportune times. They changed hitting coaches in hopes of getting better in just these situations; so far, not much has improved.

Going into the weekend, the Cubs were driving in runners from third with fewer than two out 23 percent of the time, by far the worst in baseball. Last season, they improved a little down the stretch in this category, finishing out of the cellar by a couple of percentage points. And with a man on second and no outs this season, they're not much better, tied for 25th at getting him over to third -- successful just 38 percent of the time.

It's mind-boggling a team that can rake as much as the Cubs can't hit a fly ball when needed. According to Statcast research, the Cubs average an exit velocity of 77.9 mph on balls hit with a man on third and fewer than two out, last in baseball. Overall, they rank in the middle velocity-wise, at 88.3 mph. Stick a man on third and Chicago's bats go soft.

But as they demonstrated Saturday, the Cubs will still take their walks and, of course, hit their home runs. And what they lack when men are on third base with fewer than two out, they make up for when there are two out in an inning. For example, they rank third in on-base percentage with runners on and two out.

I know it's early, but once again the Cubs have leadoff issues. They rank in the bottom third in on-base percentage from the No. 1 spot in the order and are second in baseball (first in the National League) in strikeouts from their leadoff men. That's about the same as last season, when they ranked 18th in OBP and third in the NL in strikeouts.

The Cubs knew they weren't replacing Dexter Fowler but were hoping for a little more this season after Kyle Schwarber failed in that role. They haven't gotten the improvement so far.

I know it's early, but Yu Darvish is showing some of the bad attributes that arrived with his résumé. Seemingly, if things are not going perfectly for him, he can't overcome the adversity. Some slight humidity in Miami in his Cubs debut apparently helped lead to a short outing there. In his home debut Friday, it was a questionable call that admittedly threw his game off. He couldn't overcome a simple balk, which sent a man from second to third base in a scoreless game. That's bad.

"The first four innings up until [Freddie] Freeman, that was great," Darvish said through an interpreter after the game. "But after the balk, I was thrown off guard. It went downhill from there."

Maddon added: "Obviously, everything went south after the balk. ... It seemed to create a little bit of awkwardness, because he was doing really well to that point. Really well."

Darvish couldn't get out of the inning, eventually walking the pitcher for a miserable finish to his outing. Darvish's stuff is so good, he'll bounce back with many great outings. But are those enough to offset the ones that go off the rails over so little? Keeping a critical eye on the right-hander would be prudent.

I know it's early, but we can point to a few other carry-over trends from 2017, including periodic meltdowns by reliever Justin Wilson to Maddon's reluctance -- until Saturday -- to move Javier Baez up in the lineup.

Of course, not everything is the same. The Cubs are playing without Anthony Rizzo because of a back injury, and Schwarber has looked better. According to ESPN Stats & Information research, Schwarber has three opposite-field, ground-ball base hits already after compiling four all of last season. That can only help.

I know it's early, but it feels like some of the teams that were rebuilding are starting to "ascend," as Maddon said last week. As such, the Cubs know they can't take anyone lightly anymore, if they ever did. Now they just have to go out and prove they aren't doing so -- and break the trends that hurt them in 2017 while strengthening the ones that helped.

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NBC Sports Chicago

With miserable weather and a bonkers comeback, this was the craziest game these Cubs have ever played
By Vinnie Duber

Was this the craziest game you've ever been a part of?

"The craziest, absolutely."

Kris Bryant didn't even need to go through his memory banks to find comparisons. Saturday's insane comeback win over the visiting Atlanta Braves had no comparison.

Denizens of the press box, the few fans who waited through three-plus hours of miserable weather conditions and the players getting dressed in the clubhouse all said the same thing: That was the craziest game I've ever seen.

Baseball's got a long history and a lengthy list of wild finishes, but there's no doubt that Saturday's 14-10 final will forever be lodged in the memories of those who watched, witnessed and participated in it.

And all because it started as such a game to forget.

In Joe Maddon's opinion, it was a game that never should have been played, and it's hard to argue with that assessment considering the conditions at Wrigley Field. It was freezing cold, with an announced wind chill of 25 degrees in the fourth inning. Rain fell the entire game, moving sideways through the stadium in a never-ending mist. And the wind was howling at such a speed that the standings flags and flags honoring the Cubs' retired jersey numbers never even went up. It wouldn't have been at all surprising to see the American flag fly off the flagpole above the center field scoreboard.

"I thought the 2008 World Series game was the worst-weather game I ever participated in. I think it just got surpassed," Maddon said. "That's not baseball weather. I don't know what the intent is, I really don't. The elements were horrific to play baseball, it's not conducive.

"We made mistakes on the infield, they made mistakes on the infield, in the outfield based on weather-related issues. Because these are really good players. Even to a certain extent their wildness toward the end of the game was contributed to by the horrible weather.

"We're going to do what we're asked or told to do. But I'm here to tell you, that was the worst elements I've ever participated in in a baseball game ever. And I've been in some pretty bad stuff."

That "wildness," of course, ended up defining the game. The Braves' bullpen, which entered Saturday with the best relief ERA in baseball, blew up in the eighth inning, allowing the Cubs to score nine runs — all with two outs — and engineer an unbelievable comeback in jaw-dropping fashion.

Here's the play-by-play of that bottom of the eighth: hit batter, strikeout, single, strikeout, hit batter, infield single, walk, double, intentional walk, walk, walk, walk, wild pitch, throwing error, strikeout.

Described in more detail, it featured three bases-loaded walks, a seared bases-clearing game-tying double off the bat of Javy Baez, a wild pitch that brought home a runner from third and another when the Braves' catcher threw the ball into center field. It was absolute baseball madness.

It all added up to nine runs, which turned a 10-5 deficit — which was as big as 10-2 earlier in the game — into a 14-10 lead for the Cubs, who walked away with an absolutely incredible win.

The team on the other side of town has turned its tendency not to quit into a mantra. But these guys on the North Side don't give up easily, either. And they praised the positive attitude in the dugout, with the bench keeping everybody lively. Anthony Rizzo, most likely itching to come off the disabled list, was supposedly acting as cheerleader/team dad, pumping up his teammates and bringing in supplies to keep them warm.

"Everybody played a part in this win, and that's kind of what we're all about this year," Bryant said, "the guys that aren't in the game, Rizz on the disabled list helping us out, bringing us coats and warm water bottles and doing all he can. Everybody, from our trainers to the clubhouse guys, everybody had a part in this win today, and that's what makes it more special."

"It's not a good feeling when you're down that much, especially in that weather," Kyle Schwarber said. "It was a great sign of resilience. I would say that we all had really great attitudes throughout the whole game there. Our bench guys were cheering everyone on, getting everyone going. Once everything started going, we just kept rolling."

"We don't really give up never. The energy in the dugout was pretty pumped, with Rizz joking around and stuff," Baez said. "We didn't give up."

And so, yeah, this is one to remember. But will it be a turning point?

That's hard to say. As much as fans — many of whom were in a foul mood over the game's first seven innings and were letting the Twitterverse know it — might want it to cure all the ills that have plagued these Cubs through the season's first two weeks, Maddon cautioned that it's still too early in the season.

“It can be impactful, but you have to wait till tomorrow or the next day to find that out,” Maddon said. “These are professionals, you don’t know the kind of impact it’s going to have. I do know that the guys are definitely going to go home feeling better about themselves. But I don’t get carried away yet about things like this, I really don’t.”

“It’s just another win in the win column,” Bryant said. “Obviously, there’s a lot more camaraderie and guys having a lot of fun, especially after a win like that, it’s impossible not to have fun. We’ll enjoy it for tonight, and then come out here and it’ll be nice and cold and rainy out here tomorrow.”

They have a point. The Cubs were hardly at their best Saturday, even in pulling off such an epic comeback. They were out-hit 15-10, got only three hits in their nine-run inning and glaringly got only one run out of a bases-loaded, nobody-out situation in the sixth inning. There were errors in the field — though, as Maddon suggested, perhaps those were weather-related — and Jose Quintana made it another short outing for a Cubs starting pitcher, giving up seven runs in fewer than three innings and putting the Cubs in such a hole to begin with.

The issues remain. One comeback win won’t solve them all. But at the same time, there’s something to be said about something so improbable happening giving a group of players the idea that they can do anything. Maybe it is the start of something special. Like Maddon said, it’s impossible to know until tomorrow.

And while this game is sure to be remembered for a very long time, it will only be celebrated until tomorrow. Maybe even shorter than that.

“Thirty minutes,” Maddon said, “and it’ll be over.”

Some celebration for the craziest game these Cubs have ever played.

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NBC Sports Chicago

Unbelievable: Cubs erase eight-run deficit with an insane, nine-run eighth inning
By Vinnie Duber

What started as a game to forget became the ultimate game to remember.

The Cubs trailed the visiting Atlanta Braves by eight runs on two separate occasions during Saturday’s freezing-cold, rain-soaked afternoon contest, once 9-1 and then 10-2. But thanks to a crazy, nine-run bottom of the eighth, they erased that gap and then some.

With the score at 10-5 entering the bottom of the eighth, two hit batters and a base hit loaded the bases with two outs before Willson Contreras tapped a ball that beat out for a run-scoring infield single. The Ben Zobrist took a bases-loaded walk to bring in another run.

Then came Javy Baez with the biggest blow, a bases-clearing double that he smoked to the left-center field wall to tie the game at 10.

Three batters later — as the Braves’ bullpen was unable to find the strike zone to a jaw-dropping degree — Kyle Schwarber drew a bases-loaded walk to give the Cubs the lead. Tommy La Stella followed with his own bases-chucked free pass to make it 12-10. And the madness was taken to the ultimate level with a wild pitch/throwing error combo that brought home two more runs.

In the end, the Cubs scored nine runs in the eighth on three hits, five walks and two hit batters, plus a wild pitch and an error.

Baez has been at the center of everything on this homestand. He had two two-homer games against the Pittsburgh Pirates and scored a go-ahead run after reaching base on a dropped third strike. Plus, he was the subject of a “respect the game” controversy. But he delivered perhaps his biggest moment yet Saturday.

The struggling Cubs’ offense isn’t out of the woods yet — again, there were only three hits in that nine-run inning — and Jose Quintana had a rough day on the mound. But this kind of win is just the kind that can jump start a team in need.

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NBC Sports Chicago

Anthony Rizzo on track to return to Cubs soon, but Joe Maddon wants everyone to recognize the fill-in job Victor Caratini has done

By Vinnie Duber

Anthony Rizzo will be back in the Cubs’ lineup soon, and they could use him.

The Cubs rate in the middle of the pack in baseball in most stat categories: 13th in runs scored (58), 16th in batting average (.235), 15th in on-base percentage (.320), 15th in OPS (.724). Even though those numbers don’t come anywhere close to making the Cubs one of the game’s worst offensive teams, the “World Series or bust” expectations for this team mean that any offensive struggles are met with an amplified reaction from fans and observers on social media.

But a reinforcement is coming. Rizzo is eligible to come off the disabled list Monday, and it sounds like that’s when he’ll make his return to the Cubs’ lineup, with Joe Maddon saying Rizzo feels great and is on track to return “on time.”

Maddon, though, wanted to make sure that a certain thing is not lost in the hype of the Cubs getting their middle-of-the-order bat back. Maddon wants everyone to recognize the fill-in job that Victor Caratini has done in Rizzo’s absence.

Caratini hasn’t been the only guy to play at first base while Rizzo has been on the DL (Ben Zobrist has started there twice, and Kris Bryant started there Friday). But the Cubs’ backup catcher has become the team’s interim first baseman, making four starts there since April 6. He also made a start at catcher during the series against the Pittsburgh Pirates, spelling Willson Contreras. And he’s been one of the few Cubs swinging a good stick: Caratini’s 7-for-20 with three doubles since Rizzo went on the DL.

“Victor Caratini is showing you why we thought he’s a Major League Baseball player,” Maddon said Friday. “How about his at-bats? Great at-bats, both sides of the plate. Moves really well around first base. Totally calm, gets it. And then you put him behind the plate, he does a great job behind the plate yesterday. Switch-hitter. You’re always going to miss Anthony Rizzo when Anthony’s not playing, but you’ve got to give Victor some credit here, man.”

Maddon explained that this was part of the reason that Caratini made the Opening Day roster over Chris Gimenez, the veteran with experience catching big-ticket free-agent addition Yu Darvish. The Cubs have

long been pleased with Caratini's bat, and he's showing why in this stretch of increased playing time. He's also impressed Maddon, well-known fan of versatility, in the field.

"This is a guy who's been primarily a catcher with us, and all of a sudden you throw him out there (at first base). We threw him (out there) in spring training, and he looks like that's what he is, he looks like he is a first baseman," Maddon said. "We're kind of fortunate that if Anthony's unable to go — we thought that leaving camp, that having Victor would give Anthony days off. Didn't realize it'd be under these circumstances."

Those circumstances are about to come to an end with Rizzo's return. But Maddon's raving shows the Cubs are quite happy with one of the key members of their bench.

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Chicago Tribune

Cubs score nine in wild eighth inning for 14-10 comeback win against Braves

By Mark Gonzales

Like most of his Cubs teammates and the remaining 1,000 or so fans at bitterly cold Wrigley Field on Saturday afternoon, Javier Baez was in survival mode.

"I was trying not to get jammed and have my hand feel numb the whole inning," Baez said.

Manager Joe Maddon said the game was played under the worst baseball conditions he has witnessed, but Baez provided some warmth with a three-run double that tied the score during a zany nine-run eighth inning in the Cubs' unforgettable 14-10 win against the Braves.

The Cubs trailed by eight runs early but chipped away to a 10-5 deficit entering the eighth as the wind-chill factor dipped to 25 degrees. Then, with two outs, the Braves imploded. The Cubs scored nine runs while putting the ball in play three times, with five walks, two hit batters, an error and a wild pitch providing the rest of the offense against three relievers.

Baez's bases-clearing double against Jose Ramirez tied the score following an RBI infield single by Willson Contreras and Ben Zobrist's run-scoring walk. Ramirez and Sam Freeman combined to walk the next four batters for two more Cubs runs. Then, new pitcher Peter Moylan's wild pitch and catcher Kurt Suzuki's throwing error on the same play allowed two more to score.

"Fortunate," Maddon said of the result.

For Maddon, the elements surpassed the soggy, cold conditions during the suspended Game 5 of the 2008 World Series as the worst he's experienced.

"We're going to do what we're asked or told to do, but I'm just here to tell you those were the worst elements I've ever participated in a baseball game, ever," Maddon said.

Maddon, who managed the Rays against the Phillies in that unseasonable series 10 years ago, suggested that some of the wildness displayed by Braves relievers might have been caused by the miserable elements.

If the Cubs had not made a game of it with a run in the sixth and two in the seventh, Maddon was prepared to use first baseman Efrén Navarro to pitch the eighth.

Nevertheless, “the game really should not have been played,” Maddon said.

The subdued music in the Cubs clubhouse mirrored the players’ mix of relief and satisfaction.

“It’s not a good feeling when you’re down that much, especially in that weather,” said Kyle Schwarber, who came off the bench in the sixth and drew the go-ahead walk in the eighth. “You want to be out there with those guys and grind it out. But it’s a great sign of resilience.”

Kris Bryant credited everyone, from the fans to the trainers to the clubhouse attendants to injured first baseman Anthony Rizzo — who distributed coats and warm water bottles to teammates — for keeping spirits up during gloomy times.

Reliever Eddie Butler helped make the comeback possible by pitching 3 2/3 innings after starter Jose Quintana was pulled in the third after allowing seven earned runs. Toward the end of his outing, Butler told catcher Contreras to set his target down the middle of the plate because the elements were becoming more challenging.

“I had kind of an idea where the ball was going to go but had no pinpoint control,” said Butler, who allowed three runs (two earned).

Butler became more energized while watching the eighth-inning comeback in the training room.

“The trainers said for everyone to keep doing exactly what you’re doing,” Butler said. “I was getting the same thing stretched out for 20 minutes. I said, ‘I’m super loose now.’”

Maddon said he would celebrate with a glass of wine under stipulations of a diet in which he can sip only after victories.

Maddon had a quick response when it was suggested he might need something stronger.

“Then I won’t be able to talk to you guys (Sunday),” Maddon said.

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Chicago Tribune

As Cubs starters struggle, Eddie Butler helps keep bullpen fresh

By Mark Gonzales

Eddie Butler’s 3 2/3 innings of relief saved the bullpen Saturday as much as it enabled the Cubs offense to rally for a 14-10 win against the Braves after Jose Quintana exited early.

Manager Joe Maddon was able to go without using relievers Pedro Strop, Carl Edwards Jr., Mike Montgomery and Brian Duensing, even after Quintana allowed seven earned runs in only 2 1/3 innings.

Only one Cubs starter — Kyle Hendricks in Thursday’s 6-1 loss to the Pirates — has pitched more than five innings in the last five games. Yu Darvish and Quintana combined for only seven innings Friday and Saturday.

“We haven’t gotten any depth (from the starters),” Maddon said. “We’re surviving it kind of, and I look at that as a positive because these guys are so good and are going to turn it on and get on a nice little roll. The same thing with the offense.”

Butler, who earned the last spot on the pitching staff when the Cubs elected to go with an eight-man bullpen, is third on the team with 14 2/3 innings.

“He’s been fabulous,” Maddon said. “He’s really saved our bullpen a ton.”

Almora returns: Albert Almora Jr. felt well enough to start after missing Friday’s game due to illness. He smacked a home run in the second inning before he was lifted as part of a double switch in the sixth.

Maddon thought it better to start the right-handed batter Almora against Braves left-hander Sean Newcomb, which ensured the center fielder of a favorable matchup rather than taking the chance on a potential late-inning situation. Almora made a diving catch to rob Lane Adams of a hit in the first.

Rare rally: The Cubs rallied from an eight-run deficit to win for the first time since they beat the Nationals 10-9 after trailing 8-0 on July 7, 2011. The Cubs scored nine runs in an inning for the first time since the fifth inning against the Pirates on July 30, 2012.

According to Cubs historian Ed Hartig, Saturday marked the first time the Cubs scored nine runs on three or fewer hits in an inning since May 19, 1954, when they reached on three hits, four walks and three errors against the Dodgers at Ebbets Field.

Extra innings: Maddon said slugger Anthony Rizzo remains on schedule to return Monday from the 10-day disabled list. Rizzo has been nagged by lower-back stiffness. ... The temperature of 38 degrees equaled the coldest first pitch at Wrigley Field since May 16, 2014, against the Brewers.

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Chicago Sun-Times

Cubs score 9 in 8th on just 3 hits, rally past Braves 14-10

By David Just

The 1,500 or so hardy Cubs fans who stayed and braved the rain, the 25-degree wind chill and the 24 mph winds at Wrigley Field were treated to one of the wildest games in recent memory.

With numb and wet hands, frozen toes and every reason to give in, the Cubs rallied to claim an improbable 14-10 victory against the Braves.

The Cubs scored nine runs — all with two outs — during a loony eighth inning in which they had only three hits. The Braves did their part with five walks, two hit-by-pitches, a wild pitch and an error.

“It’s one of the craziest wins I’ve ever been a part of,” third baseman Kris Bryant said. “Windy, wet, cold, sideways rain — we were able to overcome that. It says a lot about us and who we are.”

The Cubs overcame an eight-run deficit in a victory for the first time since July 7, 2011, in Washington. The nine-run inning was their best since July 30, 2012, against the Pirates, and it was the most runs scored in an inning with three hits or fewer since May 19, 1954, against the Dodgers at Ebbets Field.

Javy Baez provided the key hit. Trailing 10-7 with the bases loaded, Baez worked a full count against reliever Jose Ramirez, then belted a double into the left-center-field gap to clear the bases and tie the score.

"I was just trying to hit the ball on the barrel," Baez said. "He knew I was seeing the ball good, and he had to throw a fastball there on a 3-2 count. So I was ready for it, and I didn't try to do too much to it."

The win, while ugly, might help alleviate some early-season doubts in Wrigleyville. For now, the Cubs (7-7) can move past Jose Quintana lasting only 2.1 innings after Yu Darvish's unraveling Friday.

"It can be impactful, but you have to wait until tomorrow or the next day to find that out," manager Joe Maddon said. "If we were playing on the weekends in the Pac-12, it can have that kind of influence on the whole weekend. I do know the guys will go home feeling better about themselves, but I don't get carried away yet about things like this."

Frustration had taken hold in the stands and on social media as the Cubs fell behind 10-2 in the fourth inning. Most fans flocked to the exits long before the comeback began.

Braves starter Sean Newcomb seemed less bothered by the conditions and allowed three runs (two earned) in 5.1 innings. Meanwhile, the Braves scored three runs in the second and five in the third to seemingly seal the Cubs' fate.

The Braves' bullpen can be credited for doing much of the work for the Cubs, allowing 10 earned runs with six walks and two hit batters. The Cubs, in large part, sat back and watched as they regained the lead.

But the Cubs' bullpen still had to do its job. Eddie Butler allowed three runs (two earned) in 3.0 innings. Steve Cishek, Justin Wilson and Brandon Morrow each pitched a scoreless inning.

"There was a point where [Efrén] Navarro was almost in to pitch," Maddon said of their newly promoted left fielder/first baseman. "And suddenly your closer is in for the ninth inning for the win. Really an interesting game."

It would have been easy, as Maddon said, "to pack that game in," but the Cubs didn't leave their die-hard fans out in the cold.

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Chicago Sun-Times

Joe Maddon says Braves-Cubs game should not have been played

By David Just

Baseball wasn't meant to be played on cold, rainy days, and manager Joe Maddon didn't even think the Cubs should've been on the field for their 14-10 comeback victory Saturday.

"I give both teams a lot of credit under the circumstances," Maddon said, "because that game should not have been played."

The three-hour, 43-minute game started at 1:22 p.m. with 38-degree weather, a 28-degree wind chill and winds gusting out of the northeast at 24 mph.

The temperature dropped to 37 degrees in the fourth inning with the wind chill at 25.

Pitchers suffered the most from the conditions. The teams combined for 18 walks, four wild pitches and two hit batters. There were also four errors.

"I had an idea of where the ball was gonna go but no real pinpoint control," Cubs reliever Eddie Butler said. "So I just ended up attacking the zone as much as possible and trying to let them get themselves out."

Maddon said the conditions were the worst he has managed in.

"I thought the 2008 World Series was the worst weather game I ever participated in," he said. "I think it just got surpassed. That's not baseball weather. The elements were horrific to play baseball. It's not conducive.

"We'll do what we're asked or told to, but those were the worst elements I've ever experienced in a game. Ever. And I've been in some pretty bad stuff."

Starter struggles

Jose Quintana was used to getting no-decisions after quality starts with the White Sox.

Against Atlanta, his luck tilted in the other direction for a change. Quintana didn't factor in the decision despite allowing seven runs in 2¹/₂ innings.

"That's lucky," Quintana said. "It was a very special game for us. Everybody knows it was a tough game for me with the weather. But I need to do my job.

"It was a tough day. But it's not about me, and I'm excited we got the 'W' after that."

The Cubs' starting pitchers haven't lived up to expectations, and they've especially struggled in the last week.

Jon Lester allowed four runs in five innings Wednesday, and Yu Darvish melted down after 4¹/₂ innings Friday.

"We haven't gotten any depth," Maddon said. "And I look at that and we're surviving, so I look at that as a positive. These guys are so good, they're going to turn it on and get on a nice little roll."

Almora returns

Albert Almora Jr. was a late addition to the lineup after missing the game Friday with an illness.

He immediately made his presence felt with a diving catch in center field in the first inning that saved at least one run. Then Almora tied the score 1-1 by blasting a home run in the bottom of the inning.

Victor Caratini was originally slated to start the game at first base, with Ian Happ in center and Ben Zobrist in left. Instead, Almora came in to bat second, Zobrist moved to first, Happ moved to left and Caratini came out of the lineup.

The homer was Almora's first of the season.

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Chicago Sun-Times

Efren Navarro trying to model himself after ex-Cub Mark Grace

By David Just

Efren Navarro grew up in Southern California emulating former major-leaguer J.T. Snow and Cubs All-Star Mark Grace, both left-handed first basemen like himself.

“Being left-handed, being a first baseman, and the fact that he would choke up on the bat,” Navarro said of Grace. “I enjoyed his swing and just watching him play.”

Navarro said that he strives to play much like Grace and Snow, fielding well, hitting the gaps and, “every once in a while,” connecting for power.

The Cubs called up Navarro from Class AAA Iowa on Tuesday to replace the injured Anthony Rizzo (back). He has been a pinch hitter three times and cracked a single in his first at-bat.

“Joe [Maddon] told me he was going to use me and to stay ready,” Navarro said.

Navarro was a 50th-round draft pick by the Angels in 2007. He has spent parts of six seasons in the majors, previously playing for the Angels and Tigers. He also signed with the Mariners, Cardinals and Orioles but never appeared in a game for them.

It hasn't been the easiest road to the majors, but Navarro is grateful for every minute of it. He has played alongside and learned from Albert Pujols, Miguel Cabrera and Anthony Rizzo.

“They are all in control,” Navarro said. “They don't let the game get too high or too low. And for me, that's the one thing I have learned — to stay in control of what I do. Everything else will fall into place.”

Navarro was a non-roster invitee to spring training and batted .234 with three doubles, a home run and six RBI in 21 games.

“Getting that call is a testament to my work and my faith,” Navarro said of joining the Cubs. “If I have a jersey on, that's the best.”

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Daily Herald

Butler putting in MVP-quality performances for Cubs

By Bruce Miles

If you're looking for an MVP on the Cubs pitching staff, look no further than reliever Eddie Butler.

The 27-year-old right-hander was iffy to make the roster when spring training started, but he has saved the Cubs' bacon -- and their bullpen -- at least twice this year.

In Miami on March 30, he pitched 7 innings of relief in a 17-inning marathon. On Saturday, in brutal weather conditions, he relieved Cubs starter Jose Quintana in the third and wound up working 3⅓ innings as the Cubs rallied for a 14-10 victory over the Atlanta Braves.

Don't look now, but Butler is third on the team in innings pitched (14 $\frac{2}{3}$), behind starters Kyle Hendricks (17) and Yu Darvish (15).

"I'm taking a lot of pride in it," Butler said. "I knew coming in I really wasn't going to be a starter, obviously knowing it was going to be the long (relief) role. I tried to embrace it as much as possible, get the guys into the back part of the game and let the back end of the bullpen really take care of it."

How hard was it to pitch Saturday?

"At the end of the outing, I ended up telling Willson (catcher Contreras), 'Just kind of sit down the middle.' I had kind of an idea where the ball was going to go, but you had no real pinpoint control. I ended up just attacking the zone as much as possible and try to let them get themselves out."

Quintana gets bailed out:

After pitching 6 scoreless innings against the Brewers last Sunday, Jose Quintana couldn't make it out of the third inning Saturday, as he gave up 7 hits and 7 runs. He got a no-decision as the Cubs rallied from a 10-2 deficit.

"I think that's lucky," he said. "It's a really special game for us all. Everybody knows a really tough game for me. It's tough for me to bring the bullpen in early in the game."

This and that:

The Cubs overcame an 8-run deficit to win for the first time since July 7, 2011 at Washington. They trailed in that game 8-0 before winning 10-9 ... The Cubs scored 9 run in an inning for the first time since July 30, 2012 against Pittsburgh. It was the first time they scored 9 run on 3 or fewer hits in an inning since May 19, 1954 against the Dodgers at Brooklyn ... According to STATS, the Cubs are the first team to win by 4 or more runs after trailing by 8 or more since the Blue Jays came back from an 8-run deficit to beat the Reds 14-9 on June 20, 2014.

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Daily Herald

Rozner: Far too much flap over Baez's bat flip

By Barry Rozner

In the timeless words of Livia Soprano, "It's all a big nothing."

At least, it should have been nothing, but seeing as how this is America in 2018, let's have an angry debate, divide the masses and send aircraft carriers when a paper airplane would suffice.

It's what we do today. Scream, point and eliminate the possibility of conversation.

It's all so very pleasant.

Nevertheless, and in the interest of full disclosure, I confess to having a Javy Baez bias.

His defense wins games. He has as good a pair of hands as has been on display at Wrigley Field in the last 50 years. He has turned the tag into an art form. He's exciting at the plate and on the bases. He plays with total joy for the game.

He is good for baseball. He is entertaining. He sells tickets.

And he means no harm.

But Baez made a mistake Wednesday night when he threw his bat in frustration after a pop out against Pittsburgh pitcher Josh Smoker.

In essence, firing your bat there says the pitcher stinks and the ball should have been hit a mile. Baez didn't intend to show up anyone. He just reacted. But it's disrespectful to tell everyone in the stadium you should have gone deep.

To his credit, Baez immediately owned it after Wednesday's game, calling it embarrassing and a mistake, and something he would learn from. One of his veteran teammates expressed such to him.

In decades past, a handwritten note sent to the opposing pitcher -- or a phone call to the opposition clubhouse -- would have accompanied the gesture, and that would have ended hostilities.

It should have been over. At worst, next time Smoker faced Baez he would have had the option of sending him a message between the shoulder blades. Players used to fix these things themselves.

Instead, Pittsburgh manager Clint Hurdle -- clearly unaware of Baez' contrition -- arrived at Wrigley Field Thursday morning and went after the popular Cubs second baseman.

"Where is the respect for the game?" Hurdle asked. "The guy hits four homers in two days, so that means you can take your bat and throw it 15, 20 feet in the air when you pop up like you should have hit your fifth home run?"

"I would bet that men over there talked to him, because I do believe they have a group over there that speaks truth to power."

Well, maybe Hurdle should have asked someone before he started talking about another team's player, and an opposition locker room.

That is also inexcusable.

As an old-school, hard-nosed baseball lifer, Hurdle made the same mistake he accuses Baez of making. Hurdle was disrespectful to the Cubs organization.

"To be honest, I have a lot of things I can say right now, but I don't control what's out there, what people say about me," Baez said postgame Thursday. "I'm just going to keep playing my game. Last year, there was a player talking about my game style and now this year it's a manager."

"I bust my (butt) every day to play hard. I don't think anyone plays this game harder than me. I will learn from it. That's all I have to say. If anybody has stuff to say, they can save it."

For his part, manager Joe Maddon had every right to suggest Hurdle stay out of Cubs business and worry about his own team. He would have been universally cheered for it.

Or he could have made a phone call. Instead, he raised the stakes and made some rather startling suggestions about Hurdle's character.

"Whenever you want to be hypercritical of somebody, just understand you are revealing yourself and your beliefs more than you're evaluating somebody, because you have not spent one second in that person's skin," Maddon said. "To try to disseminate what I think about a guy on another team based on superficial reasons, I'll never go there.

"Just like people making decisions on (Pedro) Strop based on wearing his hat (different). I think most of the time when you hear critical commentary, it's self-evaluation. It reveals you more than it reveals the person you are talking about."

Maddon appears to be making assumptions about Hurdle, while accusing Hurdle of making assumptions about Cubs players.

It's a big leap from Hurdle not wanting someone to show up his pitcher to where Maddon has directed the conversation, but that's the essence of most conversation today.

Leap and escalate.

Thing is, the guy who's injured in all of this is Baez, who made a little mistake and owned up to it. Hurdle overreacted, making it a big deal, and Maddon overreacted, making it a bigger deal.

The truth is it was a small moment in a game when a baseball player showed emotion after making an out.

Everyone involved can lend it much greater significance now if they want to score points with their respective constituents because that's the way it works today.

There's no escaping it, Mrs. Soprano, even though in this case it was really a big nothing.

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Daily Herald

Whoa! Down 10-2, Cubs come back to stun Braves 14-10

By Bruce Miles

The weather was awful. Sometimes the baseball was farcical.

But in the end, it was another Wrigley Field thriller, if not an artistic masterpiece.

On a day when hands took on the color of grape Popsicles, the Cubs kept the fires burning after being down 10-2 to the Atlanta Braves in the fourth inning.

They rallied for a run in the sixth inning, 2 in the seventh and 9 in the eighth to score a stunning 14-10 victory.

The game began with a temperature of 38 degrees and northeast winds of 24 mph, contributing to a windchill of 28.

The weather got only worse from there.

"The craziest, absolutely," said third baseman Kris Bryant. "Freezing cold. How many was it, 10-2? I think we scored all 9 of those runs with two outs, too. I don't know. Give credit to the fans for sticking that one out with us. Just one of the craziest wins that I've been a part of."

Once again, Javier Baez stole the show for the Cubs. His 3-run double in the eighth tied the game at 10-10, and Kyle Schwarber later drew his second RBI walk of the game to put the Cubs ahead.

"It's not a good feeling when you're down that much, especially in that weather," said Schwarber who came off the bench in the sixth inning. "When you're on the bench, we want to be out there with those guys trying to grind it out with them. It was just a great sign of resilience there."

"I would say that we all had really great attitudes the whole game there."

Baez, the center of attention much of the week after having his "respect for the game" questioned by Pirates manager Clint Hurdle, was 0-for-4 when he came to the plate in the eighth. In the field, he had made one dazzling fielding play in covering first base and also committed a throwing error.

"The weather really got to me today," he said. "No excuses on playing defense with my error. We don't really give up -- never. The energy in the dugout was pretty pumped."

There were all kinds of crazy occurrences in this one:

- Cubs starting pitcher Jose Quintana lasted only 2½ innings, giving up 7 runs before being bailed out by reliever Eddie Butler and the rest of the bullpen.
- During pitching changes in the latter part of the game, Braves outfielders left the field to seek warmth in the bullpen.
- Braves second baseman Ozzie Albies attempted to throw a ball to first base, but it squirted out of his hand and went to the pitcher's mound instead.
- Atlanta relievers threw 55 pitches in the eighth inning alone. Of the 14 pitches Sam Freeman threw, only 2 were strikes. In all the two teams combined to throw 397 pitches for the game. The Cubs' 9 runs in the eighth came on just 3 hits.

Before the game, Cubs manager Joe Maddon again voiced his opinion that elements such as Saturday's were not conducive to playing baseball. Even though the Cubs won, Maddon reiterated those concerns.

"I thought the 2008 World Series game was the worst game I ever participated in," Maddon said of a game he managed for the Rays at Philadelphia. "I think it just got passed. That's not baseball weather. I don't know what the intent is, I really don't (on playing the game). Again, the elements were horrific to play baseball. It's not conducive."

"We made mistakes on the infield. They made mistakes on the field, the outfield, based on weather-related issues. These are really good players. I think to a certain extent, their wildness toward the end of the game was (attributed) to the horrible weather. Whatever. We're going to do what we're asked or told to do. But I'm just here to tell you that was the worst elements I've ever participated in a baseball game in, ever, and I've been in some pretty bad stuff."

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The Athletic

Cubs' late rally caps incredible comeback on wild, wet, windy day at Wrigley

By Sahadev Sharma

Nobody would have blamed the Cubs for checking out of Saturday's game early. After an ugly 4-0 loss to the Atlanta Braves on Friday in which the Cubs looked nothing like the group that's gone to three straight NLCS and headed into the season expecting a fourth, the North Siders faced a 10-2 deficit after four innings. If that wasn't bad enough, the wind was blowing in at 24 mph at first pitch, helping contribute to a wind chill of 28 degrees as a steady sideways rain fell for the entirety of the three hours and 43 minutes of gameplay.

But none of that stopped the Cubs from playing a full nine innings of baseball and storming back for a 14-10 victory, keyed by a nine-run eighth inning and a game-tying, bases-clearing, three-run double from Javy Báez.

"How about Javy again?" manager Joe Maddon asked after a hard-fought win. "Javy might have been 0-for-4 to that point, but all of a sudden it mattered and here comes an absolute [liner] up the middle to the gap. Perfectly placed to score everybody."

The early part of the game was as ugly as the weather for the Cubs. After Friday's loss, one in which the offense looked particularly meek and the Cubs' big-money offseason addition, Yu Darvish, struggled to find his slider, rarely went to his curveball and changeup and failed to get through the fifth for the second time in the three starts, there seemed to be a bad trend developing. If you didn't know any better, you'd think you were watching a bad baseball team go through the motions.

Starter José Quintana lasted just 2 1/3 innings, allowing seven runs while 11 of the 18 batters he faced reached base. Reliever Eddie Butler performed admirably for 3 2/3, but even he allowed a few runs and saw some sloppy defense played behind him.

"Craziest weather," Báez said when asked if it was the craziest game he'd played in. "To be honest, yes, the weather really got to me today. No excuses on playing defense on my error."

Báez threw wide to first on what looked like a routine grounder to second and Addison Russell also bounced a throw past first to give the Braves some extra outs early. But eventually the tables turned and the Cubs were able to capitalize on a wild Braves bullpen. Luke Jackson, José Ramirez and Sam Freeman combined to retire just two batters in the eighth inning and though they allowed just three hits in total, they walked five batters and gave up nine runs, eight of them earned. In total, 13 batters came to the plate, the Cubs scored all nine runs with two outs and five of the runs scored without the ball even being put in play.

"We don't really give up ever," Báez said. "The energy in the dugout was pretty pumped from Rizz [Anthony Rizzo] joking around and stuff. I took good ABs today, even if I was 0-for-4 before the last AB. We didn't give up."

Assuming they would give up would be folly. Some onlookers see poor play and losses piling up and believe that means the players don't care or aren't trying hard. But that couldn't be further from the truth. Not with this team. Not with these players.

Kyle Schwarber didn't start the game, but came in late to draw a pair of walks and drive in a pair, including the go-ahead run with a bases-loaded walk in the eighth.

“It’s not a good feeling when you’re down that much,” Schwarber said. “Especially in that weather. You’re on the bench and you wanna be out there with those guys grinding it out with them. It was just a great sign of resilience there. I would say that we all had really great attitudes throughout the game there. Our bench guys were cheering everyone on, getting everyone going.”

Rizzo, who is on the disabled list with a tight back, was keeping things loose in the dugout, providing warm coats and plenty of laughter for the group. That positivity permeates throughout the team, no matter the situation.

“It changed everything,” Báez said. “Our mood, the whole game. [The Braves] were comfortable with the lead and we just scored nine runs in one inning. We can change the game with one swing. Everybody’s got power in the lineup, on the bench. We got great athletes here. We just gotta play the game for 27 outs and when it’s over, it’s over.”

As pleased as they were with the win, Maddon seemed to be speaking for the team when he wondered why the game was even played.

“I thought the 2008 World Series game was the worst weather game I ever participated in,” Maddon said. “I think it just got surpassed. That’s not baseball weather. I don’t know what the intent is, I really don’t. And again, the elements were horrific to play baseball. It’s not conducive. We made mistakes on the infield. They made mistakes on the infield, outfield. Based on weather-related issues. These are really good players. I think, to a certain extent, their wildness towards the end of the game was the contributed to the horrible weather. Whatever. We’re gonna do what we’re asked or told to do. But I’m just here to tell you, that was the worst elements I’ve ever participated in a baseball game. And I’ve been in some pretty bad stuff.”

The group seemed more exhausted and perplexed by what had just happened than in the celebratory mood that has become the post-victory norm for the team over the years.

It wasn’t as if the poor weather came out of nowhere. Days earlier, the Cubs were looking at mutual off-days with the Braves in case of a potential rainout. Rain blew in the faces of players and fans alike as they walked into Wrigley and the early assumption was the game would likely be called. However, by the time Maddon sat down to meet with the media prior to game time, he seemed well aware that regardless of the conditions, this one was being played. When asked if there was a window to get the game in, the always colorful manager said it was a “bay window” and said it had nothing to do with elements, but only about precipitation. The rain was there, but it was mostly just a strong mist exacerbated by the gale-force winds.

“It was tough,” Kris Bryant said. “And we knew it. And they had to play through it too. If we did end up losing 10-2, there would have been no excuses. It’s just a crazy turn of events. Windy, wet, cold, sideways rain and we’re able to overcome that. It says a lot about us and who we are. We don’t really let the scoreboard dictate how we’re going to go out there and play. That was the prime example of that.”

Bryant went 2-for-3 on the day with a double, walk and a hit by pitch. He leads the National League with a 201 wRC+ and while the Cubs offense has been criticized for its mercurial way, the former MVP has quietly been a steady presence in the middle of the lineup, stacking up impressive at-bats one after another. Through 69 plate appearances, Bryant is hitting a cool .352 and has 10 walks and just eight strikeouts.

While he knew his team would never give up, Maddon was also preparing for how to handle a blowout loss.

"I'm not going to tell you that I thought it was going to happen that way," Maddon said. "You prepare for it to happen that way. There was a point there where [Efren] Navarro was almost in that game to pitch going into the eighth inning. And then all of a sudden you have your closer in there for the ninth."

His closer, Brandon Morrow, along with the rest of his bullpen continues to look masterful through 14 games. In 60 1/3 innings of work, the relievers have posted a 2.09 ERA and continue to pick up a starting rotation that is averaging just a tick over five innings per start.

The bullpen has been a bright spot for a team that sits at 7-7 and has onlookers wondering what happened to all that talk of a fast start out of spring. But perhaps a win like Saturday's can spark the group.

"It's just another win in the win column," Bryant said, dispelling that notion. "Obviously, there's a lot more camaraderie in here and guys having a lot of fun. Especially after a win like that, it's impossible to not have fun. We'll enjoy it for the night and come out here and be nice and cold and rainy again tomorrow."

Maddon seemed to echo that sentiment.

"It obviously can be impactful," he said. "But you have to wait for tomorrow and the next day to find that out. These are professionals, you don't know the kind of impact it's going to have. I do know the guys are definitely going home feeling better about themselves. But I don't get carried away yet about things like this."

The Cubs can't rely on one unforgettable win to get them going. They'll undoubtedly take it and enjoy a much-needed victory. But there are flaws that still remain and they'll continue to work on correcting them. For right now, though, they'll enjoy this one while they can. And perhaps a post-victory drink will be in order.

"Thirty minutes and it'll be over," Maddon said of celebrating the win. "I do get to drink wine tonight. We're having this diet contest and I'm only able to drink wine after victories. After defeats, I'm not able to have a glass of wine. Last night, I really needed it and I wasn't able to have one. One of the better parts of this whole event is the fact that I can have a glass of wine tonight."

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Cubs.com

Cubs' 9-run 8th caps amazing rally from 8 down

By Jeff Arnold

CHICAGO -- When Jason Heyward was hit by a pitch to start the eighth inning in front of a Wrigley Field crowd dwindled dramatically by cold winds, a constant rain and a sizable scoreboard deficit, it seemed so innocent. At least at the time.

By the time the inning ended, the Cubs had scored nine runs on a collection of three hits, five walks, a wild pitch, an error and two hit batsmen, and suddenly, everything had changed.

Trailing once by eight runs and down five entering the eighth, the Cubs sent 13 hitters to the plate to cap an amazing 14-10 win over the Braves on Saturday, during which they scored 12 unanswered runs. The Cubs scored the go-ahead run on a bases-loaded walk to Kyle Schwarber from reliever Sam Freeman after Javier Baez tied it with a clutch three-run double off Jose Ramirez.

All nine runs in the inning were scored with two outs.

- Relive madness of Cubs' epic comeback with best plays, fan reactions

"We don't really ever give up -- never," said Baez, who finished 1-for-5 with four RBIs. "We didn't give up. ... They were comfortable with the leads, and we scored nine runs in one inning. We can change the game with one swing, and everybody [has] power in the lineup and on the bench.

"We just have to play the game to 27 outs, and when it's over, it's over."

Baez's clutch hit came after he had popped out, struck out, reached on an error and grounded out, although the groundout drove in a run.

"I didn't try to do too much to it," Baez said. "Obviously, a ball in the air wasn't going anywhere with the wind today, so I was just being smart and hitting the ball good."

Willson Contreras drove in a run in the eighth inning with a bases-loaded infield single before Ben Zobrist drew a walk to get the Cubs to within three runs. Baez then tied the score with his double into the gap in left-center before the Cubs piled on four more runs, two of which came on bases-loaded walks and two more coming on a wild pitch.

"It was one of the craziest wins I have been a part of," Kris Bryant said. "It was just a crazy turn of events. Windy, wet, cold, sideways rain, and we were able to overcome that. It says a lot about us and who we are. We don't let the scoreboard dictate how we're going to go out there and play, and that [game] was a prime example of that."

The late rally saved the Cubs, who trailed, 10-2, going into their half of the sixth inning and appeared on the verge of falling to 1-4 at home this season. Starter Jose Quintana was cold from the beginning, when he served up a leadoff homer to Ozzie Albies -- who drove in a run in each of his first four at-bats, while falling a triple shy of the cycle.

Quintana's day ended after walking Braves pitcher Sean Newcomb -- his fourth free pass of the day. But the Cubs' eighth-inning rally took Quintana off the hook, and the bullpen -- sparked by Eddie Butler, who gave the Cubs 3 2/3 innings before Steve Cishek, Justin Wilson and Brandon Morrow each recorded a scoreless inning.

The Braves tallied at least one run in each of the first four innings, including five in the third, and appeared in control even after the Cubs scored a pair of runs in the seventh inning to get to within five runs.

But then came the eighth, when the Cubs relentlessly grinded out at-bats. Afterward, manager Joe Maddon characterized the victory as "fortunate."

"[It would have been] easy to pack that game in," Maddon said. "[The win] obviously can be impactful, but you have to wait until tomorrow or the next day to find that out. I do know the guys are definitely

going to go home feeling better about themselves. But I don't get carried away yet by things like this -- I really don't."

MOMENTS THAT MATTERED

Triple threat: The Cubs scored a pair of key seventh-inning runs that provided momentum going into the game-changing eighth. After Bryant drew a leadoff walk, Zobrist, who went 3-for-3 and reached base five times, delivered an RBI triple with one out and then scored on Baez's groundout to get the Cubs to within 10-5.

Zobrist also scored in the eighth inning on Baez's bases-clearing double. Zobrist, along with Bryant (two), were the lone Cubs hitters with multiple hits.

"Those two guys had a pro day," Maddon said. "Zo had himself a spectacular day."

That's Almora: Albert Almora Jr. was a late add to the lineup after he missed Friday's loss to the Braves due to an illness. But the outfielder wasted little time making his mark on this game. Almora saved a run from scoring in the first inning, when he made a diving catch in wet, windy and frigid conditions on Lane Adams' fly ball.

In the bottom half of the frame, he proceeded to tie the game with a solo home run into the left-field bleachers off Newcomb. It was his first home run of the season. [More >](#)

SOUND SMART

The Cubs are the first team to win by four or more runs after trailing by eight or more runs since the Blue Jays came back from an eight-run deficit to beat the Reds, 14-9, on June 20, 2014.

UP NEXT

Making his third start, Tyler Chatwood (0-2, 4.91 ERA) will look for his first victory in a Cubs uniform Sunday at 1:20 p.m. CT against the Braves, as the clubs celebrate Jackie Robinson Day at Wrigley Field. Chatwood will duel with Atlanta starter Julio Teheran.

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DYK: Facts, figures from Cubs' epic comeback

By Matt Kelly and Manny Randhawa

Sub-30 degree wind chills, wind gusts over 25 mph and plenty of rain. That was just the start of a memorable day at Wrigley Field.

The Cubs scored 12 unanswered runs to shock the Braves with a 14-10 comeback victory Saturday after trailing, 10-2, in bone-chilling temperatures. That included a nine-run eighth inning for Chicago, which gave the fans brave enough to venture to Wrigley something to truly remember.

It was the Cubs' biggest comeback since they erased another eight-run deficit against the Nationals on July 7, 2011, in Washington. In that game, Chicago was down, 8-0, in the top of the sixth, and proceeded to score six runs in that frame, followed by two in the seventh, and one each in the eighth and ninth to win, 10-9.

- Relive the Cubs' comeback with the best plays and fan reactions

Saturday's epic comeback was a run shy of the franchise's biggest, which came on Aug. 29, 1989, when Chicago erased a nine-run deficit against the Astros. In that game, the Cubs were down, 9-0, in the bottom of the sixth. They scored two in the sixth, three in the seventh, and four in the eighth to tie the game. Then they won in walk-off fashion in the 10th inning on a Dwight Smith RBI single.

Saturday's comeback featured plenty of twists and turns, particularly the wild eighth inning. Here are some things you should know about Chicago's shocker:

- The Cubs trailed, 10-2, when they came up to bat in the bottom of the sixth inning. According to the Elias Sports Bureau, the last team to erase a deficit of at least eight runs in the sixth inning or later was the Yankees against the Orioles at Yankee Stadium on April 28, 2017 -- New York trailed, 11-1, entering the bottom of the sixth inning and went on to win, 14-11.
- The last time any team scored nine or more runs in the eighth inning of a game or later came on Aug. 27, 2017, when the D-backs had a nine-run eighth inning against the Giants in an 11-0 win at Chase Field.
- Chicago's nine-run eighth inning marked the franchise's first frame of nine or more runs since July 30, 2012, when the Cubs plated nine runs against the Pirates in the fifth inning of a 14-4 victory at Wrigley Field. It also marked only the sixth time since Aug. 29, 2002, that the Cubs scored nine times in one inning.
- Saturday's frigid loss marked the first time the Braves had blown a lead of at least eight runs since Aug. 25, 2010, against the Rockies at Coors Field, when Atlanta blew a nine-run lead, the largest blown lead in franchise history.
- The Cubs completely flipped the script on the Braves, turning that eight-run deficit into a four-run victory. Per STATS LLC, the last team to win a game by four or more runs after trailing by at least eight runs was the Blue Jays. Toronto came back from eight runs down to beat the Reds, 14-9, on June 20, 2014.
- The Cubs needed just three base hits during their nine-run rally in the eighth, as Atlanta issued five walks and a pair of hit by pitches to help the Chicago's cause. Three of the Cubs' runs scored via bases-loaded walks. Per Elias, the last team to issue at least seven combined walks and hit by pitches in one frame was the Blue Jays on April 17, 2014, vs. the Twins in the second game of a doubleheader at Target Field.
- This marked the second time this week that a team scored at least nine runs in one inning on three or fewer hits. The Red Sox did the exact same thing Tuesday when they scored nine times against the Yankees on just three hits in the sixth inning of their 14-1 rout at Fenway Park.
- The Cubs totaled 10 hits, a respectable figure but unique in this case considering they scored 14 times. It's just the 18th time since at least 1908 that a team has scored at least 14 runs on 10 or fewer hits, and the first time since the Phillies beat the Mets, 14-8, on 10 hits on Sept. 1, 2015. It's just the second time the Cubs have accomplished that feat, the first coming in a 15-2 win against the Dodgers on April 24, 1958 -- a game in which they recorded just nine hits.
- All nine runs the Cubs scored in the eighth inning came with two outs -- Jason Heyward was hit by a pitch to open the frame, and that was followed by a Kyle Schwarber strikeout, a Tommy La Stella single and an Efrén Navarro strikeout. That's when the floodgates opened. According to Elias, the last time a

club scored nine times with two outs in an inning was on June 2, 2016, when the Mariners scored nine runs in the seventh inning of a 16-13 victory over the Padres in San Diego.

- The last time the Cubs walked 10 or more times in a single game was on Sept. 13 of last season against the Mets, a 17-5 victory in which they drew 11 bases on balls.
- The last time the Braves' pitching staff issued 10 or more walks in a single game was earlier this month, when on April 2, Atlanta pitchers walked 10 Nationals batters in an 8-1 loss at SunTrust Park.

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Cubs.com

Almora makes presence felt early after illness

By Jeff Arnold

CHICAGO -- Albert Almora Jr. was a late addition to the Cubs' lineup on Saturday, but he wasted no time in making manager Joe Maddon glad he was there, and he played an early role in Chicago's epic 14-10 comeback victory over the Braves.

With the Braves already leading, 1-0, in the first inning and starter Jose Quintana struggling, Almora -- who missed Friday's 4-0 loss to the Braves due to illness -- battled 24-mph winds and made a diving catch in center field on a Lane Adams fly ball. The catch saved at least one run and minimized the damage for both the Cubs and Quintana.

Almora then tied the game at 1 in the Cubs' first, when he lifted a solo home run into the left-field bleachers off of Braves starter Sean Newcomb. The homer was Almora's first of the year, and it turned out to be the Cubs' first run en route to their 14-run output, which included nine in the eighth inning.

"He did a nice job," Cubs manager Joe Maddon said.

Maddon said Almora was "really, really not feeling good" on Friday before the skipper made the decision to use Almora at the start of the game Saturday as opposed to possibly using him later to ensure he would get at-bats against the lefty Newcomb.

Almora, who walked in his second at-bat and later scored on a Willson Contreras groundout in the third, was then intentionally taken out of the game as Saturday's dreary windy and rainy conditions continued.

"I was concerned that with the weather and everything else that it might start dragging him down a bit," Maddon said.

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Cubs.com

Rizzo likely to return Monday for Cards opener

By Jeff Arnold

CHICAGO -- Anthony Rizzo has yet to play a game at Wrigley Field this season, but that is expected to change in a matter of days.

The Cubs' All-Star first baseman remains on the 10-day disabled list with back tightness, which has prevented him from playing this week against the Pirates and Braves. But with Rizzo eligible to return on

Monday against the Cardinals, Cubs manager Joe Maddon said before Saturday's game against Atlanta that everything continues to point to an on-time return.

"He's doing good -- he's doing really good," said Maddon, who said Rizzo has amped up his activity in the batting cage in recent days. "He's walking and he's smiling and he's happy, and his work has been really good in the weight room. So he should be on schedule to come back on time."

In Rizzo's absence, the Cubs have used Ben Zobrist, Kris Bryant and Victor Caratini at first base. Caratini was originally slated to start on Saturday before center fielder Albert Almora Jr. -- who missed Friday's 4-0 loss to the Braves due to illness -- was deemed healthy enough to play. The move shifted leadoff hitter Ian Happ to left field and Zobrist from left field to first base.

Almora, along with Happ, Bryant and second baseman Javier Baez, has been among the bright spots in a Cubs lineup that has been inconsistent over the first 13 games of the season. Braves starter Anibal Sanchez and the bullpen limited the Cubs to four hits on Friday, which marked the third time this season the Cubs have been shut out.

Entering Saturday, the Cubs ranked 16th in the Major Leagues with a .235 team batting average. Bryant was hitting .333, while Baez has homered four times and driven in 10 runs. But as on and off as the Cubs' offensive production has been, Maddon expects things to turn around at some point.

"It's just a part of the season," Maddon said Saturday. "It happens to everybody at some point -- it's happening to us right now. Typically, like we did last year, we've had a couple of really good games where we put up some nice numbers, and all of a sudden, the next day, you have nothing. The spigot turns on and off.

"I have a lot of faith in everybody, in our hitters -- they're still growing, they're still young. But I want to believe that at some point we're going to gain a lot of consistency during the course of this year that we're never going to lose again."

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