



CHICAGO CUBS DAILY CLIPS

CubsPressbox.com · CubsMedia@Cubs.com · 773-404-4191

September 9, 2018

- Chicago Tribune, **Veterans Ben Zobrist, Anthony Rizzo and Daniel Murphy leading the way in Cubs' playoff push**
<http://www.chicagotribune.com/sports/baseball/cubs/ct-spt-cubs-ben-zobrist-daniel-murphy-anthony-rizzo-20180908-story.html#>
- Chicago Tribune, **Joe Maddon mystified by Friday's rainout: 'We were willing to wait and play'**
<http://www.chicagotribune.com/sports/baseball/cubs/ct-spt-cubs-joe-maddon-rainout-20180908-story.html>
- Chicago Tribune, **After 6 hours, 26 minutes of total delays, Max Scherzer and the Nationals rout the Cubs 10-3**
<http://www.chicagotribune.com/sports/baseball/cubs/ct-spt-cubs-nationals-game-one-20180908-story.html>
- Chicago Tribune, **Cubs drop much-delayed, disappointing doubleheader sweep to Nationals**
<http://www.chicagotribune.com/sports/baseball/cubs/ct-spt-cubs-national-doubleheader-20180908-story.html>
- Chicago Tribune, **Cubs fall to Nationals 6-5 in Game 2; NL Central lead cut to 2 1/2 games**
<http://www.chicagotribune.com/sports/baseball/cubs/ct-spt-cubs-nationals-game-two-20180908-story.html>
- Chicago Sun-Times, **Cubs more 'confused' than angry over MLB's decision-making in Friday's rainout**
<https://chicago.suntimes.com/sports/cubs-confused-angry-mlb-decision-friday-rainout/>
- Chicago Sun-Times, **Rain storms followed by Max Scherzer lightning, Bryce Harper thunder sweep Cubs**
<https://chicago.suntimes.com/sports/rain-washington-cubs-smacked-hurricane-max-scherzer-loss-doubleheader/>
- Daily Herald, **Hamels, Murphy, Garcia reflect on watching Cubs transform into champions**
<https://www.dailyherald.com/sports/20180908/hamels-murphy-garcia-reflect-on-watching-cubs-transfrom-into-champions>
- The Athletic, **Ben Zobrist on the best free-agent decision he ever made, his comeback season and why the Cubs are annual contenders**
<https://theathletic.com/512892/2018/09/08/ben-zobrist-on-the-best-free-agent-decision-he-ever-made-his-comeback-season-and-why-the-cubs-are-annual-contenders/>

- The Athletic, **Bryce Harper and Max Scherzer make it a miserable doubleheader for the Cubs in Washington**
<https://theathletic.com/513449/2018/09/09/bryce-harper-and-max-scherzer-make-it-a-miserable-doubleheader-for-the-cubs-in-washington/>
- Cubs.com, **Garcia labors in debut as Cubs drop Game 1**
<https://www.mlb.com/cubs/news/jaime-garcia-labors-in-game-1-loss-to-nats/c-293831830>
- Cubs.com, **Friday's rainout lets Lester open against Crew**
<https://www.mlb.com/cubs/news/jon-lester-to-open-cubs-series-with-brewers/c-293834368>
- Cubs.com, **Cubs can't get by on Caratini's slam in G2**
<https://www.mlb.com/cubs/news/cubs-fall-in-g2-despite-victor-caratinis-slam/c-293817736>
- ESPNChicago.com, **Joe Maddon still wondering why Friday's game vs. Nationals was postponed**
http://www.espn.com/mlb/story/_/id/24616647/joe-maddon-chicago-cubs-perplexed-friday-rainout-washington-nationals
- NBC Sports Chicago, **Cubs confused by handling of weather issues at Nationals Park**
<https://www.nbcsports.com/chicago/cubs/cubs-confused-handling-weather-issues-nationals-park-mlb-rain-delay>

--

Chicago Tribune

Veterans Ben Zobrist, Anthony Rizzo and Daniel Murphy leading the way in Cubs' playoff push
By Mark Gonzales

The Cubs' hopes for a second World Series title in three years centers around the development of their quartet, or "Core Four" of young, homegrown talent: Javier Baez, Albert Almora Jr., Kris Bryant and Kyle Schwarber.

But the stability provided by seasoned veterans such as Ben Zobrist, Anthony Rizzo and newly acquired Daniel Murphy has strengthened their postseason push.

"We've gotten better in a lot of ways, but they haven't hit their potential yet," manager Joe Maddon said Saturday. "Then the real stability comes from Murphy, Zo and Riz."

The trio's production and leadership has been instrumental in the Cubs' hold on first place in the National League Central, especially because team President Theo Epstein warned last fall that the growth of the Cubs' young stars won't be linear.

Baez, 25, has emerged into an NL MVP candidate with a .295 average, 30 home runs, 100 RBIs, Gold Glove-caliber defense and astute base running. Almora, 24, has cooled off after an impressive start but still is batting .292 entering Saturday's doubleheader against the Nationals.

Bryant, 26, has been hampered by injuries and is batting .277 with 11 home runs and 44 RBIs in 82 games. Schwarber, 25, has 25 home runs and 58 RBIs while raising his average from .211 last season to .239.

Meanwhile, the switch-hitting Zobrist, 37, has provided quality and versatility, as evidenced by his .313 average, .388 on-base percentage, .318 average with runners in scoring position and the ability to play multiple positions.

“The oldest guy (Zobrist) has been setting the example for a while, and he’s going as well as anybody,” Maddon said Saturday.

“And Murphy coming in (an Aug. 21 trade from the Nationals), I can’t envision us being in the position we’re in had he not shown up in the lineup, the productivity, what he’s done,” Maddon said. “How he jump-started the lineup (at the leadoff spot), the offense on different nights.”

Murphy, 33, is batting .306 while stabilizing the leadoff spot and serving as a beacon of information for the younger players.

In 50 games since July 13, Rizzo, 29, is batting .370.

“Just the attitude within the group has been fantastic,” Maddon said. “Give them a lot of credit. It’s later in the year. They take care of themselves.

“They know what they’re doing up there and are very large in regards to our success.”

--

Chicago Tribune

Joe Maddon mystified by Friday's rainout: 'We were willing to wait and play

By Mark Gonzales

Manager Joe Maddon was somewhat at a loss with Major League Baseball’s decision to postpone Friday night’s Cubs-Nationals game after a second rain delay that lasted 2 hours, 55 minutes.

Rain pushed back the start of the game 1 hour, 21 minutes, and the second delay — and subsequent postponement — occurred with two outs in the top of the second, wasting a start by Jon Lester, who threw a 14-pitch first inning.

“We played when we shouldn’t have, and we didn’t play when we should have,” Maddon said Saturday.

“I voiced my opinion at the appropriate moment, and we wanted to play (Friday night). We wanted two one-gamers. We waited as long as we could, and the skies were absolutely cleared from that moment on. And they said they cannot be sure there (wouldn’t) be another popup. I’m beyond an amateur meteorologist. I can see it wasn’t going to rain anymore. So it’s kind of confusing to us.”

A message to Major League Baseball seeking comment regarding the postponement hadn’t been answered.

Lester will make his next start Monday night against the Brewers at Wrigley Field, followed by Jose Quintana and Kyle Hendricks. The Cubs entered play Saturday with a four-game lead over the Brewers and 5½ over the Cardinals in the National League Central.

After his expressing his frustration, Maddon suggested the night’s developments “go in the trash can.”

"It was just unfortunate," he said. "We made it clear in the beginning we wanted to wait and play. We were willing to wait and play. And about 10 o'clock it didn't look good, but all of a sudden it started to look better and we had no issues with starting at 11:30. None."

Maddon praised his players for coping with the conditions, especially as they enter the final stages of a four-city, 11-game trip.

"When it happens in September sometimes, it's not as horrific or difficult as when it happens in the regular season, when you get (only) one plus guy," Maddon said. "The fact we've been going through all this makes it easier in a sense because you're not just throwing a wrench in the gears right now. The wrench has been thrown in the gears for a bit, and you keep grinding through it."

Maddon also was pleased that Friday's rainout was rescheduled as part of a straight doubleheader instead of a split doubleheader, although the start of Saturday's first game was delayed by rain.

Maddon said the Cubs and Nationals weren't required to play a split doubleheader because each team already played the maximum amount of three in a season.

"It's the worst situation they've invented regarding how to play his game," Maddon said. "Doubleheaders are fine, but they're necessary. But split (doubleheaders) are bad form."

"I understand economics, but they're bad form."

--

Chicago Tribune

After 6 hours, 26 minutes of total delays, Max Scherzer and the Nationals rout the Cubs 10-3
By Mark Gonzales

The start of Saturday's rescheduled game between the Cubs and Nationals was delayed by 2 hours, 10 minutes due to inclement weather.

That came after Friday's game was delayed twice first for 1 hour, 21 minutes, then, after they started playing, 2:55 more until the game finally was postponed.

The teams finally squared off after delays totaling 6 hours, 26 minutes. It was not worth the wait for the Cubs.

Any hope of getting a contribution from left-hander Jaime Garcia faded, as Garcia walked three and was pulled after Juan Soto was credited with a two-run single that skipped past the glove of first baseman Anthony Rizzo during a three-run first inning as the Nationals cruised to a 10-3 win.

After allowing a double to Tommy La Stella with one out in the first, Nationals starter Max Scherzer (17-6) retired 15 consecutive batters en route to his 10th career complete game. Scherzer allowed nine hits but struck out 11 and walked none.

The Cubs finally broke through in the seventh on a single by catcher Willson Contreras. But that came after the Nationals scored five times in the sixth off Randy Rosario and James Norwood.

Throwing errors by Contreras and second baseman Daniel Murphy resulted in three unearned runs.

Left fielder Terrance Gore hit a single up the middle in the ninth for his first major league hit after 4 ½ seasons and 15 plate appearances.

Infielders Javier Baez and Kris Bryant did not start, although Baez pinch-hit in the seventh and fouled to first. Bryant batted for Tyler Chatwood in the ninth and struck out.

Manager Joe Maddon was hoping to get two innings out of Garcia, who hadn't pitched in a major league game since Aug. 20 with the Blue Jays.

--

Chicago Tribune

Cubs drop much-delayed, disappointing doubleheader sweep to Nationals

By Mark Gonzales

As the Cubs enter the final day of a four-city, 11-game odyssey against some of the National League's elite pitchers, playoff-like tension and a recent series of tedious rain delays, the simple familiarity of returning Monday night to Wrigley Field will provide some comfort.

"You never know what you're going to get," pitcher Kyle Hendricks said Saturday. "It's weird."

And tenuous.

The Cubs' lead in the National League Central shrank to 2 ½ games ahead of the Brewers after the Nationals completed a soggy doubleheader sweep.

"We know what's at stake," Cubs manager Joe Maddon said. "We've done this before. I'd like to believe we don't need someone pushing us to gain energy."

In the first game, the the Nationals humbled the Cubs 10-3 as Max Scherzer pitched a complete game. Rain delayed the opener 2 hours, 10 minutes, so with the delays of 1:21 before the start Friday night and 2:55 before the postponement, the Cubs and Nats had to endure 6:26 of weather-induced idleness in two days to play one game.

Then, the second game was delayed 1:29 in the eighth inning of the Nationals' 6-5 win. Victor Caratini's grand slam gave the Cubs a 4-0 lead in the fourth inning, but Bryce Harper smacked a two-run homer off left-hander Justin Wilson to cap a three-run rally in the seventh that put the Nationals ahead 6-5.

After the rain delay, Greg Holland closed the game for the Nats in the early morning hours of Sunday. Holland hit Willson Contreras to open the inning, but Ian Happ flied to center and pinch-hitter Ben Zobrist grounded into a game-ending double play.

"Give (Major League Baseball) credit for giving us that opportunity to try to come back and win the game," said Maddon, who said the game was close to being called.

"We're not complaining. There so many (games) in a row, four cities, the weather — this is the kind of stuff that actually can make you better as you move forward. As long as nobody is crying or complaining, those are the things that can make you stronger."

Left-hander Cole Hamels accepted his share of the responsibility, as he walked five in 5 2/3 innings — including three walks to Harper.

“He kept the lineup moving,” Hamels said. “For a lefty-lefty matchup, you have to attack him. “

In a season that has forced the Cubs to adjust because of injuries and ineffectiveness to starting pitchers Yu Darvish and Tyler Chatwood, a shoulder ailment that caused slugger Kris Bryant to miss 51 games and the likelihood that closer Brandon Morrow won't return this season, perseverance and resourcefulness will be stretched thin to the end of the regular season.

Caratini provided a lift with his slam that temporarily alleviated some of the feeling of helplessness after left-hander Jaime Garcia walked three batters and was pulled after facing just five in the first game. Left-hander Jon Lester couldn't go after throwing one inning and 14 pitches Friday night.

As a result, the Cubs adjusted their rotation so Lester will make his next start Monday night in the opener of a National League Central showdown against the Brewers, with left-hander Joe Quintana and Kyle Hendricks getting an extra day of rest. The Cubs led had a three-game lead over the Brewers pending the outcome of Saturday's nightcap.

“If you're feeling down or your energy level is low, you can be picked up a lot easier at home,” Hendricks said. “The crowd helps a ton. But on the road, you have to find that within yourself and within a group. Guys push each other.

“You know when the energy is down. Those guys who aren't playing that day pick up the energy in the dugout.”

Garcia's early knockout forced manager Joe Maddon to employ his bullpen sooner but he was able to preserve late-inning specialists Pedro Strop, Jesse Chavez, Wilson, Steve Cishek and Carl Edwards Jr. for the second game.

But Cishek failed to protect a two-run lead in the top of the seventh.

“We had the right pitchers lined up,” Maddon said. “They were rested, and they got us. There's no crying or complaining on our side. We normally get that game done.”

With Garcia knocked out early, the only consolation was that Maddon cleared his bench late and inserted speedster Terrance Gore, who singled in the ninth off Scherzer for his first major-league hit after 15 plate appearances over 4 ½ seasons of his career as a September pinch-running specialist.

But Scherzer (17-6) struck out 11 en route to his second complete game of the season. After allowing a double to Tommy La Stella with one out in the first, Scherzer retired the next 15 batters.

The Cubs also committed three errors — tying a season high — that led to three unearned runs in the first game.

Maddon elected to not start Javier Baez and Bryant, who were a combined 1-for-18 against Scherzer but they made pinch-hitting appearances and were retired.

Gore provided a spark in the second game when he entered as a pinch-runner in the seventh and stole second and third base to set up a Bryant RBI double for a short-lived 5-3 lead.

The start of the second game was delayed by 15 minutes because of extended festivities for a ceremony honoring former Nationals slugger Jayson Werth, but Maddon said the delay had no bearing on the outcome.

--

Chicago Tribune

Cubs fall to Nationals 6-5 in Game 2; NL Central lead cut to 2 1/2 games

By Mark Gonzales

Victor Caratini smacked a grand slam, but his clutch hitting couldn't overcome the shortcomings of the Cubs' pitching staff. Bryce Harper capped a comeback with a two-run home run in the seventh inning to vault the Nationals to a 6-5 victory in Game 2 of Saturday's doubleheader at Nationals Park.

Play resumed in the bottom of the eighth inning after a 1-hour, 29-minute rain delay that extended the game into early Sunday morning. The start of the game was delayed by 15 minutes after an extended ceremony honoring former Nationals player Jayson Werth.

Willson Contreras was hit by a pitch to start the ninth, but Ian Happ flied to center and pinch-hitter Ben Zobrist grounded into a double play against Greg Holland.

The Cubs' doubleheader loss, combined with the Brewers' win over the Giants, cut the Cubs' lead to 2 ½ games in the National League Central.

Cubs left-hander Cole Hamels walked five in 5 2/3 innings and was pulled after allowing a two-out RBI double to Adrian Sanchez.

Reliever Steve Cishek allowed an infield hit to Trea Turner and RBI double to Anthony Rendon in the seventh.

Left-hander Justin Wilson relieved Cishek, but Harper launched a two-run home run over the center-field fence.

The Cubs had expanded their lead to 5-3 in the top of the seventh when pinch-runner Terrance Gore stole second and third base, and Kris Bryant followed with a double with two out.

Caratini's slam was the first of his career.

--

Chicago Sun-Times

Cubs more 'confused' than angry over MLB's decision-making in Friday's rainout

By Gordon Wittenmyer

WASHINGTON – As the rain poured onto the tarp at Nationals Park on Saturday afternoon just ahead of the Cubs' third lengthy rain delay in barely 20 hours, Cubs manager Joe Maddon somehow located a ray of sunshine that no one else saw.

Friday night's confounding fits and starts to a game night that eventually ended in a rainout created a swampy doubleheader Saturday against the Nationals with the Cubs already more than two weeks into a 23-games-in-23-days stretch.

“The fact that we’ve been going through all this actually makes this somewhat easier in a sense,” Maddon said, “because you’re not just throwing a wrench in the gears right now. The wrench already has been thrown into the gears for a bit.”

In other words, getting hit in the head with a brick isn’t so bad if you already have a migraine?

By the time the Cubs started Saturday’s doubleheader, they had endured rain delays of 6 hours, 26 minutes since Friday night (in increments of 1:21, 2:55 and 2:10).

Along the way, the Cubs lost ace Jon Lester for the series after he pitched just one inning Friday, then was forced to sit through thunderstorms until the eventual postponement.

“Everything about last night was [frustrating],” said Maddon, who will bring Lester back Monday to open their three-game home series against the second-place Brewers.

The Cubs came away more baffled than angry over what happened Friday – getting in just eight outs of baseball after the first delay, then waiting out nearly three hours only to have the game postponed once the rain stopped.

Maddon suggested inquiries be directed at Major League Baseball, which presided over the decision-making.

“It was kind of confusing to us also,” he said. “We played when we shouldn’t have, then did not play when we should have. I voiced my opinion at the appropriate moment. We wanted to play.”

Entering Saturday, the Cubs were 12-5 during their 23-game grinder, which was created by another postponement that forced a one-nighter in Atlanta to start this 11-game, four-city trip.

“We’ve been through a rough baseball stretch,” Maddon said. “We’ve handled it well. I anticipate we’ll continue to handle it well.”

Notes: With Lester going Monday, Jose Quintana and Kyle Hendricks each get pushed back a day to pitch the other games of the final series of the season against Milwaukee. Pitching for the Brewers, in order: Wade Miley, Jhoulys Chacin and Chase Anderson. ...The reason Saturday’s doubleheader was not scheduled as a day-night, separate-admission split is because the collective bargaining agreement allows teams to veto such lengthier schedules after they’ve had three in a season. Both teams already had reached the limit. ...Friday’s rainout was the Cubs’ eighth weather-related postponement of the season, first since June 18. ...When Tommy La Stella doubled in the first inning of Saturday’s opener, he improved to 4-for-7 lifetime against three-time Cy Young winner Max Scherzer – with a homer, triple and two doubles.

--

Chicago Sun-Times

Rain storms followed by Max Scherzer lightning, Bryce Harper thunder sweep Cubs
By Gordon Wittenmyer

WASHINGTON – Seven hours and 55 minutes of rain delays for that?

The Cubs on Saturday played baseball when the weather allowed – and several innings when it shouldn't have – only to get swept by the Nationals in a doubleheader that ended after 1:40 a.m. Sunday local time.

After more than four hours of delays and a postponement Friday, the Cubs waited around more than an hour to start Saturday's opener – losing 10-3 to Cy Young contender Max Scherzer.

They lost the nightcap 6-5 after Justin Wilson gave up a decisive seventh-inning homer to Bryce Harper – and only after another 1:29 delay in the eighth inning.

"This is some tough weather for both teams to be involved in," said Cole Hamels, who pitched into the sixth and handed off a lead to the bullpen in the nightcap. "Obviously, it's not what you would like just for the fact that we all know what's at stake. You want to have some nice transitional games that are more of what's to be expected.

"This is just kind of the tough part of a little stretch right here that you have to try to bear the weather and just maintain our focus and try to go out there and be ourselves and try to win ballgames."

The sweep left the road-weary Cubs with one game to play in this four-game series – and an adverse forecast for the finale – near the end of the toughest stretch of the season for the team.

Their fourth loss in six games dropped them to 5-5 on this 11-game, four-city trip – and 12-7 with four to play during a stretch of 23 games in 23 days.

"It's been a very difficult, weird trip," manager Joe Maddon said. "We're not complaining. This whole, so-many-in-a-row, the four cities, the weather – this is the kind of stuff that can actually make you better as you go forward. As long as nobody's crying or complaining, these are those things that can make you stronger."

Talk about a sunny disposition – especially for a manager whose team just watched its division lead shrink to 2½ games with the second-place Brewers at Wrigley for a three-game series starting Monday.

After taking a late lead in Game 2 behind Victor Caratini's grand slam and Hamels' pitching into the sixth inning, the Nationals stormed back for three runs in the seventh, including Harper's go-ahead, two-run homer off Wilson.

The first game was all about Scherzer (17-6), whose second complete game of the season included 11 strikeouts and made him the first pitcher in the majors to reach 200 innings (202 2/3).

He gave up only one run through eight innings Saturday and leads the majors with 271 strikeouts.

In two starts against the Cubs, he has allowed three runs in 16 innings and struck out 22 with just one walk allowed.

Scherzer, who retired 15 consecutive batters at one point, has a 2.31 ERA – third in the league behind the Mets' Jacob deGrom (1.68) and Phillies' Aaron Nola (2.29) in what looks like a three-man race for the NL Cy Young Award.

The highlight for the Cubs in Game 1 was the first hit for journeyman speedster Terrance Gore in 16 career plate appearances. Gore, who has 25 career stolen bases, singled up the middle off Scherzer in the ninth and eventually scored the Cubs' final run.

He came back in the nightcap as a pinch-runner in the seventh and stole second and third before Kris Bryant drove him in with a double.

The lowlight for the Cubs? Take your pick from Game 1: Jaime Garcia's 23-pitch, three-run, one-out start in his Cubs debut, or Tyler Chatwood's erratic two-inning relief appearance.

In his first appearance since a two-start minor-league rehab appearance for a mysterious hip injury, Chatwood hit the first batter he faced, sprinkled in a wild pitch and two walks, and allowed two runs — including one on Scherzer's run-scoring single on a 3-2 pitch.

It was the first loss for the Cubs in 10 games against six of the top pitchers in the National League they have faced this year: Scherzer (twice), deGrom (twice), Nola (twice), Mike Foltynewicz (twice), Kyle Freeland and Clayton Kershaw.

--

Daily Herald

Hamels, Murphy, Garcia reflect on watching Cubs *transform* into champions

By Bruce Miles

Not so long ago, three recently acquired Cubs peered across the field from the opposing dugout and witnessed it firsthand: the opening act of the Cubs' rise to power.

Two of these players enjoyed moments of success against the Cubs.

One was on the receiving end of a call that signaled changing of the guard in the National League Central.

They're all Cubs now, and they're seeing that things are all they've been cracked up to be.

Cole Hamels no-hit the Cubs on July 25, 2015, a day when trade rumors swirled about Hamels being traded from the Phillies, possibly to the Cubs. He wound up with Texas, who traded him to Cubs on July 27.

Daniel Murphy torched the Cubs in the National League championship series in October 2015, ending the upstart Cubs' dreams of a World Series.

Jaime Garcia found out firsthand what was coming when he lasted only 2 innings in Game 2 of the division series, won by the Cubs in four games.

Now all three have converged and are trying to help the Cubs get to the World Series again.

How did it look from across the way, seeing the Cubs on the ground floor to their rise?

"I think you have to really admire the young talent they had that came up and played ready to go and put up really great numbers," Hamels said. "That sometimes is tough because guys come up and might have a good week or two or a month and then the league kind of figures them out. They just kept coming. You really have to look at the veterans that they had. Utmost respect for those types of guys.

"You just knew that something was cooking. When you get Jed (Cubs GM Hoyer) and Theo (team president Epstein) together and what they were able to accomplish in Boston and how they were able to build a team up, they were doing the same with the Cubs. Obviously, they put together this amazing team that now a couple years later that I get to be a part of."

The Cubs obtained Murphy in a trade with the Washington Nationals on Aug. 21. In the 2015 NLCS with the New York Mets, Murphy went 9-for-17 against the Cubs with 4 homers and 6 RBI in winning MVP honors for the series.

He signed with the Nationals the following off-season and played in the NLDS in 2016 against the Dodgers and last year against the Cubs.

Although the Mets dominated the Cubs in '15, Murphy could see something coming, as well.

"I think it was a really talented group of guys, offensively and defensively," he said. "They had (Jake) Arrieta and (Jon) Lester and (Kyle) Hendricks leading the rotation. Then (Kyle) Schwarber and (Anthony) Rizzo and Kris (Bryant). Javy (Baez) had a good series against us, too. I thought it was a really young and talented group.

"The cool part from a competition standpoint is we got to see them mature almost right in front of our eyes into the 2016 world champions."

Garcia signed a minor-league deal with the Cubs on Aug. 31, and he had his contract selected from Class AAA Iowa last week.

Pitching for the Cardinals, Garcia got to see plenty of the Cubs on their way up, and he knew what was on the horizon.

"One hundred percent," he said. "I think being with the Cardinals for many years and playing against this team a bunch of times, I've seen the direction they've gone in the last 3-4 years. It's for sure something special. I've had a lot of really good friends that are playing here, and everybody said great things about the coaching staff and the players, just the culture of this team. When I saw that they were interested in bringing me here, it was an honor for me to be considered for that."

Hamels, Murphy and Garcia have been with the Cubs for only a short time, but each said he feels welcome and that things are as advertised.

"It's been amazing," Hamels said. "The warm reception from the fans has been outstanding. This clubhouse has been so much fun to be a part of, the way that they do things and the attitude that they have, the fight that they have to the bitter end. It's just good to be around. And it really brings you up a notch in trying to compete and being the best and trying to win."

Murphy's hot hitting early made him an instant hit with the Cubs.

"It's been awesome," he said. "I can speak from my experience. The organization from ownership to the front office to the coaching staff to the players, my teammates, have been as welcoming as they could possibly be. They made a transition that could be very difficult very seamless. I can't say enough about how I've enjoyed my time here."

Garcia cites as friends pitchers who have played for both the Cubs and Cardinals: John Lackey and Jason Motte.

"You can see it from the other dugout," he said. "You can see the fun they're having. You can see what they've done. You can see winning a World Series a couple years ago and the direction the team is going."

The other half of the equation is that players a club brings in have to fit in well in addition to performing. Cubs manager Joe Maddon says he believes the front office has hit with these players in addition to others, such as relievers Brandon Kintzler and Jorge De La Rosa.

"It's been outstanding," Maddon said. "It's tough when you bring somebody into the room in the latter part of the year. The rest of the group has to know that it is beneficial, that these guys are good, that they do make us better. I think in every situation that's been the case.

"Conversationally, they've all been first rate. They're always engaged in involved conversations in a good way. It's been kind of seamless. That's a credit to them, but it's also a credit to our guys, the way they welcomed and accepted these players as they walked in the door and made them feel like Cubs from the very first moment. That doesn't happen everywhere."

--

The Athletic

Ben Zobrist on the best free-agent decision he ever made, his comeback season and why the Cubs are annual contenders

By Patrick Mooney

WASHINGTON — Scott Pucino, one of Ben Zobrist's representatives at the Octagon agency in Chicago, has described it as "the perfect storm" that brought the Cubs and their World Series MVP together.

The Oakland A's traded Zobrist to the Kansas City Royals in the middle of the 2015 season, exempting him from the qualifying offer and attached draft-pick compensation that can drag down a player's market. Zobrist became an essential component to Kansas City's first World Series winner in 30 years, hitting .303 with an .880 OPS in 16 playoff games. Zobrist handled the New York Mets' power pitching that shut down the Cubs that October, a clutch performance that reinforced what teams already knew about a versatile player who appealed to both the scouting and analytic sides of the industry.

There were hungry, aggressive, big-market teams waiting for Zobrist. All along, the Cubs wanted Zobrist, but first needed to trade Starlin Castro to the New York Yankees, the only team with interest in the former All-Star shortstop, the resources to cover his contract and a willingness to give up a pitcher of value. Cubs president of baseball operations Theo Epstein called it a "multiple bank shot" at the 2015 winter meetings in Nashville, not far from Zobrist's home in Tennessee. The Cubs flipped Castro to the Yankees and agreed to a four-year, \$56 million deal with Zobrist, who took a discount because he grew up in downstate Illinois, felt the pull of making history at Wrigley Field and wanted to reunite with Joe Maddon, the manager who groomed him as a super-utility player with the Tampa Bay Rays.

There were no bad choices here: The Mets and San Francisco Giants had both offered four-year deals worth \$60 million. The Washington Nationals presented a three-year deal with a higher average annual value and turned to Daniel Murphy as a fallback option at three years and \$37.5 million guaranteed.

Zobrist could have driven off in his convertible Camaro as the 2016 World Series MVP and never played again and it totally would have been worth it. What's interesting is that while the Cubs are still a World

Series contender, the Nationals, Giants and Mets have crashed and Zobrist still remains such a valuable presence in the lineup, even at the age of 37.

“That was part of the reason why I signed here, because I knew that they were going to be good,” Zobrist said. “There were a lot of other factors. But when you look at the organization and you see that as long as they stay healthy – and as long as they continue with that commitment to the fan base – I’ve been nothing but impressed.”

The Cubs have issues to sort through between now and October, but it’s all relative for a team that’s spent almost 340 days in first place since Zobrist signed and targeting its third straight division title.

This weekend at Nationals Park once looked like a potential playoff preview, but Washington punted this season, trading Murphy to the Cubs as part of a series of salary-dump deals. The Cubs killed the myth of the even-year Giants in 2016 and San Francisco is lurching toward another sub-.500 season after a 98-loss campaign. The Mets are on pace for 90 losses and searching for a new general manager.

“It’s a combination,” Zobrist said. “For those teams, they’ve dealt with some injuries. They’ve dealt with some internal kind of issues. But I just feel like it’s the consistency of this organization for the last three years and the amount of talent that they had in the minor leagues between ’15 and ’16 as those guys are coming up.

“It’s the commitment of Theo and the front office to go get what we need to try to make us potentially that last team standing every year. They know that this is the main time for this organization — its opportunity to push — so everybody feels that around here. With some of those teams, that identity is a little bit mixed right now. Obviously, the Nationals, it’s mixed. The Mets, it’s mixed now. And the Giants at the time, they were all-in.

“You just never know how it’s going to pan out. You can only make a decision based on what you see at the time. I’ve been fortunate that it ended up working out that we’ve been successful the first three years of my tenure here. And hopefully next year, too.”

Maddon has been talking up Zobrist as the comeback player of the year after a series of injuries sapped his bat speed and disrupted his timing, leaving him with a .232 batting average and a .693 OPS last season. Javier Báez took over at second base and the Cubs expected their young hitters to take another step forward.

While Zobrist bounced back (.313 batting average/.849 OPS), Báez became part of the MVP conversation, Anthony Rizzo got hot and Murphy sparked the team from the leadoff spot, there are still a lot of quiet spots in this lineup and what Maddon has called “empty calories” in the overall offensive statistics.

“Yeah, if you remember in the beginning of the year, I was talking about how I was really eager to watch our younger guys,” Maddon said. “I thought third year into it, you’d see some real ascension among them. We’ve gotten better in a lot of ways, but they still haven’t hit their potential yet.

“The real stability comes from Murph, Zo and Rizz. The oldest guy has been setting the example for a while and he’s going as well as anybody. And then Murph coming in – I really can’t envision us being in the position we’re in had he not shown up in the lineup. The productivity and how he’s jumpstarted the offense on different nights and just his attitude among the group, it’s been fantastic.

“Give them a lot of credit. It’s later in the year. They know how to take care of themselves. They know what they’re doing up there. They’re very large regarding our success right now.”

The Zobrist bidding war — and all the 1908 anxiety surrounding the Cubs — feels like a lifetime ago. As teams began to phase out over-30 players and rethink the free-agent market, Zobrist downplayed the idea that Major League Baseball’s winter of austerity might have motivated him.

“Not really,” Zobrist said. “I guess I don’t do a lot of comparing myself to guys around the league, or even organizations around the league and what decisions they’re making. I definitely look around now and go, ‘Wow, if you don’t play well at my age, you’re in trouble very quickly.’”

“But that being said, it’s a fleeting thought for me because it doesn’t affect how I go about what I’m trying to do. I think if I had been 27 in the third year of a contract, I’d have felt the same exact way: ‘I got to go out and prove that I can get back to the level that I can play at.’”

--

The Athletic

Bryce Harper and Max Scherzer make it a miserable doubleheader for the Cubs in Washington
By Patrick Mooney

WASHINGTON — There should be so much built-in drama for the Cubs and Washington Nationals: Cole Hamels vs. Max Scherzer. Kris Bryant vs. Bryce Harper. Joe Maddon vs. Dave Martinez. Instead, this became Man vs. Mother Nature in front of rows and then sections of empty seats as rain soaked Nationals Park.

Washington had already pulled the plug on its season, reenergizing the Cubs by trading Daniel Murphy in an August waiver deal and shutting down the electric atmosphere that filled this stadium last October. Injuries, underperformance and an overall feeling that something is off with the Nationals led to those cost-cutting moves. Whatever happens this weekend, the Cubs will fly back to Chicago after a four-city road trip as a first-place team.

But, uh, yeah, this was a long, miserable Saturday for the Cubs, getting swept in a doubleheader that officially ended at 1:42 a.m. Sunday, creating some intrigue about October. Whatever system-wide issues the 71-72 Nationals have experienced, they still have superstar talent. That display left the Cubs clinging to a 2 1/2-game lead over the Milwaukee Brewers while the St. Louis Cardinals are hanging five games back in the division.

“This is tough weather for both teams to be involved in,” Hamels said after a 6-5 loss in Game 2. “Obviously, it’s not what you would like, just because we all know what’s at stake. You just kind of have to bear the weather and maintain our focus and try to go out there and be ourselves.”

Forget about the idea of Justin Wilson as a possible closer. In one of those “pockets” Maddon saw for his mix-and-match relievers, Harper destroyed Wilson’s 93-mph fastball, launching it over the center-field wall for a go-ahead, two-run homer in the seventh inning. Harper posed, walked up the first-base line and screamed, “Hell yeah, baby! Let’s go!” before hugging Martinez in the dugout.

That vicious left-handed swing showed why we will be chasing Harper rumors this offseason. The Cubs only scored during garbage time against Scherzer in a 10-3 Game 1 loss. The big-name hitters were pretty quiet all night. Backup catcher Victor Caratini generated the offense in Game 2 with a grand slam

and an awesome bat flip while pinch-runner Terrance Gore looked like Dave Roberts 2.0, stealing two bases and creating a run.

In between games, the Nationals inducted Jayson Werth into their "Ring of Honor," recognizing a good player with a big personality who once signed a seven-year, \$126 million contract, becoming a part of teams that went 0-for-4 in playoff series while the Cubs ramped up as the National League's superpower. In that sense, the on-field ceremony felt a little awkward, especially since Werth played for Triple-A Tacoma as recently as June and actually won a World Series ring with the Philadelphia Phillies.

While Hamels warmed up in the bullpen before Game 2, Werth gave a shout-out to the 2008 World Series MVP, a reminder of how fast and fleeting those windows can be. Of course, Werth-fest ran too long, bumping the anticipated first pitch from 8:45 p.m. toward 9:00 and into the heavy storm that caused another rain delay at 12:02 a.m. Sunday in the middle of the eighth inning.

At least Werth got his camouflage rocking chair. After an 89-minute wait, Cubs reliever Jesse Chavez threw the next pitch to Michael A. Taylor at 1:31 a.m.

"Nothing bugged me," Maddon said. "We knew it going in. We wanted to play. We got on top. We had a nice lead. Cole was pitching well, and then all of a sudden, they just rallied from behind. We had the right pitchers lined up. They were rested and they got us. There's no crying or complaining on our side. We normally get that game done."

Rain already washed away Jon Lester's start on Friday night, pushing the \$155 million lefty back to Monday against the Brewers at Wrigley Field and forcing Jaime Garcia to start Game 1 opposite Scherzer, eight days after getting released by the Toronto Blue Jays and following another rain delay that lasted 2 hours and 10 minutes.

This went just about as expected, Garcia loading the bases with three walks in the first inning and Scherzer still throwing 95 mph in the ninth. Garcia got one out, the Cubs defense committed three errors and Scherzer notched his 16th double-digit strikeout game and 17th win this season, burnishing his Cy Young Award credentials. That is what Washington's season has been reduced to, playing for individual honors, numbers and jobs while messing with teams like the Cubs.

Scherzer is a freak, but is there anyone else out there on an NL contender right now that you would trust more in a playoff game than Hamels?

Hamels, the NL pitcher of the month for August, allowed zero, one or two runs in each of his first seven starts as a Cub since getting traded from the Texas Rangers.

Hamels took a no-hitter into the fourth inning when Adrian Sanchez drove a ball into center field, where Albert Almora Jr. missed one of those on-the-run catches he normally makes, the ball bouncing off his glove/left wrist for an RBI triple. Hamels later walked off the mound with two outs in the sixth inning, a runner on second base and a 4-3 lead, a scenario that will probably make Cubs fans nervous in October. But the Cubs aren't looking that far ahead yet. The forecast for Sunday afternoon might be worse.

"I have not [heard anything yet], except that if you look at the screen, it's pretty green," Maddon said. "We're not complaining. This is the kind of stuff that could actually make you better as you move forward. As long as nobody's crying and complaining, these are those things that can make you stronger. I'm proud of the boys. We didn't get it done tonight. We'll show up tomorrow, weather permitting."

--

Cubs.com

Garcia labors in debut as Cubs drop Game 1

By Ian Quillen

WASHINGTON -- After waiting nearly 24 hours to play the second of four games at Nationals Park, the Cubs committed three errors -- including two in the Nats' five-run sixth -- while succumbing to Max Scherzer's 10th career complete game in a 10-3 loss to open Saturday's doubleheader.

Scherzer (17-6) struck out 11, walked none and allowed nine hits as Washington evened the series at one game apiece. He carried a shutout through six innings before allowing a run in the seventh and two in the ninth.

After Friday night's washout, another rain delay of 2 hours, 10 minutes preceded this one. When play finally started, it was the Cubs who looked off the pace as their lead in the National League Central shrank to 3 1/2 games over the Brewers, who were playing the Giants on Saturday night.

Jaime Garcia began what was a bullpen game for the Cubs, allowing three runs while retiring only one batter in his Cubs debut.

After Tommy La Stella's double in the Cubs' half of the first, Scherzer retired 15 consecutive batters before plunking Ian Happ and allowing a single to former Nats teammate Daniel Murphy in the sixth. La Stella grounded into a double play to end that threat.

Willson Contreras eventually singled in a run off Scherzer in the seventh, but only after Chicago's defense and pitching capitulated in the bottom of the sixth.

Randy Rosario walked Matt Wieters, allowed a single to Adrian Sanchez and saw the bases loaded when catcher Contreras made a wild throw to third on Scherzer's sacrifice attempt. Rosario then walked Trea Turner with his final pitch to force across a run.

Anthony Rendon drove in another run on a bloop single off James Norwood that spilled off Anthony Rizzo's glove on an attempted over-the-shoulder catch. Scherzer sprinted in on Norwood's wild pitch, Turner scored on Murphy's errant throw home from second, and Mark Reynolds' grounder plated Rendon to make it 8-0.

The Nats added two more in the seventh off Tyler Chatwood in a game in which all six Cubs pitchers gave up one hit.

MOMENT THAT MATTERED

Rizzo came close to making a play on Juan Soto's bases-loaded single in the first, but he couldn't get his glove on it. Had he corralled it, there may have been time for an inning-ending double play to get Garcia out of the first unscathed. Instead, two runs scored.

SOUND SMART

La Stella actually dipped to 4-for-10 in his career against Scherzer despite his first-inning double, with all four of those hits going for extra bases. That's more than any other Cubs player has against the three-time Cy Young Award winner. Ben Zobrist has three extra-base hits -- all homers.

YOU GOTTA SEE THIS

La Stella got into the act on defense, too, when Victor Robles led off the sixth inning with a well-placed bunt down the first-base line. On a slick surface, La Stella charged, barehanded the ball and fired on the run to nab Robles by fractions of a step.

WASHINGTON -- After waiting nearly 24 hours to play the second of four games at Nationals Park, the Cubs committed three errors -- including two in the Nats' five-run sixth -- while succumbing to Max Scherzer's 10th career complete game in a 10-3 loss to open Saturday's doubleheader.

Scherzer (17-6) struck out 11, walked none and allowed nine hits as Washington evened the series at one game apiece. He carried a shutout through six innings before allowing a run in the seventh and two in the ninth.

After Friday night's washout, another rain delay of 2 hours, 10 minutes preceded this one. When play finally started, it was the Cubs who looked off the pace as their lead in the National League Central shrank to 3 1/2 games over the Brewers, who were playing the Giants on Saturday night.

Jaime Garcia began what was a bullpen game for the Cubs, allowing three runs while retiring only one batter in his Cubs debut.

--

Cubs.com

Friday's rainout lets Lester open against Crew
By Ian Quillen

WASHINGTON -- After pitching only an inning on Friday night at Nationals Park, in a game eventually wiped out by rain, Cubs left-hander Jon Lester will now start on Monday to open a crucial three-game home series against the Brewers.

Had the game been completed without interruption, Lester (15-5, 3.53 ERA) would've been on regular rest for Wednesday's finale.

Bumping him up two games may help the Cubs alleviate some angst, however, after a rain delay of three hours and eventual postponement followed a scoreless, 14-pitch opening inning.

"Everything about last night was [frustrating]," said Cubs manager Joe Maddon said on Saturday afternoon. "But you've got to [say], 'Here's a trash can, it's got to go away.'"

Lester won his only previous start against Milwaukee this season, going six scoreless innings in an 8-0 victory on April 5.

Lefty Jose Quintana will start Game 2, with Kyle Hendricks following in Game 3 against the Brewers -- who began Saturday four games behind the first-place Cubs in the National League Central.

Maddon frustrated by 'confusing' rainout decision

Maddon also expressed his frustration with what he called the "confusing" decision-making process throughout Friday night, which culminated in the call at roughly 11:45 p.m. ET to postpone the game when the rain finally appeared to clear.

"We played when we shouldn't have [in starting the game] and then did not play when we should have," Maddon said. "We waited as long as we did, and then when the skies were absolutely clear, from that moment on, they said they could not be sure [of] another pop-up [storm]. I'm beyond an amateur meteorologist, and I could see that it wasn't going to rain anymore."

Maddon said it didn't matter that it was nearly midnight.

"We had no issues with starting at 11:30 [p.m. ET]. None," he said.

The scheduled 3:05 p.m. ET start of Saturday's single-admission doubleheader was also delayed -- just the latest obstacle in what is still scheduled as a 23-game, 23-day stretch for the Cubs, who are 12-5 in that span, so far.

"I think the fact we've been going through all this makes this somewhat easier, in a sense," Maddon said. "Because you're not just throwing a wrench in the gears, right now. The wrench has been thrown in the gears for a bit and we keep grinding through it."

--

Cubs.com

Cubs can't get by on Caratini's slam in G2

By Ian Quillen

WASHINGTON -- It was Cubs reliever Justin Wilson who gave up Bryce Harper's go-ahead two-run homer in a 6-5 loss to the Nationals in the nightcap of Saturday's doubleheader.

Still, starter Cole Hamels lamented his own battles with Harper in Game 2 after they led to a second loss to cap a long rain-delayed evening at Nationals Park. Washington won the early game, 10-3.

"Walking him three times, I think that really kind of hurt," said Hamels, who allowed three earned runs over 5 2/3 innings in a no-decision. "For a lefty-lefty matchup, you have to attack him. No matter what type of dangers and what he's obviously capable of doing. You have to try to get him out.

"His at-bats were really what decided this game."

After turning those three free passes into one run scored, Harper clobbered a cutter from Wilson in his fourth plate appearance, a shot to dead center that traveled a projected 413 feet, according to Statcast™, to give the Nationals their first lead of the game in the seventh inning. It was his 32nd homer of the season.

In the process, Wilson's scoreless-outings streak was snapped at 14, and the Cubs' lead over the Brewers atop the NL Central dwindled to 2 1/2 games. It's their smallest margin since a victory over the Tigers on Aug. 22.

"We had the right pitchers lined up, they were rested, and they got us," manager Joe Maddon said. "They absolutely got us. There's no complaining on our side. We normally get that game done."

Chicago gave back a four-run lead in a nightcap that ended at roughly 12:45 a.m. CT after a delay of 1 hour, 29 minutes following the top of the eighth. After Friday's washout, Saturday's first game was also plagued by a delay of 2 hours, 10 minutes prior to first pitch.

Hamels' three runs allowed were his most in eight starts since being acquired in a trade with the Rangers. They all came after rookie Victor Caratini's first career grand slam -- and third career home run -- staked Chicago to a 4-0 lead in the fourth inning off Nationals starter Jefry Rodriguez.

Hamels allowed an RBI triple and RBI double to Adrian Sanchez, a second-year player who hadn't played in a big league game since June before starting both games of Saturday's doubleheader.

"No matter who they are and what type of track record they have, you have to be able to execute," said Hamels, who allowed only three hits but issued five walks. "And I didn't execute multiple times to him."

The Cubs still appeared to be heading for a split of the twin bill when Kris Bryant's seventh-inning double off Wander Suero scored Terrance Gore from third to make it 5-3.

Steve Cishek came on in the bottom half and gave up an RBI double to Anthony Rendon, prompting Maddon to turn to Wilson to face the left-handed-hitting Harper. After working a 1-1 count, Harper connected for the decisive blow.

"Any pitch properly thrown in the right spot is always the right pitch," Maddon said. "He just didn't get it in the right spot."

YOU GOTTA SEE THIS

After sitting out the opener, shortstop Javier Baez made an immediate impression in Game 2, tracking Trea Turner's foul pop to the warning track before making a slick, back-handed grab just a step from the railing to record the Cubs' first out of the game.

GORE ON TO SCORE

After Tommy La Stella led off the seventh with a pinch-hit single, Gore entered as a pinch-runner with one out and immediately created havoc on the basepaths. He swiped second despite an awkward late slide, when Nats shortstop Turner might've caught him skidding past the base had he held the tag. Then, Gore took third more comfortably for his fourth steal of the season as Albert Almora Jr. struck out for the second out of the inning. The twin thefts came after the 27-year-old speed merchant registered his first career hit against Scherzer in Game 1.

SOUND SMART

The Cubs were swept in a doubleheader for the first time this season after splitting three previous twin bills, which were all of the day-night variety. The twin bill also appears to be the franchise's first played in Washington in more than 121 years. On Aug. 20, 1897, the Chicago Colts split a pair of games with the Washington Senators at Boundary Field.

UP NEXT

The Cubs conclude a season-long 11-game road trip at 12:35 p.m. CT on Sunday as left-hander Mike Montgomery (4-5, 3.85 ERA) will start the series finale at Nationals Park. Montgomery is coming off back-to-back starts of fewer than five complete innings after returning from the disabled list (shoulder inflammation) on Aug. 30. Righty Erick Fedde (1-3, 6.00) starts for the Nats.

--

ESPNChicago.com

Joe Maddon still wondering why Friday's game vs. Nationals was postponed

By Jesse Rogers

WASHINGTON - While attempting to fit in their Saturday doubleheader between raindrops, the Chicago Cubs are still wondering why their game against the Washington Nationals wasn't played on Friday night.

"If you want the true story, contact MLB," manager Joe Maddon said Saturday. "It was confusing to us, also. We played when we should not have and then not played when we should have."

The teams waited out a 1:21 delay to begin the game on Friday only to play 1 2/3 innings before the rains came again. This time, they stuck around for almost three more hours, forcing a cancellation, but curiously only after the rain ceased at about 11:30 p.m. ET. The Cubs were ready to play then.

"We waited as long as we did, and the skies were absolutely clear from that moment [11:30 p.m.] on, and they said they could not be sure there would not be another pop-up [storm]," Maddon said. "I'm beyond an amateur meteorologist and I could see it wasn't going to rain anymore, so it was kind of confusing to us also."

Starter Jon Lester pitched just one inning, so he'll come back on short rest on Monday to face the Milwaukee Brewers at Wrigley Field. Also at issue was whether the teams would play a split doubleheader on Saturday or a single-ticket admission. The Nationals wanted a day/night affair.

"We've already played three of those [split doubleheaders]," player rep Kris Bryant said. "It's our right [per the CBA] to want a straight doubleheader. We ended up getting it, but we had to wait here for a while."

Bryant isn't an advocate of playing baseball past midnight, but it's the lesser of two evils, compared to a late postponement and then a doubleheader just a few hours later. And now even that has been delayed by rain on Saturday.

"I'm just as confused too," Bryant said. "From the player's perspective, when you play games at 1 or 2 in the morning, you are going to get the worst possible baseball. But either call it early or just play."

Sunday calls for even more rain, which may cause more headaches as Sunday is the last meeting between the teams. They have a common off day on Thursday, but that was going to be the Cubs first off-day in 24 days. There are no good options, which is why Maddon wanted to get the game in on Friday at all costs.

"It was unfortunate, because we made it clear in the beginning we were willing to wait and play," he said. "We had no issues with starting at 11:30."

--

NBC Sports Chicago

Cubs confused by handling of weather issues at Nationals Park

By Tony Andracki

WASHINGTON — The Cubs' 2018 regular season is apparently on track to be bookended by some brutal weather.

After a slew of snowouts and other weather delays in April, the Cubs now have to contend with a wet weekend in D.C. that has impacted at least two days of the four-game trip and is expected to continue into Sunday, as well.

Friday night was particularly frustrating for the Cubs and Nationals, as first pitch was delayed more than an hour, then both starting pitchers warmed up and began the game only to go back into a rain delay with two outs in the top of the second inning.

Three hours after that, the game was officially postponed to Saturday for a doubleheader, with Friday's inning-plus of action washed away.

"If you'd like the true story, contact MLB," Joe Maddon said before Saturday's doubleheader. "It was kinda confusing to us also. Played when we shouldn't and then did not play when we should have. So I voiced my opinion at the appropriate moment.

"We wanted to play [Friday]. We wanted two [days of one game]. We waited as long as we did and then the skies were absolutely clear from that moment on. And they said they could not be sure that there would not be another pop-up, which — I'm an amateur meteorologist and I could see it wasn't gonna rain anymore. So it was kinda confusing to us also."

The Cubs are already in the midst of a stretch where they have 23 straight days with a game and really wanted to avoid having to play a doubleheader on top of that.

But with so much rain hitting the field, the Nationals were not all that interested in risking injury to play Friday night:

While the Cubs were upset to "burn" Lester in the first part of a game that didn't count, the Nationals also had their starter — Joe Ross — making his first MLB start since Tommy John surgery.

"Everything about last night was [tough], but you gotta [mimics throwing motion]. There's the trash can — it's gotta go away," Maddon said. "It was just unfortunate because we made it clear in the beginning that we wanted to wait and play and we were willing to wait and play and then about 10 o'clock, it didn't look good. Then all of a sudden, it started to look better and we had no issues with starting at 11:30."

The good news from the Cubs' end is that their "A" bullpen (Pedro Strop, Steve Cishek, Justin Wilson, Jesse Chavez) were unable to go Friday due to recent work, but will be available Saturday.

But it still wasn't an actual day off for the Cubs Friday as guys had to "burn some fuel" to warm up and get loose for a game that never actually got played. Not to mention spending more than a full day's worth of time at the ballpark instead of with their families or at the hotel resting.

As if Saturday wasn't a long enough day already, the start of Game 1 was delayed two hours and 10 minutes, making for a total of more than six hours of delays in a 24-hour span at Nationals Park.

It also leaves only about a 24-hour span for the Cubs and Nationals to play three games between Saturday evening and Sunday afternoon.

The Cubs will have to fly back to Chicago Sunday night to get ready for an all-important three-game series with the Brewers at Wrigley Field beginning Monday night.

Still, the Cubs woke up Saturday morning 12-5 over this tough stretch with a four-game lead in the division.

"The guys have been great," Maddon said. "I don't want us to take that trip and start thinking in a negative manner. We've been through a rough baseball stretch. We've handled it well; I anticipate we'll continue to handle it well."

The other saving grace is the expanded rosters in September, giving the Cubs a lot more options to help cover innings in Game 1 as well as resting players and ensuring most guys don't have to play both games.

"I think the fact we've been going through all this actually makes this somewhat easier, in a sense," Maddon said. "Because you're not just throwing a wrench in the gears right now."

"The wrench has been thrown in the gears for a bit and we keep grinding through it. So I think we're OK."

--