



CHICAGO CUBS DAILY CLIPS

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

March 10, 2018

- The Athletic, **Jon Lester's state of the 2018 Cubs: 'It's good sometimes to get your butt kicked and get knocked down.'**
<https://theathletic.com/268030/2018/03/09/jon-lesters-state-of-the-2018-cubs-its-good-sometimes-to-get-your-butt-kicked-and-get-knocked-down/>
- The Athletic, **Cubs' prank wars rage on, and Tommy La Stella isn't standing down**
<https://theathletic.com/267871/2018/03/09/cubs-prank-wars-rage-on-and-tommy-la-stella-isnt-standing-down/>
- Cubs.com, **Rizzo, Venable share bond dating to SD days**
<https://www.mlb.com/cubs/news/will-venable-key-in-anthony-rizzos-career/c-268283518>
- Cubs.com, **La Stella adds some bounce to Cubs' camp**
<https://www.mlb.com/cubs/news/tommy-la-stella-adds-bounce-house-to-cubs-camp/c-268283354>
- Cubs.com, **Lester likes energy in Cubs' camp this spring**
<https://www.mlb.com/cubs/news/jon-lester-on-cubs-energy-attitude-in-spring/c-268322470>
- Cubs.com, **Cubs send three top prospects to Double-A**
<https://www.mlb.com/cubs/news/cubs-send-three-top-prospects-to-double-a/c-268278256>
- Chicago Tribune, **After all these years, longtime Cubs broadcaster Pat Hughes still gets butterflies**
<http://www.chicagotribune.com/sports/baseball/cubs/ct-spt-cubs-pat-hughes-sullivan-20180310-story.html>
- Chicago Tribune, **Jon Lester believes Cubs 'are in a good place' getting ready to go**
<http://www.chicagotribune.com/sports/baseball/cubs/ct-spt-cubs-jon-lester-notes-20180309-story.html>
- Chicago Tribune, **Chris Denorfia, Matt Murton return to Cubs' organization in front office roles**
<http://www.chicagotribune.com/sports/baseball/cubs/ct-spt-cubs-chris-denorfia-20180309-story.html>
- Chicago Tribune, **Northwestern alum Luke Farrell aiming for more highlights at Wrigley Field**
<http://www.chicagotribune.com/sports/baseball/cubs/ct-spt-cubs-farrell-family-20180309-story.html>
- Chicago Tribune, **Cubs counting on new coach Will Venable being able to relate to players**
<http://www.chicagotribune.com/sports/baseball/cubs/ct-spt-cubs-will-venable-experience-20180309-story.html>

- Chicago Tribune, **Javier Baez likely to miss more time with hamstring soreness**
<http://www.chicagotribune.com/sports/baseball/cubs/ct-spt-cubs-javier-baez-hamstring-20180309-story.html>
- Chicago Tribune, **Cubs eager to see latest Wrigley renovations — especially the dugout upgrades**
<http://www.chicagotribune.com/sports/baseball/cubs/ct-spt-cubs-wrigley-field-renovations-20180309-story.html>
- Chicago Tribune, **Who put a bouncy house in Theo Epstein's parking space?**
<http://www.chicagotribune.com/sports/baseball/cubs/ct-spt-cubs-joe-maddon-bouncy-house-prank-20180309-story.html>
- Chicago Tribune, **Transportation matters for Javier Baez and Ben Zobrist**
<http://www.chicagotribune.com/sports/baseball/cubs/ct-spt-cubs-javier-baez-ben-zobrist-20180309-story.html>
- Chicago Tribune, **Friday's recap: Cubs 6, Angels 1**
<http://www.chicagotribune.com/sports/baseball/cubs/ct-spt-cubs-angels-recap-20180309-story.html>
- Chicago Sun-Times, **Jon Lester on Cubs' 2018 focus: 'It's good sometimes to get your butt kicked'**
<https://chicago.suntimes.com/sports/jon-lester-on-cubs-2018-focus-its-good-sometimes-to-get-your-butt-kicked/>
- Chicago Sun-Times, **Cubs among teams seeing new pitching math as 200-inning starters fade away**
<https://chicago.suntimes.com/sports/cubs-among-teams-seeing-new-pitching-math-as-200-inning-starters-fade-away/>
- Chicago Sun-Times, **Jon Lester impressive in Cubs' 6-1 spring-training victory over Angels**
<https://chicago.suntimes.com/sports/jon-lester-impressive-in-cubs-6-1-spring-training-victory-over-angels/>
- Chicago Sun-Times, **Look for bounce in Jon Lester's step with Anthony Rizzo in lineup for Cubs**
<https://chicago.suntimes.com/sports/look-for-bounce-in-jon-lesters-step-with-anthony-rizzo-in-lineup-for-cubs/>

--

The Athletic

Jon Lester's state of the 2018 Cubs: 'It's good sometimes to get your butt kicked and get knocked down.'
By Patrick Mooney

MESA, Ariz. — The Cubs talked a good game in spring training last year.

Manager Joe Maddon thought admitting the possibility of a World Series hangover would help make it go away. Theo Epstein's front office added veterans like Wade Davis, Jon Jay and Brett Anderson to change the clubhouse dynamics. Pitching coach Chris Bosio adjusted the schedule for a staff that had worked into early November.

The Cubs would still have youth on their side and the elite talent that allowed them to have a parade down Michigan Ave. and go on "Saturday Night Live."

"We were feeling good about ourselves," Cubs stater Jon Lester said after his outing Friday at Sloan Park. "We just broke a 108-year-old curse. And I'm sure when we all came into camp, there was that feeling of: 'Well, we'll just show up and do it again.'

"I don't know if that's true. I don't know how you want to word that. But I think it's good sometimes to get your butt kicked and get knocked down, especially after you've tasted success."

Maddon looked out of touch and out of answers during a 43-45 first half in 2017, but his steady nature would be rewarded with a 49-25 sprint into the playoffs. While teammates admired Davis and Jay for their sense of purpose and professionalism, Anderson got hurt in early May and would never return to the rotation. Bosio – one of the most influential figures during the Cubs' rebuild – didn't get his contract option picked up after a third consecutive trip to the National League Championship Series.

There are obvious and subtle reasons why the three-peat New York Yankees (1998-2000) are the last team to win back-to-back World Series titles. It's what the Houston Astros are going through now and will have deal with all year, whether they believe it or not.

"We're not the Cubs," Cy Young Award winner Dallas Keuchel recently told the Washington Post. "I firmly believe we have better players."

Imagine how good the Astros would be now if they had taken Kris Bryant instead of Mark Appel with the No. 1 overall pick in the 2013 draft. But an Astros vs. Cubs breakdown in the middle of March isn't nearly as interesting as 2017 Cubs vs. 2018 Cubs.

"The energy level has been good," Lester said. "I'm sure everybody says the same thing in every camp, but it's crisp, it's clean, we're moving on to the next thing. I feel like the games are being played so much better this year than it was last year, for whatever reason.

"Whoever wants to put 'hangover' or whatever else on there, I just think last year ended a little bit sour for some guys, so I think they're ready to improve. I know for myself [that] it didn't go as well as I expected or wanted to last year."

Lester has exacting standards and fell 19 1/3 innings short of reaching 200 for the sixth consecutive year, finishing with a 4.33 ERA that was almost two runs higher than his Cy Young Award runner-up season in 2016.

Lester spent part of August and September on the disabled list with left lat tightness and general shoulder fatigue before gathering himself for another strong October (1.88 ERA in 14 1/3 postseason innings).

For what it's worth, Lester looked sharp during Friday afternoon's 6-1 win over the Los Angeles Angels, throwing five scoreless innings in front of another sellout crowd in Mesa.

This is now the second half of the six-year, \$155 million megadeal that changed franchise history. Not that Lester is looking that far ahead on the runway or guaranteeing the good vibes at Camp Maddon will automatically carry over into the regular season or saying the Cubs should start taking postseason ticket deposits now.

"It's too long of a season," Lester said. "I've been a part of teams that were supposed to win the World Series before we even took the field and didn't even make the playoffs.

"This season in baseball is so unique and so long that you can't put the cart before the horse. You got to saddle up. You got to ride the whole deal. You can't skip. You can't look back. You can only look forward to tomorrow.

"That's one thing I've always tried to do. You make a start. It is what it is. The next day is on to the next start. You got to prepare for that next one. You can't sit back and go, 'Woe is me' or feel too good about yourself."

Wearing flip-flops, shorts and a pink polo shirt, Lester stood in almost the exact same spot outside the clubhouse where Javier Baez spoke with reporters the day before, downplaying left hamstring tightness as nothing more than a cramp from dehydration. Maddon said it is still bothering Baez and will be monitored this weekend, a reminder of what could go wrong for the Cubs. But those are physical issues. Mentally, the Cubs say they are all there.

"Everybody forgets that we still have a young team," Lester said. "These guys have grown up a lot and kind of figured out how to go through the grind and then show up the next spring training and get their stuff done, off a losing season and off the high of a World Series. Hopefully, we just keep learning and these guys continue to get better."

--

The Athletic

Cubs' prank wars rage on, and Tommy La Stella isn't standing down
By Patrick Mooney

MESA, Ariz. — Theo Epstein seems like the last person you would want to engage in a prank war. (Just ask @JedHoyer_.) The Cubs president has at least four special assistants, a research and development wing, a mental skills staff, a video department and a savage sense of humor

The reigning "World's Greatest Leader" (according to Fortune magazine) also has a lot of "executive time" on his hands since it's spring training and the Cubs pretty much knew their Opening Day roster a month ago.

But, hey, Tommy La Stella is wired a little differently and has a, um, unique relationship with his bosses. That explains the colorful bounce house blown up on Friday in RESERVED spots 12 and 13, where Epstein and Hoyer park their cars at the Sloan Park complex.

"I don't know why he put that there," Epstein said. "He's just below the line. He'll have to wait a couple years. He's not tall enough to bounce in it."

Epstein paused as he walked up the stairs toward the second-floor offices, looked down at reporters and said: "Neither is Jed though."

Hoyer's official GM look — striped polo shirt and khaki pants — became La Stella's outfit for Monday's workout after he recently parked in those executive spots. La Stella cut Hoyer's khakis because, as he said, "my glutes are a little too big for the pants."

Less than 72 hours after La Stella hinted there might be a ceasefire, an inflatable castle magically appeared in the same row as Clark the Cub's minivan.

"This will be the last one," La Stella said. "I'm trying to do a nice thing for the kids."

This is a remarkable transformation for La Stella, who does not have any kids and went AWOL during the 2016 World Series season, initially refusing to report to Triple-A Iowa and going home to New Jersey for a break.

But Epstein, Hoyer and manager Joe Maddon are empathetic and open-minded, especially by the standards of a conservative industry. La Stella earned a championship ring and won over teammates with his energy, upbeat attitude, constant chatter in the dugout and preparation as a left-handed pinch-hitter and backup infielder.

When Maddon gets rolling, he likes to talk about the free exchange of ideas and well-rounded experience at "The Cub University."

Are bounce houses part of the liberal arts education?

"Don't you love it?" Maddon said. "I love it. That's the kind of stuff, the unique kind of stuff, that adds to the day. Like I drove up and I started smiling immediately. You probably thought it was Tommy. It probably is Tommy. But I'm into all this stuff."

"The educational process around here is really fascinating and I'm really enjoying it."

Maddon also gave a shout-out to ESPN multimedia personality Jesse Rogers, who championed La Stella's "3 a.m." nickname on Twitter and is the co-author of "Try Not to Suck: The Exceptional, Extraordinary Baseball Life of Joe Maddon," a soon-to-be-released biography.

Maddon – who says a lot of things – once said something like La Stella could "wake up at 3 a.m. and hit anyone." Maddon wishes he thought of the bounce house first.

"I thought it was a great idea," Maddon said. "I'm certain it's there for the family and kids. I hope, although Tommy may be into that kind of thing and easily fits in there. And if you see Jesse Rogers there also, then you know it was Tommy. I think it was like blocked out between 5 and 6. It's only for Tommy and Jesse at that point."

--

Cubs.com

Rizzo, Venable share bond dating to SD days

By Carrie Muskat

MESA, Ariz. -- Anthony Rizzo was 21 years old when he was traded from the Red Sox to the Padres, one of five players involved in the Adrian Gonzalez deal in December 2010. One of Rizzo's new teammates in San Diego was an outfielder, Will Venable, who helped the young first baseman make the transition.

"It was just different," Rizzo said about going from the Red Sox to San Diego. "It was a new organization, and when you go to a new organization, it's hard. Will was one of the guys who was there and a nice guy who understood me. I always liked him for that."

"He was a good guy and helped me," Rizzo said. "I always rooted for Will."

Venable is now the Cubs' first-base and outfield coach, and he is reunited with Rizzo.

"I got a chance to see a young Rizzo come up and make his debut," said Venable, now 35. "It's great for me now being in this role to have a relationship with him in the past."

Cubs general manager Jed Hoyer held that post with the Padres at that time and orchestrated the Rizzo-Gonzalez deal. He also was a main reason the Cubs hired Venable last year as a special assistant.

"[Rizzo] mentioned to me that he really appreciated how Will went out of his way for him," Hoyer said. "That's how Will is -- he sees a young guy come up and he puts his arm around him and helps him. When Anthony saw Will here [with the Cubs] last year, he said, 'That's great, I love that guy. He really helped me out.'"

Maybe it was Venable's upbringing. His father, Max, played for the Giants, Expos, Reds and Angels. Maybe it's Venable's education -- he went to Princeton. Maybe Will Venable is just a nice guy. Whatever, it was, he recognized that Rizzo was in a unique situation and wanted to help.

In 2011, Venable was sent down to Triple-A to "catch his breath," as he put it. He and Rizzo connected there.

"He was just awesome," Rizzo said. "He wasn't moping or anything. He was excited and just a nice guy. When you're in Triple-A, it was cool to see that."

When Rizzo was called up to the Padres, he had to deal with a lot of hype.

"My impression was the pressure the city [of San Diego] put on Anthony was less about Adrian and more about the fact that we truthfully hadn't had a big-time prospect come up and have the same kind of buzz that there was with Anthony," Venable said. "I don't think it had anything to do with Adrian. The San Diego community loved Adrian, he did a ton for the community and everyone was sad to see him go. I think the pressure on [Rizzo] came from the buzz around his prospect status. It was really unfair, to be honest. It put him in a tough spot."

Rizzo made his Major League debut with the Padres on June 9, 2011. He batted .141 in 49 games in his first pro season.

"This is just me guessing, but that [pressure] on top of the fact that we didn't have a very good team and we didn't have veteran leadership, I think it was an uncomfortable situation for a kid to come up and try to be successful," Venable said. "I know Anthony wishes that stretch in San Diego would've been better for him. I'm happy things worked out for him the way it did. It's all good, and my guess is he's not looking back."

That was Rizzo's only season in San Diego. He was traded in January 2012 to the Cubs in exchange for Andrew Cashner.

Hopefully, all Minor League players can find someone to help ease them into the grind of the big leagues.

"Anyone who comes up, you want to make sure you're professional and respect the game," Venable said. "There's something to be said for a guy who is successful in the Minor Leagues to come up and be

comfortable to go about his business the way he did in the Minor Leagues. That's something I wanted to make sure the young guys knew from me, that I supported that."

Now, Rizzo, 28, is a three-time All-Star, a World Series champion, the head of the Anthony Rizzo Family Foundation, and beginning his eighth big league season. Venable isn't surprised at how far the first baseman has come.

"He's a really good kid and super talented, and the game, I don't want to say was easy for him, but you knew he had the ability to succeed at the big league level," Venable said. "Certainly I'm not a scout by any means, but you knew he'd be special. I just didn't know he'd be this special, to be honest."

--

Cubs.com

La Stella adds some bounce to Cubs' camp

By Carrie Muskat

MESA, Ariz. -- When Cubs president of baseball operations Theo Epstein and general manager Jed Hoyer arrived at the team complex on Friday, both of their parking spaces were taken by a large red, yellow and blue bounce house for kids. Earlier this spring, infielder Tommy La Stella took the liberty of parking in the executives' reserved spots. Could La Stella be behind the latest prank?

"I figured I'd make it a semi truce," La Stella confessed. "I got their parking spots taken, but also some kids can come and bounce around a little bit, front office, players' kids."

Hoyer retaliated on Monday by taking La Stella's uniform and leaving a striped polo shirt and khaki pants for the infielder to wear, which he did during the morning stretch and drills. La Stella did return the pants to Hoyer, although the inseam was ripped open because they were a little snug.

Epstein tried to be coy.

"I don't know why [La Stella] put it there," Epstein said of the bounce house. "He's not tall enough to be able to bounce in that. He's borderline. He'll have to wait a couple years. Neither is Jed, though."

Cubs manager Joe Maddon was a little jealous.

"I loved that," Maddon said. "I drove in today and wished I had thought about it myself.

"That's the kind of unique stuff that adds to the day," Maddon said. "I drove up and started smiling immediately. You probably thought it was Tommy, it probably is Tommy. I'm into all this stuff."

Hoyer's children were jumping around in the bounce house pregame Friday. La Stella said the fun and games this spring were just a "spur-of-the-moment thing." Isn't he nervous as to what will happen the next time he comes into the clubhouse?

"If it happens, it happens," La Stella said.

--

Cubs.com

Lester likes energy in Cubs' camp this spring

By Carrie Muskat

MESA, Ariz. -- The Cubs appear to have recovered from the World Series hangover, and Jon Lester tuned up for the team's next run with five scoreless innings on Friday against the Angels.

"The energy level has been good," Lester said after the Cubs' 6-1 win in front of 15,481 at Sloan Park.

"I'm sure everybody says the same thing in every camp, but like I said, it's crisp, it's clean, we're moving on to the next thing. I feel the games are being played so much better this year than last year.

"Whoever wants to put 'hangover' or whatever on there, I think guys last year, it ended a little sour and they're ready to improve on that," Lester said of the Cubs, who reached the National League Championship Series last year, only to lose to the Dodgers.

"I know for myself, that's one of the reasons [motivating] me. It didn't go as well as I wanted or expected last year. It's been a good energy, even the guys, the non-roster guys, the fill-in guys, they've all done a great job at their job."

The Cubs' World Series championship in 2016 was the franchise's first since 1908.

"We were feeling good about ourselves [last spring] -- we just broke a 108-year-old curse," Lester said.

"I'm sure when we came into camp there was a feeling of, 'Well, we'll just show up and do it again.' I don't know if that's true, but I think it's good sometimes to get your butt kicked and knocked down, especially after you've tasted success. I think we're in a good place."

Kyle Schwarber and David Bote each smacked two-run homers Friday, and Bote added an RBI single, to back Lester. New closer Brandon Morrow struck out one in one inning.

Catcher Chris Gimenez was busy. He nearly picked off a batter at first and was credited with a caught stealing when Kaleb Cowart tried to steal home in the third. Usually Willson Contreras catches Lester, but Contreras has not played since Tuesday because he's battling a fever. His status is day to day.

Lester complimented Gimenez for his pitch calling in the third against Luis Valbuena, who the lefty struck out to end the inning.

"The sequence was great for a guy who has never caught me," Lester said.

Injury updates

Javier Baez, who had to leave Thursday's game because of tightness in his left hamstring, was still being evaluated and not expected to play Saturday.

"It's still there, it's still bothering him a bit," manager Joe Maddon said of the soreness. "We're trying to figure out exactly what's going on."

Baez said Thursday he thought the problem might be from dehydration. The second baseman has played in seven games so far, and is 5-for-16 with five strikeouts. The Cubs, of course, would like to see Baez cut down on the strikeouts. That will take experience, Maddon said.

"Of course, he needs more at-bats," Maddon said. "I don't know if he'll benefit from more Spring Training at-bats. He needs at-bats over the next couple years. It's getting better, it's totally getting better. I keep talking about once he stops swinging at the slider in the dirt, this guy becomes a superstar. I think that's accurate."

Infielder Chesny Young, who replaced Baez at second base, also had to leave the game after colliding with first baseman Anthony Rizzo chasing a foul ball.

"We're saying contusion," Maddon said of Young, who has a bruise on his head. "I have not heard the word 'concussion' at all. We still want to watch him. When he got hit like that, he said, 'I want to stay in the game,' but I can't let that happen. I thought we did the right thing. I hope we are correct that it is a contusion."

Reliever Pedro Strop, who has been slowed because of a tender left calf, threw a bullpen session on Thursday. He was expected to pitch in a Cactus League game later next week.

Camp battles

Jason Heyward was the Cubs' leadoff man for the third time this spring and went 1-for-3 with a double in the first. He's now 2-for-9 in the No. 1 spot.

He's one of four players to bat leadoff so far. Ian Happ is 9-for-21 with four homers, one triple, two doubles and eight RBIs in eight games in the No. 1 spot, while Albert Almora Jr. is 0-for-7 in three games there, and Ben Zobrist is 0-for-3 in one game.

Worth noting

- The Cubs named Chris Denorfia as special assistant to the president/general manager and Matt Murton as baseball-operations assistant.

In their new roles, both Denorfia and Murton will contribute to all elements within the baseball-operations department. They will visit the Minor League affiliates to work with the players on and off the field, evaluate amateur players leading up to the Draft, and spend time around the Major League club.

Denorfia, 37, concluded his 10-year Major League career with the Cubs in 2015, and was a career .272 hitter. Murton, 36, played 15 professional seasons that included five in the big leagues and six in Japan. He made his Major League debut with the Cubs in 2005.

Up next

The Cubs have split-squad games on Saturday, and Kyle Hendricks will make his third spring start in the early game (2:05 p.m. CT) at Sloan Park against the White Sox, while Luke Farrell will go in the night game (8:05 CT) in Glendale against the Dodgers. Both games can be seen on MLB.TV. Saturday will be Hendricks' third spring start. He's given up two earned runs on four hits over five innings so far, striking out seven. It will be Farrell's first spring start.

Looking ahead, Yu Darvish will make his second Cactus League start on Sunday against the Athletics.

--

Cubs.com

Cubs send three top prospects to Double-A

By Carrie Muskat

MESA, Ariz. -- The Cubs trimmed the spring roster to 49 players on Friday, assigning top prospects Adbert Alzolay, Oscar De La Cruz and Duane Underwood Jr. to Double-A Tennessee.

The three pitchers ranked No. 1, 3 and 30, respectively, on MLB Pipeline's top 30 Cubs prospects list.

Thomas Hatch, the Cubs' top Draft pick in 2016 and ranked seventh on MLB Pipeline's list, also was assigned to Minor League camp. Neither he nor Alzolay appeared in any of the Cubs' Cactus League games but that was by design.

"That was part of the plan coming in to be protective," manager Joe Maddon said Friday. "[Alzolay's] got a great arm. I'm talking to the kid in there -- I had the meeting before never having seen him pitch, I had the meeting after and never saw him pitch. I'm eager to watch him. I've heard nothing but accolades.

"[Alzolay and Hatch] both handled it well and they understood it," Maddon said. "They approached this camp as we asked them to approach the camp."

In addition to Hatch, the Cubs also assigned nine non-roster invitees to Minor League camp, including right-handed pitchers Craig Brooks and David Garner; left-handed pitchers Alberto Baldonado, Daniel Camarena and Michael Roth; infielder Jason Vosler; outfielders Charcer Burks and Bijan Rademacher; and catcher Ian Rice.

--

Chicago Tribune

After all these years, longtime Cubs broadcaster Pat Hughes still gets butterflies

By Paul Sullivan

Getting ready for his first Cactus League broadcast of the season recently at Sloan Park, Cubs radio broadcaster Pat Hughes insisted he had butterflies.

It was difficult to believe, considering Hughes' status among modern-day broadcasters and the meaninglessness of an exhibition game in which most of the regulars would leave after a couple of at-bats.

But Hughes insisted it was true, and when Pat Hughes is speaking one shouldn't doubt a single word.

"I always do," he said. "I have a little bit of butterflies whenever I'm going to do a performance, unless it's a ballgame after (I've) already done 40 or 50 for the year. And even having said that, when you get to the postseason, knowing the enormity of the audience and the importance of the ballgame, I still feel some anxiety.

"I don't think I'll ever lose it, and actually I like having a little of that because that means I care. It's part of me and I can't ever shake it. I don't ever want to mail it in, thinking, 'Oh, I can just wing it and do it.' I have to feel I prepare for it and I'm ready for it."

Hughes, 62, the only broadcaster in team history to call the final out of a Cubs championship, is entering his 36th year of broadcasting and 23rd in Chicago.

He has chronicled the best and worst of the Cubs over the years, from Kerry Wood's record-tying 20-strikeout game in May 1998 to a typical Edwin Jackson late-season start in 2013 — the low point of Theo Epstein's rebuild — to the World Series clincher.

Hughes' most famous call before the 2016 Series might have been the one in which he was drowned out by partner Ron Santo, who uttered those two memorable words — “Oh, no!” — when Brant Brown dropped a fly ball in Milwaukee near the end of the 1998 wild-card chase.

Broadcasting for a winner obviously is much more fun than doing so for a tanking team, and Hughes seems energized by the current club, which is expected to compete for a World Series again.

“It's never easy because for three (or) 3 1/2 hours a day, you have no idea of what you're going to say or what's going to transpire in front of you,” he said. “It's never easy, but it's more enjoyable, and there's a natural adrenaline factor every day when the team is good. It means something.

“And (when) you get to August and September and you're in a pennant race, these are some big games. You don't even need to worry about getting excited. You know when you get to the park and get all your notes together, you're going to be excited once that first pitch comes down the pike.”

A successful offseason for Hughes means doing nothing that involves traveling. He works out, reads, relaxes and tries to stay away from O'Hare. His kids are grown, and he devotes much of his offseason time to his projects, including baseballvoices.com. Hughes' latest subject is legendary Giants announcer Jon Miller.

Hughes also is selling autographed prints of his scorecard for Game 7 of the World Series, the only Cubs championship in our lifetime.

Across town, Hawk Harrelson's retirement is one of the bigger storylines of the season for the White Sox. Few announcers are as associated with their clubs as Harrelson, though Hughes is as revered on the North Side. He remains at the top of his game and said he has no plans to retire any time soon.

“I love working with Ron (Coomer), and (WSCR-AM670's) Mitch Rosen is the best boss we've ever had,” he said. “The Cubs are amazing. They give us complete freedom. They never interfere with what we do, and the team is good. We've been exciting to watch.

“If you retire, you better make sure you're done because if you leave and then want to come back a year later, you almost certainly would not get the same job. So you've got to be careful.”

Cubs fans don't have to worry about that for a while. Hughes — and his butterflies — aren't going anywhere.

--

Chicago Tribune

Jon Lester believes Cubs 'are in a good place' getting ready to go
By Mark Gonzales

The positive vibes around the Cubs spring clubhouse suggest a lesson has been learned after falling short of a second consecutive World Series appearance.

“Guys (were) going through that for the first time and not knowing how to deal with it,” Jon Lester said Friday after throwing five scoreless innings in a 6-1 victory over the Angels. “We were feeling good about ourselves. We just broke a 108-year curse, and I’m sure when we came to camp there was that feeling of we’ll just show up and do it again. I don’t know if that’s true or how to word that.

“It’s good sometimes to get your butt kicked and get knocked down, especially after you’ve tasted success. So I think we’re in a good place. Other than (Javier Baez’s injury), we’ve been relatively healthy. That’s all spring training is for — to get our feet under us, stay healthy and come into the season ready to go.”

Lester’s five-inning performance was so efficient that he threw an extra 15 pitches in the bullpen to raise his pitch count to 65.

Backing off Baez: Manager Joe Maddon said Baez, who suffered a left hamstring cramp Thursday, probably won’t play in either of Saturday’s split-squad games.

Maddon also tempered a reporter’s suggestion that Baez needed more at-bats this spring to stop being such a pull hitter.

“Once he stops swinging at that slider in the dirt, this guy becomes a superstar,” Maddon said. “I think that’s accurate.”

Maddon prefers not to force Baez to hit into the gaps.

“Just work on it in pregame and practice, but don’t push it to where it becomes obsessive,” Maddon said.

Dazzling defense: Backup catching candidate Chris Gimenez nearly picked Michael Hermosillo off first base, then caught Kaleb Cowart in a rundown off third base after faking a throw to second on a steal attempt in the third inning.

“He did a lot of good things,” said Lester, who praised Gimenez’s pitch selection, especially on a strikeout of Luis Valbuena to end the third.

“It seems like he’s very comfortable. That’s big for us pitchers.”

--

Chicago Tribune

Chris Denorfia, Matt Murton return to Cubs' organization in front office roles

By Mark Gonzales

Former Cubs outfielders Chris Denorfia and Matt Murton have returned to the organization in front office roles.

Denorfia, who played for the Cubs in 2015, was named as a special assistant to the president/general manager. Murton, an outfielder for the Cubs from 2005-08, was named as an assistant in the baseball operations department.

Denorfia, 37, and Murton, 36, will work with minor league players on and off the field, scout amateur players prior to the draft, and spend time around the major league team.

The Cubs also promoted traveling secretary Vijay Tekchandani to director of team travel and clubhouse operations.

Tekchandani has spent the past five seasons supervising team travel. Tekchandani joined the Cubs after the 2005 season as an intern in the community affairs department and worked there for seven seasons before he was named traveling secretary in 2013.

--

Chicago Tribune

Northwestern alum Luke Farrell aiming for more highlights at Wrigley Field

By Teddy Greenstein

Luke Farrell has thrived during his two appearances on the mound at Wrigley Field.

If and when he gets a third?

"It's going to feel amazing," he said.

The first came while pitching for Northwestern on a frigid Saturday night in April of 2013. He fired a three-hit shutout to beat Michigan, saying afterward: "That might be the best I've (ever) thrown. No better place to do it."

The second came in mop-up duty last season – three scoreless innings for the Reds in a 9-3 loss.

Cincinnati released him after the season, and the Cubs scooped him up Oct. 4.

"I like him," Cubs manager Joe Maddon said. "Saw him last year with the Reds, liked him there. He's a bright kid, knows what doing out here, and obviously he has been around the game. He's very comfortable in major-league skin."

His father, John Farrell, managed the Red Sox from 2013-17. Both of his brothers work for the Cubs; Jeremy is the infield coordinator and Shane is an upper Midwest area scout.

"I'm very fortunate to be here," the right-hander said.

Last season Farrell pitched a scoreless inning of relief against the Red Sox, the first time in MLB history a son pitched against a team managed by his father.

The Cubs' rotation and bullpen are loaded, so Farrell figures to open in the minors. He will be on the mound Saturday evening in Glendale to face the Dodgers and Rich Hill.

"I think he is a major-league guy," Maddon said. "I like what I'm seeing. And I've known his daddy for a long time."

Farrell, 26, has twice endured the physical and psychological toll of having golf-ball sized tumors removed from his neck.

That's part of what made that 38-degree night at Wrigley in 2013 so special.

“What an awesome night,” Farrell said. “To be able to share that with so many (teammates) who I really love, who have become brothers ... that was the highlight.”

--

Chicago Tribune

Cubs counting on new coach Will Venable being able to relate to players

By Mark Gonzales

As Will Venable shifts from the spacious batting cages to a crowd of young outfielders, the nights of cramming for an anthropology exam or guarding the likes of Kirk Hinrich, J.J. Redick and Steve Blake seem so distant.

But those experiences provide a balance for Venable as he embarks on his first season as the Cubs first base/outfield coach after retiring from baseball following the 2016 season.

In hiring Venable, who spent seven of his nine big-league seasons with the Padres, the Cubs weren't afraid to take a chance on someone not far removed from his playing days. They did much the same thing with former assistant hitting coach Eric Hinske.

Much of the Cubs' faith in Venable, 35, is rooted in his ability to relate instantly to younger players.

“You want the experience of older coaches (such as Chili (Davis) and (Brian Butterfield), as well as Joe (Maddon),” general manager Jed Hoyer said. “But having a couple of guys who are not far removed (from their playing days is) a nice balance when a player has a conversation he might not feel an older guy can necessarily relate to.”

It hasn't hurt that Venable long ago learned how to manage his time efficiently and effectively. He earned a bachelor's degree in anthropology from Princeton while managing to play basketball and baseball in his junior and senior seasons.

“It has been pretty crazy,” said Venable, who joined the organization last August as a special assistant and was one of four new coaches the Cubs added in the winter.

“But when they presented me with the opportunity to interview for the job and talk through some of the things they thought I might be of value for, it was less intimidating to take on the role. Some of the things they wanted me to do lined up well with the things I believed I could do well.”

Venable's athletic and academic success at Princeton included averaging more than 10 points per game in his final three seasons as a 6-foot-3 guard, batting .344 and .385 in his two baseball seasons and earning an Ivy League degree.

“It was very important for me to graduate in four years and not have to go back to finish it,” Venable said. “I know guys who do that, and they say it's tough. Once I decided to play baseball (after being drafted in the seventh round of the 2005 draft), I was able to focus all my energy there and have a nice degree in my back pocket.”

He appreciated the support from former Tigers basketball coach John Thompson III and baseball coach Scott Bradley in managing his time. But Venable recalled the struggles of a computer programming class he eventually had to drop.

"I had no business taking the class," he said. "I try to erase that memory."

Anthropology might seem a curious field of study, but Venable said his experience of growing up as the son of a major-league player (outfielder Max Venable played parts of 12 seasons) and spending time in Latin America and Japan (where he was home-schooled when he was 10 years old) exposed him to various cultures.

The upcoming NCAA tournament brings back pleasant memories for Venable, even though the Tigers lost to Texas in the first round of the 2004 tourney.

"It was a great experience to have the structure of basketball in balance with the academic schedule," Venable said.

--

Chicago Tribune

Javier Baez likely to miss more time with hamstring soreness

By Mark Gonzales

The left hamstring of Javier Baez isn't 100 percent, as the Cubs infielder initially thought an hour after suffering a cramp during Thursday's spring game.

Manager Joe Maddon indicated that Baez probably won't play in either of the Cubs' split-squad games Saturday due to lingering soreness.

"It's still there," Maddon said. "It's still bothering him a bit. We're still trying to figure out exactly what we got going."

Baez said he felt discomfort while running out a double.

Infielder Chesny Young also remains sidelined due to a bruise suffered in a collision with first baseman Anthony Rizzo.

Before Friday's game against the Angels, the Cubs cut 13 players.

Pitchers Adbert Alzolay, Oscar De La Cruz and Duane Underwood Jr. were optioned to Double-A Tennessee. Pitchers Thomas Hatch, Daniel Carmanera, Alberto Baldonado, Craig Brooks, David Garner, Michael Roth, infielder Jason Vosler, outfielders Charcer Burks, Bijan Rademacher and catcher Ian Rice were reassigned to minor league camp.

The trimmings leave the Cubs' spring roster at 49.

--

Chicago Tribune

Cubs eager to see latest Wrigley renovations — especially the dugout upgrades

By Mark Gonzales

With less than one month before the home opener, Cubs outfielder Ian Happ is curious about Wrigley Field's renovations.

"I've seen the photos with everything ripped out, so we'll see what it's like when we get back," Happ said.

Three upgrades that likely will be highly pleasing to the Cubs players are the widening and relocation of the dugouts, the addition of two batting cages and the installation of a trainer's room adjacent to their third base dugout.

For 6-foot-5 left-hander Mike Montgomery, the extra space will be pleasing.

"It was cramped in there," Montgomery said of the narrow dugouts that often created congestion. "They moved the dugouts down the line, so I'm reserved on how that will be. I like being close (to home plate), but the move was much needed. There are a lot of big guys trying to move through there and not hit their head on the walkway while trying to get in and out. You got used to it."

The extra space also allows reserves such as Tommy La Stella to move quicker to the expanded cages to prepare for pinch-hitting duty.

"There are many times when guys are coming off the field and need to prepare for their at-bat quickly," La Stella said. "And to not have to bump into guys will make things easier."

Despite the plethora of equipment currently on the field and the removal of seats behind the third base dugout, the Cubs say their project remains on schedule.

Much of the excavation on the first and third base sides is designed for the Makers Mark Barrel Room and the W Club, and is scheduled to open in 2019. Construction on the Catalina Club in the upper level behind home plate, also is targeted for 2019.

The American Airlines 1914 Club remains on schedule for the April 9 home opener against the Pirates.

Offseason work also includes expansion of concession areas, although those won't be completed until 2019, said Julian Green, the Cubs' vice president of communications.

This latest construction phase, which includes structural improvements and seat replacements, started Oct. 20, one day after the Dodgers eliminated the Cubs in the National League Championship Series.

Among the other upgrades scheduled for completion by the home opener are two elevators behind the home plate area and faster cell service. The expanding of netting 20 feet farther down the first- and third-base lines also are projected for completion before the opener.

Eight new concession stands are to open by July, but hungry fans can go across the street to sample Smoke Daddy barbecue and Big Star tacos at the Hotel Zachary, which the Cubs announced Thursday is scheduled to open March 26.

A newer version of the McDonald's restaurant that was razed to make room for the hotel will open near the same spot.

The updates are fueling optimism that the Cubs might have a chance to host their first All-Star Game since 1990.

"It won't be until they finish the locker room for the visitors," Lawry Price said at a Wrigleyville community meeting Thursday night. "That will be the big stepping-stone."

In 2017, the Park at Wrigley, a 50,000-square-foot outdoor plaza marked by a large TV screen, concession areas and shops with merchandise and a tavern, opened amid some concerns, said Heather Way Kitzes, the Cubs' manager of government and community relations.

"Last year, we promised that this would not be a beer garden, and I think we can all agree that it is anything but," Way Kitzes said. "It's not a disaster waiting to happen as some believed. In fact, it has become our neighborhood town square."

Players who have appreciated previous state-of-the-art amenities don't seem worried about the current state of Wrigley with opening day looming.

"The construction company will be in trouble if they (don't finish) on time," Happ said.

La Stella added: "They haven't missed one (deadline) yet. So I have no reason to expect otherwise."

--

Chicago Tribune

Who put a bouncy house in Theo Epstein's parking space?

By Teddy Greenstein

Joe Maddon won't bother dusting for fingerprints. He has a pretty good idea of who paid to have a bouncy house constructed in the parking lot of the Cubs' Under Armour Performance Center.

Tommy La Stella, you little rascal.

"That's the unique kind of stuff that adds to the day," Maddon said. "I drive up and started smiling, immediately. I probably thought it was Tommy; it probably is Tommy. I'm into all this stuff."

To get you caught up, La Stella earlier pranked President Theo Epstein and general manager Jed Hoyer by swiping their parking spots. The Cubs execs responded Monday by issuing a polo shirt and pair of Hoyer's khaki pants for La Stella to wear during a workout. Which he did.

La Stella then dropped a clue, telling reporters that Epstein and Hoyer would have their parking spots back — "for now."

That ceasefire ended Friday as the colorful bouncy house took up residence.

"(Tommy) likes to do it on the sly," Maddon said. "I think it's a great idea. I'm certain it's there for the families and their kids — although Tommy may be into that kind of stuff. And he easily fits in there."

When asked Friday if he was responsible, La Stella said: "Potentially."

La Stella said the bouncy house is intended for children.

What about executives?

"Of course, anybody," he said. "All sizes as well."

--

Chicago Tribune

Transportation matters for Javier Baez and Ben Zobrist
By Mark Gonzales

Cubs second baseman Javier Baez made a low-key arrival at the Cubs' spring training complex last month that turned out to be wise considering the cool temperatures that hovered over the Valley during the morning hours.

Baez has taken more conventional means of transportation after arriving last spring in a Polaris Slingshot.

"I still got it," Baez said. "I'm putting a roof on it so I can use it in Chicago."

Baez will have to be extra careful when driving his three-wheeled motorcycle given the plethora of potholes around the city.

Ben Zobrist's mode of transportation on the field is somewhat old school.

After being lifted for a pinch-runner in the fourth inning of the Cubs' 10-4 win over the Padres on Thursday, Zobrist spent much of the next 30 minutes running the bases on a field adjacent to Sloan Park under the supervision of conditioning coordinator Tim Buss.

Zobrist was sporting a pair of PF Flyers — black high-top shoes that were popular in the 1960s and hyped its slogan of "run faster, jump higher."

But there was a twist. After completing his drills, Zobrist showed that his carefully designed shoe — complete with the PF Flyers logo — provided extra padding.

Of more importance, the shoes have plenty of traction as the result of the spikes. Zobrist showed that the soles (with extra padding) and spikes were made by New Balance, which bought PF Flyers in 2001.

--

Chicago Tribune

Friday's recap: Cubs 6, Angels 1
By Mark Gonzales

A 10-hit attack Friday paced the Cubs to a 6-1 victory over the Angels before a sellout crowd of 15,481 at Sloan Park. Jason Heyward and Albert Almora Jr. hit consecutive doubles in the first inning, and Kyle Schwarber smacked a two-run homer in the third.

At the plate: Infielder Mike Freeman remains a long shot to make the opening-day roster, but he continues to make a case for himself in the event of a player injury. Freeman singled in the second and doubled in the sixth to raise his spring average to .560.

On the mound: Reliever Brandon Morrow's fastball was clocked at 96 mph, but in the sixth he drilled Michael Hermosillo in the back with a pitch that led to Luis Valbuena's sacrifice fly. Brian Duensing's breaking pitch looked sharp as he struck out two in the seventh.

In the field: Right fielder Peter Bourjos leaped to rob Valbuena of an extra-base hit in the first and third baseman Tommy La Stella ranged quickly to his left to retire Kaleb Cowart in the fifth.

Key number: 3 — Cubs players with eight RBIs this spring.

Up next: vs. White Sox, 2:05 p.m. Saturday at Sloan Park. RH Kyle Hendricks vs. RH Lucas Giolito; vs. Dodgers, 8:05 p.m. Saturday at Camelback Ranch. RH Luke Farrell vs. LH Rich Hill.

--

Chicago Sun-Times

Jon Lester on Cubs' 2018 focus: 'It's good sometimes to get your butt kicked'

By Gordon Wittenmyer

MESA, Ariz. — On a day the last man on the bench raised the stakes in his prank battle with the front office, the Cubs shrugged off Javy Baez's hamstring cramp as a minor issue, Kyle Schwarber hit another home run and opening-day starter Jon Lester pitched like he could start a playoff opener in five days.

Just another Friday in Mesa, or what most Cubs seem to consider the happiest place on earth.

Happy? Tommy La Stella, who has been alternately parking in the assigned spots of team president Theo Epstein and general manager Jed Hoyer for the last week or so, took up both spots Friday morning, when he rented a full-scale kids' bounce house and had it inflated over the adjoining spots.

The happiest place on earth? Look what showed up in Theo's and Jed's parking spots Friday morning.

"I'm trying to do a nice thing for the kids," said a smirking La Stella, who has no children of his own.

Several kids of players and team staff — including Hoyer's son — made the most of the instant playground.

"I love it," manager Joe Maddon said. "I'm certain it's there for the family and kids. Although Tommy may be into that kind of thing. And he easily fits in there."

More laughter in the sea of joy that has been a Cubs camp with nary a hiccup, their roster set from Day 1, their high expectations fed daily by energy and practices that many say remind them of 2016.

Reserve a table for 25 in October.

What could possibly stop this team this year?

"No," said Lester, a three-time World Series champion. "You don't go there, no.

"It's too long of a season. I've been part of teams that were supposed to win the World Series before we even took the field and didn't make the playoffs."

Nobody has to tell the 12-year veteran how cruel a 162-game season can be to bodies, minds and expectations.

Even more significant, he doesn't think anybody has to tell it to the Cubs' young core players as they head into a fourth season together. Not after they responded to the '16 title by sleepwalking to a bad first half and eventually falling short in the postseason.

"It was guys going through that for the first time and not knowing how to deal with it," Lester said. "We were feeling good about ourselves. We just broke a 108-year-old curse. I'm sure when we all came into camp, there was that feeling of, 'Well, we'll just show up and do it again.'

"I don't know if that's true or how you want to word it. But I think it's good sometimes to get your butt kicked and get knocked down, especially after you've tasted success.

"I think we're in a good place."

NOTE: After feeling tightness in his left hamstring Thursday and leaving the game, second baseman Javy Baez still had some soreness Friday morning. "It's still bothering him a bit, so we're still trying to figure out what we've got going on," said Maddon, who said Baez "probably" wouldn't make his next scheduled start Saturday.

--

Chicago Sun-Times

Cubs among teams seeing new pitching math as 200-inning starters fade away

By Gordon Wittenmyer

MESA, Ariz. — Want to get Cubs left-hander Jon Lester riled up?

Just tell him that it's not a big deal if a starting pitcher doesn't throw 200 innings in a season anymore. Or that 200-inning men are about to go the way of the woolly mammoth and Myspace.

"I hope not," he said. "I think it's terrible for the game."

Lester is still chapped he didn't reach 200 innings last season after getting there in seven of the previous eight years, even if it was a late-season lat injury that caused him to fall short.

"I feel like I let the team down," he said.

If that's the case, then 90 percent of the pitchers who opened the 2017 season in their teams' rotations let their clubs down.

Lester admitted he might be a dinosaur in the way he thinks about the subject, but he's even more of a dinosaur these days in the way reaches 200 innings as often as he does.

Only 15 pitchers did that in each of the last two seasons. Those totals are down from 28 in 2015, 34 in 2014, 45 in 2010 and 50 in 2005.

Teams are adhering to strict pitch counts and responding to analytics that show how significant the drop-off is for many starters the third time through the order. It has changed the rotation-bullpen equation to such a degree that it would be absurd for most teams to set a goal of the traditional 1,000 innings from their starters. No team did that in either of the last two seasons. The last time the Cubs did it was in 2004.

There's no indication the trend is going to stop, much less reverse itself. A look at the recent free-agent market that was slow for every position group but relievers suggested that much. The Angels even are talking about using a six-man rotation this season, all but assuring no 200-inning starters.

And the Cubs are in the middle of the trend, despite signing right-hander Yu Darvish and putting together what on paper looks like one of the best rotations in the league.

Their decision to carry an eight-man bullpen from the start this season is a direct response to the trend, said general manager Jed Hoyer, whose front office deepened the Cubs' relief corps by signing free agents Brandon Morrow and Steve Cishek.

And it has put an even higher premium on the infield-outfield versatility of Ben Zobrist, Ian Happ and even Kris Bryant as the Cubs' bench shrinks.

"Teams are putting more emphasis on the bullpen," Hoyer said. "Teams are trying to avoid pitchers seeing a hitter for the third time. But over the course of the entire season, normally the teams that get the most innings out of the rotation are really successful.

"What's fair to say is that maybe we've lowered the goal from getting 1,000 innings out of your starters to maybe getting over 900."

Blame the Royals and other teams that have loaded up on elite bullpen arms and leaned on them hard to win championships in recent years. Nobody thinks that's a recipe for success in a six-month season, but it likely has helped fuel the trend toward stout bullpens in general. And it has created a new math on distributing the roughly 1,450 innings a team pitches during the season.

"I can't deny that it probably is a new math," Cubs manager Joe Maddon said. "But I still want guys to go out there with the intent of throwing 200 innings. I think it does something for you internally. That's something that can't be measured: How do you feel about yourself?"

"I mean, you become a bad man at that point. And that probably, confidence-wise, puts you in this elite level."

Of course, if 900 innings from your rotation is the new benchmark, does that make 180 the new 200? Don't tell Lester. Or Rick Sutcliffe, who broke in when four-man rotations were common and threw 244 $\frac{2}{3}$ innings — 150 $\frac{1}{3}$ in 20 starts for the Cubs — during his Cy Young season in 1984.

Sutcliffe, who talks derisively about the impact the "quality start" has had on starters' thinking, said the sea change came two decades ago, when then-Yankees manager Joe Torre turned games into six- and seven-inning affairs with a dominating back end of the bullpen and when then-Cardinals manager Tony La Russa resurrected several starters' careers by turning them into five-inning pitchers and leaning on bigger bullpens.

"I understand it now," Sutcliffe said. "There's still those [Clayton] Kershaws and [Max] Scherzers out there."

But it's hard to imagine modern player-development methods regularly producing more classic workhorses, let alone enough to reverse the trend.

"You've got prospects that have limits; they can't do this, they can't do that," Sutcliffe said. "It's something that's here to stay, whether you like it or not."

--

Chicago Sun-Times

Jon Lester impressive in Cubs' 6-1 spring-training victory over Angels

By Gordon Wittenmyer

MESA, Ariz. — In just his third start of the spring, Cubs ace Jon Lester was so efficient Friday that he was able to talk his way into pitching a fifth inning against the Angels — and still needed to finish in the bullpen afterward to complete his pitch allotment for the day.

The quick, scoreless five innings led to a 6-1 victory over the Angels at Sloan Park — the Cubs' quickest games of the spring (2 hours, 25 minutes).

"Fastball command was good," said Lester, who threw just 53 pitches, allowing one hit without a walk and striking out three. "I got some early outs, which was good. They're an aggressive team, so I just kept firing heaters and they kept hitting them at people so that makes it easier."

He starts the season opener on March 29.

The Cactus League-leading Cubs improved to 11-2-2 this spring.

Schwarbombling

Left fielder Kyle Schwarber delivered the loudest hit of the game, a line-drive, no-doubt, two-run homer to right on a 3-1 pitch in the third.

It was the second homer in as many starts for Schwarber, who is 7-for-21 with five walks this spring.

Big Bat Bote

Infield prospect David Bote, who has played almost every position in the minors, continued an impressive spring with a run-scoring single in the second, and a two-run homer way out to left in the fourth, both against big-league pitcher Matt Shoemaker.

He finished 2-for-3. In 14 games this spring, Bote is 10-for-33 (.303) with three extra-base hits and three walks.

Spring cleaning

The Cubs cut 13 from big-league camp Friday, including three of their top pitching prospects, who were optioned to Class AA Tennessee: right-handers Adbert Alzolay, Duane Underwood Jr. and Oscar De La Cruz.

Ten non-roster players were reassigned to minor-league camp: pitchers Thomas Hatch, Alberto Baldonado, Craig Brooks, Daniel Camarena, David Garner and Michael Roth; catcher Ian Rice; infielder Jason Vosler; and outfielders Bijan Rademacher and Charcer Burks.

Forty-nine players remain in camp.

Young bruised but OK

The day after a frightening crash with first baseman Anthony Rizzo on a popup, infield prospect Chesny Young appeared to suffer a bruise but no concussion, manager Joe Maddon said.

“But we still want to watch him,” Maddon said.

On deck: Split squad: White Sox at Cubs, Mesa, Ariz., Lucas Giolito vs. Kyle Hendricks, Saturday 2:05 p.m., 670-AM; Cubs at Dodgers, Glendale, Ariz., Luke Farrell vs. Rich Hill, 8:05 p.m., cubs.com audio.

--

Chicago Sun-Times

Look for bounce in Jon Lester’s step with Anthony Rizzo in lineup for Cubs

By Gordon Wittenmyer

MESA, Ariz. – The Cubs are ready for some bounce passes Friday against the Angels like they haven’t been ready all spring.

Cubs starter Jon Lester, who has committed this spring to a “Jordan to Pippen bounce pass” as a means of addressing his throwing problems in the field, has his Gold Glove security blanket at first base for the first time this spring, with Anthony Rizzo in the lineup.

In Lester’s last start, a ball hit back to the mound turned into a throwing error when he two-hopped it to the right of first, and Efen Navarro couldn’t handle it.

“The kid over there had no chance. He had no idea what we’ve been working on,” Lester said.

As the Cubs hit the back half of their exhibition schedule, more regular season-like lineups and game looks will be in play.

In the case of Lester and Rizzo it could turn the bunt into one of the most exciting plays the rest of the month, at least every five days.

--