



# CHICAGO CUBS DAILY CLIPS

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

October 9, 2018

- **Cubs.com, Inbox: Is Hamels going to return to Cubs?**  
<https://www.mlb.com/cubs/news/cubs-fans-ask-about-bringing-back-cole-hamels/c-297380008>
- **NBC Sports Chicago, It sure sounds like Cole Hamels will be back in the Cubs rotation in 2019**  
<https://www.nbcsports.com/chicago/cubs/it-sure-sounds-cole-hamels-will-be-back-cubs-rotation-2019-world-series-theo-epstein>
- **Chicago Tribune, 4 offseason questions for the Cubs about their relief pitchers**  
<http://www.chicagotribune.com/sports/baseball/cubs/ct-spt-cubs-offseason-questions-relief-pitching-20181009-story.html>
- **Chicago Tribune, Nico Hoerner, Justin Steele are among the Cubs prospects headed to the Arizona Fall League**  
<http://www.chicagotribune.com/sports/baseball/cubs/ct-spt-cubs-nico-hoerner-arizona-fall-league-20181008-story.html>
- **Daily Herald, Rozner: Cubs against Brewers might not have been pretty**  
<https://www.dailyherald.com/sports/20181008/rozner-cubs-against-brewers-might-not-have-been-pretty>
- **The Athletic, 'We didn't pop any bottles this year': The Cubs' 2018 season in quotes**  
<https://theathletic.com/577329/2018/10/08/we-didnt-pop-any-bottles-this-year-the-cubs-2018-season-in-quotes/>

--

## Cubs.com

Inbox: Is Hamels going to return to Cubs?

By Carrie Muskat

After the season ended abruptly with the loss in the National League Wild Card Game, both Hamels and Cubs president of baseball operations Theo Epstein expressed hope that the left-hander would return. Hamels has a \$20 million option for 2019 (and a \$6 million buyout that the Rangers would be obligated to pay). Epstein said they were impressed at how quickly Hamels fit in. The Cubs' rotation options could include Jon Lester, Jose Quintana, Kyle Hendricks, Mike Montgomery, Yu Darvish, Drew Smyly and Tyler Chatwood.

"We're set up to have some depth in the starting staff next year," Epstein said last week at his end of the season wrap up. "We're not looking to get rid of starting pitchers. We're looking to have as much depth as possible, so we can withstand multiple injuries."

Obviously, it's hard to tell which way the Cubs are looking, but who do you think is the better option, Bryce Harper or Manny Machado? I would take either one, but I think the outfield is filled and with the Addison Russell situation, there could be a hole in the infield.

-- Alec M., Buffalo Grove, Ill.

All Epstein would say about the free-agent market is that they're still discussing their financial flexibility.

"We've spent a lot of money on players, and that's not always the answer -- to rush back out and spend more," Epstein said. "There are a lot of attractive players out there, and some impact players out there and we'll get together and figure out what's possible, what's not possible and all the best approaches to this offseason."

Harper and Machado are both attractive. Harper, 25, has had fun fueling the rumor mill, from naming his dog Wrigley to posing with Las Vegas buddy Kris Bryant and their wives with the hashtag #Back2BackOneDay. He also batted .249 with a career-high 169 strikeouts this season with the Nationals. Machado, 26, is buddies with Albert Almora Jr. -- the two are so tight, they call each other "cousin," and they used to pretend they were on the same team playing in the World Series. Machado batted .297 with the Orioles and Dodgers this season. Who's the better option? If Russell does not return, Machado would be a better fit.

It seemed the Cubs were frequently in trouble in the first inning or at least running into high pitch counts. Where did the Cubs rank in terms of first inning runs allowed?

-- Dave P., Portland, Ore.

The Cubs ranked third in the NL in runs allowed in the first inning (100) behind the Rockies (133) and the Reds (108). Chicago's pitchers had a 5.25 ERA in the first inning (third worst in the NL) and the second-highest batting average against (.288).

Individually, here are the Cubs' starters' ERA in the first inning:

Hendricks 6.82 (33 games)  
Darvish 5.63 (eight games)  
Hamels 5.25 (12 games)  
Chatwood 4.50 (20 games)  
Quintana 4.22 (32 games)  
Lester 2.53 (32 games)

Do you see Almora having a more consistent spot in next year's lineup? I think he is just great (especially on defense), and I'm really hoping Joe Maddon uses him more next year.

-- Melissa E., Marion, Iowa (but living in Cedar Falls for grad school)

Almora did set career highs in games played, at-bats, runs, hits and strikeouts. But after batting .319 in the first half, he batted .232 in the second half. He's made improvements against right-handed pitchers, but he just needs to be more consistent to get more playing time.

--

### **NBC Sports Chicago**

It sure sounds like Cole Hamels will be back in the Cubs rotation in 2019

By Tony Andracki

It's safe to say Cubs fans can expect to see Cole Hamels in the "Cubbie blue" pinstripes again in 2019.

Hamels has a \$20 million team option for next year and to this point, there's been absolutely no gamesmanship from either side with both the veteran southpaw and the Cubs front office openly admitting they'd like things to continue next year.

From the second Hamels got to the North Side of Chicago, he's been straightforward about how he's always wanted to play for the Cubs, dating back even before he was linked to the Cubs at the 2015 trade deadline before he was ultimately dealt to the Texas Rangers.

When the Cubs picked up Hamels this season, the 34-year-old was everything the team was hoping for and more, going 4-3 with a 2.36 ERA, 1.10 WHIP and racking up 2.5 WAR in only 12 starts.

Even when he wasn't pitching, Hamels was a leader inside the clubhouse, helping lend advice to pitchers like Mike Montgomery while also serving as a respected veteran voice as a former World Series MVP who had pitched in seven different Octobers prior to 2018.

Oh yeah, and then there was that bold statement about the Cubs-Brewers "rivalry" that endeared Hamels to North Side fans and let the entire baseball world know he was not interested in simply being a three-month rental for the Cubs.

"The Cubs have always been one of the top teams I've always wanted to be a player for," Hamels said after the Cubs were eliminated from the playoffs last week. "And obviously it didn't happen in '15. Very fortunate to go to Texas, but the Chicago Cubs were always a team I would've loved an opportunity to play for in front of this crowd and this organization and to see these types of players.

"They have a tremendous clubhouse presence, tremendous talents and it was great to be able to toe the rubber and have these guys behind me."

When Theo Epstein addressed the media about 16 hours or so after the Cubs' season ended, he didn't hesitate for even a split-second when asked if the front office hoped Hamels could return in 2019.

"Yeah, absolutely," Epstein said emphatically. "I mean, Cole was such a breath of fresh air for us. He made an unbelievable impression. For a guy that's only been here a couple months, he's as universally respected in that room as anyone I've ever seen.

"He's a pro's pro and contributed tremendously on the field and off the field and with a great, engaged, accountable, positive presence in that clubhouse who really cares about his teammates and help make them better by example and by discussion, too. He's absolutely someone we'd love to have part of the mix going forward."

The Cubs already have a bunch of starting pitchers locked under contract for 2019, but that shouldn't - and won't - dissuade Epstein's front office from paying Hamels that \$20 million as rotation depth and a clubhouse presence. We should get a final determination on Hamels' option a few days after the World Series ends this fall.

The old adage in baseball is there really is no such thing as a bad one-year deal and with the question marks surrounding Yu Darvish and Tyler Chatwood, Hamels would give the Cubs a reliable fourth starter behind Jon Lester, Kyle Hendricks and Jose Quintana. The Cubs also have Montgomery as depth and they've already publicly stated they plan to stretch Drew Smyly out as a starter in 2019 after he did not pitch at all in 2018 while recovering from Tommy John surgery.

Many questioned how much Hamels had left in the tank after he posted a 4.42 ERA in 262.1 innings with the Rangers from 2017-18, but he silenced all doubters as he was rejuvenated joining a pennant race and pitching in front of the Cubs' young, talented core.

Hamels has seen so much in his 13 years in the big leagues and truly believes the Cubs' stunning early exit from this October can be a great learning experience for the team moving into next year and beyond.

And he really wants front-row seats for that in 2019.

"This was a fun experience to be a part of and hopefully this will be something I'll be able to be a part of next year," Hamels said. "...This is the right type of environment [for winning.] What Theo and the ownership have done and the players they have, they really look at that. They have the type of players that are capable of [getting back to the postseason year after year]."

"Obviously, everybody getting healthy, that definitely turns the tide. So I think they've got quite a few more years to really put a dent in the National League and bring home a couple more World Series."

--

### **Chicago Tribune**

4 offseason questions for the Cubs about their relief pitchers

By Mark Gonzales

This is the second in a series of a position-by-position analyses about the Cubs entering the offseason.

Next up: Relief pitching.

#### 1. How much insurance should the Cubs acquire for Brandon Morrow?

Pedro Strop might have pitched himself into having his \$6.25 million option picked up, and there was mutual satisfaction between newcomer Jesse Chavez and the organization to at least fuel discussions about an extension.

Morrow's bone bruise that sidelined him for the entire second half will force the Cubs to recommit to a structured schedule that will prevent him from being used for more than two consecutive games and perhaps an extended break if he's used three times in a four-game stretch.

The combined projected salaries of Morrow (\$9 million) and Strop for 2019 are cheaper than what 2017 closer Wade Davis (\$18 million) will earn.

In one of the final scenes a day after the conclusion of the 2018 season, Chavez departed Wrigley Field with two family members from an auxiliary exit when fans noticed and called for him.

Chavez turned around, walked about 30 yards before fulfilling their wishes with autographs and selfies. Whether that was a farewell will be revealed in the upcoming months.

#### 2. Should there be serious concern about Carl Edwards Jr.?

Serious? Not yet. Edwards actually had a lower ERA in the second half (2.25) than the first (2.89) in the same number of appearances (29). But that was misleading in many ways.

Edwards walked as many batters (19) as he struck out in 24 innings in the second half, and his strikeout rate dipped from 15.4 per nine innings in the first half to 7.1 in the second half. His fastball rarely exceeded 95 mph, his curve was erratic, and the torque on his grip led to the forearm discomfort that caused him to be left off the National League wild-card roster.

The cause and cure seem simple. Edwards pitched in 25 of the Cubs' first 51 games before he was placed on the 10-day disabled list because of right shoulder inflammation that sidelined him for nearly six weeks.

Edwards could revert to a schedule somewhat similar to Morrow by rarely pitching on consecutive days. The front office and manager Joe Maddon remain fond of Edwards, who likely will be eligible for arbitration as with Super Two service time.

That will result in a handsome raise in his first year of eligibility, but the Cubs will look for more consistency.

Brandon Kintzler likely will pick up his \$5 million player option once the Cubs decline their \$10 million team option, leaving the mission of him lowering his 2.00 WHIP in 25 appearances with the Cubs a priority next season.

3. Do the Cubs need a left-handed specialist, or can they lean on reverse-split specialists?

If Chavez and Strop return, the need isn't as great, based on their success against left-handed batters last season (lefties batted .234 vs. Chavez, .217 vs. Strop).

Nevertheless, left-hander Justin Wilson is destined to leave via free agency. This could mean that Randy Rosario, who limited left-handed hitters to a .174 batting average in 64 at-bats, could take on a bigger role.

Brian Duensing limited left-handers to a .217 batting average, but he pitched in 27 of the Cubs' first 56 games, which eventually led to ineffectiveness and shoulder issues. He is owed \$3.5 million next season but will need to regain his effectiveness.

There's also the issue of getting a lefty who can neutralize left-handed hitters such as Christian Yelich of the Brewers, Matt Carpenter of the Cardinals and Joey Votto and Scooter Gennett of the Reds.

4. Who could surprise next season?

Until suffering a season-ending lat strain in mid-June, Adbert Alzolay was destined to help as a long reliever/spot starter. Because of the innings lost to the injury, Alzolay likely will start the 2019 season at Triple-A Iowa, but team officials believe he has the stuff and poise to contribute soon as a long reliever before moving into the rotation.

Dillon Maples and James Norwood throw in the high 90s and could break through with more polish. Maples remains prone to bouts of wildness (39 walks in 38 2/3 innings at Iowa), but his knee-buckling slider can't be discounted.

Norwood allowed only three home runs in 50 1/3 innings in the minors while striking out 57, and the continued development of a split-finger fastball could enhance his chances.

A logjam on the 40-man roster blocked Dakota Mekkes' chances of a promotion from Iowa, where he struck out 41 with the help of a sharp slider but walked 16 in 31 1/3 innings.

The Cubs' pro scouts unearthed the likes of Anthony Bass, Justin Hancock, Cory Mazzoni and Rosario to help a taxed bullpen, and they'll need to find similar reinforcements for more insurance.

--

### **Chicago Tribune**

Nico Hoerner, Justin Steele are among the Cubs prospects headed to the Arizona Fall League  
By Mark Gonzales

David Bote used the Arizona Fall League as a springboard for his ascent to becoming a key member of the 2018 Cubs.

It might be a reach for the team's current prospects to follow the same path, but Nico Hoerner and Justin Steele will be among the players who receive a close look when the AFL season starts Tuesday.

Hoerner, the Cubs' first pick in the 2018 draft, and Steele, who missed most of 2018 while recovering from Tommy John surgery, will play for Mesa.

Hoerner, 21, an infielder, batted .327 with two home runs, six RBIs and six stolen bases in 14 games at three low minor-league levels before suffering a left elbow injury on July 15 while playing for Class A South Bend.

Steele, 23, a fifth-round pick in 2014, resumed pitching in July and posted a 2-2 record and 2.31 ERA in 11 starts at three levels.

In his last start for Double-A Tennessee on Aug. 31, Steele limited Pensacola to three hits and one run while striking out five in six innings.

Hoerner and Steele will be joined on the Mesa roster by the following Cubs' prospects: pitchers Bailey Clark, Erick Leal and Manuel Rondon; catchers P.J. Higgins and Jhonny Pereda; infielder Trent Giambrone and outfielder D.J. Wilson.

The AFL operates a 30-game schedule that runs through Nov. 15 at six Catcus League parks. The season culminates with the league championship on Nov. 17.

--

### **Daily Herald**

Rozner: Cubs against Brewers might not have been pretty  
By Barry Rozner

So, serious question ...

If the Cubs had won either Game 163 or 164, do you really think they would've had a chance against Milwaukee?

Based on the way they played the final month, as gallant an effort as it might have been under the circumstances, by the time they reached the final week of the season it was clear the Cubs weren't likely to win a series in the postseason.

And though a victory in one of those last two games would have given them a puncher's chance, it hardly felt like the Cubs were trending in the right direction.

"I would never bet against the heart of this team, because I believe in these guys and I've seen them overcome a lot," said Cubs president Theo Epstein. "But ... if we're being honest, I think we had a lot of things working against us."

Yeah, Epstein saw what everyone else saw. That's not surprising, nor was his customary honesty as he closed the season last week with a news conference.

"The offensive issues were there the entire second half, including down the stretch in the biggest games of the year, the biggest home stand of the year, the tiebreaker game, the Wild Card Game," Epstein said before Milwaukee crushed Colorado in the NLDS. "So to think that all of a sudden we would have snapped out of it in Milwaukee is maybe more hopeful thinking than anything else.

"But I would have liked the opportunity."

Despite the difficulty scoring runs and managing a bullpen that was great in numbers and thin on top-grade talent, Epstein also saw a bright side.

"Look at all the good things that happened," Epstein said. "With a lot of names that were different than what we expected, we crushed the run prevention there.

"Look at (the Wild Card Game). There were some unbelievable performances by guys.

"Our starting pitching was locked in the whole second half of the season.

"Our bullpen, we were finding a way without the two (closers) who usually pitched (late) in games.

"I would have liked to see the heart of our group have an opportunity to overcome some things."

But the reality is the Cubs were cooked and everyone knew it. They were hanging on by a thread and they were facing several teams in the National League peaking at the perfect time.

"We were diminished," Epstein admitted. "There are some years -- and this is the goal -- there are some years when the talent you have on paper is there, and through the course of the season that talent synthesizes and it finds a way to manifest and you get stronger as the year goes on.

"And by the end of the year you're feeling like you can beat anybody.

"You say, 'We're gonna be a tough team to beat. The other team might beat us, but they're gonna have to do a lot of things well to beat us. We're a tough out.'

"Now, this year, because of what we went through with the pitching in the first half and then the offense in the second half, and then the injuries on top of it and everything else that occurred this year, it felt like the opposite.

"It felt like to start the year the talent was there on paper and instead of the talent synthesizing through the course of the year, it almost felt like an erosion through the course of the year.

"Some things got in the way with some players physically, and we had a couple players perform way below expectations because the mental side of the game got in the way for them, and that's something we have to tackle and get better at."

Watching what Milwaukee did to Colorado is just more evidence of what the Brewers would have probably done to the Cubs.

"Did we feel a 100 percent and like the team to beat, that we were an incredibly tough out had we won that (Wild Card Game)?" Epstein wondered aloud. "Not to the extent that we would have liked.

"It was more like betting on the people we had and the heart we have, and how tough they are, than it was looking at that team on paper and saying, 'Hey, it's all come together the way we wanted.'

"It didn't."

It's an unfortunate truth for a team that won 95 games and valiantly fought through a brutal stretch of games despite injuries and poor performances.

Nevertheless, truth it is.

--

### **The Athletic**

'We didn't pop any bottles this year': The Cubs' 2018 season in quotes

By Patrick Mooney

The day before Valentine's Day, Yu Darvish emerged from the passenger seat of a silver Ford Explorer that rolled into the employee parking lot at the Cubs' Arizona complex. Reporters awkwardly held their phones in the air and then rushed to get the Darvish photos out on Twitter.

Nearing the end of Major League Baseball's long winter – a cold war that may ultimately shatter a delicate labor peace with the players' union – the Cubs had reached an agreement on a six-year, \$126 million mega-deal with the veteran pitcher. The big Darvish news that broke over the weekend heightened all the usual pitchers-and-catchers-report-to-spring-training optimism.

Japanese reporters and the Chicago media stood in the sunshine and staked out the building before the press conference where Darvish would put on a Cubs hat and button up his No. 11 jersey. At least seven TV cameras were positioned outside the "Under Armour Performance Center," a two-story strength-and-conditioning facility with a 120-seat theater, video and hydrotherapy rooms, a cafeteria and separate clubhouses for major- and minor-league players, financed by the city of Mesa.

All of this reinforced the idea of "Cubbie Exceptionalism," the memories still fresh from the 2016 World Series title and no signs of slowing down after investing \$215 million in free-agent pitchers, taking Darvish and hard-throwing reliever Brandon Morrow away from the Los Angeles Dodgers team that throttled the Cubs during last year's National League Championship Series.

Less than eight months later, the Cubs' season would be over before the NLDS even began. The 2018 Cubs would win 95 games without any true sense of rhythm or blowout champagne celebrations in the



clubhouse. The Milwaukee Brewers are now resting and preparing to host the Dodgers in Game 1 of the NLCS on Friday at Miller Park. It turns out the Cubs didn't need to block out all of October for playoff baseball and can now ramp up construction for the next stage of the \$1 billion Wrigley Field development.

What just happened? Let the Cubs explain in their own words.

"We know that there's more to Yu Darvish than what happened in the World Series." – Cubs president Theo Epstein addressing Darvish's 21.60 ERA in two postseason losses to the Houston Astros, Feb. 13.

"My (perception of) the Cubs – it was never bad – but it kept growing in a positive manner." – Darvish, through an interpreter, explaining his decision to sign with a team that had been on his no-trade list for the 2017 season, Feb. 13.

The next day – the first formal workout for pitchers and catchers – would be remembered for the heartbreaking news out of South Florida. A gunman killed 17 people at Stoneman Douglas, Anthony Rizzo's high school, devastating the Parkland community so close to the Cubs first baseman and becoming another reminder that it's impossible to stick to sports and treat this only as a game.

"We see this on TV too often. I feel like it's all the time. There's a cycle to it. We get horrified that this violence is inflicted (on) our kids. We get angry that there's nothing we can do and nothing's done about it. And then we ultimately get immune and move on to something else. But then it happens in our own town, in your own school or the movie theater or a nightclub or a church. And we realize it could happen to us, in our safe and tight-knit community. In fact, there are a lot of communities out there that know exactly what we're going through right now and have to relive these moments again and again. Look, I'm a baseball player, but I'm also an American. I'm a Floridian and I'm a Parklander for life. Though I don't have all the answers, I know that something has to change before this is visited on another community and another community and another community." – Rizzo delivering an emotional speech at a Parkland vigil, Feb. 15.

After a 2017 season that saw the Cubs fade out in the NLCS, the narrative was that the Cubs were recharged and ready to get back to the World Series. Several hitters had down years in 2017, but were supposedly ready to rebound in 2018.

"I don't think anybody's ever really had to deal with that in baseball, when you're talking about how much pressure was on our team and getting to that Game 7 and winning the championship that hasn't been done in 108 years. I think everybody was pretty satisfied, as far as Cub Nation goes, at least for a little bit." – Ben Zobrist on the World Series hangover, Feb. 19.

"If you want to talk about a crossroads, there are a lot of players who have another gear in their game, have another level to get to. I think we're getting to that point where a lot of guys have three years in the big leagues, they've had their ups and they've had their downs and part of why guys peak at 26, 27 and 28, it's like that crossroads of experience and physical talent, you know? And I think we're getting to that place. That's what excites me about this team. I think we're getting to that place where this core group of position players are getting into their prime years." – general manager Jed Hoyer, March 6.

"Obviously, you want to come back and show 'em you got it and shove it up their ass." – Morrow after Darvish's Cactus League debut as a Cub against the Dodgers, March 6.

As part of that growing familiarity – while stuck in the monotony of spring training without the big-game adrenaline that fueled these Cubs – pinch-hitter extraordinaire Tommy La Stella escalated a prank war

with the front office and arranged for an inflatable bounce house to take over Epstein and Hoyer's reserved parking spots. It was a remarkable transformation for La Stella, who nearly quit the team in the middle of the 2016 World Series season when he initially refused to report to Triple-A Iowa and instead went home to New Jersey for some downtime. It's just hard to imagine, say, the punter doing this to Bill Belichick's parking spot at the New England Patriots' practice facility.

"I don't know why he put that there. He's just below the line. He'll have to wait a couple years. He's not tall enough to bounce in it. ... Neither is Jed though." – Epstein, March 9.

"I thought it was a great idea. I'm certain it's there for the family and kids...although Tommy may be into that kind of thing and easily fits in there. And if you see (ESPN's) 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." – manager Joe Maddon, March 9.

Beyond the infusion of pitching and recovery from the World Series hangover, the Cubs made a big bet on their young players, dismissing hitting coach John Mallee last October, quickly hiring Chili Davis as a "graduate school" instructor and talking up a next-level offense that would be better prepared for the aces and power bullpens seen in the postseason. Early results were mixed.

"I'm not frustrated at all. I've got a good offense. It's early. We've played five games. If I panic now, then something's wrong. I've been around this game too long. I think guys are gonna break out. And when they do, we'll be fine." – Davis, approached by reporters after a 1-0 road loss to the Cincinnati Reds, April 2.

"They seem like a fun group over there having a lot of fun. Sure, it can get a little annoying, but we do the same thing." – Kris Bryant after watching the Brewers celebrate a walk-off win over the Cubs at Miller Park, April 6.

"You know what I really got out of today? You know what I learned? How ugly I looked on that fly ball. I tossed the bat really high. I didn't run to first base. A lot of teammates came up to me, and they said it in a good way. You learn from it. Especially me, I don't take the AB before to the plate. After I hit that fly ball where I tossed the bat really high, I was kind of mad about it. Not because of the fly ball, just the way I looked for the kids and everybody that follows me. That's not a good look, so I learned that from today." – Javier Báez, at the beginning of his MVP campaign, about a game against the Pirates on April 11.

"Where is the respect for the game? He's hit four homers in two days, does that mean you can take your bat and throw it 15-20 feet in the air when you pop up, like you should have hit your fifth home run? I would bet that men went over and talked to him, because I believe they've got a group there that speaks truth to power." – Pittsburgh Pirates manager Clint Hurdle on Baez, April 12.

"I bust my ass every day to play hard. No one plays this game harder than me. ... People that talk about me, they can save it. I don't control it. I don't really care about it." – Báez firing back at Hurdle, April 12.

"It reveals you more than it reveals the person you're talking about. I've always believed that, so whenever you want to be hypercritical of somebody, just understand you're pretty much revealing yourself and what your beliefs are more than you are being critical or evaluating somebody. Because you have not spent one second in that person's skin." – Maddon responding to Hurdle, April 13.

"Keep your launch angles. Keep your exit velocities. Give me a good at-bat." – Maddon, April 19.

“It’s where we belong. We’re just playing Cub baseball right now and we’ve yet to explode — explode the way we can and we’re still in first. It’s where we belong.” – Albert Almora Jr. after the Cubs moved to the top of the NL Central, April 30.

“I don’t give a rat’s ass about lineups, but the leadoff spot...” – Chicago Sun-Times reporter Gordon Wittenmyer, leading off a question during Maddon’s pregame press conference, May 8.

“Is that a technical term? We can use that on The Athletic, but not necessarily on everyone else’s newspaper.” – Maddon, May 8.

“That’s the biggest poison ever in terms of a professional athlete. It’s funny, my wife was getting physical therapy done the other day and she overheard a conversation. The guy was just saying, ‘Yeah, I’m one of those sports trolls. I love trolling all these athletes.’ My wife wanted to say something. Good thing she didn’t. I get it to an extent, but sometimes it’s not what I need. I hate looking at it. It really started in high school. I mean, I was pretty dang good in high school. There wasn’t much that I could be faulted on. But it always seemed like there was someone out there that wanted to say something bad about me. That’s when it really got to me. I’m like, ‘Why is this getting to me?’ I felt like I was doing everything right. I’m a very likable kid. And that’s kind of when I was like: ‘You know what, I need to limit what I see. Good and bad.’” – Bryant on social media, May 2018.

“One of the first things I learned from Bill James when I was working with him in Boston: He would always say, you know, don’t obsess about the lineup. It’s the biggest waste of your time. All you want to do is hit your best hitters the most often. If you do that, don’t worry about it. Any other changes, we’re talking about fractions of runs over the course of a season. So for an individual game, it’s just not going to have enough of an impact. Fractions of runs and people obsess. It’s a sports radio lightning rod, both a consistent lineup and the batting order. I just think people spend too much time thinking about something that doesn’t have a significant impact on winning and losing.” – Hoyer, June 19.

“Just undressing at my house. Taking my pants off yesterday morning after we got back in at like 3 a.m. Just in the closet, got my right leg off. Left one, just felt like a spasm in my back.” – Morrow explaining his latest injury, June 19.

“Dominating sim game,” — Epstein, in a good mood after Darvish’s first simulated game at Wrigley Field, June 20.

“He was an unbelievable person and even a better friend. Expert listener. I think that’s something that’s kind of a lost art nowadays. Everyone is in a rush to share their opinions and share what they know. That wasn’t Ken. His greatest strength was his ability to listen and truly hear what you needed and put it in a language that makes sense. He had such a knack for that. His communication came from his ability to listen.” – La Stella mourning the death of Ken Ravizza, 70, Maddon’s longtime friend, a mental skills consultant for the Cubs and a trailblazing sports psychologist, July 9.

“Our fans are great and they are so genuine and they always look for the positive. They always look for the positive thing. It doesn’t matter how the day is going. They find one positive and they roll with that. That’s rare to find with people.” – Jason Heyward, not being sarcastic, July 19.

Even though Darvish hadn’t pitched since late May – and Bryant’s nagging left shoulder problems would ultimately limit the 2016 NL MVP to roughly 60 percent of a 163-game schedule – the Cubs still reached the All-Star break in first place with a 55-38 record and a 2 1/2-game lead in the division.

Epstein then aggressively closed two separate deals with the Texas Rangers, acquiring super-utility pitcher Jesse Chavez and big-name starter Cole Hamels to bolster the staff. Darvish, who underwent Tommy John surgery in 2015, had sought another opinion on his right triceps tendinitis. Alex Rodriguez would give his take in the middle of ESPN's "Sunday Night Baseball," a jarring aside during what should have been a feel-good win over the St. Louis Cardinals at Busch Stadium.

"It's been a very sobering year with the debacle of the start of Yu Darvish, who's been devastating. I mean, a guy to start a six-year contract with three of the worst months you could ever see. I know he threw a 10-pitch bullpen, then a 16-pitch bullpen, and then he said his arm was hurting. It's gotten so bad around – now they won't say this publicly – but it's gotten so bad that they let him basically police and take control of his own rehab, which is scary, because they don't want to create anything that he can kind of push back against. So he'll let the team know when he's ready, which, let me just tell you what that means to a clubhouse. You lose respect quickly. And my concern for him – because he's a great young talent – is it may take two or three or four years and you may never get that back. The other side of that is Chatwood, Tyler, who's actually struggled, but has gone out there, he's posted. ... This is an issue that, if you're Cubs Nation, you have to watch the Yu Darvish development because it's not good inside that clubhouse right now." – A-Rod, July 29.

"If this story had come from a credible journalist, we might have shown some concern. But it came from A-Rod, so we're paying it little attention. I think it was classless and bordered on unprofessional to take a little nugget of somewhat exaggerated information from one person that maybe he had history with and turning that into a spokesman for the entire team. (A-Rod's) attacking a player who is injured and on the disabled list, which is difficult for any player, especially one who has a big contract and is in his first year (with a new team). Imagine how difficult it is for Darvish. But then also attacking him for staying with the team? During A-Rod's absurd comments, the video shows that Darvish was right there on the top step in the dugout cheering on his teammates, which is what you want from somebody like that. He wasn't hiding out in Mesa at the spring-training complex or back home like A-Rod was when he was suspended." – Joel Wolfe, Darvish's agent, July 30.

"When you speak badly of my group, our group, it brings out the Hazleton in me." – Maddon after a pregame meeting with ESPN broadcasters, Aug. 12.

"I have over 25 years in the game and I'm going to call it as I see it. We don't always have to agree on everything. But I do have a lot of respect for Joe – and obviously the Cubs organization – and I have for a long time and that hasn't changed. As a matter of fact – before I go to rehearsal – Joe and I plan to have drinks together. So that's planned. That's in the books." – A-Rod ending a two-question, 51-second media scrum in the Wrigley Field press dining room, Aug. 12.

"Having a lead this late is nice. But it means nothing until you win the division." – Rizzo on Aug. 15.

Darvish's rehab looked like it was progressing. On Aug. 19, he pitched one inning in South Bend, but as he warmed up to start the second, he called for the Cubs trainer Matt Johnson. He and Johnson left the field. Darvish has already been diagnosed with elbow impingement/inflammation and would eventually require a shutdown and an arthroscopic procedure in September.

"I feel most disappointed in myself out of everyone on the world, I think." – Darvish on Aug. 19 in South Bend.

That aforementioned episode of "Sunday Night Baseball" will be remembered as The David Bote Game. That walk-off grand slam helped push the underachieving Washington Nationals into salary-dump mode,

allowing the Cubs to pick up Daniel Murphy in an August waiver deal that jumpstarted their offense and created conflicting emotions for fans aware of his anti-gay comments in 2015.

“Oh dear. I would hope that you would root for the Cubs.” – Murphy said in response to a question about gay fans not wanting to root for the Cubs with him on the team, Aug. 23.

“Since several people have asked, yes, I was consulted prior to the Daniel Murphy trade. There were several thoughtful conversations among Cubs executives, my brothers and me, as well as with Billy Bean, MLB’s ambassador for inclusion and the subject of Daniel’s 2015 comments. I know Billy and have immense respect for him and his work with the league. Billy, who has since developed a friendship with Daniel, was very positive and encouraging. After these considered and thoughtful conversations, which took place precisely because of the Cubs’ sensitivities on the matter, I was on board with the trade.” – Cubs board member Laura Ricketts, writing on her personal Twitter account before the “Out At Wrigley” event, Aug. 26.

Maddon preaches that September brings its own energy and a team built around the concepts of depth, versatility and experience entered a Labor Day series against the Brewers with a five-game lead in the division.

“When you have majority Cubs fans in the stands, I don’t know if that’s a rivalry yet. I’ve been in rivalries. They’re not going to like me for the comment, but you can look at the ticket sales. When they start getting a little bit closer and their fans sell out, then I think that’s kind of the understanding. It’s just a matter of us going out there and playing hard. It’s no (disrespect) to who they have in their dugout. They have great players and I know those guys want to win. But this game of baseball, you want to be able to see the fans in the stands and obviously that’s where you feel it the most. To be able to have the Cubs fans travel in the masses that they do, it’s great to see.” – Hamels after a walk-off loss at Miller Park, Sept. 3.

“Disrespect 90.” – Cut4, an official MLB Twitter account, trolling Maddon and Willson Contreras after the All-Star catcher didn’t run hard to first base, Sept. 16.

The whole world is watching. The Cubs understood that the moment Addison Russell’s ex-wife, Melisa Reidy, published a disturbing blog post detailing abuse allegations against the one-time All-Star shortstop. That raw account reactivated an MLB investigation and darkened the mood before a crosstown series against the White Sox on the South Side.

“I would say that I know him in a baseball context. And that I think one thing that we’ve learned as a society is we collectively wrestle with trying to deal with how to appropriately handle accusations like this. It’s important to step back and realize that if you know someone in one context, you don’t necessarily know them fully.” – Epstein, Sept. 21.

“I don’t know. Should I?” – Maddon, who waited almost a week before reading Reidy’s blog post, Sept. 21.

“These allegations against me are completely false. I made that clear to Major League Baseball last year and reiterated it to the Cubs today. I’m confident any full and fair investigation will fully exonerate me. The protection of my children is foremost in my mind so I will have no further comment.” – Russell in a statement released through the players’ union, Sept. 21.

“I did eventually read the blog. My stance has not changed. Domestic violence is horrible, absolutely, it is. By reading that, you feel her pain, absolutely. But at the end of the day, there’s really nothing that I’m

able to do. This is in the hands of MLB and the players' union. Period." — Maddon before a Sept. 26 game.

Roughly 14 hours after the Colorado Rockies eliminated the Cubs from the playoffs, MLB commissioner Rob Manfred announced that Russell accepted a 40-game suspension without pay under the joint domestic violence policy. Reidy talked to The Athletic's Katie Strang.

After losing the opener of a road series at Guaranteed Rate Field on Sept. 21, the day Russell was put on administrative leave, the Cubs won two straight to give themselves a 2-1/2 game lead over the Brewers going into the final week of the season. The Cubs had seven straight games at home, four against the Pirates and three against the Cardinals. They promptly lost the first two games of the Pirates series, while the Brewers won two to shave two games off the lead. A Jon Lester win that Thursday gave the Cubs a full-game lead going into the final series.

"I don't think that's an arrogance. We all kind of expect to win the division." — Lester on the Cubs' mindset, Sept. 27.

"He's off the beer train." Lester on old friend John Lackey, who was in the crowd and sipping on a clear beverage, Sept. 27.

The Cubs beat St. Louis that Friday, but lost 2-1 Saturday, while the Brewers kept winning. Both teams won on the final Sunday of the season to set up an NL Central tiebreaker.

"Baseball is such a perfect game, in some ways. It takes 162 games to not decide anything. It's just like it's the first day of the season." — Maddon previewing Game 163, Sept. 30.

"Just open up the turnstiles for whoever wants to come in. Make your money on concessions." — Rizzo, marketing genius, on an afternoon game to decide the NL Central tiebreaker, Sept. 30.

The Cubs had no problem drawing fans to the game, but a lot of them were Brewers backers who made the drive south on I-94. Chants of "MVP!" were more for Christian Yelich than Báez. The Brewers won 3-1.

"We'd like to have one pitch back to (Orlando) Arcia." — Maddon on Justin Wilson's game-changing hanging slider to one of the worst hitters in baseball, Oct. 1.

"This is nothing new to us. We've been fortunate enough to see a lot of crazy shit happen the last few years. Just keep adding on to the story. That's what 2018 has been. I feel like we've done an outstanding job of putting stuff behind us and keep it moving." — Heyward after losing Game 163 to the Brewers, Oct. 1.

"It's just the consistent hard contact has not been there. I can't give you a solid reason. I talked to Chili and Andy (Haines) and the hitters a lot, too. We just got to find it quickly. The capabilities are within the group. There's no doubt. We have one more shot tomorrow to right the ship and move on from there. But I don't have any like really solid answers." — Maddon on the prevailing story of the season, Oct. 1.

With no off day, the wild-card game against Colorado was a blur. Before the game, Báez woke up a sleepy interview room with a fiery take on the Cubs' hitting woes.

"You know, we've got to stop worrying about other teams. We've got to go out there and have fun. We've got to go out there and compete. If we do that, there's no team that can beat us, and they know

that, so that's why they run their mouth a lot, because they know we're the best. Even when we're struggling, we are the head of everybody." — Báez before the wild-card game on Oct. 2.

The Cubs lost to Colorado 2-1 in a crazy 13-inning wild-card game to end the season. Báez drove in the only run of the game for the Cubs with a double. After the game, the Cubs weren't angry, but very disappointed. The Cubs scored one run at home in: a Game 161 loss to the Cardinals, a Game 163 tiebreaker against the Brewers and the finale loss to Colorado. Some players went around the clubhouse hugging their teammates, while others spoke plainly about why they were going home.

"If we don't play as a team, we're not going to win." — Báez after the game, Oct. 3.

"Successful? Well, I'll tell you the way we go about things here. We didn't pop any bottles this year. We had plenty of toasts to things and we don't take postseasons for granted. We don't take winning for granted. But our mindset is World Series or no." — Heyward, Oct. 3.

"Sometimes you need to get, for lack of a better term, sorry, you need to get your dick knocked in the dirt to appreciate where you're at." — Lester, Oct. 3.

In his end-of-season media address, Epstein denied the obvious tension with Maddon, but declined to guarantee the entire coaching staff would return next season.

"Here's where I am about the offense, and I mean this with no disrespect to any of our players. I respect them all greatly, in every way, and our coaches, and our front office. Everybody involved, there's no disrespect. But I think part of getting better is facing the problem, and our offense broke, somewhere along the lines." — Epstein, Oct. 3.

"If you just show up, playing it cool, knowing you're talented, knowing it's a long season and trusting that the talent will manifest over the course of 162, sometimes you'll end up one game short. ... We could've done more from Day 1 to 162 as far as complete sense of urgency every day, being completely on mission every day, showing up with that assertiveness and that edge every day." — Epstein, Oct. 3.

--