



# CHICAGO CUBS DAILY CLIPS

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July 7, 2018

- Chicago Tribune, **Cubs' Willson Contreras floored by support in NL All-Star voting**  
<http://www.chicagotribune.com/sports/baseball/cubs/ct-spt-cubs-willson-contreras-20180706-story.html>
- Chicago Tribune, **Kris Bryant's shoulder discomfort might linger after he returns from DL, Joe Maddon says**  
<http://www.chicagotribune.com/sports/baseball/cubs/ct-spt-cubs-kris-bryant-shoulder-injury-20180706-story.html>
- Chicago Tribune, **Cubs prospect Oscar De La Cruz suspended 80 games**  
<http://www.chicagotribune.com/sports/baseball/cubs/ct-spt-cubs-oscar-de-la-cruz-suspended-20180706-story.html>
- Chicago Tribune, **Theo Epstein says Cubs are in 'mode of assessing' trade market**  
<http://www.chicagotribune.com/sports/baseball/cubs/ct-spt-cubs-theo-epstein-trade-market-20180706-story.html>
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- Chicago Tribune, **White Sox prospects Dylan Cease and Luis Basabe, Cubs' Miguel Amaya named to All-Star Futures Game**  
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<https://chicago.suntimes.com/sports/cubs-winning-streak-stopped-cold-in-another-loss-to-reds/>
- Chicago Sun-Times, **Theo Epstein says Cubs 'still assessing' situation before trade deadline**  
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<https://chicago.suntimes.com/sports/chicago-cubs-javy-baez-joe-maddon-national-league-all-star-bryce-harper/>
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<http://www.dailyherald.com/sports/20180706/cubs-content-to-allow-bryants-shoulder-to-heal-on-its-own>
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### Chicago Tribune

Cubs' Willson Contreras floored by support in NL All-Star voting.

By Mark Gonzales

Regardless of the final results, Cubs catcher Willson Contreras was appreciative of the support he's received in National League voting for the July 17 All-Star Game.

Contreras moved ahead of the Giants' Buster Posey in the latest numbers released Thursday. Voting ended late Thursday night, and the final results will be announced Sunday.

"It took me by surprise," Contreras said. "A few days ago, Posey was still up by quite a bit. When we woke up (Thursday), my wife told me I had taken the lead among catchers. To be honest, it makes me really happy to have the support of all the fans."

All-Star starters, reserves and pitchers will be announced starting at 6 p.m. Sunday on ESPN. As of the last update, Contreras had 1,683,686 votes to Posey's 1,675,468.

"Whether I make the team or not, I'm going to be very happy and thankful for the fans," Contreras said. "I saw more than 2 million votes now, and that's really something for me. I'm happy to have the support of the fans. If I make it, great. If I don't, then it will be just as good and still be thankful for the fans and move forward in the second half."

Contreras believes he has helped his case with a career-high four consecutive multi-hit games and a five-game hitting streak in which he has gone 10-for-18.

"My home run numbers (seven) might not be as high as I'd like them to be, but I feel like I'm doing a lot to help the team, and that's really my focus, to help the team," Contreras said.

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### **Chicago Tribune**

Kris Bryant's shoulder discomfort might linger after he returns from DL, Joe Maddon says  
By Mark Gonzales

Kris Bryant managed through the pain of a sprained left pinkie for nearly the entire second half of 2017, and he might have to cope with similar discomfort in his left shoulder when he rejoins the Cubs.

Bryant, who hasn't played since June 22, could need a short minor-league rehab assignment before he's activated from the 10-day disabled list. But manager Joe Maddon acknowledged that Bryant could return despite feeling less than 100 percent.

"Maybe it's just more of a manageable situation to begin with," Maddon said Friday after Bryant took batting practice in the indoor cages. "How much can he handle?"

Maddon said Bryant feels the discomfort when he finishes his swing and understands it could linger.

"We've all been through that, where you get those kind of nagging things, and then whether sometimes historically you slide and put your hand down, all of a sudden that wrist bothers you for an entire season and gets well in November and December," Maddon said. "I really don't know. (The discomfort is) not totally gone."

Last season Bryant missed only one game after injuring his pinkie on a headfirst slide July 19. He raised his batting average by 20 points but hit only 10 home runs after the injury.

Red-faced: The Cubs lost to the Reds for the fifth consecutive time — matching their longest losing streak to them since June 25-July 9, 2014. They've lost seven of their last 10 to the Reds, who are 17-6 in their last 23 games.

"They've gotten better, primarily because their pitching is so good and they're playing better defense," Maddon said. "They always can hit. But the difference is they're keeping the other side down."

Extra innings: Reliever Carl Edwards Jr. was activated from the DL and struck out Adam Duvall in his first appearance since May 29 after suffering right shoulder inflammation. ... Catcher Chris Gimenez cleared waivers and was assigned to Triple-A Iowa. ... The Cubs announced they signed 32 draft picks, including their top 20, by Friday's deadline.

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### **Chicago Tribune**

Cubs prospect Oscar De La Cruz suspended 80 games  
By Mark Gonzales

The Cubs' attempts to develop pitching in their minor league system suffered a blow Friday when Oscar De La Cruz was suspended 80-games for violating Major League Baseball's Joint Drug Prevention and Treatment Program.

"We are disappointed to learn today that Oscar De La Cruz has violated Major League Baseball's Joint Drug Prevention and Treatment Program," the team announced Friday in a statement. "The Cubs fully support the Program and its efforts to remove performance enhancing drugs from the game.

"We also expect Oscar to learn from this experience and will support him on his journey back. Per Program protocol, the Cubs will not comment further on this matter."

De La Cruz, 23, tested positive for Furosemide, a masking agent. He was 6-7 with a 5.24 ERA in 16 starts for Double-A Tennessee. De La Cruz was ranked as the organization's sixth top prospect entering this season by Baseball America but has been hampered by injuries throughout his minor league career.

The suspension also puts a dent in the Cubs' trade inventory as they try to acquire pitching help by the July 31 non-waiver deadline.

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### **Chicago Tribune**

Theo Epstein says Cubs are in 'mode of assessing' trade market  
By Mark Gonzales

With Yu Darvish's return date uncertain, the Cubs are in a "mode of assessing" the trade market, President Theo Epstein said Friday.

"On the position-player front, right now there's not a lot we'd want to go get," Epstein said. "Not a lot of roster spots to fit guys in. We have guys we have to sit on a given day that we want to get at-bats for, so it's not like we're not actively looking at them on the position-player side.

“And with the pitching, we’ll learn a lot more over the next few weeks. There are couple guys in some ruts that we expect to get out of and get locked in, and the health front with Yu, we’re optimistic. But we need to see more.”

Darvish, who hasn’t pitched since May 20 because of right triceps tendinitis and an impingement that was diagnosed June 29, has begun to resume his strength program. After completing that program, he will throw off flat ground before pitching off a mound.

The Cubs have yet to place a timetable on Darvish’s return, but it seems highly unlikely he would rejoin the team by the July 31 trade deadline.

“Based on the reports we got, there’s no structural damage or anything serious in there,” Epstein said. “We’re optimistic. It might not be on the timeline that we all hope, but we’re all very optimistic he’s going to make a solid contribution.”

As for the trade market, “I don’t necessarily think this is the year we’ll be out front beating the market,” said Epstein, who acquired closer Aroldis Chapman and left-hander Jose Quintana well in advance of the deadline the last two years. “But I think industry-wide there’s going to be a lot of activity before the deadline.”

Don’t expect the Cubs to pursue a high-caliber starter such as left-hander Cole Hamels of the Rangers.

“There’s no way we’re going to go out and acquire a starter the caliber of a locked-in (Kyle) Hendricks or a locked-in Jose Quintana,” Epstein said. “The majority of our answers lie within, for sure. That’s how we’re looking at it.”

Epstein indicated Darvish and third baseman Kris Bryant feel better. Bryant tested his left shoulder by taking batting practice in the indoor cage before Friday’s game.

Epstein added that he will check with Bryant, who hasn’t played since June 22, to see if he would like to go on a minor-league rehab assignment before rejoining his teammates.

Manager Joe Maddon indicated Bryant may have to tolerate some discomfort when he returns.

“It’s the finish part of the swing,” Maddon said. “That’s where he feels it.”

Epstein didn’t rule out the Cubs pursuing relief help, particularly from the left side. But they have an in-house candidate in Drew Smyly, who is rehabbing from Tommy John elbow surgery 12 months ago and will be stretched out after initially being projected as a reliever for the remainder of this season and as a starter for 2019.

“We’re probably going to stretch him out on the rehab assignment,” Epstein said. “We’ll see how he’s feeling and see what our needs are when he comes back. But it makes sense to give him a prolonged outing.

“I don’t think he’s going to get to a point where he’s going super deep in games. That’s more for next year. But it makes sense to get him some reps and see how he responds to multiple innings and goes from there.”

The Cubs activated reliever Carl Edwards Jr. from the 10-day disabled list before Friday’s game and optioned reliever Dillon Maples to Triple-A Iowa.

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## Chicago Tribune

Cubs' 6-game winning streak ends with 3-2 loss to Reds

By Mark Gonzales

With Yu Darvish likely sidelined at least through July and two daunting stretches in the second half, it appears likely that Cubs left-hander Mike Montgomery will surpass his career high of 16 starts, set with the Mariners in 2015.

So while team President Theo Epstein and his staff scour the major and minor leagues for help, Montgomery hopes he can regain his strength and sharpness for the second half.

"That's the challenge right now," Montgomery said Friday after the Cubs' rally fell short in a 3-2 loss to the Reds, snapping their winning streak at a season-high six games. "I'm not as fresh as I was a month ago. That's what you have to deal with as a starter. You don't necessarily have your best stuff every time. That's the fun part for me.

"I go into this week working on some of the things that get me mechanically and physically where I need to be. You don't lose confidence ever — I don't — when things you don't go your way. It just gives you an opportunity to learn, and that's the good thing about baseball. There are a lot of games to be played, a lot of opportunities."

Montgomery, who fell to 3-3 after allowing three runs in five innings, has thrown 71 innings — the last 45  $\frac{2}{3}$  innings over eight starts. He is scheduled to make one more start, Wednesday against the Giants, before the All-Star break.

"We're all looking forward to it, but we definitely want to finish strong this last week," said Montgomery, who is on pace to match his career high of 130  $\frac{2}{3}$  innings, set last season.

For the first time in a week, the Cubs didn't finish strong Friday. They chipped away at their 3-0 deficit with a run in the fifth and another in the eighth. In the ninth, Ian Happ singled and went to second on a groundout, but Jason Heyward lined out to left to end it.

Epstein envisions better days ahead for a rotation that has averaged only 5  $\frac{1}{3}$  innings per start and has leaned heavily on ace left-hander Jon Lester, who is 11-2 with a 2.25 ERA.

"Our starting pitching is going to carry us for long stretches this season, and it hasn't happened yet," Epstein said. "It lies ahead."

That places most of the weight on Kyle Hendricks, Jose Quintana, Tyler Chatwood and Montgomery. The Cubs in a "mode of assessing" the trade market, according to Epstein, with Darvish only recently having resumed his strength program and plenty of steps ahead before he rejoins the rotation.

"There's no way we're going to acquire a starter with the caliber of a locked-in Hendricks or a locked-in Quintana," Epstein said. "The majority of our answers lie within, for sure."

And their reservoir of tradable players took a hit Friday when pitcher Oscar De La Cruz, their sixth-best prospect, according to Baseball America, was suspended 80 games for violating Major League Baseball's Joint Drug Prevention and Treatment Program. The right-hander tested positive for Furosemide, a masking agent.

Depth remains important because the Cubs open the second half with 12 games in 11 days and play a stretch of 23 games without a day off starting Aug. 21.

Epstein believes Darvish, who hasn't pitched since May 20 because of right triceps tendinitis, will make a "solid contribution" once he returns. Medical reports last week indicated no structural damage, and Darvish told Epstein and manager Joe Maddon he is feeling better since receiving a cortisone shot June 29.

The bullpen lowered its ERA to 3.15 with four shutout innings Friday, but Epstein acknowledged the team will continue to search for depth.

"You just assess the staff overall — more than one player — and see where your needs are," Epstein said.

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### **Chicago Tribune**

White Sox prospects Dylan Cease and Luis Basabe, Cubs' Miguel Amaya named to All-Star Futures Game  
By Mark Gonzales

Right-hander Dylan Cease and outfielder Luis Alexander Basabe of the White Sox and catcher Miguel Amaya of the Cubs were selected Friday to participate in the All-Star Futures Game on July 15 at Nationals Park.

Cease, 22, was recently promoted from Class-A Winston-Salem to Double-A Birmingham. Acquired from the Cubs in the Jose Quintana trade last July, Cease is a combined 9-2 with a 3.13 ERA in 15 starts with 96 strikeouts in 83 1/3 innings. He will pitch for the USA squad.

Basabe, 21, is batting a combined .251 with nine home runs, 34 RBIs and nine stolen bases at Winston-Salem and Birmingham. A native of Venezuela, Basabe will play for the World team.

"To have those two guys join it, it's awesome for them, awesome for the organization," manager Rick Renteria said. "We're excited for their opportunity to show the world who they are and what they're about and I hope they have some success, allow themselves to shine and have some fun."

Amaya, 19, is batting .271 with 10 home runs and 40 RBIs for Class-A South Bend. Amaya, a native of Panama, will play for the World team.

The Futures Game will be played one day before the Home Run Derby and two before the All-Star Game. All-Star starters will be revealed Sunday evening.

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### **Chicago Sun-Times**

Cubs' winning streak stopped cold in another loss to Reds  
By Chris Kuc

A Cubs offense that was as scorching as the temperatures during the recent Chicago heat wave was greeted by a cool wind blowing briskly over the center-field scoreboard Friday afternoon.

Gone with the heat — the game-time temperature was 70 degrees — was the Cubs' six-game winning streak as the Reds came out on top 3-2 before a crowd of 41,434.

The Cubs, who had scored at least five runs in each of their previous eight games, couldn't overcome a solid outing from starter Tyler Mahle, the Reds' bullpen and the swift breeze. Both teams had balls that would have reached the seats had an 18 mph wind not been howling in from the north. Instead, they ended up nestled in outfielders' gloves.

"The conditions were definitely in favor of the pitchers," said Cubs starter Mike Montgomery, who went five innings and allowed three runs and six hits with two walks and two strikeouts. "[On] both sides there were balls that probably would have been homers on a different day, but that's kind of how Wrigley plays. We had a good run [with the] six-game win streak, we lose one and we just move on."

The Reds got to Montgomery with two runs in the fourth, when Adam Duvall singled to score one and another crossed the plate when Scott Schebler grounded into a double play. The Reds tacked on another on Scooter Gennett's sacrifice fly in the fifth.

In the bottom of the fifth, the Cubs plated one when Albert Almora Jr. grounded into a fielder's choice that scored Willson Contreras.

The Reds threatened in the sixth, but Jason Heyward made a spectacular diving catch in right-center — his second sparkling defensive play of the day — to keep the score close.

The Cubs pulled to within a run on a sacrifice fly by Ben Zobrist, who drove the ball deep to center, but the wind kept it in the park. Raisel Iglesias closed out the game for the Reds to hand the Cubs their first loss at Wrigley Field since June 19.

While Cubs bats were mostly muted, manager Joe Maddon has been pleased with his hitters' approach during the team's hot stretch, especially with balls hit to the opposite field. Both Cubs runs Friday came after batters opened the rallies with opposite-field hits, one by Contreras and the other by Javy Baez.

"Nobody is up there just trying to put the ball in the seats on every pitch," Maddon said. "I think we're starting to understand that pitchers throw home runs more than you hit them. Meaning that if you go up there with the home run in your mind every swing, I promise you the pitcher is not going to throw it where you can do that with every swing."

Cubs president Theo Epstein also was appreciative of Cubs hitters' mindset.

"Ball in play, high batting average [and] getting guys on base never goes out of style," Epstein said. "To see some of these games where we score a ton of runs without homers are really gratifying because we know the home runs are coming. We have guys with a lot of power who are going to hit their bombs, so we just don't want to be completely reliant on it, and we're not. We have a few different ways to score runs now, which is really nice."

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### **Chicago Sun-Times**

Theo Epstein says Cubs 'still assessing' situation before trade deadline

By Chris Kuc



Cubs president Theo Epstein is taking a wait-and-see approach when it comes to possible trades to bolster the pitching staff.

Much will depend on the health of Yu Darvish and whether fellow starters Kyle Hendricks and Jose Quintana can break out of their funks before the deadline July 31.

Epstein, who spoke before the Cubs' 3-2 loss to the Reds on a brilliantly sunny Friday afternoon at Wrigley Field, said the team is "still in a mode of assessing" and is optimistic all three pitchers will be productive for the stretch run.

"I think we'll learn a lot more over the next few weeks," Epstein said. "[We have] a couple of guys in some ruts that we expect to get out of them and to get locked in, and then on the health front with Yu we're optimistic."

Darvish remains sidelined with an impingement and inflammation in his right elbow, but Epstein said the right-hander "is feeling better."

"We are optimistic based on the reports that we got that there's no structural damage, nothing serious in there," Epstein said. "It might not be on the timeline we all hope, but we're very optimistic he's going to make a solid contribution."

Epstein also said the Cubs aren't in the market for a position player.

"There's not a lot that we would want to go get, honestly," Epstein said. "We have guys who have to sit on a given day who we want to get at-bats for, so it's not like we're actively out looking."

Bryant still out

Kris Bryant remained out of the lineup because of inflammation in his left shoulder. The third baseman, who is eligible to come off the disabled list, hit in the cage Friday, and Epstein said Bryant "had a real good day. We'll see whether he wants or needs a rehab assignment ... just to test it in a game situation before he comes back."

Back in the pen

The Cubs activated Carl Edwards Jr. off the 10-day DL and optioned fellow right-hander Dillon Maples to Class AAA Iowa. Edwards had been on the DL since May 30 with shoulder inflammation.

"I was basically just taking my time. I didn't want to come back too early and re-injure myself," said Edwards, who struck out the only hitter he faced, Adam Duvall, with a 95 mph fastball.

The Cubs also activated left-hander Rob Zastryzny off the DL and optioned him to Iowa, and catcher Chris Gimenez cleared waivers and was assigned to Iowa.

Punished

Class AA Tennessee pitcher Oscar De La Cruz was suspended 80 games without pay for violating Major League Baseball's drug program.

De La Cruz, one of the Cubs' top prospects, tested positive for Furosemide, a diuretic and masking agent.

“We are disappointed to learn today that Oscar De La Cruz has violated Major League Baseball’s Joint Drug Prevention and Treatment Program,” the Cubs said in a statement. “The Cubs fully support the program and its efforts to remove performance-enhancing drugs from the game. We also expect Oscar to learn from this experience and will support him on his journey back.”

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### **Chicago Sun-Times**

All the cool kids want to field and run the bases like the Cubs’ Javy Baez

By Rick Morrissey

Everything is cool about Javy Baez, but the coolest things are those being recognized when people talk about him: his fielding and baserunning.

Now, you could no more hide Baez’s flair and excellence in those areas than you could hide a bonfire. But in a sport in which hitting is glorified (and financially rewarded), the Cubs second baseman has grabbed everyone by the collar and said, “Look.”

And we can’t take our eyes off him.

Think about this: He has us gushing about the way he tags out runners. A tag! Who else can make that happen? Our jaws drop when he takes a throw from catcher Willson Contreras and drops a no-look tag on a would-be base-stealer, who, before he knows it, is a won’t-be base-stealer. A what-could-you-possibly-have-been-thinking base-stealer.

He runs the bases with a spirit about him that brings to mind Roberto Clemente or, as Cubs manager Joe Maddon has said, Willie Mays. In a sports world overrun with hyperbole, these comparisons are met with a nod: Yes, that’s exactly whom the kid looks like when he’s tearing around the bases, legs pumping, helmet bouncing around, dust flying.

I don’t want to demean Baez’s hitting. It’s good, and the ball takes a beating when he connects. But it almost has gotten to the point where the hitting is the opening act for the baserunning. You wouldn’t turn down any of his 16 home runs this season, but how in the heck is he supposed to steal home when the base is already given to him for free?

That’s right: It really is all about us.

Baseball people have spent a lot of time insisting that defense is just as important as offense, but, judging by ESPN’s “SportsCenter,” we’re still a nation that digs the long ball. Home-run numbers have skyrocketed in the last few years, and teams have preached the gospel of launch angles and exit velocity. When clubs hand out big contracts, it’s almost always because of hitting prowess. The Nationals’ Bryce Harper might be a five-tool player, but when he signs what is expected to be a massive contract after this season, it won’t be because of his work in right field.

Conversely, when Cubs right fielder Jason Heyward was horrible at the plate in 2016, his excellent defense could not repel the tidal wave of criticism that came his way.

That’s what makes the Javy phenomenon so beautiful. When Baez signs his next contract, it will reward those parts of the game too many of us take for granted. Or, worse, rank far below hitting.

If Baez were turning the batter's box into a contaminated work site, the way Heyward did in the Cubs' World Series season, perhaps we wouldn't be quite so excited about his work as a fielder and baserunner. But he was hitting .286 with 61 RBI, the fifth-most in the majors, entering play Friday.

He has come a long way from his rookie season in 2014, when he struck out 95 times in 219 at-bats. He would swing so hard that there was real concern he would break an ankle on a particularly exuberant pass at the ball. There are still times when his swing looks more like a boxer's roundhouse punch, and bless him for that. It wouldn't be him if he didn't do that once in a while. There's a lust for life in that swing, just as there is in a diving stop to his right or a joyride of a stolen-base attempt at home.

To use a terrible phrase that somehow fits Baez perfectly, he is what he is. He's not a billionaire trying to pawn himself off as a man of humble beginnings. He's right there in front of us, sprinting, throwing off his knees and flipping his flippin' bat. You got a problem with that?

Fielding and baserunning on the marquee — what a wonderful thing that is. Baez has taken those underappreciated elements of baseball and made people take notice. He has done it with a smile on his face. His game is fun personified.

ESPN's "Web Gems" recognizes top defensive plays. Baez could have his own show. No, really.

He's making a huge push to be a National League All-Star. It's possible that fans are comparing his offensive stats to those of other second basemen and casting their vote for that reason. It's also possible — OK, 100 percent probable — that Cubs fans are stuffing the ballot box.

But it's more than that. Everything about Baez is cool, though especially his fielding and baserunning. There's no escaping it. Who would want to, other than the Cubs' opponents?

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### **Daily Herald**

Cubs content to allow Bryant's shoulder to heal on its own

By Bruce Miles

The Cubs seem content to allow Kris Bryant's ailing left shoulder to take its own course in healing.

Bryant did not come off the 10-day disabled list Friday, as the team had hoped he would. But Bryant did take swings in the batting cage. He has been on the DL effective June 23 with inflammation.

"He had a real good day today in the cage," said team president Theo Epstein. "We're going to get together and see what that means, see whether he wants or needs a rehab assignment or not just to test it in a game situation before he comes back.

"The shoulder is an important joint for the swing, especially with his swing and the finish that he has, I don't know that we expected it to be this long but it certainly is a very legitimate and he needs to be able to execute his swing."

Darvish "feeling better:"

Right-hander Yu Darvish seems back at square one as he continues his slow rehab from right-triceps tendinitis.

Darvish has been on the DL effective May 23, and it may not be until early August until he pitches in a major-league game.

He is in the early stages of a strengthening program. After that, he'll begin throwing. A simulated game or two is likely followed by at least one minor-league rehab start.

"He's feeling a little better," Theo Epstein said. "It's been a good couple days for him. He's still in that strengthening mode. We're not going to set any timetables yet until he moves from the strengthening phase to the throwing phase. It's been a really good couple days for him."

Edwards back from DL:

Reliever Carl Edwards Jr. returned to the active roster after being sidelined since late May with right-shoulder inflammation. To make room on the roster, the Cubs optioned reliever Dillon Maples to Class AAA Iowa. They also activated left-handed reliever Rob Zastryzny from the DL and optioned him to Iowa.

Edwards struck out the only batter he faced in Friday's 3-2 loss to the Reds.

Hello, old friend:

The Cubs have signed one of their former players to a minor-league contract. Right-hander Casey Coleman, a 2008 draft pick, pitched 6 innings Thursday for Class AAA Iowa, giving up 3 hits and 1 run while striking out nine.

He was a Cub from 2010-12, going 7-13 with a 5.36 ERA. In 2014 for the Royals, he was 1-0 with a 5.25 ERA. He was pitching this year for the Sugar Land Skeeters of the independent Atlantic League.

"I actually emailed with him this winter," Theo Epstein said. "He was in winter ball and was doing pretty well. All of a sudden our Triple-A rotation got really strapped and he was throwing well in the independent league. This is a good reminder of how of you enter and how you exit an organization is important. He's always been someone we've kept on really good terms with. He as an easy reach-out for our guys, and he responded real well in his first start. We'll see how that develops. It probably surprised a lot of you guys to see his name pop up in the box score. He's a great kid and still has a good arm and knows how to pitch."

This and that:

Minor-league pitching prospect Oscar De La Cruz, a member of the 40-man roster, has been suspended 80 games for violating Major League Baseball's Joint Drug Prevention and Treatment Program ... The Cubs announced the signings of 32 players from this year's amateur draft ahead of Friday's signing deadline. That includes each of their first 20 picks.

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### **Daily Herald**

Cubs win streak snapped at six; Epstein says team still assessing trade options

By Bruce Miles

During their time in Chicago, Cubs president Theo Epstein and general manager Jed Hoyer often have gotten ahead of the July trading season.

That may not be the case this year.

The Cubs have a roster loaded with position players, and the pitching presents possibilities and challenges for the rest of the season.

"Every year is different, both with the marketplace and with the nature of that team's season," Epstein said Friday before the Cubs lost 3-2 to the Cincinnati Reds at Wrigley Field. "For us, we're still in a mode of assessing. On the position-player front, right now there's not a lot that we'd want to go get, honestly, not a lot of roster spots to fit guys in. We have guys we have to sit on a given day who we want to get at-bats for. It's not like we're actively out looking to add on the position-player side.

"With the pitching, I think we'll learn a lot more over the next few weeks. We have a couple guys in ruts we expect to get out of them and to get locked in and the health front with Yu (Darvish), we're optimistic but we need to see more.

"I don't necessarily think this is a year where we're going to be out front beating the market, but I do think industry-wide there will be a lot of activity well before the (July 31) deadline."

While Darvish has been out since late May with a triceps injury and Kyle Hendricks and Jose Quintana have been inconsistent, Mike Montgomery has helped to hold things together in the first half and into the second.

Montgomery started Friday and worked 5 innings, giving up 6 hits and 3 runs as the Cubs (49-36) had their winning streak snapped at six games.

The Reds scored a pair of runs in the fourth as Montgomery loaded the bases with nobody out on a walk, a single and a hit batter. Adam Duvall singled home a run and another came home on Scott Schebler's double-play grounder. The Reds got another run in the fifth before the Cubs came back with single runs in each of the fifth and eighth innings.

The Cubs are hoping to get Darvish back sometime within the next month as he restarts a strengthening and throwing program. They also hope Hendricks can work out some mechanical glitches and that Quintana can get all his pitches working.

"You're always looking to fortify or to add a little bit," Epstein said. "You always have Plan B or Plan C in case of injury or really bad performance. There's no way we're going to go out and acquire a starter who's the caliber of a locked-in Kyle Hendricks or a locked-in Jose Quintana, guys like that. The majority of our answers lie within, for sure. That's how we look at it."

Montgomery fell to 3-3 with a 3.68 ERA. He has made 8 starts since replacing Darvish in the rotation in late May. He has gone at least 5 inning in every start since coming out of the pen. He knows proper pacing will be important because he will remain in the rotation for the foreseeable future.

"I think that's the challenge right now," he said. "I'm not as fresh as I was a month ago, but that's kind of what you have to deal with as a starter. You don't necessarily have your best stuff every time. That's the fun part for me. I get to go this week and kind of work to get me mechanically where I need to be, physically where I need to be. You don't lose confidence ever, at least I don't, when things don't go your way. It just gives you an opportunity to learn. That's the good thing about baseball. There's a lot of games to be played, a lot more opportunities and a lot more chance to go out there and execute pitches."

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## The Athletic

Cubs recalculating their trade-deadline strategy with Yu Darvish's status still unknown

By Patrick Mooney

The Cubs have no timetable for Yu Darvish and no idea what to expect whenever the \$126 million pitcher rejoins their rotation. There have been enough mixed messages that the Cubs are focused more on how Darvish will feel on July 7 than if the July 31 trade deadline is a realistic target date. It is truly the clichéd day-to-day-situation.

Where does that leave Theo Epstein? The Cubs president isn't going to publicly question Darvish's energy and effort levels the way St. Louis baseball boss John Mozeliak blundered while discussing Dexter Fowler's nightmare season on a podcast with Cardinals TV broadcaster Dan McLaughlin.

Epstein also doesn't have another Gleyber Torres or Eloy Jiménez in the farm system, the kind of A-list prospect it takes to make a deal for a top-of-the-rotation starter (in case the Cubs have to write off Year 1 of Darvish's contract).

Epstein's baseball operations group is constantly thinking big and small, working on contingencies, running through worst-case scenarios and blending information from scouts and the R&D department. But realistically the Cubs have probably already made their biggest rotation moves for October, when bullpens are maximized, anyway, with the extra days off built into the schedule and a heightened sense of urgency.

"You're always looking to fortify and to add a little bit," Epstein said, sitting in the Wrigley Field dugout before Friday's 3-2 loss to the Cincinnati Reds snapped a six-game winning streak. "You always have Plan B and Plan C in case of injury or really bad performance.

"But there's no way we're going to go out and acquire starters the caliber of a locked-in Kyle Hendricks or a locked-in José Quintana, guys like that. The majority of our answers lie within, for sure. That's how we're looking at it."

Darvish is a huge question mark and that has to change the team's trade-deadline outlook. After last week's consultation with Dr. Keith Meister — the longtime head team physician for the Texas Rangers organization that supervised his recovery from Tommy John surgery in 2015 — Darvish got a cortisone shot for right elbow impingement/inflammation and instructions to shut down his throwing program for several days.

Darvish needs to rebuild his arm strength and then redo all the steps — long toss, bullpen sessions, simulated game, minor-league rehab assignment — that once left the Cubs thinking he could return before the All-Star break.

"It impacts a little bit," Epstein said, "but we are optimistic based on the reports that we got. There's no structural damage, nothing serious in there, so we're optimistic. It might not be on the timeline we all hope. But we're very optimistic he's going to make a solid contribution.

"You just assess the staff overall more than any one player and see where your needs are."

Those needs clearly line up more with the relievers the Baltimore Orioles should be selling — Zach Britton, Brad Brach — than any blockbuster Manny Machado trade that generated delirious Chicago media coverage in May.

“We’re still in the mode of assessing,” Epstein said. “On the position-player front, right now, there’s not a lot that we’d want to go get, honestly. Not a lot of roster spots to fit guys in — and we have guys who have to sit on a given day who we want to get at-bats for — so it’s not like we’re actively out looking to add on the position-player side.

“With the pitching, I think we’ll learn a lot more over the next few weeks. [We have] a couple guys in some ruts who we expect to get out of them and get locked in. And then on the health front with Yu, we’re optimistic, but we need to see more.

“I don’t necessarily think this is a year where we’re going to be out front beating the market. But I do think industry-wide there’s going to be a lot of activity well before the deadline this year.”

Keep in mind: Carl Edwards Jr., who had been on the disabled list since May 30 with right shoulder inflammation, blew away Cincinnati slugger Adam Duvall on Friday, getting a seventh-inning strikeout with four straight fastballs clocked between 94.7 and 95.5 mph. Looking for more in-house solutions, the Cubs also plan to stretch out Drew Smyly in the minors, more than a year after undergoing Tommy John surgery, hoping the lefty can eventually become a spot starter/hybrid reliever in August and beyond.

Also look at the state of the organization’s pitching depth in terms of trade chips and immediate help: top pitching prospect Adbert Alzolay is sidelined with a season-ending lat injury. Major League Baseball suspended fading pitching prospect Oscar De La Cruz for 80 games on Friday after testing positive for furosemide, a diuretic and masking agent, violating the joint drug program. The Cubs just signed Casey Coleman, their 2009 minor league pitcher of the year, away from the Sugar Land Skeeters and watched him throw six innings of one-run ball on Thursday for Triple-A Iowa.

“Almost every contender is always looking to add another good reliever or two from each side,” Epstein said. “But we have some righties who get lefties out. C.J. coming back today really helps on that front. Again, the way it looks right now isn’t necessarily the way it’s going to look for the remainder of the season. Yeah, certainly, if you can acquire an impact reliever on either side, that’s always helpful, but probably every contender feels that way.”

Sometimes the best moves are the ones you don’t make. Like not trading lefty swingman Mike Montgomery, who wasn’t sharp against the Reds (six hits, three runs allowed in five innings) but still has a 2.76 ERA in eight starts this season. The Cubs also can’t entirely rule out adding a legitimate starter when the Milwaukee Brewers are in first place and Montgomery will probably hit a wall in the second half.

“That’s the challenge right now — I’m not as fresh as I was a month ago,” said Montgomery, who will get an extended All-Star break after his next start. “But that’s kind of what you have to deal with as a starter. You don’t necessarily have your best stuff every time. That’s the fun part for me. I get to work on some of the things that’ll get me mechanically where I need to be, physically where I need to be.

“You don’t lose confidence — at least I don’t — when things don’t go your way. It just gives you an opportunity to learn and that’s the good thing about baseball. There’s a lot of games to be played.”

That’s also true for Darvish, even if it’s hard to put in perspective with all the non-updates. Disregard Jim Hickey’s interview with WSCR-AM 670 on Thursday, when the Cubs pitching coach sounded optimistic about Darvish returning to the rotation in late July. Before Friday’s game, manager Joe Maddon pulled at the sleeve of his new technicolor Uncle Sam hoodie and looked at the watch on his left wrist.

“This is July 6th, right?” Maddon said. “God, this week’s been weird with all the day games. I don’t even know what day it is. So...no, that’s not unreasonable to think that would be a good target date, something in that area.

“But, again, I don’t know. I honestly have no clue on this one, which oftentimes you all know that’s true. I want to see him get out there, play catch, talk to him [and hear], ‘Man, I feel really good today.’ Or, ‘I’m still feeling it. I can do more.’ I just don’t know. I really don’t know where this is at yet.”

That pretty much sums up how the Cubs are approaching the July 31 trade deadline, with or without Darvish.

“I don’t have any kind of preconceived finish-line thoughts,” Maddon said. “I just want him to be well. That’s what I talked to him about specifically [the other day]: ‘It’s not about rushing. Just get back out there. Get back into your routine. Get back into your work.’

“Of course, we want Yu back sooner rather than later. But if biology’s not going to permit it, it’s not going to permit it.”

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### **The Athletic**

Once-heralded Cubs prospect Oscar De La Cruz struck with 80-game suspension

By Sahadev Sharma

Fridayafternoon, Major League Baseball announced an 80-game suspension for right-handed Cubs pitching prospect Oscar De La Cruz. According to the press release, De La Cruz tested positive for Furosemide, a diuretic and masking agent. The suspension is without pay and will begin immediately.

The Cubs released the following statement:

“We are disappointed to learn today that Oscar De La Cruz has violated Major League Baseball’s Joint Drug Prevention and Treatment Program. The Cubs fully support the Program and its efforts to remove performance enhancing drugs from the game. We also expect Oscar to learn from this experience and will support him on his journey back. Per Program protocol, the Cubs will not comment further on this matter.”

Entering the 2016 season, De La Cruz was a very intriguing prospect for the Cubs. A giant of a man, the righty stands 6-foot-4 and has a starter’s build as he’s listed at 200 pounds, but many suggest he’s actually 30-40 pounds heavier. At the time, De La Cruz was sitting in the mid-90s with his fastball, a pitch he showed strong command of and that had nice sink. He also was developing an impressive curveball that caught scouts’ attention and displayed potential for an average-to-better changeup.

With his big body, scouts saw the perfect build for a starter, a durable frame that would be able to withstand the rigors of a 30-plus-start season. In 2015, he struck out 73 batters in 73 innings while walking just 13. The concept of such a big-bodied starter having such strong command had the Cubs hoping they’d finally found a prized pitching prospect.

And it wasn’t just the Cubs pumping up their own players. Numerous scouts I spoke with at the time were high on De La Cruz and expected he’d jump onto the scene in what was viewed as a big year for Cubs pitching prospects. But 2016 didn’t bring the rise many expected. The hopes of durability quickly



came to a halt as injuries limited him to just 39 innings across three levels that season. In 2017, De La Cruz missed all of May, June and July with an elbow issue.

Prior to that, he was once again sitting in the mid-90s. But upon his return in the Arizona Fall League, De La Cruz topped out at 92 in his lone outing. During the offseason, he made numerous Cubs top 10 prospect lists, ranking as high as third according to MLB.com and as low as eighth in Baseball Prospectus' rankings.

When watching him in the backfields this past spring, I noticed that once again, he was struggling to get any higher than 92 on his heater and was mostly sitting below that mark. There was some optimism that he could build his arm strength back up, but it was clear the shine had worn off this once-ascending prospect. No longer did De La Cruz hold the promise as the rising pitching prospect in the Cubs system. That mantle had been passed to Adbert Alzolay (out for the season with a lat injury), José Albertos (44 walks in 20 1/3 innings at the lower levels of the minors) and a slew of picks from recent drafts, including Alex Lange (looking strong at High-A Myrtle Beach) and Brendon Little (struggling with run prevention, but with arguably the best stuff in the system).

Speaking to scouts around the league, the De La Cruz buzz was gone. Those outside the organization who were once high on De La Cruz had little positive to say about him. Even in a system with few prospects who stood out, De La Cruz could no longer generate much optimism from onlookers. This suspension marks the end of De La Cruz's 2018 season and is certainly a low point in a once-promising career. But his unfortunate fall down the prospect rankings started long before.

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### **The Athletic**

Second-half regression? Theo Epstein optimistic for better starting pitching, but strikeouts have to come  
By Sahadev Sharma

The Cubs have a strikeout problem. Not the offense, which is actually quite good at avoiding the whiff. It's the starting pitchers who have struggled with finishing off hitters.

"I think when we're at our best, we're going to be inducing a lot of swing and miss," team president Theo Epstein said before Friday's 3-2 loss to the Cincinnati Reds. "Right now we're not. But you want to craft your team so you can survive without it. Which means really good defense and trying to anticipate where the ball's going to be put in play. I think our team is back to being really good at handling the ball in play. There have been plenty."

Epstein is absolutely right that his team's defense has done a remarkable job of making up for the pitchers' lack of strikeouts. The Cubs are third in baseball in defensive efficiency and fourth in defensive runs saved. But with fewer balls in play and fewer hard plays to make, I wonder if at least that first ranking would be a little higher.

Epstein pointed out that Yu Darvish, Carl Edwards Jr. and Brandon Morrow — three of their best swing-and-miss arms — have all missed time. But the focus here is on the starters, and as important as Darvish is to this rotation getting strikeouts (it was a big topic of discussion in spring training when he first arrived), his absence isn't the sole issue here.

As if on cue, Mike Montgomery went out on Friday and struck out just two batters in five innings of work, both against the pitcher. Of his 85 pitches thrown, he garnered just four swing and misses. For the

season, Montgomery is striking out 15.8 percent of the batters he's faced. His extreme ground-ball tendencies help him combat that, but the issue isn't limited to him.

As a group, the Cubs starting pitchers have dropped dramatically in both swinging-strike rate and strikeout rate since they became a playoff team in 2015. That season their starters were second in baseball with a 23.1 percent strikeout rate and 10th with a 9.6 percent swinging-strike rate. In 2016, their strikeout rate jumped to 23.3 percent (third in baseball) and their swinging-strike rate to 10.6 percent (fifth). Last year they fell a bit to 21.9 percent (ninth) and 9.3 percent (16th), respectively. And entering Friday's game, they're down to 20.4 percent (19th) and 8.9 percent (25th).

All this while the league strikeout rate has jumped progressively year after year, from 20.4 percent in 2015 to its current mark of 22.3 percent. Along with Montgomery, Kyle Hendricks is down to a 17.8 percent strikeout rate and Jon Lester is at 19.3 percent. José Quintana is at 21.1 percent, and while that lines up well with his career numbers, it's a sharp drop from the 26.2 percent he put up in 2017.

"I think when he's at his best, he's mixing his pitches," Epstein said of Quintana. "There's been a tendency this year to be more of a two-pitch guy. I think that's some room for improvement with him, if he can get a little bit more comfortable with that changeup. I know he's working on it a little bit in the 'pen. Getting comfortable with it, tweaking some grips, just trying to find it so he can go up there a dozen of them, instead of maybe three or four. It makes a big difference."

At nearly 48 percent, Quintana's four-seam usage is at its highest since the 2014 season. His two-seamer hasn't been this low since 2015 and since he became a full-time starter, he's never used his changeup less than the 7.9 percent he's at this season.

I spoke to Hendricks recently about his mechanical issues leading to a lack of fastball command, which hurts his ability to get swings and misses on his changeup. Epstein echoed his issues with mechanics, but also expressed optimism that he'd find his way.

"We have so much trust in him," Epstein said. "It's not as if there's zero concern, because you want him to feel locked and sharp. But you just know with his work ethic and his aptitude, his intelligence, his ability to make adjustments, it's just a matter of time for him to come out of it. It doesn't make him feel any better while he's in the midst of it, but you just trust him to get through it."

Epstein then went on to explain why mechanics are so key for Hendricks.

"When he's in the mechanical rut, not everything is synced up, he's not over the rubber the proper amount of time," he said. "It affects his release point, it affects the shape of his pitches and obviously the command of his pitches too. A sinker down and away to a righty is kind of a pretty big bread and butter pitch for him and when that's leaking back over the plate, it changes the whole dynamic of how his stuff works. It affects the changeup off of that, he's not ahead in the count as much, there's a little bit more damage. He's in the process right now of working his way out of it. It's just a matter of time."

Of course, the anchor of the rotation has been Lester, who is in the fourth season of his six-year, \$155-million contract. Despite the fact that he's not getting the strikeouts, Lester continues to impress with a 2.25 ERA and looks like he may be headed to D.C. for the All-Star Game.

"He's such a reliable guy," Epstein said. "Any time you sign a free-agent, you feel like the first half of that contract is going to be where you get the majority of your value. Then you hope for contributions in the second half of the contract. As he's started the second half of his deal this year, to see him perform the way he has is just a huge testament to his work ethic and his desire and how much he wants to win. He's

a guy who really competes with himself to pitch in a manner that he can be proud of. He's certainly done that."

There is some concern that Lester's low strikeout rate, 8.5 percent walk rate (his highest since 2011) and career-worst hard (34.7 percent) and soft (15.5 percent) contact rates will lead to some regression in the second half. But even so, the rest of the staff, along with the potential of a healthy Darvish — Epstein said with no structural damage, the team is very confident he'll be back and helping the team at some point this season — could help carry the team down the stretch.

"We've had a really nice season so far and most of our starting pitchers haven't locked it in yet," Epstein said. "A pessimist may look at it and say it's unsustainable because of your starting pitching. But I don't look at it that way. I think our starting pitching is going to carry us for long stretches of the season. And it hasn't happened yet. I think that lies ahead for us."

Epstein expects it to happen in the second half. Realistically, a team that's playing really well and sitting 13 games over .500 is going to need it to happen for them to keep up the pace and live up to expectations.

After Montgomery's five innings of work on Friday, the rotation is averaging a tick above 5 1/3 innings per start, 22nd in baseball. The bullpen has been strong, and injuries to Edwards and Morrow may actually be blessings in disguise as far as the long run goes. They need to be rested, and short outing after short outing by the starters wouldn't allow for that. Look for manager Joe Maddon to do his best to continue to give those two, along with Pedro Strop and Steve Cishek, a break here and there or limit them to very short outings, like he did with Edwards and his 1/3 inning of work on Friday.

But what the Cubs could use even more is for Lester's peripherals to move back to their career norms. They need Hendricks to find his mechanics and with that, his command. They need Quintana to start mixing up his pitches more often, utilize his changeup and get more swing and miss on his curve. And perhaps most importantly, they need a healthy and effective Darvish missing bats on the mound every fifth day. If the Cubs can make that happen, all that talk of second-half regression will be a distant memory.

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### **Cubs.com**

Comeback Cubs fall short as win streak ends

By Carrie Muskat

CHICAGO -- The Cubs ran out of comebacks on Friday.

Reds starter Tyler Mahle combined with three other pitchers to hand the Cubs a 3-2 loss at Wrigley Field, snapping their win streak at six games.

"We had a good run, six-game win streak," Chicago starter Mike Montgomery said. "We lose one and we just move on."

All six of the Cubs' wins were the come-from-behind variety, but they couldn't muster much against Mahle and an 18-mph pitcher-friendly northerly wind.

The Cubs have lost seven of 10 games against the Reds this season, including a four-game sweep at Great American Ball Park from June 21-24, which Chicago manager Joe Maddon dubbed "Hurricane

Cincinnati." Friday was the Reds' first game at Wrigley Field this season. The Cubs are 19-19 so far versus the National League Central.

"You look at the numbers on the stat sheet and they're pretty good up and down, and the bullpens, too," Maddon said of the division's pitching staffs. "[The Reds'] bullpen is a lot better than it had been, Milwaukee, ourselves, etc. The pitching is good in this division. But so is the offense. It's turned out to be a tough division.

"It's very strong, which is good. I want that. I want us to play in what's hopefully considered the best [division] in baseball. That should bring out the best in your players on a nightly basis."

Montgomery, continuing to fill in for the injured Yu Darvish, took the loss, serving up three runs over five innings. He didn't get the offensive support the Cubs have shown lately. They had scored at least five runs in their last eight games.

"I'm proud of the way I battled, but it's definitely not the way I want to throw the ball," Montgomery said. "Credit to them. They have a good lineup and made it challenging as well."

The Cubs got on the scoreboard in the fifth when Willson Contreras flared a ball over first baseman Joey Votto and hustled to second for a double. After advancing to third on a groundout, he scored on Albert Almora Jr.'s fielder's choice with runners at the corners. Ben Zobrist added a sacrifice fly in the eighth, driving in Javier Baez, who had singled.

"I thought we had great at-bats," Maddon said. "We didn't score a lot of runs, but they made some plays."

This series features the top two hitters in the NL in Scooter Gennett and Almora. Both finished the game batting .328. Almora said he isn't checking the scoreboard after each at-bat to see who's in the lead.

"We're not even at the All-Star break," Almora said. "He's having a great year. We're just trying to get him off the bags as much as they're trying to get us out."

#### MOMENTS THAT MATTERED

Trailing 3-1 with one out in the Cubs' eighth, Baez singled off Michael Lorenzen, who was pulled for Kyle Crockett. Anthony Rizzo greeted the lefty with a single, advancing Baez to third. Crockett was lifted for Raisel Iglesias, who got Zobrist to fly to center, scoring Baez on a sacrifice fly. The Cubs lead the Majors with 161 runs scored in the seventh inning or later.

The Cubs don't feel they're ever out of a game.

"We like to be in the games," Almora said. "We like to have fight. [Being behind] doesn't bother us at all."

#### YOU GOTTA SEE THIS

Jason Heyward flashed his Gold Glove in the Reds' sixth. With two outs and two on, Jose Peraza lined the ball into the right-center gap, but Heyward made a great diving catch to snare it. According to Statcast™, it was a four-star catch (27 percent catch probability), with Heyward covering 76 feet in 4.5 seconds to get to the ball. Peraza applauded the effort.

"Amazing," said the Reds' Billy Hamilton, who knows a thing or two about great catches. "He's one of those guys you see amazing plays all the time. He's a guy we say in the dugout, if you hit it in right field,

there's a Gold Glover out there. It's a place you don't want to hit the ball to. Even though it went against [Peraza], I feel like it's a nice play. I know my teammate doesn't like that he got the ball caught, but you've got to give credit where credit is due. It's one of the nicest catches I've seen."

Added Almora: "It happened so quick. Obviously, he's a special defender, special person. That was awesome. When I saw the ball in the air, I knew he was going to make the catch. Absolutely. There's no doubt. Not a lot of balls fall out there. A day like today, when the wind is blowing in, you know balls that are hit well are going to die. He was there to get it."

#### HE SAID IT

"Look where we're at -- we're in a good spot and right there. We have what we feel like is the best baseball to be played." -- Montgomery, when asked to assess where the Cubs are heading toward the All-Star break

#### UP NEXT

Tyler Chatwood will start on Saturday, his second outing since coming off the paternity list. In his last start, he gave up seven runs over five innings against the Twins, but the Cubs rallied for a win. He still leads the Majors in walks with 66 free passes over 73 1/3 innings. The Reds will counter with Matt Harvey. First pitch from Wrigley Field is scheduled for 1:20 p.m. CT.

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#### **Cubs.com**

Epstein: Don't expect frontline starter pursuit  
By Carrie Muskat

CHICAGO -- Yu Darvish has yet to resume throwing since he received a cortisone shot in his right arm one week ago, but the pitcher's uncertain status does not mean the Cubs are in the market for another frontline starter by the July 31 non-waiver Trade Deadline, president of baseball operations Theo Epstein said Friday.

"You're always looking to fortify and add a little bit, and you always have Plan B and Plan C in case of injury or bad performance," Epstein said. "There's no way we're going to go out and acquire starters the caliber of a locked-in Kyle Hendricks or a locked-in Jose Quintana. The majority of our answers lie within, that's for sure."

Darvish has not pitched since May 20 with right triceps tendinitis, and he got the cortisone shot after the Rangers' orthopedic specialist diagnosed a right elbow impingement and inflammation one week ago. The Cubs and Darvish mutually agreed that the right-hander needed to see the doctor.

"We're not going to set any timetables until he moves from the strengthening phase to the throwing phase," Epstein said of Darvish. "We have to take it a day at a time."

The Cubs were encouraged that Darvish's exam in Texas showed no structural damage.

"It might not be the timeline we want, but we're very optimistic he'll make a solid contribution," Epstein said.

In his conversation with Darvish on Wednesday, Cubs manager Joe Maddon told the right-hander to take his time.

"I just want him to be well," Maddon said. "That's what I talked to him about specifically. 'It's not about rushing. Just get back out there. Get back in your routine. Get back in your work. Then, as this plays, we'll get you back out there. Of course, we want you back sooner rather than later, but if biology's not going to permit it, it's not going to permit it.'"

The Cubs began play on Friday 1 1/2 games behind the Brewers in the National League Central and have been aggressive the past few years at the Trade Deadline.

"Every year is different with the marketplace and the nature of that team's season," Epstein said. "For us, we're still in the mode of assessing. On the position-player front, right now there's not a lot we'd want to go get. There's not a lot of roster spots to fit guys in. We have guys who have to sit on a given day. It's not like we're actively looking at anything on the position-player side. With the pitching, we'll know a lot more in the next few weeks."

Besides getting Darvish healthy, the Cubs are hoping for improvement from Hendricks (5-8, 4.27 ERA) and Tyler Chatwood (3-5, 4.54 ERA). Quintana (7-6, 4.22 ERA) was 0-2 in five starts before picking up a win on Wednesday.

"I don't think this is the year we're going to be out front beating the market, but I do think industrywide there will be a lot of activity well before the Deadline," Epstein said.

Bryant on the mend

Kris Bryant was smiling. That's because the Cubs' third baseman had a good day in the batting cages on Friday and may be close to returning from the disabled list. He has been sidelined since June 23 because of inflammation in his left shoulder. He had an MRI last week when the team was in Los Angeles.

"The shoulder, it's an important joint for the swing and his swing and the finish he has," Epstein said of Bryant. "I don't know that we expected it to [take] this long, but it's certainly very legitimate and he needs to be able to execute his swing. I'm glad today is a good day, and hopefully we'll have him back sometime soon."

"He really wants to be out there, but any time you have an injury you feel on your swing, you have to be smart about it. He's been smart about it. He wants to be out there contributing. The fact that guys have stepped up and won some games makes it a little bit easier. Today might be the day you finally see him smile because it was a good day in the cage. He's not going to be happy until he's back out there playing big league games, which is the way it should be."

However, Bryant may have to deal with soreness in his shoulder the rest of the season, Maddon said.

"We've all been through that where you get these nagging things," Maddon said. "It's just not totally gone, the feeling, whatever he feels at the end of his swing. ... We're just playing it as he sees fit, pretty much."

Smyly could be back in 2018

Drew Smyly, who began the season on the DL as he rehabs from last year's Tommy John surgery, may contribute later this season. The lefty will be stretched out in his rehab -- he's currently at the Cubs' complex in Mesa, Ariz. -- but most likely will be used in relief when he does join the team.

"This guy could be very helpful," Maddon said.

Cubs' future to be represented

Class A South Bend catcher Miguel Amaya will be part of the World Team that plays in the SiriusXM All-Star Futures Game on July 15 at Nationals Park. Amaya, 19, is batting .271 with 10 home runs, 16 doubles, two triples and 40 RBIs in 73 games this season.

Sandy Martinez, who was the catcher for Kerry Wood's 20-strikeout game in May 1998 with the Cubs, will be the bullpen coach for the World Team. Martinez is a manager in the Dominican Summer League for the Nationals.

Perseverance pays off

Casey Coleman, the Cubs' 15th-round Draft pick in 2008 who pitched with the big league team from '10-12, struck out nine in his first start with Triple-A Iowa on Thursday. The Cubs signed him from an Independent League team.

"It's a good reminder of how you enter and exit an organization is important," Epstein said. "He's someone we've kept on really good terms. ... He still knows how to pitch."

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### **Cubs.com**

Cubs prospect De La Cruz suspended 80 games

By Carrie Muskat

CHICAGO -- The Office of the Commissioner of Baseball announced that Cubs prospect Oscar De La Cruz has received an 80-game suspension without pay after testing positive for Furosemide, a diuretic and masking agent, in violation of Major League Baseball's Joint Drug Prevention and Treatment Program.

The suspension of De La Cruz, a 40-man roster player who is currently on option to Double-A Tennessee of the Southern League, is effective immediately. De La Cruz ranks third on MLB Pipeline's list of Top 30 Cubs prospects.

"We are disappointed to learn today that Oscar De La Cruz has violated Major League Baseball's Joint Drug Prevention and Treatment Program," the Cubs wrote in a statement. "The Cubs fully support the Program and its efforts to remove performance enhancing drugs from the game. We also expect Oscar to learn from this experience and will support him on his journey back. Per Program protocol, the Cubs will not comment further on this matter."

De La Cruz, 23, was 6-7 with a 5.24 ERA in 16 starts at Tennessee this season.

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### **Cubs.com**

Edwards returns from DL to fill late-inning role

By Matthew Martell

CHICAGO -- Carl Edwards Jr. returned to the mound for the first time in over a month and struck out Adam Duvall for the final out of the seventh in the Cubs' 3-2 loss to the Reds on Friday at Wrigley Field. He was lifted for a pinch-hitter in the bottom of the inning.

The Cubs activated the 26-year-old right-hander, who hadn't pitched since May 29 because of shoulder inflammation, from the 10-day disabled list on Friday.

Edwards, who said before the game that he feels 100 percent healthy, was originally scheduled to make two appearances during his rehab assignment with Triple-A Iowa, but a third one ended up being necessary after he retired just two of the five batters he faced in his second outing on Monday.

"It's great to have him back," Cubs manager Joe Maddon said before the game. "I know on rehab he had some tough innings, but I'm not really concerned about that. We've got to get him back out there in a Major League game. He just told me he feels wonderful, so he's ready to rock and roll."

Edwards isn't worried about how he fared in Iowa, even though his third appearance wasn't great either -- he gave up a hit and a walk, hit a batter and recorded a strikeout over two-thirds of an inning.

"Just to get out on the mound and face hitters," Edwards said. "That was my whole goal, and just to see how I'd feel afterward."

Including Friday, Edwards has a 2.84 ERA with 41 strikeouts over 25 1/3 innings spanning 26 outings. His presence in a late-inning role provides more depth to a Cubs bullpen that already features closer Brandon Morrow and right-handers Pedro Strop and Steve Cishek.

The Cubs optioned right-hander Dillon Maples to Triple-A in a corresponding move, and left-hander Rob Zastryzny was activated from the DL and optioned to Iowa.

Zastryzny had been out with a back strain since June 24. He posted a 1.69 ERA in five relief outings with the Cubs this year. Maples gave up five earned runs in 2 2/3 innings over two relief outings for the Cubs.

Worth noting

- Chris Gimenez cleared waivers and was assigned to Triple-A. The Cubs designated the 35-year-old catcher for assignment on Wednesday. He batted .143 in 12 games with the Cubs.
- The Cubs announced Friday they have signed 32 selections from the 2018 Draft, including each of their first 20 picks. The most recent signings include infielder Andy Weber (fifth round), left-hander Josh Sawyer (16th round), right-hander Jake Reindl (17th round), right-hander Niels Stone (27th round) and outfielder Edmond Americana (35th round).

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### **ESPNChicago.com**

Cubs assessing needs while waiting for Darvish's return

By Jesse Rogers

CHICAGO -- Cubs president Theo Epstein says the front office is still assessing its July trade needs as the team awaits the return of right-hander Yu Darvish from the disabled list.

Darvish has been out six weeks with an elbow issue and is seemingly back to square one in his rehab.

"It's been a good couple days for him, but he's still in that strengthening mode," Epstein said Friday before the Cubs played the Cincinnati Reds.

"Anytime you stop like that [rehabbing] and go for another opinion, you want to see some progress. We're happy with the last few days, for sure."



Darvish, 31, was on his way to returning, but a rehab start in the minors followed by a bullpen session didn't go well, as he felt pain in his elbow. The Cubs say an end-of-the-month return is possible, but they won't put a timetable on it until he's throwing again.

His status affects the Cubs' trade needs, at least a little bit, according to Epstein. The team is already in the market for a reliever or two, but could a starter be on its wish list as well? And would Chicago have the wherewithal to acquire one who could start a potential playoff game?

"There is no way we're going to go out and acquire starters the caliber of a locked-in Kyle Hendricks or a locked-in Jose Quintana and guys like that," Epstein said. "The majority of our answers lie within."

Although ranked fifth in ERA in the National League, the Cubs' rotation has underachieved, outside of Jon Lester. It's 12th in innings pitched and first in walks, although most of that damage is due to Tyler Chatwood, who leads the league in free passes.

Either way, Epstein all but ruled out acquiring a bat, meaning that early-season Manny Machado rumors were highly misplaced. The Cubs rank first in every important offensive category in the NL, including runs scored.

"On the position-player front, right now, there is not a lot we would want to go get, honestly," Epstein said. "Not a lot of roster spots to fit guys in, and we have guys we have to sit on a given day we want to get at-bats for. It's not like we're actively looking to add on the position-player side."

One of those players sitting is former MVP, Kris Bryant. He's been out close to two weeks with a sore shoulder but is feeling better after a hitting session Friday, according to Epstein. He could be activated or sent out for a rehab assignment soon.

The Cubs' biggest current need is a left-hander for their bullpen, as former swingman Mike Montgomery is entrenched in the rotation while Brian Duensing has struggled and is on the disabled list. Former Tigers closer Justin Wilson has also been unreliable since coming over in a July trade last year.

"Almost every contender is looking to add another reliever or two from each side," Epstein said. "The way it looks right now isn't necessarily the way it looks for the remainder of the season."

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### **NBC Sports Chicago**

Cubs have dropped five straight against the Reds, learning there are no easy days in NL Central  
By Vinnie Duber

The Cincinnati Reds have beaten the Cubs seven times this season, including five times in the last two weeks.

This is the Reds team that was supposed to be in full rebuild mode, a Reds team pegged by anyone and everyone to finish last in the National League Central and be an utter non-factor during the 2018 season. All that, of course, can still happen and is happening, in a way. Even though the Reds have won 17 of their last 23 games, they are still a last-place team.

But the Reds were supposed to be a punching bag for the Cubs and other contending clubs this season. Not so much, it's turning out, as the Cubs find themselves staring at a division race that keeps getting tougher. The Central has proven full of formidable foes. And while the first-place Milwaukee Brewers

still seem to be missing a pitcher and the St. Louis Cardinals are not that far above .500 and the Pittsburgh Pirates are still the team that traded away its two best players over the offseason, the Cubs are learning that there are no easy games in this division.

“It’s really gotten better,” manager Joe Maddon said. “You look at the numbers on the stat sheet, they’re pretty good up and down. Bullpens, too. (Cincinnati’s) bullpen’s a lot better than it had been. Milwaukee, ourselves, et cetera. The pitching’s good in this division. But so is the offense. (Cincinnati’s) got a nice offensive club, so do we.

“It’s turned out to be a pretty tough division right now, it’s very strong, which is good. I want that. I want us to play, hopefully, what’s considered the best division in all of baseball. I think that should bring out the best in your players on a nightly basis. So give them credit, man, they’re playing a lot better.”

The Reds are on a nice little tear, and they brought that to Wrigley Field on Friday, when Tyler Mahle threw 6.2 innings of one-run ball and the Reds followed up their recent four-game sweep of the Cubs with a 3-2 win in the opener of this series. Raisel Iglesias picked up a five-out save, and while they were dealing with the same windy conditions that the Cubs’ offense was, the Reds scratched across enough runs to win the day.

Not something that would’ve been expected in the preseason.

But this Reds team does have its very bright spots. Scooter Gennett is almost certainly and deservedly going to the All-Star Game, and Eugenio Suarez could join him. Joey Votto is simply one of the greatest hitters ever. And reliever Michael Lorenzen is out-Ohtani-ing Shohei Ohtani, with three homers already this season in just eight at-bats.

It’s not a menacing roster like the Cubs or Brewers or even Cardinals have. But it’s certainly gotten the Cubs’ attention. And the team that was supposed to rule this division has even the last-place group biting at its heels.

“They’ve got a lot of confidence right now,” pitcher Mike Montgomery said Friday. “We saw it a couple weeks ago when we were at their place. They came out, their starter pitched a great game, and they battled. Their offense puts up good at-bats, and they’ve got some good players.

“We’re not going to take anyone lightly, especially them, especially now how they’ve shown that they’re not afraid to play against us.”

The Cubs entered Friday with the second-best winning percentage in the NL, and though consistency has eluded them for much of the season’s first half, they’ve managed to do plenty of winning, stay neck and neck with the Brewers for the division lead and remain a legit World Series contender. It’s perfectly reasonable to suggest that once the starting pitching finally comes together — as president Theo Epstein predicted Friday that it will — the Cubs could pull away as the NL’s dominant team.

But it appears that the rest of the division is going to have something to say about that and not just the Brewers, also competing for that same title. The Reds and Pirates have been thorns in the Cubs’ side this season. The Reds have done their damage recently, and the Pirates had their early success against the Cubs and have won four of the nine head-to-head matchups.

The Cubs are going to have a challenging go of things the rest of the way with their division-mates. That includes the upstart Reds.

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## **NBC Sports Chicago**

Cubs with few answers on injured Kris Bryant, Yu Darvish, but they're having plenty of success without them

By Vinnie Duber

When will Kris Bryant return to the Cubs' lineup?

The Cubs don't exactly know.

When will Yu Darvish return to the Cubs' rotation?

The Cubs don't know.

What do the Cubs know?

The Cubs know that they've won six straight games, that they're getting some terrific outputs from their offense and that they're a game and a half out of first place with the second best record in the National League.

That enough?

The hot topics around this team right now might be Bryant and Darvish, a pair of injured All Stars whose extended stays on the disabled list are nearly as puzzling as their uncustomary performances this season. But while both induce nothing but head scratches over their absence, the Cubs are playing some of their best baseball of the campaign.

Bryant's case isn't as severe as Darvish's, the third baseman three games past the date he was eligible to come off the DL while recovering from a shoulder injury. Bryant hit for the second time this week before Friday's game against the visiting Cincinnati Reds. The update that came from Cubs president Theo Epstein was that Bryant "had a good day" and the team would figure out what comes next.

Whether that means Bryant's return to the lineup is imminent is unknown, but prior to that update from Epstein, Cubs skipper Joe Maddon said that Bryant's still feeling discomfort at the end of his swing and that it's potentially something that could linger as the season marches on.

"I don't think we're necessarily waiting for (a complete lack of discomfort), maybe it's more of a manageable situation to begin with," Maddon said. "I think the no discomfort's going to be down the road a bit. That's something we've been talking through, also. How much can he handle?"

"We've all been through that where you get these kind of nagging things. Whether it's sometimes you slide and you put your hand down, all of a sudden that wrist bothers you for an entire season, it gets well in November and December.

"I really don't know. It's not totally gone, whatever he feels at the end of his swing. ... We're trying to manage it right now, we're trying to find out where we're at, what he's capable of doing and just playing it as he sees fit."

Bryant's unusual-for-him numbers — he's got a .280 batting average and just nine homers on the season, with a .188 average in the 12 games prior to him going on the DL — have been a panic point

among fans this season. Can the Cubs hope to make another run at a World Series championship without Bryant's heretofore dependable bat anchoring the lineup?

But Bryant's situation pales in comparison to Darvish's on the Cubs Twitter Freakout Richter Scale.

Darvish is starting anew in his recovery process, which has kept him out of action since mid May. That means he'll be working on getting his strength back before he can start throwing again, and that's well before he can start pitching in games, be they with minor league affiliates or with the big league team. Epstein said there's no timetable for Darvish's return.

Maddon was asked if Darvish could make his return around the July 31 trade deadline and said that maybe the pitcher could return around then — only to follow that up with admitting he really has no idea.

"I don't have any kind of preconceived finish line, thoughts, whatever. I just want him to be well," Maddon said. "Of course we want Yu back sooner rather than later, but if biology's not going to permit it, it's not going to permit it.

"(July 31), that's not unreasonable. I think that would be a good target date, something in that area, but I don't know. I honestly have no clue on this one. I want to see him get out there, play catch, talk to him. 'I feel good today' or 'I'm still feeling it.' I just don't know. I really don't know where this is at."

Darvish is more of a flashpoint for fans after he brought World Series expectations with him when the Cubs inked him to a big-money deal on the first day of spring training. He hasn't done much to live up to that hype in his brief action with the team, pitching only eight times and owning a 4.95 ERA.

Darvish, be it because of those expectations or the second-guessing following his ugly performances with the Los Angeles Dodgers in last fall's World Series, has earned more scorn than his rotation-mates, though similar woes are shared by the majority of the Cubs' starting staff: Jose Quintana has a 4.22 ERA, Kyle Hendricks has a 4.27 ERA, and Tyler Chatwood has a 4.54 ERA.

That the Cubs have managed to stay one of the NL's best while only one of their starting pitchers, Jon Lester, has been his dominant self is astounding and a credit to what the rest of the team has done. Epstein, for one, sees it as an indication that brighter days are ahead for the Cubs following the All-Star break.

"I think the optimistic way to look at it is we're on a really nice pace, we've had a really nice season so far and most of our starting pitchers haven't locked it in yet," he told reporters Friday. "A pessimist might look at it and say, 'this is unsustainable because your starting pitching's bad.' I don't look at it that way. I think our starting pitching is going to carry us for long stretches of the season, and it hasn't happened yet. But I think that lies ahead of us."

Without Bryant and without Darvish — because of lack of expected production or their time on the DL — the Cubs have remained World Series contenders. When those two return remains a mystery. But if the Cubs keep winning, keep playing like they've been playing, their returns become far less pressing an issue than it would seem.

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### **NBC Sports Chicago**

Cubs prospect Oscar De La Cruz suspended 80 games for failing drug test

By Michael Allardyce

Chicago Cubs minor league pitcher Oscar De La Cruz's holiday week took a turn for the worse on Friday. De La Cruz failed a drug test resulting in an 80-game suspension.

"We are disappointed to learn today that Oscar De La Cruz has violated Major League Baseball's Joint Drug Prevention and Treatment Program," the team said in a statement. "The Cubs fully support the Program and its efforts to remove performance enhancing drugs from the game. We also expect Oscar to learn from this experience and will support him on his journey back. Per Program protocol, the Cubs will not comment further on this matter."

According to reports, the substance was Furosemide which is a diuretic and a masking agent.

De La Cruz has been pitching in AA with the Tennessee Smokies in the Southern League. The right-handed pitcher is 6-7 in the 2018 season, with a 5.24 ERA. The suspension ends his 2018 campaign and will carry on into the first part of the 2019 season.

Entering the season, Oscar De La Cruz was ranked as the sixth-best prospect by Baseball America.

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