



# CHICAGO CUBS DAILY CLIPS

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July 11, 2018

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## **Cubs.com**

7th-inning rally backs Quintana's 6 scoreless

By Martin Oppegaard

SAN FRANCISCO -- Cubs starter Jose Quintana (8-6) watched from the first-base dugout Monday night as rotation counterpart Kyle Hendricks threw 8 1/3 innings of nearly flawless baseball against the Giants. Manager Joe Maddon suggested afterwards that Hendricks' outing was a harbinger of starts to come.

"Going forward, that becomes contagious sometimes," he said, "when you've got a guy that pitches like that."

In Tuesday's 2-0 win, Quintana validated his manager's comments and built off the momentum Hendricks created in the series opener.

The left-hander pitched six shutout frames, striking out three and walking two in what was undeniably his best start since May 31. He got ahead of hitters early, throwing first-pitch strikes to the first 10 Giants he faced; Quintana entered Tuesday night with a 65.8 first-pitch strike rate this season.

"I said to Kyle, 'I'll try to follow you,'" Quintana said. "I try to throw like him or when Jonny [Lester] pitches good. It's really good competition for us."

Quintana threw like himself on Tuesday, successfully pitching to contact. Despite generating only six swinging strikes all game, he made up for it with 10 ground-ball outs.

"Early on, the fastball had great carry, I thought," Maddon said. "The curveball, much sharper. The difference for me was the curveball strike, the curveball command, the curveball chase. That was a part of his repertoire tonight, whereas that has not been part of it."

Quintana flirted with fire in the form of a single and a walk to open the fourth, but niftily worked his way out of trouble. The lefty induced a 6-4-3 double play and then retired NL All-Star starter Brandon Crawford to end the threat.

The Cubs' offense was finally able to pick up Quintana in the seventh with aggressive baserunning. Addison Russell manufactured the first run of the game, slicing a one-out hustle double to right-center and scoring on a sequence that featured both a wild pitch and a throwing error.

Three batters later, Victor Caratini followed Ian Happ's two-out walk by cracking an RBI double off the wall in right field.

Before Tuesday, each of the Cubs' last nine wins had been comeback victories, but the bullpen ensured there were no late-inning fireworks at AT&T Park on Tuesday. Right-hander Carl Edwards Jr. struck out the side in the seventh, lefty Justin Wilson pitched a perfect eighth and, with closer Brandon Morrow unavailable for a routine day off, Steve Cishek threw a scoreless ninth to convert his third save.

Maddon praised his entire bullpen, in particular Edwards Jr., who generated seven swinging strikes in a 12-pitch inning.

"He was much more fluid in his delivery," Maddon said. "He wasn't trying to be too quick at the end of it. It was really nice to watch. That's what he can look like. That's what he's capable of doing. That was not an anomaly moment. He is capable of that on a consistent basis."

After scoring a total of three runs in the first two games of the three-game series, the Cubs will activate third baseman Kris Bryant from the disabled list Wednesday.

"Hopefully, we have KB tomorrow, and I know we're going to take off soon and be back on track," second baseman Javier Baez said.

#### MOMENTS THAT MATTERED

In the seventh inning, Russell got a terrific read on a slider that Sam Dyson bounced in the dirt, instinctively taking off for third. When Nick Hundley's throw to third sailed wide, Russell scored what would be the game's winning run.

"The one pitch when Addi took off to third was huge," Baez said. "I thought we were going to win 1-0, and then Caratini hit the double. It was really big."

#### SOUND SMART

This Friday marks the one-year anniversary of the Cubs acquiring Quintana. With six scoreless innings Tuesday, the left-hander continued his stellar road splits. He entered the start with a 3.04 road ERA in 16 starts as a Cub.

#### YOU GOTTA SEE THIS

Baez had another tremendous game in the field. He ranged to his left and made a sliding stop to rob Hunter Pence of a leadoff single in the fifth.

One inning later, Baez and Quintana combined for a smooth double play. Quintana snared Andrew McCutchen's comebacker destined for center and led Baez to the second-base bag, and Baez then effortlessly made an off-balanced throw across his body to turn two.

#### HE SAID IT

"Oh yeah. But at the same time, we miss KB and we need him. I'll bat wherever. I'll bat 12th in the lineup if I have to." -- Baez, when asked if he likes hitting third

#### UP NEXT

The Cubs will hand the ball to Mike Montgomery for the series finale Wednesday at 2:45 p.m. CT at AT&T Park. In his previous start, against Cincinnati, the lefty only made it through five innings and took the loss. Montgomery will look to revert to his June form, a month in which he accumulated a 2.83 ERA in 35 innings of work. The Giants will counter with Johnny Cueto, who was originally scheduled to pitch Tuesday but received an extra day of rest before his second start off the disabled list.

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#### **Cubs.com**

Bryant rejoining Cubs; activation imminent  
By Martin Oppegaard

SAN FRANCISCO -- After scoring one run on just four hits in Monday night's extra-inning loss, the Cubs will soon welcome a significant boost to their lineup.

Before Tuesday's game, manager Joe Maddon said third baseman Kris Bryant is flying out to San Francisco in hopeful anticipation of returning to the lineup Wednesday. The 26-year-old has been sidelined since June 23 with a sore left shoulder.

"I think there's an opportunity he might be able to play tomorrow," Maddon said. "We had hoped that it would work out this way and it looks like it's going to."

In a short rehab stint at Double-A Tennessee, Bryant went 2-for-6 with a home run and three RBIs. He exited Tuesday's game in the fourth inning after two at-bats.

Maddon has used a combination of Javier Baez, David Bote, Ian Happ and Tommy La Stella to fill the void at third base. Bote, a rookie, has likely been the biggest beneficiary. Now, Maddon will have some balancing to do with Bryant's imminent return, a decision the Cubs manager described as "a wonderful problem."

"David Bote has really taken advantage of this opportunity," Maddon said. "Javy Baez has ascended to the third spot in the batting order, done a great job with that. Albert Almora's playing more often in the leadoff spot. Harper's gotten himself straightened out with more playing opportunity."

Prior to his brief stay on the disabled list, Bryant led off in five consecutive games. Maddon is still deciding where he'll insert the former MVP in the lineup.

"You always wanted to put Javy [at leadoff] but you couldn't because it was always an all or nothing approach," Maddon said. "Now it's not. All or nothing guys you put toward the bottom of the order and take what you get because they're not going to be on base for your run producers. But all of a sudden he is. Albert is. Addison Russell is getting to that point now."

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### **Cubs.com**

Schwarber is better defensively than you think

By Joe Posnanski

Before we talk about Kyle Schwarber (and a little Bryce Harper), let's point out that in the old days, a defender built a reputation and kept it more or less forever.

Bernie Williams was a good example of that. For the first few years of his career, Williams was a good outfielder. He had above-average range. Williams was as solid as they come. He was legitimately good, maybe even Gold Glove Award good. Then in 1997, with the Yankees right in the middle of their dominance, people began noticing. Williams began getting acclaim for his defense. It was nice.

The trouble is that by 1997, Williams was no longer a good outfielder. His range was well below average. The early attempts to rate defense suggested that Williams made many fewer plays than the average center fielder. The gurus at Strat-o-Matic -- the extraordinary baseball strategy game -- noticed and dropped his defensive rating dramatically.

Williams still won four Gold Gloves Awards in a row.

Once you get the reputation, you keep the reputation.

This is a story that repeated itself often in baseball. Back in the day when errors were pretty much the only way to judge a player's defense, that reputation was everything, there was no other way to keep track. A player who was good defensively would always be good. And a player who was bad defensively would always be bad.

Enter: Kyle Schwarber.

Schwarber is famous, at least in part, for his defensive deficiencies. He was a college catcher, and after the Cubs drafted him with the fourth overall pick in 2014, they made noise about keeping him behind the plate.

Two things prevented that from happening. One, Schwarber needed a lot of work as a catcher. Two -- and more importantly -- he was too good of a hitter to keep in the Minor Leagues. cblitzed through all the levels in a year and a half, and then he came to Chicago and blasted the ball, and there was no time to mess around with his receiving skills. You don't hesitate with a bat like his. The Cubs put Schwarber in the outfield.

And, well, it was rough. The thing about Schwarber was that not only was he not a good outfielder, but he also had a knack for making the particularly ugly defensive play, the one that stuck in your mind. He would run in on a ball that went over his head, or he would dive for a ball that landed 10 feet away or something. Whatever Schwarber's true defensive value, people assumed he was even worse, because of those frightful moments.

People wrote off Schwarber as an outfielder.

And so it's unclear how to deal with the fact that, by the numbers, Schwarber is playing adequate -- even good -- defense in 2018.

Quickly, what do those numbers say? Well, Baseball Reference ranks Schwarber five runs above average. John Dewan, who has been studying defense forever, has him plus-one on his plus-minus scale (which estimates how many plays above or below the average player are made). Fangraphs has Schwarber five runs above average. The Statcast™ folks have him slightly below average but show him holding his own.

What do you make of it? Are the numbers just wrong? Probably not. Even basic numbers show that Schwarber is just playing better defense. His range is way up from last year, and it is right around league average. Schwarber already has a career-high eight assists and has made just one error.

"Kyle's been terrific out there and his arm has been a huge weapon," tweeted Cubs broadcaster Len Kasper. "He has passed the eye test too."

And yet, it's hard for people who don't watch the Cubs regularly to accept that Schwarber is playing better defense. I mean, it's Schwarber. Part of the issue is how geared we are to thinking about defense a certain way. We tend to think of defense as a static thing, unchanging.

We do not naturally think that players can have good defensive years and bad ones. We fully understand that happens with offense, that one year someone might hit .311 and the next .260, one year hit 29 home runs and the next year 13, this makes sense to us.

But we think of defense as constant. And it isn't. There are countless variables to defense, just like hitting. Players absolutely have good and bad defensive years, no question about it. We've never had defensive numbers that we trust the way we trust batting average.

In Washington, a sort of counter-Schwarber thing is happening to Harper. He came into the season with a solid reputation as a defender. Harper worked hard, showed athleticism, went all-out after balls,

smashed into walls. Nobody was going to give him a Gold Glove Award, but he helped his team defensively. Everybody thought so.

This year, Harper is having a disastrous season defensively, utterly disastrous. The numbers suggest he has been one of the worst defenders in the game. Harper has minus-1.6 wins defensively at Baseball Reference. Dewan has him making 13 fewer plays than the average outfielder.

So what's the deal with that? What's happening with Harper? Is he hurt? Harper is playing like he's hurt. Is he frustrated? Harper is playing like he's frustrated.

Then, you go back and ask what's happening with Schwarber? Is this real? It seems real. He seems to be getting comfortable in left field. Schwarber is showing off his above-average arm. He's impressing people around the game.

The final point must be made: We're talking about a half of a season. It's nothing. It's such a small sample size that you can't make conclusions, not about a moving target like defensive skill.

Still, these defensive numbers -- imperfect as they might be -- are great, because they allow us to follow the story in real time rather than relying on outdated reputations.

For years now, everyone assumed that the Cubs would have to deal off Schwarber, because he is destined to be a designated hitter. That assumption might be changing. He might be coming into his own. A Schwarber who plays average defense -- even slightly below average -- can help the Cubs an awful lot.

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### **ESPNChicago.com**

Which players could the Cubs target at the trade deadline?

By Jesse Rogers

SAN FRANCISCO -- The Chicago Cubs have made a habit of making July trades under Theo Epstein, including acquisitions such as Jake Arrieta (2013), Addison Russell (2014), Aroldis Chapman (2016) and Jose Quintana (2017). This year should be no different, though there is the question as to what they have left in their farm system to use as bait and if it's enough to grab another big fish like the names above.

On paper, the Cubs could use a playoff-caliber starter, but they've gone down that road several times over the past 12 months, with varying degrees of success, in acquiring Quintana, Yu Darvish and Tyler Chatwood. Their rotation is tied for fifth in the National League in ERA, though it hasn't passed the eye test to the extent that ranking suggests. Only Jon Lester has earned the trust of fans this season, but it doesn't seem feasible to bring in another big arm, considering the state of that farm. The answers really do have to come from within -- at least at the top of the rotation.

"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 recently.

As if on cue, Hendricks turned in his best performance of the year Monday, and Quintana did likewise on Tuesday. The Cubs will have to rely on that happening a lot more frequently in the second half while also hoping to get Darvish healthy for a playoff push.

Instead, the team will look to fortify on the edges, especially in the bullpen, where the Cubs could use another left-handed pitcher. That has been a running theme for them over the past couple of years. They've traded for two lefty back-end relievers in Chapman and Justin Wilson the past two seasons, and they're basically in need of the same this year. Their look from the left side has changed since April, considering that Mike Montgomery is now in the rotation, Brian Duensing has been ineffective (and hurt) and Wilson has been somewhat inconsistent, with a 1.4 WHIP.

So which pitchers could the Cubs target to shore up the pitching staff?

San Diego Padres closer Brad Hand is being closely watched, according to league sources, but he'll be a hot commodity, considering he's under contract for two more seasons. The Cubs' best bets will come in the rental market, where the costs won't be as prohibitive.

On that front, Toronto Blue Jays lefty J.A. Happ is reportedly being scouted, as is fellow lefty Matt Moore from the Texas Rangers.

Moore is an interesting name, as he is being transitioned to the bullpen after an awful stint as a starter this year. His ERA in the rotation is 8.02, but it's 3.29 in six games as a reliever. As with most starters who go to the bullpen, Moore's fastball velocity is up, jumping from 91.4 to 93.3 mph. Also, Moore played for Joe Maddon in Tampa Bay. That connection never hurts when making a midseason acquisition. And here's the other thing about Moore: He can start if the Cubs are desperate for an outing. He has that experience, and it can't hurt leaving hitter-friendly Globe Life Park and the dangerous AL West.

Adam Conley of the Marlins and Robbie Erlin of the Padres are two more names who have popped up on the radar. Of course, whomever the Cubs go after, there is sure to be stiff competition.

"Almost every contender is looking to add another reliever or two from each side," Epstein said.

Although Chicago's system isn't stocked with the blue-chip prospects it would take to swing a July blockbuster, there are still some pieces who could help bring back pitching help.

The Cubs traded third-base prospect Jeimer Candelario for Wilson last year. This year's version, David Bote, could net a similar type player. Scouts have taken notice of him.

"Dangerous hitter with a high IQ," one NL scout said. "Just needs to get familiar with the league."

Another lauded his defense, which has been as slick as they come. Bote is the Cubs' best bet to bring a pitcher -- not necessarily a Grade A type but one who can help on the back end, either as a starter or reliever.

But should prices on the trade market make a deal prohibitive, there might be an in-house wild card ready to provide a boost in Drew Smyly. The lefty is rehabbing after having Tommy John surgery and could be the addition the Cubs are looking for.

"Most TJ's are 14 months, and I just passed the 12-month mark," Smyly said this week. "I feel strong and ahead of schedule."

Smyly is hoping for an August return to the big leagues, giving the Cubs another option from that side of the mound.



One name that is conspicuously missing from Chicago's deadline shopping list is Manny Machado. A strong first half from the offense has allowed the front office to put to rest all that talk of a Machado blockbuster once and all, focusing instead on what it needs most: arms.

"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."

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### **NBC Sports Chicago**

Report: Javy Baez, Kyle Schwarber will participate in Home Run Derby

By NBCSportsChicago.com Staff

Javy Baez and Kyle Schwarber will both participate in the 2018 Home Run Derby, according to a report from the Sun-Times' Gordon Wittenmeyer.

Both Schwarber and Baez have hit 17 home runs apiece this year, tied for 8th in the National League.

It's the first time the Cubs have had participants in the Home Run Derby since 2015, when both Anthony Rizzo and Kris Bryant took part. Rizzo hit eight homers in Round 1, losing to Josh Donaldson, while Bryant's nine homers weren't enough to get past Albert Pujols.

Wittenmeyer reports that Baez and Schwarber will be joined on the National League side of things by Washington's Bryce Harper and the Dodgers' Max Muncy.

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### **NBC Sports Chicago**

Better days ahead for Kyle Hendricks?

By Vince Lovergine

Could Kyle Hendricks' recent outing indicate he's starting to turn the page?

Hendricks took the hill in his second start of July against the Giants Monday night, and this could've been his best performance in a Cubs uniform.

That's according to manager Joe Maddon, after he spoke with reporters after the game.

"I thought Kyle was outstanding," Maddon said. "That's the Kyle that we all know and love. That's actually one of the best games I've seen him throw physically. His stuff was that good."

"He was fresh there at the end, and he did an outstanding job out there."

Hendricks tossed 8.1 innings, yielding five hits, one unearned run, one walk and tallied eight strikeouts.

For Hendricks, it was a huge step in the right direction, and he hopes to build on this performance.

"Now you just want to keep rolling," Hendricks said postgame. "Stay on the routine and try to lock in on these good habits."

“Relief in a way but still it’s just one outing. Felt good to feel the good ones, and now I’ve got to ingrain those good habits. But today was a big positive for me.”

Before this start, Hendricks started against the Tigers July 3rd, and he lasted just five innings, gave up seven hits and three earned runs.

Now three earned runs is not a lot, but it was a positive sign after his rough month of June.

Hendricks finished at 1-4, with a 7.03 ERA and 1.685 WHIP in 24.1 innings pitched.

This was something the Cubs aren’t used to seeing out of the “professor”, considering Hendricks led MLB in ERA in 2016 at 2.13.

In 2016 and 2017, Hendricks combined for a 2.51 ERA.

But coming into the start against the Giants, Hendricks ERA was at 4.27. That quickly dropped to 3.93 after yesterday.

As his ERA continues to slowly drop, it’s encouraging for the Cubs pitching staff.

This is definitely a confidence booster to say the least for Hendricks. Even though he got the no decision against the Giants, consider it a job well done.

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### **Chicago Tribune**

Javier Baez says 'I'll bat 12th' with Kris Bryant's expected return

By Mark Gonzales

Cubs slugger Kris Bryant is expected to be activated before Wednesday’s game against the Giants, and Javier Baez doesn’t envision any problems.

“I’ll bat wherever,” said Baez, who batted in the third spot while Bryant was recovering from left shoulder inflammation the past 2 ½ weeks. “I’ll bat 12th in the lineup if I have to.”

The Cubs lineup will be at full strength for the first time since June 22 – the last game Bryant started before the discomfort became too acute. Since that time, the offense has improved with its situational hitting while relying less on the home run.

And even during Tuesday night’s 2-0 win, Baez cited the Cubs’ ability to add another run during a two-run rally in the seventh inning on a two-out double by Victor Caratini – who started in place of Anthony Rizzo.

“We’ve been coming from behind a lot, but once we can score first and get the lead, I think our pitchers can get more confidence and throw the ball well,” Baez said.

During Bryant’s absence, Baez’s batting average climbed from .266 to .291 with nine doubles and three home runs during that span.

And in the third spot, Baez batted .377 in 14 starts.

“Oh yeah,” Baez smiled. “But at the same time we miss KB and need him.”

Infielder David Bote is expected to be optioned to Triple-A Iowa to make room for Bryant.

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### **Chicago Tribune**

Cubs' Mike Montgomery: 'We still know we're the team to beat'

By Mark Gonzales

The Cubs' history of second-half surges, such as their 2017 post-All-Star break burst that enabled them to erase a 5½-game deficit to overtake the Brewers for the National League Central title, bolsters their confidence.

But they know how difficult it will be to do it again this season.

“We know how taxing that was,” left-hander Mike Montgomery said. “If we have to do it again, both of us have to battle with it.”

Montgomery will take the mound in Wednesday's series finale against the Giants with the satisfaction that he has succeeded in a starting role so far. But he acknowledges the All-Star break will give him some much-needed time for recuperation.

The rest will be essential to helping the Cubs make a strong push, as they open the second half with 12 games in 11 days against the Cardinals and Diamondbacks while trying to overtake a Brewers team that has been in first place for 61 of 131 days, including every day since June 21.

The Cubs' confidence stems from an offense that has surged the last two weeks. During the first half of last season they collectively were coping with a malaise while trying to overcome a World Series “hangover.”

“We're better than we were last year, for sure,” Montgomery said. “So are (the Brewers). They have a little more confidence because of that (division race).

“But we still know we're the team to beat. That's how we feel. Everyone in here has a lot of confidence.”

Montgomery has made the most of his long-awaited opportunity to start, as he replaced an injured Yu Darvish in the rotation and allowed one run or fewer in his first five starts. But Montgomery has become somewhat fatigued and looks to sharpen his pitches against the Giants after allowing 10 earned runs in his last three starts.

“That's the challenge,” he said. “Hitters deal with the same thing. Sometimes they're locked in, and it's about trying to extend those streaks of being locked in. It's putting the work in, trying to stay consistent in the routine and making sure the body feels good.

“There's always room for improvement. That has been the case since my career started. That's what I was taught, and it's never truer than in the big leagues. You have to adapt your mix — maybe you hold the running game, maybe you're comfortable pitching out of the stretch more or out of the windup. A lot of it is a mental thing too. That's the fun part.”

Montgomery, 29, has become more effective as a starter as he gains more experience. He's 8-7 with a 3.55 ERA in 27 career starts with the Cubs, including a 7-4 record and 2.68 ERA in his last 15 starts.

But he continues to monitor his work between starts to ensure his durability while the Cubs await the return of Darvish sometime during the final two months of the season.

"You learn to nurse certain fatigue and also stay sharp," Montgomery said. "With the All-Star break coming up, it resets you physically and mentally. It's needed.

"We've played a lot of good baseball, but we also need to step back because of the grind of the season."

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### **Chicago Tribune**

Jose Quintana pitches 6 shutout innings, Cubs beat Giants 2-0

By Mark Gonzales

The Giants' switch in starting pitchers caused manager Joe Maddon to change Anthony Rizzo's day off from Wednesday to Tuesday night, but that didn't affect Cubs left-hander Jose Quintana.

Quintana pitched six shutout innings, and the Cubs took advantage of two miscues in the seventh to earn a 2-0 victory at AT&T Park.

In a strange twist, Steve Cishek pitched the ninth to earn the save. Closer Brandon Morrow last pitched on Sunday and said before Tuesday's game that he felt fine and was pleased with the manner he has been used this season.

Meanwhile, Quintana scattered three hits and walked only two before he was lifted for pinch-hitter Tommy La Stella.

Assuming Quintana isn't needed in relief this weekend at San Diego, he will finish the first half with a 3.96 ERA. Kyle Hendricks and Quintana have combined for 14 1/3 innings without allowing an earned run against the Giants.

But the Cubs already broke through against Derek Holland, whose start was moved up to give Johnny Cueto an extra day of rest prior to Wednesday's series finale.

Addison Russell hit a double with one out in the seventh off Holland, who was replaced by Sam Dyson.

With pinch-hitter Kyle Schwarber at the plate, Dyson threw a wild pitch, and catcher Nick Hundley's errant throw to third enabled Russell to score.

With two out, Ian Happ walked and Victor Caratini — Rizzo's replacement at first, whacked a double off the right field wall. Third baseman Brian Butterfield waved Happ toward home, and his aggressive move paid off as the relay throw from Brandon Belt sailed wide of home plate.

Rizzo is 2-for-5 lifetime against Holland but Maddon plans to start him in Wednesday's series finale with the strong possibility that Kris Bryant could join him.

Carl Edwards Jr., making his third appearance since returning from the 10-day disabled list, struck out the side in the seventh.

The victory kept the Cubs (52-37) 1 ½ games behind the Brewers in the National League Central (55-37).

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### **Chicago Tribune**

Javier Baez and Kyle Schwarber chosen for next week's Home Run Derby

By Mark Gonzales

Kyle Schwarber doesn't mind losing a day during the All-Star Break so he can compete in the Home Run Derby on Monday at Nationals Park.

The Cubs left fielder confirmed he and second baseman Javier Baez accepted invitations to represent the National League. It will be the first Home Run Derby for both players.

"It's going to be fun, especially with Javy in there, too," Schwarber said Tuesday night. "I know what kind of (batting practice) that guy takes."

Schwarber, who is tied with Baez for the Cubs lead with 17 home runs, plans to "soak up the moment."

"It's on the bucket list," Schwarber said. "It's one of those things you grow up watching (Ken) Griffey and (Mark) McGwire. Now that I can do it, it's a thing you want to do at least once."

Baez already was selected to start for the National League at second base in Tuesday's All-Star Game, so his selection to the Home Run Derby provides another opportunity to showcase his skills.

"A lot of people got the question mark on my mind, how I'm going to do it?" Baez said. "It's all about putting on a show and having fun, and we'll see what happens."

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### **Chicago Tribune**

Column: Kyle Hendricks' mastery of Giants suggests sabbatical over for 'The Professor'

By David Haugh

After the Giants celebrated a 2-1 victory over the Cubs in 11 innings that ended at 12:24 a.m. Tuesday, Chicago woke up to bigger and better news than the outcome of one measly game.

The Professor's sabbatical appears to be over.

In the long view of the Cubs season, that development made Giants infielder Pablo Sandoval's game-winning single at AT&T Park in San Francisco practically moot. What mattered most to the Cubs happened when struggling pitcher Kyle Hendricks — nicknamed "The Professor" — authored his most impressive start of the season by allowing five hits in 8 1/3 innings.

History says this could mark the beginning of Hendricks' annual summer revival. The right-hander typically plods through June, picks up his stride in July and practices precision in August and September as the stakes increase.

After lasting six innings in only one of his previous seven starts, Monday's masterpiece came as a welcome relief. The Cubs can't get where the Cubs want to go in the postseason without Hendricks

regaining his form as the top-of-rotation starter they have relied upon heavily the last three postseasons.

Watching the Cubs can be so paradoxical. They arrived in the Bay Area having rallied to win nine of their last 11 games and were 15-5 at Wrigley Field since May 25. Yet amid all the winning, concerns over consistent starting pitching created an uneasy feeling on the North Side. Then on Monday, the Cubs lost the first game of a weeklong California trip before the All-Star break and nobody minds because of the confidence Hendricks restored.

“That’s the Kyle we know and love,” manager Joe Maddon told reporters after the game.

What better tribute to sports psychologist Ken Ravizza, who died Sunday night at age 70, than a thinking-man’s pitcher channeling the grief every Cubs player felt into a 109-pitch masterpiece? Everything worked for Hendricks, who threw first-pitch strikes to 22 of 31 hitters he faced. He kept the Giants guessing, striking out eight — seven swinging — and walking only the final hitter he faced, Brandon Belt.

“In the third inning, something just clicked and I was able to repeat one (delivery) after another so that was a really good feeling,” Hendricks told reporters. “(Catcher Willson Contreras) and I were just really on the same page, mixing pitches, keeping them off-balance, and that’s the game I have to play.”

That’s the game Hendricks plays as well as any finesse pitcher when he is on, the game he executed poorly in June when he went 1-4 with a 7.03 earned-run average and 1.685 WHIP. That’s the game that looked familiar against the Giants.

“I really believe you could see that version of Kyle most of the time the rest of the season,” Maddon said.

Maddon’s faith isn’t blind. Historically, something happens to Hendricks around the All-Star break. He starts hitting his spots and finds a comfortable groove.

His career numbers for June stink: a 6-9 record in 18 starts with a 4.67 ERA and 1.349 WHIP. But in 17 career July appearances (16 starts), Hendricks is 5-3 with a 2.11 ERA and 1.149 WHIP. The efficiency improves in August when Hendricks is 12-2 with a 2.54 ERA and 1.083 WHIP. In September and October, Hendricks has gone 8-4 with a 2.73 ERA and 0.994 WHIP, suggesting he gets more locked in as the pressure builds.

So the Cubs feel relatively safe believing the best is yet to come for Hendricks, a major part of a baffling rotation that holds the key to the second half of the season. What Maddon expected to be his best starting five as Cubs manager has been his most disappointing. Yu Darvish has more disabled list stints than victories. Tyler Chatwood can’t find the plate without Google Maps. Jose Quintana, whom the Cubs traded a future superstar to acquire, has been closer to mediocre than elite. Nobody wants to imagine where they would be without Jon Lester, the team’s most valuable player — with due respect to Javier Baez, its most outstanding.

After Lester, the most dependable starter has been Mike Montgomery, a revelation as good as he promised. But the deeper Montgomery goes into the season, the more you wonder what effect the toll of so many innings will have on a left arm used to relief pitching — and the more you support the idea of the Cubs trading for a veteran innings-eater who capably can keep them in games but not cost them any top prospects or players off their major-league roster in return.

Chatwood's unpredictability increases the urgency. Hendricks received the benefit of the doubt the Cubs can't give Chatwood. Forget his \$38 million free-agent contract; championship teams must operate under a meritocracy. After one more start this week, the Cubs should use the break to address feasible alternatives for a fifth starter. A half-season of control issues suggests this is who Chatwood is in 2018.

The Cubs realistically can't count on anything from Darvish, so they should consider him a bonus if he returns to contribute in a meaningful way after the trade deadline. Quintana is a pro and figures to work his way back toward consistency, which admittedly sounds a little like wishful thinking.

The entirety of the team's pitching issues underscores why Hendricks resembling his old self meant so much Monday night, when the Cubs lost a game but found some hope.

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### **Chicago Tribune**

Kris Bryant's minor-league rehab is over, could return to Cubs lineup Wednesday vs. Giants  
By Mark Gonzales

Slugger Kris Bryant went 0-for-2 on Tuesday as the designated hitter in his second minor-league rehab game with Double-A Tennessee, and later in the day flew to San Francisco to rejoin the Cubs.

Cubs manager Joe Maddon said before Tuesday night's game that Bryant could be in the starting lineup on Wednesday.

"He's flying out right now, I believe," Maddon said. "And I think there's an opportunity he might be able to play tomorrow. So that's what we're working on right now."

Bryant, who hasn't played for the Cubs since June 22 because of left shoulder inflammation, struck out and flied to left before being pulled for pinch hitter Ian Rice in the fifth inning of the Smokies' game against Montgomery.

Bryant told reporters Sunday that he could rejoin the Cubs in San Francisco, where they will conclude a three-game series Wednesday.

Bryant went 2-for-4 with a home run and three RBIs on Monday. He also committed a throwing error, but multiple reports indicated Bryant made several exceptional stops.

Left-hander Brian Duensing, who has been on the disabled list with shoulder fatigue since July 1, threw a perfect inning of relief Tuesday for Tennessee.

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### **Chicago Tribune**

Dexter Fowler and the Cardinals trying to keep their heads in trying times  
By Paul Sullivan

Dexter Fowler was back home in Chicago on Tuesday, a city where his legacy is sealed and drinks are always on the house.

“Um, I don’t know if it’s home,” Fowler said in the Cardinals’ clubhouse before their game against the White Sox. “It feels good coming back, but obviously this is the South Side, not the North Side. But Chicago, yeah.”

It’s been a rough week for the former Cubs star, who is having a terrible season and was thrust into a controversy when Cardinals general manager John Mozeliak questioned his “effort and energy level,” which is corporate-ese for saying he was dogging it.

Mozeliak later backtracked on his comment, and Fowler accepted his apology.

But it was too late to stop the social media tide that engulfed Fowler while he was away from the team for the birth of his second child, a girl he and wife Aliya named Ivy.

No matter what happens next, Fowler probably will spend the rest of his time in St. Louis trying to prove himself over and over again. He was batting .167 with five home runs and 21 RBIs in 221 at-bats entering Tuesday. He’s had some highlight moments, like his grand slam against the Sox on Tuesday and his walk-off homer in the 14th inning against the Cubs on May 7, but the bad has far outweighed the good.

Some fans already have turned on him, putting Fowler in the spotlight and making him a potential scapegoat for this underachieving team if it doesn’t make the postseason for a third straight year.

“I’m good, I’m good,” he said. “I’m in positive spirits, so that’s all that matters.”

Fowler said he’s able to “shake things off” and put the controversy in perspective, adding: “When I look in the mirror, you know yourself.”

He took early batting practice before the game, and manager Mike Matheny said Fowler was trying his best to get into a “good rhythm” again.

“And it’s hard to get into a good rhythm when you’re not out on the field on a consistent basis,” Matheny said. “It’s one of those (things), it’s a different space for him and where he’s been in the past. It’s a great challenge, but he is putting in a good attitude trying to get it right.”

Fowler, who signed a five-year, \$82.5 million deal after helping the Cubs win a championship in 2016, has too many friends in the game to let something like this affect him. He appreciated the kind words from Cubs manager Joe Maddon and admitted it’s more “laid back” playing for the Cubs manager.

“But at the end of the day you’ve got to adapt to every situation,” Fowler said.

Was being off for a while helpful?

“I think it helps and hurts,” he said. “It’ll help you one way but it’ll hurt you another way. You obviously get out of whack, felt like spring training, but working through things.”

The Cardinals are working through things as well, and they came into the two-game series against the Sox three games over .500 and seven games out of first in the NL Central.

Matheny is on the hot seat, and Cardinals fans are on edge. This is an organization that’s always expected to contend, so the frustration builds when they’re flatlining.

“We expect a lot out of ourselves,” Matheny said. “But we understand it’s a 162-game season, and we understand too that we’ve played some good baseball against some of the best teams in this game and



haven't even hit our stride yet. So you can use the word frustration, but that's not necessarily something that describes where we are.

"There are times we want to play better, there's no doubt about it. But there are also some things we're doing well, and I see even better things ahead. We put our head down and keep playing the game, and next thing you know something could happen, and you're right in the middle, which we are. We're right in the middle of this thing. Just keep playing the game, and don't get too distracted by a lot of the noise. That's one of our main objectives."

But the Mozeliak-Fowler thing was a huge distraction, and on Tuesday a reporter tried to resurrect the alleged feud between Yadier Molina and Cubs catcher Willson Contreras, which ended months ago. Molina was asked if he had a good relationship with Contreras.

Yeah, why not?" Molina shot back. "I'm always going to pull for him. He's a great kid. He's got great talent. I've got nothing against him."

That's one fire doused, but Matheny's job status will be the next one if the Cardinals continue to flounder. Traditionally positive-thinking St. Louis fans clearly are tired of the mediocrity since 2016.

Are the players good at shutting out the criticism?

"Noise is noise," Matheny said. "They're not impervious to it. Very few people are. Part of what we do is create an atmosphere where we do limit distractions. Not that we put our head in the sand, but once again it comes down to playing the game. There's almost half a season left. How can you start drawing conclusions with half a season left? It makes no mathematical sense to me, and in application, just go play the game. Don't get too far down any one road, whether it's on a high note or it's on a low.

"And unfortunately if we're not right there holding on to first place, it's usually a low. You can't buy into that (viewpoint) because it's just not accurate at this point."

It's hard living up to the standard of excellence set by your predecessors.

That's a problem the Cubs never had to deal with.

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### **Chicago Sun-Times**

Cubs' Javy Baez, Kyle Schwarber fill half NL field for Monday's Home Run Derby

By Gordon Wittenmyer

SAN FRANCISCO — The official announcement won't come until Wednesday night, but the Cubs have drawn starring roles for what might be the most powerful event of All-Star week in Washington.

Second baseman Javy Baez and left fielder Kyle Schwarber, who entered Tuesday night's game tied for the Cubs' lead with 17 homers, make up half of the National League field for the Home Run Derby on Monday.

They join the Nationals' Bryce Harper and the Dodgers' Max Muncy on the NL side of the eight-player bracket.

“A lot of people have the question on their mind how I’m going to do,” said the big-swinging Baez, a first-year All-Star voted into the starting lineup by fans, of the event that is built for his style. “It’s all about putting on a show and having fun. We’ll see what happens.”

Schwarber, who might have the most natural power among Cubs hitters, was invited despite not being selected as an All-Star.

“It’ll be fun, especially with Javy in there, too,” said Schwarber. “I know what kind of BP that guy takes. It’s going to be pretty fun to watch him and me just go have fun and just soak up the moment.

“It’s on the bucket list, being in the Home Run Derby.”

It’s the first time the Cubs have had a participant in the Home Run Derby since Anthony Rizzo and Kris Bryant both participated in 2015.

“It’s one of those things, you grew up watching [Ken] Griffey and [Mark] McGwire and all those guys doing it,” Schwarber said. “Not that I can do it, it’s definitely a thing that I want to do and at least try once.”

Many hitters in recent years have declined invitations because of the potential effects on their swings and, in Bryant’s and Rizzo’s cases, the fatigue factor.

The last two winners, Aaron Judge and Giancarlo Stanton of the Yankees, both declined to participate this year.

Neither Baez nor Schwarber seem worried about their swings.

“If I just take it like my last round of batting practice – I think that’s kind of the way I’ll approach it, not try to do too much,” Schwarber said. “Whenever I try to do too much in batting practice, I end up hitting a grounder. So I’ll just go out there and enjoy the moment and have fun.”

Cubs manager Joe Maddon is not only fine with his young hitters participating, he said it gives him strong incentive to watch.

“I don’t think it messes your swing up,” Maddon said. “I think it’s just [makes you] tired.”

Organizers addressed that issue, switching from a format that allowed for 10 outs per round to timed rounds.

“I think that’s a much better method,” Maddon said.

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### **Chicago Sun-Times**

Jose Quintana backs Hendricks’ gem for 2-0 win in big week for Cubs’ rotation

By Gordon Wittenmyer

SAN FRANCISCO — Don’t look now, but the Cubs’ starting rotation finally might be starting to fulfill the promise manager Joe Maddon suggested in spring training when he called it the best rotation on paper he has had in four seasons in Chicago.

That's high praise, considering the last three produced the top rotation ERA in the National League during that span.

But after Kyle Hendricks' best start of the season Monday and Jose Quintana's six scoreless innings in a 2-0 victory Tuesday against the Giants, a rotation that has been the weak link on a strong team suddenly has a streak of 15 2/3 innings without allowing an earned run.

"Obviously, those two guys have got to feel pretty good about themselves right now," Maddon said.

"This game is contagious, and hopefully that becomes a contagious thing and we all get on that run," said ace Jon Lester, who has been the lone reliable constant in the rotation all season.

Yu Darvish still is sidelined for who knows how long, and Tyler Chatwood still leads the planet in walks. But if the performances of Hendricks and Quintana the last two nights are the start of something, the rotation Maddon and the rest of the Cubs have been waiting to see might be arriving just in time for another big second half.

"I hope so," Hendricks said. "Jon's been there all year for us, so we've all been trying to feed off of him. And luckily I was able to have a good one, and hopefully I can build on it. Q has been throwing the ball really well, so hopefully he can go out and build on what he's been doing."

Quintana allowed three hits and retired nine of the first 10 batters he faced and seven of the last nine, with two double plays among the seven.

"That's really important for us," Maddon said of getting the kind of rotation production behind Lester that Hendricks and Quintana showed — and that has been missing on a consistent basis all season.

"We saw that a lot out of Q last year," Maddon said. "The difference [Tuesday] was the curveball strike. The curveball command. The curveball chase. That was part of his repertoire [Tuesday] whereas that has not been part of it [earlier this season]. It has just been fastball, fastball, fastball."

"The curveball has not been as effective and the changeup hasn't. Today he had two of the three working well. And when he's really good he's got all three working so it was a nice first step."

While many of the starters have struggled with mechanics or injuries, the bullpen and fielding have excelled, and the hitting has heated up in recent weeks.

"We need the starters to lock in kind of like Kyle did [Monday]," Maddon said.

And Quintana, who has given up a combined two runs in 12 innings in his last two starts, both victories.

"I said to Kyle, 'I'll try to follow you,'" Quintana (8-6) said. "When I say 'I want to follow you,' I try to throw like him, and try to throw like when Jonny pitches really good. It's really good competition for us, and that's the best thing for the team."

Tuesday marked the start of the final full turn for the rotation before the All-Star break. It might be a huge week for the starting pitchers in pitcher-friendly ballparks on the West Coast.

"I think every week is big for us," Lester said. "But the parks [this week] do benefit us a little bit more so than the hitters, which is nice. Getting out of the Cincinnati and the Wrigleys when the wind's blowing out and coming to a place like this for a change."

“But regardless of what park we’re in, we still have to execute our game plan. It’s definitely not a group I’m worried about, that’s for sure. I’ve seen all these guys put runs together. It’s just a matter of maybe just that one last little tweak and get guys getting on that roll.”

It might go a long way toward boosting a rotation that had sagged to sixth in the NL in ERA (3.87) entering play Tuesday.

And it might go a long way toward reversing a trend that had seen the Cubs trail in 17 of 18 games through Monday.

And what might it mean if others can follow Hendricks’ and Quintana’s leads, even just heading into the break?

“For the sake of the pitchers’ confidence, to finish strongly in the first half, you take that break and you feel better about yourself coming back,” Maddon said. “You feel like you’ve locked into something.”

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### **Chicago Sun-Times**

Cubs’ Willson Contreras ASG starter, but Cards catcher still feels like the man  
By Steve Greenberg

Yadier Molina was a happy guy Tuesday as he discussed his late addition to the National League All-Star roster. Next week in Washington will be All-Star appearance No. 9 for the great Cardinals catcher.

“I’m glad to be part of this team,” Molina said at Guaranteed Rate Field before the Cardinals opened a two-game series against the White Sox. “It’s a great honor for me to be a part of this game.”

He was a happy guy, that is, until a real nudnik of a reporter started in with questions about his controversial Instagram post — way back in January, it was — directed at Cubs catcher Willson Contreras.

“Respect the ranks, rookie!” was the gist of what Molina wrote next to a photo of himself with the Giants’ Buster Posey and the Royals’ Salvador Perez at the 2015 All-Star Game.

Actually, the controversy started when Contreras, 26, proclaimed at Cubs Convention that he was going to become a better player than Molina and eventually be the “best catcher in the game for a long time.” And, technically, it only became a controversy when the very same nudnik reporter, to whom Contreras had made those remarks, wrote about it.

So sue me.

Considering Contreras is this year’s All-Star starter behind the plate, I was going to ask Molina for an update on his relationship with the Cubs hotshot anyway. But after it was discovered Tuesday afternoon by a Sun-Times sleuth that Molina had actually taken down the aforementioned Instagram post, well, inquiring minds first had to know what the heck that was all about.

“I don’t remember,” Molina said. “When did that happen, January?”

But why? Why did he remove the post?

“I don’t know why you keep asking the same question.”

Because I’m a nudnik?

“Why did I take it down? Because I wanted to.”

So that settles it.

As for his relationship with Contreras, it certainly appears that all is well.

“Yeah, why not?” Molina said. “Yeah, yeah, I’m always going to pull for him. He’s a great kid. He’s got great talent. I’ve got nothing against him.”

The Cardinals have had a healthy respect for Contreras’ ability since the first start of his career, which came in June 2016 against the Cubs’ division rivals at Wrigley Field.

“He’s obviously a talent,” Cardinals manager Mike Matheny said. “He’s got a dangerous bat, a lot of power. Got a cannon of an arm. You can see that he has a lot of energy back there, a lot of things that he does well. The first time that we watched him, we realized that he was probably going to be around for a while.”

Yet, will Contreras rise to the level of, as he put it, “the best catcher in the game for a long time”? And does the fact he’s starting in his first All-Star Game signify he’s the best in the NL right now?

Cubs manager Joe Maddon says Contreras is the top catcher in all of baseball. According to Maddon, if a scout graded every catcher in the game in all areas — hitting, arm strength, blocking pitches, running the bases, tenacity, aggressiveness, you name it — Contreras would come out No. 1.

“After a certain amount of time, somebody else has to ascend to the throne,” he said.

But many would say 31-year-old Posey is the best. There’s buzz as well about the Marlins’ 27-year-old J.T. Realmuto, who, like Contreras, will be making his All-Star debut. Of course, many others would throw their support behind Molina, who turns 36 on Friday.

That’s where Matheny — himself a four-time Gold Glove-winning catcher — is at.

“I’m extremely biased because we get to see every day all the little things he does that’ll never find a category,” Matheny said. “You can’t have metrics on some of the things that he does that help this team. To me, it’s just very rare what he has done. Just look at the impact a player has — I don’t know if there’s a more impactful player for a team.”

You know who else still puts Molina right at the top of the heap? Molina does. He’s feeling young and doing his usual workhorse thing. He’s batting close to his career .284 average, leading the league at his position with 13 home runs and still excelling defensively. Cardinals shortstop Paul DeJong, 24, called it a “privilege” to share the field with the potential Hall of Famer.

Contreras is the All-Star starter, but Molina still sees himself as the man.

“In my mind, I feel that way,” he said. “But right now, I’m worried about staying healthy and trying to help my team win. I’m not worried about anything else.”

Least of all a six-month-old social media post.

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### **Chicago Sun-Times**

Cubs' Kris Bryant to return from DL Wednesday

By Gordon Wittenmyer

SAN FRANCISCO — Third baseman Kris Bryant, who has been on the disabled list because of a shoulder injury since June 23, might return to the Cubs' lineup Wednesday against the Giants.

Bryant, who played through shoulder discomfort for about a month before it worsened enough to seek treatment, completed a two-game rehabilitation assignment Tuesday with Class AA Tennessee.

He went 2-for-6 with a home run in the two games, leaving the second game early and taking a flight late Tuesday to San Francisco to join the Cubs.

"He had a good day," manager Joe Maddon said. "We hoped it would be able to work out this way, and it looks like it's going to."

The Cubs expect to have Bryant and first baseman Anthony Rizzo in the lineup together for the first time since June 22 in Cincinnati.

Rizzo, who was out of the starting lineup Tuesday against a left-hander, has been out of the lineup 13 times this season, including a DL stint because of back stiffness. Bryant has missed 23 games.

"Give our guys credit that have been out there," Maddon said, citing rookie David Bote's work at third base and at the plate, Javy Baez's work in the No. 3 spot in the order and Albert Almora Jr.'s additional playing time in the leadoff spot. "What happens when stuff like that does happen is other people surface."

All-Star opening?

Right-hander Brandon Morrow, who has been one of the best closers in the National League, was a selection-day All-Star snub but might find his way into the game next week as an injury replacement.

Closer Sean Doolittle became an All-Star scratch when the Nationals put him on the DL.

"I've got plans now, so . . .," Morrow deadpanned.

Actually, he has plans, but he said he'd go if he got the shot.

"I'd go throw an inning for them," he said before adding: "It's hard to balance. It'd be nice to have three days off right now. And you think about your own team."

Morrow, who has converted 20 of 22 save chances and has a 1.63 ERA, knew he had a good shot at making his first All-Star team and didn't make plans for the week before learning he wasn't selected.

But he also said: "I wasn't surprised. It's so hard to make the All-Star team. I tempered my expectations. I didn't want to count my chickens before they're hatched."

Duensing update

Left-handed reliever Brian Duensing pitched a 1-2-3 inning, needing only 11 pitches, in a rehab appearance Tuesday with Tennessee. He'll be evaluated Wednesday before he's scheduled to pitch again.

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### **Chicago Sun-Times**

Keep your pants on: Brandon Morrow's fine, say Cubs, who skip closer in 2-0 win  
By Gordon Wittenmyer

SAN FRANCISCO – Joe Maddon and the Cubs delivered another pants scare in the ninth inning Tuesday night against the Giants.

But, rest assured, the manager said, closer Brandon Morrow is healthy.

Morrow, who spent 10 days on the disabled list last month after injuring his back taking off his pants, was not used in the ninth inning of a 2-0 victory at AT&T Park Tuesday night because he had worked back-to-back games just ahead of the Giants series.

"We came in the first day [Monday] and talked about giving him two days off based on recent usage," Maddon said after the victory. "So he wasn't available."

It was the second time since Morrow's DL stint that he wasn't used in a save situation, with no indication before the game that he was being given the day off for workload issues.

"It's not something you want the opposition to know," Maddon said.

The Cubs made it clear in December when they signed the veteran pitcher to a two-year deal that they planned to exercise great care and caution with his workload because of a history of injuries throughout his career.

That could change dramatically in the fall if they're in the playoffs again this year.

"We just don't want to push him right now," Maddon said. "He's done great work. He's had a little bit of a setback injury-wise [with the DL stint] so why push him right now."

Morrow has converted 20 of 22 saves with a 1.63 ERA this spring – 20 of 21 and 1.40 until giving up his second home run in two seasons on Sunday.

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### **Chicago Sun-Times**

Cubs' Jon Lester can finally buy his All-Star jersey: 'Sorry I yelled'  
By Madeline Kenney

It's a happy day for Cubs left-hander Jon Lester as he can finally purchase his 2018 All-Star jersey online.

Why would he want to purchase one for \$150 when he gets his own for free? Not sure.

But on Monday that's what Lester — presumably joking — tried to do. The problem? Well, his 2018 All-Star jersey was nowhere to be found on the online shop.

So, Lester did what everyone does when they run into technical difficulties: Call out the company on Twitter.

"Hey there MLB," Lester jokingly wrote in a tweet. "You guys mad at me? Did I get cut?"

A quick search Monday afternoon on MLBShop.com showed that Javy Baez was the only Cubs' All-Star this season that had a jersey for fans to purchase. (Sorry, Willson Contreras. It looks like you were originally left out, too.)

But on Tuesday, MLB appeared to have fixed the problem. The jerseys of Lester and Contreras are now available online for purchase, which made Lester, the now five-time All-Star, very happy.

"Thank you, MLB," Lester tweeted. "Sorry I yelled."

"We got your back," MLB responded with a first pump.

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### **Daily Herald**

Rozner: National League as wide open as ever

By Barry Rozner

Baseball has been ruined by the "superteams."

Yep, that was the narrative in spring training 2018. Too many teams tanking, too few teams with a chance to win the World Series, too many great teams dominating the sport.

Narratives come and go quickly in baseball these days, the national contingent landing on a conversation and passing it around the game as if it's gospel.

Groupthink at its finest.

The problem is it hasn't happened in the National League this year. All three division races were supposed to be over by June 1 and instead all three divisions are up for grabs.

The Cubs, Nationals and Dodgers were supposed to cruise into the playoffs, but going into Tuesday night the Cubs were in second place, 1½ back of the Brewers, the Dodgers were in second by a half-game, trailing Arizona and chased closely by the Giants and Rockies, and the Nationals were in third at .500, behind the Phillies and Braves.

So much for the NL superteams. So much for the ruined sport.

With the Red Sox, Yankees and Astros performing as expected, and the Mariners surprising just about everyone, the American League has four teams on pace for 95 wins, but the National League has just one in the Brewers as of Tuesday evening.

The Nationals, one of the guaranteed superteams, would have to finish 50-22 to win 95 games.



The average number of 95-win teams has been four the last decade, with some years five and some at three. The current pace is five -- including Seattle, which no one forecast -- so not what you would call an extraordinary occurrence.

Five of the six divisions have great races shaping up for the second half, and the only division already decided is the AL Central, where the Indians have not played like a superteam and are winning easily only because the rest of the teams are so bad.

But is that because of tanking? Only the White Sox and Tigers in the Central have announced their intentions, while the Twins are trying to win and the Royals held on to their World Series stars too long for a small-market operation needing to turn over the roster.

There are many bad teams trying to win and just aren't good at it, like the Orioles, Blue Jays, Rangers, Mets and Pirates, and fewer teams than expected actually pulling the plug as did the White Sox, admitting they are losing in hopes of future winning.

The Reds were supposed to be terrible but have played better than .500 over their last 73 games, since Jim Riggleman took over as manager, and are planning to boost the payroll in 2019.

At the same time, even the supposed superteams are flawed. The Cubs, Dodgers, Nationals, Yanks, Red Sox and Indians all have issues they are trying to address before the trade deadline, and these are not small problems.

The Astros are the only great team that seems to have little to worry about, and even they have intentions of picking up at least one late-inning arm before the postseason, and it remains to be seen how the Astros' hurlers who pitched into November will handle another long playoff run.

So if you think back to the spring-training storylines, it was supposed to be the most boring baseball season ever.

Five divisions were decided and the sixth was New York vs. Boston, with all of it sewn up before a pitch was thrown in anger.

Instead, only one division race is done and only one wild card is a certainty, coming from the AL East.

The second half looks as if it will be quite entertaining, and there is much to be determined before October.

Unless they have altered the process, only one team can come out of the American League, where four teams have a very good chance, and only one from the National League, where as many as nine teams think they can get it done with the right mix of improved performance and acquisition.

Only a few months ago, the screaming was that superteams and tanking were ruining the game, and that rules must be changed immediately to fix a broken system.

So much for narratives.

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## Daily Herald

Rookie David Bote making the most of his time with the Cubs

By Bruce Miles

David Bote may be heading back to the minor leagues soon, but the rookie Cubs infielder has displayed some veteran savvy during his stints with the big club this season.

Take this past Sunday's 10-inning, 6-5 victory over the Cincinnati Reds. With one out in the bottom of the ninth inning, Bote singled. The Cubs didn't score that inning, but Bote took care of that in the bottom of the 10th, walking with the bases loaded to force in the winning run.

Instead of panicking in the moment, Bote took pitches with the count 2-2 and 3-2 to draw the walk.

"Great at-bats," said manager Joe Maddon. "He's looked good in the field, great baserunning. He's done everything well and right."

Bote, 25, is in his third stint with the Cubs this season. The 18th-round draft pick in 2012 made his major-league debut April 21 after six-plus years in the minor leagues, including a breakout season last year at Class AA Tennessee, where he went 272/.353/.438 with 14 homers and 59 RBI.

This past week featured Bote hitting his first career big-league homer, a big drive to center field at Wrigley Field on the Fourth of July.

Bote's immediate future may hold a return trip to Class AAA Iowa when injured third baseman Kris Bryant comes off the disabled list, but he is making the most of the experience and leaving a record for future reference.

In 18 games heading into Wednesday night's game at San Francisco, Bote was 10-for-38 for a line of .263/.362/.395 with 2 doubles, the home run, 9 RBI and 7 walks.

Bote said he likes being part of an offense that makes things happen instead of waiting for the home run.

"It's fantastic," he said. "The quality of at-bats the whole last two weeks has been so exciting. It's so fun to be a part of it and watch. Everybody's in the same at-bat. Everybody's in that at-bat with them. That's the team mentality of it all."

Bote is taking something away from it for himself as well with all he has accomplished.

"Whatever I can gain from it is so I can help the team win every day, day in and day out, however I can, being ready to go in on a double switch, being able to pinch hit, just being prepared the best I can so that when my number's called," he said. "Every time you face another guy, getting history with another pitcher and starting to see him a couple times, I know that's going to help, too. Each time you get it, each time you're in front of the situation, you're obviously going to learn from your experiences."

Maddon got his first serious eyeful of Bote in spring training after Bote was added to the 40-man roster. He knows more about the player now.

"He's really centered," Maddon said. "He's got a very mature way about him. He's a married young man. He carries himself so well. When I have conversations with him, you're talking to someone a little bit older than his birth certificate indicates. On the field, he plays really calmly with really open eyes. He

sees things. Man, I liked him in spring training, but he's showing us stuff right now that we did not even see in spring training.

"He reminds me a little bit of Zo (veteran Ben Zobrist) when I first met Zo."

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## **The Athletic**

State of the farm system: Reinforcements and what the Cubs can offer in trade-deadline deals  
By Patrick Mooney

Realistically, the Cubs don't have another A-list prospect like Gleyber Torres or Eloy Jiménez, the type of premium talent other teams covet as a future franchise player. But the Cubs still have significant trade-deadline resources, purposely setting aside millions of dollars for a rainy day fund instead of signing a big-name free agent in the middle of spring training. There are enough B-level prospects who can be bundled together in a deal to reinforce the major-league pitching staff. No one doubts Theo Epstein's creativity and aggressiveness when the team president sees a chance to win another World Series.

With all that in mind, here's a snapshot of the farm system, what the Cubs have to offer before the July 31 trade deadline and how some answers could come from within.

- What began as a promising year for the organization's top-to-bottom pitching infrastructure has become another reminder of how difficult it is to plan around young arms. Slowed by an ankle injury, top prospect Adalberto Alzola didn't debut at Triple-A Iowa until April 20. Alzola's season lasted almost 40 innings, making it to May 29 before he ultimately got shut down with a strained lat muscle. Jose Albertos put up an 18.69 ERA at Class-A South Bend, moved to extended spring training for a reset and is now repeating a level with short-season Class-A Eugene. The Cubs had already discounted Oscar De La Cruz because of injury concerns that diminished his value as a prospect...and then last week Major League Baseball announced an 80-game suspension after he tested positive for a diuretic and masking agent.
- When the Cubs spent \$215 million on free-agent pitchers, lefty Drew Smyly became an afterthought, a Tommy John recovery that could factor into the tail end of the 2018 season and an insurance policy for the 2019 rotation. But given how much Yu Darvish and Tyler Chatwood have struggled – and the unpredictable nature of bullpens – Smyly has emerged as an X-factor.

Smyly played with Dallas Keuchel at the University of Arkansas and became part of the three-team David Price deal at the 2014 trade deadline, going from the Detroit Tigers to the Tampa Bay Rays and showing that he can be an effective big-league starter when healthy. Smyly left the team's Arizona complex and met the Cubs on this week's West Coast road trip with the idea that they could begin to map out next steps more clearly.

"We're probably going to stretch him out on the rehab assignment regardless," Epstein said, "and see how he's feeling and see what our needs are when he comes back. But I think it makes sense to give him some prolonged outings. I don't think he's going to get to a point where he's going super-deep in games this year, anyway. That's more for next year. But I think it makes sense to get him some reps and see how he responds to multiple innings and go from there."

- It's hard to imagine the Cubs counting on Dillon Maples to get big outs in August and September when his last outing with Iowa featured three walks and three strikeouts in a scoreless inning. But it's not crazy to think the Cubs might catch lightning in a bottle with a pitcher who has off-the-charts spin rate

and 73 strikeouts in 44 career relief appearances at the Triple-A level (all within the last calendar year). On paper and from a scouting perspective, manager Joe Maddon doesn't think Maples would look out of place in the New York Yankees' super-bullpen.

"People call it a slider," Maddon said. "Oh my God, it's bigger than that. If you want to compare it to a pitcher today, it's kind of like [Dellin] Betances. It's got that kind of super-break to it. It's above and beyond.

"We just need to get a little bit more seasoning on that one. But when he really arrives here with confidence and command of his fastball – it's 97, 98 easy – (look out). That stuff there is really high-end."

- 2017 first-round picks Brendon Little and Alex Lange are linked as the two highest-drafted pitchers during the Epstein regime. Where the left-handed Little figured to be more of a long-term project with higher potential upside out of a Florida junior college, Lange had been a Friday night starter and a College World Series performer for LSU. Little (5.03 ERA through 68 innings) is developing at his own pace with South Bend while Lange (3.52 ERA in 15 starts) is checking the boxes at advanced Class-A Myrtle Beach.

"He's a guy who's driven to be successful," farm director Jaron Madison said of Lange. "He worked his butt off this offseason and came into spring training and was open-minded and wanted to learn, made some advancements with his changeup and that's become a really good pitch for him. We talked to him about that: 'You have to have three pitches to stay as a starter and you got to put in the work.' He did everything that was asked of him. His changeup's come on and become a really good pitch. He's just continuing to develop as a pitcher and understanding what he can do to be successful. And I think he is going to be a guy that forces our hand."

- The Cubs have been aggressive promoting other pitchers from the 2017 draft class, most notably moving Keegan Thompson (a third-round pick out of Auburn) from Myrtle Beach to Double-A Tennessee last month. The Tennessee rotation also features Thomas Hatch (3.83 ERA through 16 starts), the organization's top pick in the 2016 draft (No. 104 overall), as well as Dartmouth guy Duncan Robinson, the organization's minor league pitcher of the month for June who's in the middle of a strong overall season (3.42 ERA in 17 starts).

- South Bend catcher Miguel Amaya – who has separated himself as the organization's next big-time position-player prospect – will represent the Cubs on Sunday at the All-Star Futures Game at Nationals Park in Washington.

- David Bote is a reminder that draft status and prospect pedigree don't mean everything. The Cubs eventually saw enough in Bote's swing, attitude and athleticism to think he could generate launch angle, play multiple defensive positions and become a big-league contributor, even though he was drafted in the 18th round in the same year that Albert Almora Jr. became the first pick of the Epstein administration.

Bote has a .756 OPS and nine RBIs through his first 47 plate appearances in the big leagues while also handling three different infield spots. His age (25), versatility and personality could make him a cost-controlled asset, maybe a late bloomer like Ben Zobrist.

"He's really centered," Maddon said. "He's got a very mature way about him. He's a married young man. He carries himself so well. When I have conversations with him, it's like you're talking to someone a little

bit older than his birth certificate indicates. On the field, he plays very calmly with really open eyes. He sees things.

“He reminds me a little bit of Zo when I first met Zo.”

- Trent Giambrone is an off-the-radar name, but the Cubs already see similarities to Bote. Giambrone, a 26th-round pick out of Delta State University last year, had a three-homer, nine-RBI game last week that made him the Southern League’s player of the week. Primarily used as a second baseman, Giambrone now has 14 homers, 21 stolen bases and an .816 OPS through 80 games with Tennessee.

“The numbers don’t jump off the page,” said Jason McLeod, the senior vice president of scouting and player development. “But he’s hitting for power. He’s leading the team in stolen bases. He’s playing the middle of the field. He’s kind of like my Bote 2.0 a little bit.”

- Victor Caratini has attracted trade interest in the past, though the Cubs thought he could provide enough of an immediate upgrade that they recently DFA’d Chris Gimenez and sent the veteran backup catcher back to Iowa. Caratini is a switch-hitter who gets good reviews for his work with pitchers and doesn’t have anything left to prove at the Triple-A level (.334 batting average and a .933 OPS in 115 career games).

Caratini will turn 25 next month and has infield experience and the Cubs can’t be caught shorthanded behind the plate in the middle of a pennant race. (Remember how Alex Avila went from a luxury item to a necessity last year.) But Caratini will continue to be blocked by All-Star catcher Willson Contreras for the foreseeable future.

This isn’t saying the Cubs are about to flip Caratini and Bote. But the trade deadline is part of a much larger discussion about future rosters, upcoming free-agent classes and how the young big-league core will become significantly more expensive through the arbitration system. You know Epstein is always keeping his options open and thinking about Plans A through Z.

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## **The Athletic**

Playing in Chicago, Dexter Fowler gets back in the swing of things  
By Lauren Comitor

Chicago is no longer home, but Dexter Fowler looked mostly like his old self in his old city as he rounded the bases Tuesday night after a grand slam at Guaranteed Rate Field.

But it wasn’t until Fowler jumped up to greet Yadier Molina at home plate, and took the celebration into the dugout, that he let his megawatt smile shine through, the one Cubs fans grew so accustomed to seeing just 10 miles north of where the Cardinals crushed the White Sox 14-2.

“I knew I hit it well, but I didn’t know how well,” Fowler said. “At the end of the day, it went over the fence, and I was super happy. You get a pitch and you barrel it up, it feels good.”

This particular hit had to feel like one of his best of the year, if not the most significant. Fowler’s 393-foot, two-out homer in the sixth inning was his first home run since his May 6 extra-inning walk-off against the Cubs in St. Louis, and just his second multi-hit game since June 1. That is just a snapshot of the droughts and struggles that Fowler has endured amid high-profile friction with Cardinals management.

The grand slam allowed Fowler to breathe a sigh of relief, if only for one night, a respite he'll gladly take after the last couple weeks.

Let's refresh. Fowler, who's been struggling all season, went on the paternity list last week for the birth of his second daughter, Ivy Noor. (Addison must have finished second.) While he was on leave, Cardinals president of baseball operations John Mozeliak questioned Fowler's effort in multiple interviews, as well as the play of the team as a whole, which is 46-43 and in third place in the NL Central, 5 1/2 games back of the second-place Cubs. The Athletic's Mark Saxon reported last week that Fowler and manager Mike Matheny barely speak. While Mozeliak cleared the air with Fowler, the damage was done.

Put Fowler's underperformance (.173 batting average, .560 OPS) in the context of the five-year, \$82.5 million contract he signed in December 2016, the superior offensive production and defense of Harrison Bader, who's received playing time in Fowler's stead, and the team's place in the standings, and you can see why it seems like the Fowler-Cardinals marriage won't end happily.

Despite both Matheny and Fowler being vague about future playing time, the manager commended Fowler for his early BP work on Tuesday and his determination to turn things around.

"He came out early today, got some extra swings in," Matheny said. "He's doing what he can to get it right. He just knows he's got to get into a good rhythm, and it's hard to get into a good rhythm when you're not out on the field on a consistent basis. It's one of those [things], it's a different space for him and where he's been in the past. It's a great challenge but he is putting in a good attitude trying to get it right."

That extra work paid off on this night, though Fowler had two strikeouts to go along with his two hits. The single he lofted to left field in the fourth inning was his first hit since a pinch-hit single on June 30, and it helped him get going and avoid the issues that have plagued him all season long.

Fowler just isn't getting on base (.270 OBP, the lowest mark of his career save for his 13-game MLB debut with the Rockies in 2008). His strikeout and walk rates are fairly consistent with his career averages, but he's hitting fewer line drives and more fly balls, plus he's hitting for less power (the grand slam was his sixth home run this season, after hitting 18 in 2017 and 30 total in his two seasons with the Cubs). Fowler still has an uphill battle ahead of him.

The former Cub will always be a draw — at least for the media — in Chicago for his two seasons with the Cubs and his role in the World Series, but he wasn't feeling much love from anyone on the South Side, at least until his grand slam. His introductions garnered little more than a smattering of applause from the many Cardinal fans in attendance, and a sweep of the rather full main concourse revealed not a single Fowler jersey, red or blue.

It was only two years ago Thursday that Fowler joined four of his Cubs teammates as a starter at the All-Star Game in San Diego, riding the high of the magic that was 2016 Cubs. Now, before Tuesday's game, he stood two lockers away from Molina, the 35-year-old catcher who accepted congratulations after replacing an injured Buster Posey in next week's game. Fowler is as far from those 2016 feelings as can be, but while those memories are fond, they're likely detrimental to his mindset now as he deals with both the physical and mental tolls the past few weeks have taken on him.

If one thing's clear, it's that Fowler wants to move on — from his struggles, from the drama, from the he-said, she-said. Could Tuesday night's performance be the spark he needs? Perhaps, but it's going to

take a lot more than a couple of hits to change the perception and reality surrounding this unfortunate saga.

Whether he communicated it to Fowler or (probably) not, Matheny offered praise where praise was due on his right fielder's big night.

"Just know that, this is stuff that you just, you don't go home and just forget about," Matheny said of Fowler's struggles. "He's dragging this with him all the time. To get in there in a big situation, be able to make it happen, do his part, that's what he wants to do...Just trying to make something happen, and making something happen, doing your part, is all he's trying to do right now, and today he did it."

It was only one game, but it's a start. And when those have been hard to come by, Fowler will take any positivity he can get.

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