



CHICAGO CUBS DAILY CLIPS

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September 11, 2018

- Daily Herald, **Brewers cut Chicago Cubs' lead to 1 game**
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- Daily Herald, **Hurricane Florence could wash out Chicago Cubs' makeup game**
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- The Athletic, **As the injuries and inconsistencies pile up, Brewers look poised to overtake the Cubs**
<https://theathletic.com/517601/2018/09/11/as-the-injuries-and-inconsistencies-pile-up-brewers-look-poised-to-overtake-the-cubs/>
- The Athletic, **The Javier Báez Effect, Terrance Gore's blazing speed and how the Cubs are running toward October**
<https://theathletic.com/516468/2018/09/10/the-javier-baez-effect-terrance-gores-blazing-speed-and-how-the-cubs-are-running-toward-october/>
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Daily Herald

Brewers cut Chicago Cubs' lead to 1 game

By Bruce Miles

Chicago Cubs manager Joe Maddon was asked to speak in boxing terms Monday about why his team hasn't been able to knock out the Milwaukee Brewers.

Maddon, an aficionado of the sweet science, jabbed back.

"Because they're good," he said, before the Brewers topped the Cubs 3-2 at Wrigley Field to pull within 1 game of the Cubs in the National League Central. "When (Sonny) Liston fought (Muhammad) Ali, it wasn't just a walk in the park for Ali. The Brewers are good, and they've made themselves better. I was thinking about that walking in. They've put a lot of professionals in their dugout, in their clubhouse.

"It's not any walk in the park or a dance around the ring when you're playing these guys. They're very good. They've got really good arms. The guy tonight presents a lot of problems, (Wade) Miley. It's no surprise. They're better."

The Cubs (83-60) had a chance to KO the Brewers (83-62) last week in Milwaukee, but the Brewers won two of three.

The Brewers took the lead against Cubs ace Jon Lester in the sixth inning, but the greater cause for concern was that Lester had to leave the game with two outs in the sixth with low-back tightness.

Lester has been the rock of the Cubs' starting rotation this season. Maddon called the injury "kind of a spasm," and Lester didn't seem to think it was serious.

"It's not anything painful," he said after seeing his record fall to 15-6. "Just a kind of uncomfortable. After I got out of the game and got back up here, it felt a lot better. Hopefully tomorrow will be the same."

The teams traded first-inning runs before the Orlando Arcia gave the Brewers a 2-1 lead in the second with an RBI single. The Cubs tied it in the fifth on a sacrifice fly by Kris Bryant.

Lester got two quick outs in the sixth before Mike Moustakas singled and Erik Kratz doubled. The Cubs' athletic trainer had been out once already in the sixth to look at Lester, and a second visit brought Carl Edwards Jr. in from the bullpen. Edwards uncorked a wild pitch to score Moustakas and make it 3-2.

"We need to get Carl straightened out," Maddon said. "The symmetry of the bullpen is different without him out there. His skill set is really important to us. We've got to get him right."

The game was the Cubs' first one back from a four-city 5-5 road trip that featured nearly 11 hours of rain delays in Washington over the weekend.

"I'm just proud of our guys," team president Theo Epstein said. "They hung in there as best they could. Beyond this weekend, you've got to look at the stretch as a whole. We're just about at the end of a stretch of 23 days in a row with a game, four-city road trip. This time is the ultimate dog days. Our guys have been handling it really well overall.

"But I think our guys are pretty resilient. They handled it well. You look up and you've got 20 games left ... You're playing the team that's chasing you. This is something you would definitely sign up for. It's fun. It gets the blood pumping."

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Daily Herald

Hurricane Florence could wash out Chicago Cubs' makeup game

By Bruce Miles

Like everybody else, the Chicago Cubs are keeping an eye on Hurricane Florence, which is bearing down on the East Coast.

The Cubs are scheduled to play a makeup game Thursday at Washington against the Nationals after Sunday's game was rained out. The two teams had to play a doubleheader Saturday to make up Friday's rainout.

"It's on the schedule," team president Theo Epstein said Monday. "Obviously the biggest story in the country right now is the hurricane, and we wish everyone the best. We're just going to keep an eye on it. Common sense will prevail, I'm sure, depending on how things look in a couple days."

This has not been an easy stretch for the Cubs. Because of an earlier rainout in Atlanta, they were forced to use an off-day Aug. 30 to make up that game, causing them to have 23 games scheduled in 23 days. Thursday is a scheduled off-day as well, but the Cubs may be forced to fly to Washington after Wednesday night's game at Wrigley Field to play at 4 p.m. EDT Thursday and then fly home for a 1:20 CDT start Friday at Wrigley against the Cincinnati Reds.

The Cubs would rather play the Nats on the Monday, Oct. 1, the day after the regular season ends, but Epstein said that call belongs to Major League Baseball. Another possibility would be playing the game at a neutral site, but Epstein said talks haven't progressed that far yet.

"Oh, our voices have certainly been heard, but we don't have any control," he said.

Smyly shut down:

Left-handed pitcher Drew Smyly was hoping to pitch this month after rehabbing from Tommy John surgery, but Theo Epstein said Monday the Cubs were shutting him down for the season.

The Cubs signed Smyly to a two-year deal last December with an eye toward having him ready for 2019.

"He did a great job to get back, fought through a lot of obstacles," Epstein said. "He pitched in a minor-league game, pitched a clean inning, which was awesome for him. He wanted to keep pushing. He really wanted badly to help this team.

"Realistically, we kind of ran out of time. We ran out of minor-league games. We want him to have a normal off-season. He's been rehabbing for a long, long time. We want him to have the benefit of rest and a full winter and come back."

Cautiously optimistic:

Outfielder Jason Heyward took part in running drills Monday afternoon, and closer Brandon Morrow played catch.

The Cubs say they're optimistic both will contribute before the season is over. Heyward has been on the disabled list effective Aug. 31 with right-hamstring tightness. Morrow has been out since July with right-biceps inflammation. His return for the regular season may be in jeopardy simply because the Cubs are running out of time.

"I've been in Chicago, and today was the first day I ran outside," Heyward said. "I've thrown outside some. I've been hitting off the tee. It's good. It's good stuff. Confidence is there. I just have to do the smart thing and build myself back up to running."

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The Athletic

As the injuries and inconsistencies pile up, Brewers look poised to overtake the Cubs

By Sahadev Sharma

After a 3-2 loss to the Milwaukee Brewers that shrunk their division lead down to just one game, the Cubs' rough weekend in Washington bled into Monday.

There were some signs of hope prior to the game as team president Theo Epstein seemed optimistic that closer Brandon Morrow could return to the team before the end of the season and possibly impact the club come October. Morrow threw off flat ground and expected to throw off a mound again on Wednesday and could return as early as next week. Jason Heyward is working his way back from a hamstring injury and said he hopes to come back before the season concludes as well.

But by the postgame session, the injuries were piling back up. Jon Lester pitched a solid 5 2/3 innings, giving up three runs on eight hits while striking out seven and walking two. He looked shaky early, but seemed to find his groove by the third. But after striking out Jonathan Schoop for the second out in the sixth, Lester seemed to wince a bit and catcher Willson Contreras jogged out to the mound and called for the trainer. Lester stayed in the game but gave up a single and double, prompting manager Joe Maddon to come out with the trainer and end Lester's night.

"Not really," Maddon said when asked if he was concerned about Lester's back. "Kind of a spasm. It loosened up a lot when they brought him inside, so it appears to be fine."

Lester said he expected to be fine and said it wasn't anything painful, just an uncomfortable feeling that quickly went away after he exited the game. Still, with starting pitching a scarce commodity for this team — everyone saw the result of Saturday's outing by Jaime García — any questions about the rotation at this point in the season are concerning.

After Lester exited the game, the Cubs' recent bullpen issues took center stage. Overall, the bullpen has been strong this season, but with Morrow down and Carl Edwards Jr. struggling, it's become a question mark of late. The group has a 6.00 ERA in September and during their stretch of 23 games in 23 days, they have a 4.52 ERA, 20th in baseball during that span. But Maddon chose to go to Edwards, who had given up just one earned run in his last 14 outings, but had looked shaky as he struck out only eight and walked nine while pitching 11 innings during that stretch.

"That was important there again," Maddon said. "I just wanted to reduce his outing tonight to one out. Once Jon was in the situation that he was in, I thought, get Carl in there, get one out and let him walk off the field feeling good about himself. And then you have the rest of the guys for the rest of the game, and that's exactly how it played out. But we didn't get the one out. We did get the one out, but we just had a wild pitch and all of a sudden the run scores. But yeah, we need to get Carl straightened out. The symmetry of the bullpen is different without him out there. His skillset is really important to us. We've gotta get him right."

It's easy to argue that a tight divisional matchup was not the time to try and get Edwards right. But then, when is? The Cubs aren't going anywhere without Edwards being who he can be. And it's not as if Maddon brought him in to face the heart of a strong Brewers order.

Orlando Arcia should've been an easy out for Edwards — the Brewers shortstop entered the day with a 4.1 percent walk rate, a .032 ISO and a .218 batting average. For players with at least 300 plate appearances this season, Arcia's 41 wRC+ is the worst in baseball.

But from the start, Edwards struggled. He tossed a wild pitch to allow what turned out to be the winning run to score, then threw three more balls to walk Arcia, a result more telling about where Edwards is at than any questions about Maddon's bullpen management.

In a perfect distillation of the volatile reliever's extremes, Edwards then got lefty Curtis Granderson to strike out on four pitches. At times Edwards can look like one of the best relievers in the game, no matter who is in the box; at others, he looks lost against some of the weakest competition a team has to offer.

Perhaps Maddon's more questionable decision was in the seventh when he sent Kyle Schwarber up to the plate to face righty Corbin Burnes. Brewers manager Craig Counsell quickly pulled Burnes in favor of lefty Josh Hader and Maddon countered by bringing in the right-handed David Bote. It was a little odd to see Maddon burn Schwarber when it was clear what Counsell would do, but apparently Maddon never had any intention of letting Schwarber bat.

"Schwarbs' back is bothering him a little bit," Maddon said. "So he wasn't going to hit anyway. That was easy, actually."

Schwarber indicated after the game that his back has been hampering him since August 30 in Atlanta. It locked up on a head-first slide into third on Wednesday in Milwaukee and he's had just five plate appearances in the three games since. Schwarber seemed to suggest that a few days' rest would help, so he shouldn't be unavailable much longer.

But let's rewind for a moment. Maddon used Schwarber as a decoy to force Counsell to bring in Hader, who has a 2.13 ERA, has struck out 45.7 percent of the batters he's faced and has splits that are basically inconsequential, since righties are posting a .477 OPS against him — 134 points better than lefties and still terrible. Hader proceeded to throw 24 pitches to six batters and strike out every one, pushing his strikeout rate to an MLB-best 46.8 percent.

"You have to tip your hat," Lester said. "Hader comes in and strikes out six in two innings. What're you gonna do with that? He's basically Chris Sale from a relief standpoint, with his angle and everything. We got him last week and he got us this week. We just gotta show up tomorrow and be better."

When a veteran who has seen plenty of great pitchers over the years describes the reliever coming in as "Chris Sale," that's not the ideal candidate to try and bait the other manager into bringing in. The only benefit to Hader pitching would be his likely unavailability for the rest of the series.

But as dominant as Hader was, the Cubs lost the game before he ever took the mound. The offense continues to look like a shell of itself, seldom putting up quality performances. On Monday, they went 0-for-5 with runners in scoring position and stranded six runners on base.

"We gotta hit the ball," Maddon said. "We pitched well enough to win that game, no question. The games that we've lost recently, we've normally pitched pretty well. We just gotta get our offense back in order. Because after it gets past four, five, it really falls off a cliff quite a bit. We gotta get the bottom part playing, putting the ball in play and hard. We're just not making that kind of hard contact that we're capable of."

On Monday, the six through nine hitters were Albert Almora Jr., Contreras, Lester and Addison Russell. Those position players weren't completely unproductive Monday night, but in general, they've been struggling immensely.

On Aug. 1, Contreras went 3-for-4 with a double and a home run. Since then he's posted a 38 wRC+ and an .032 ISO with just three extra-base hits (all doubles). Almora has a 48 wRC+ since July 9 with just six extra-base hits. Since returning from the disabled list on Sept. 1, Russell has a .375 OPS with just three singles. And it wasn't as if he was lighting the world on fire before that as he's posted a 38 wRC+ since July 4. With the way that trio has performed at the plate of late, the Cubs essentially had four automatic outs at the bottom of the order on Monday night.

And with Thursday's scheduled makeup game in Washington D.C., there's no reprieve in sight. Maddon stressed that delays and rainouts on Friday and Sunday mean nothing as far as getting a real day off.

"People have to understand that," Maddon said. "Your motor is still running, you gotta go through your routine. You come out, you practice like you normally practice, you do the normal stuff and you get ready. Then you sit and then the game's not played, which may actually be worse than had it been played."

A day off is a rarity once spring training comes around for these players, and the Cubs haven't had one since August 20. If Thursday's game is played as scheduled, or even if Chicago is forced to fly out to D.C., the Cubs won't have a day off until Sept. 20.

"It's tough. It's really tough," Russell said. "I feel like this year, the rain delays have been the story. We've played a tough schedule and then this back stretch — being on for 23 days and then maybe even going back to Washington. The schedule's been brutal this year. We have no choice but to go through it and then strap it on when it's game time."

As this team likes to say, that's baseball. It's hardly ideal, but they have no choice but to go out and perform. After starting this stretch of 23 games with a 10-3 record, the Cubs have gone 2-5 and allowed the Brewers and Cardinals (just 3 1/2 games back) to stay in the division race.

But the Cubs continue to search for positives. They know it was just a week ago that they appeared to be headed for a relaxed final few weeks of the season. The Cubs control their destiny, but neither the Brewers nor Cardinals appear willing to let the Cubs take this division with ease. And by the looks of it, the Brewers are keen on taking it over in the coming days.

"We just gotta keep up with the positive attitude," Russell said. "Go out there and have some fun. We're in the driver's seat right now. There's no better feeling than that going into the last three weeks of baseball. We just gotta keep being positive."

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The Athletic

The Javier Báez Effect, Terrance Gore's blazing speed and how the Cubs are running toward October
By Patrick Mooney

Kids want to "Be Like Javy," gravitating toward one of Major League Baseball's most exciting players, but there are times when it feels like the viral Báez videos should come with a warning: "Don't try this at home." Because the Cubs have made enough aggressive mistakes on the bases that it makes you wonder if his teammates have forgotten that there is only one Javier Báez.

"I think there is the butterfly effect or the Javy effect," Cubs manager Joe Maddon said while praising the team's overall baserunning. "It's in there somewhere. I do like taking chances, but also you have to emphasize good judgment."

Some of this is by design and the law of averages: No one is going to be perfect while making split-second decisions. Overall, the Cubs have a high baseball IQ and get the benefit of the doubt after winning the 2016 World Series and advancing to the National League Championship Series three years in a row. That focus and roster depth fueled a 12-8 start to this 30-day stretch during which the Cubs won't have a true day off.

But with the Milwaukee Brewers at Wrigley Field this week for a three-game series that could be the difference between a relatively smooth September or an exhausting sprint to the finish line, Maddon wants to see the Cubs focusing on the little things, not giving away at-bats or getting caught out of position on defense or going rogue on the bases.

"I tell some guys, 'Let your hair down,'" third base coach Brian Butterfield said. "We always try to emphasize there's a means to an end if you make an out on the bases. It's not always a bad thing. There are guys behind that screen from other teams saying, 'Wow, these guys are ready to go two bases. These guys are looking to advance 90 feet. They're looking to take opportunities. They're assertive as hell on the bases.'

"That puts the next team that we play on the defensive. It's almost like we create a team that's in a hurry. They look up, we create mistakes because they know the way we're going to play. Even though outs are made, it's not always a bad thing."

The Cubs lead the majors in going from first to third on a single (118 times), as Matt Snyder of CBS Sports pointed out, and it's not even close (the Los Angeles Angels are next at 83). FanGraphs' all-encompassing baserunning statistic grades out the Cubs as a top-10 team in the majors (and seventh-best in the NL).

The Cubs also haven't been firing on all cylinders with some of their best baserunners, placing Jason Heyward (right hamstring tightness) on the 10-day disabled list on Aug. 31, the day before they activated Kris Bryant after a left shoulder injury sidelined him for almost two months this season.

But the Cubs have added designated pinch-runner Terrance Gore, a September call-up who brings another dimension to the team after Theo Epstein's annual August trade for an extra outfielder. This time it was a minor-league deal with Kansas City for a specialist who appeared in six postseason series (four stolen bases, two runs scored) while the Royals made it to Game 7 of the 2014 World Series and then won it all the next year.

"Speed kills," Maddon said. "It's a skill that we really don't possess. It's fun to have. He's been through it in really big moments and he's not going to be intimidated."

Maddon insisted he isn't thinking about playoff decisions or looking at ways to manipulate the roster to find a 25th spot for Gore: "Honestly, I have not. I just want to get there." There are enough questions about the bullpen that a one-dimensional bench player might be a luxury item the Cubs cannot afford. But Gore has already made an impression, stealing four bases and scoring two runs in six games and even getting his first big-league hit (off Washington Nationals ace Max Scherzer).

“He’s not only fast, he’s got good technique,” Maddon said. “Even when he had a bad jump the other day, he still beat the throw. He’s got this knack to slide late and hold onto the bag. He just sticks. He Velcros to the bag as he gets there. He’s going fast and then he’s able to just shut it down right on the bag. He’s kind of perfected the last part of the steal.”

Maddon acknowledged that Gore is at a different level when compared to Quintin Berry, the pinch-runner the Cubs carried during two of their three playoff rounds in 2015 (when shortstop Addison Russell missed the NLCS with a strained hamstring). The Cubs are also a much deeper organization now facing bigger questions about who will handle the ninth inning and how to construct the lineup each day.

Still, Cubs executives Epstein, Jed Hoyer and Jason McLeod wouldn’t have those 2004 Boston Red Sox World Series rings without Dave Roberts stealing second base against the New York Yankees and triggering an epic comeback.

These details matter: The 2016 Cubs watched rookie pinch-runner Albert Almora Jr. tag up to gain an extra base and eventually score the go-ahead run in the 10th inning of a World Series Game 7 in Cleveland. A pivot point in last year’s back-and-forth elimination game at Nationals Park came when Cubs catcher Willson Contreras and first baseman Anthony Rizzo (and the replay system) executed a pickoff play that nailed Jose Lobaton to end the eighth inning.

The Cubs are also operating without an established closer and sacrificing defense whenever Daniel Murphy hits leadoff and plays second base (on top of missing Heyward’s Gold Glove defense in right field). Also look at how these hitters have performed since the All-Star break — Russell (.488 OPS), Almora (.568 OPS), Contreras (.611 OPS), Bryant (47 at-bats), Ian Happ (.193 batting average) — to get an idea of how the Cubs will have to be creative to generate offense. Báez has emerged as an MVP candidate, but even “Javy Being Javy” can’t do it all.

“The baserunning has been really good — you’re going to make some mistakes sometimes,” Maddon said. “When you’re not scoring a lot of runs, that’s when you do take more chances. I’m a big believer in that also. You just want to keep waiting and waiting and waiting for something to happen, you’re going to wait for a long time. In a perverse way — I can’t document this and I can’t say (for sure) — I just feel like it’s true (that) even when you push and get some guys thrown out it just picks up your aggressiveness for whatever reason and then you start getting things done after that.”

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Cubs.com

Lester exits injured as Cubs fall to Crew

By Carrie Muskat

CHICAGO -- The Cubs could afford to lose Monday's game. They can't afford to lose Jon Lester.

Brewers starter Wade Miley was stingy and the Milwaukee offense pesky in a 3-2 victory at Wrigley Field to pull within one game of the first-place Cubs. The Crew has now won six of the last eight matchups between these teams with two more remaining.

"You've got to tip your hat sometimes to good hitting, and that's what they did," Lester said of the Brewers.

Lester started on short rest because he pitched only one inning on Friday against the Nationals before play was stopped due to rain. On Monday night, he seemed to land awkwardly after striking out Jonathan Schoop for the second out in the sixth. Cubs catcher Willson Contreras signaled to the dugout and both athletic trainer PJ Mainville and manager Joe Maddon checked on the left-hander, who stayed in the game. Lester then gave up back-to-back hits before being pulled because of back spasms.

Mike Moustakas was on third and the game tied at 2 when Carl Edwards Jr. took over. His first offering skipped past Contreras for a wild pitch, allowing Moustakas to score the go-ahead run.

Moustakas was ready.

"Eddie [Sedar, Milwaukee's third-base coach] actually told me, 'Hey, look for a wild pitch right here and get down the line and try to score,'" Moustakas said. "And it happened. I was able to get down there. It worked out pretty well for us."

Maddon's plan was to have Edwards finish the sixth, then turn to the rest of the bullpen.

"Once Jon was in the situation he was in, get Carl out there, get one out, let him walk off the field and feel good about himself," Maddon said of his plan.

But it didn't work out that way.

"We need to get Carl straightened out," Maddon said. "The symmetry of the bullpen is different without him out there. His skill set is really important to us. We have to get him right."

Lester doesn't expect to miss his next turn in the rotation, but he will be re-evaluated on Tuesday.

"I didn't feel it on one particular thing," he said. "I don't know if it happened when I swung and missed in the [fifth] inning. When I hit, I came back in and was fine and I went to stand up and it didn't feel all that great. I don't know if that was it, or Friday to today or what. I don't think it'll be anything that'll stick around. I think we'll be fine tomorrow."

Lester was vying for his 16th win. Instead, he was charged with three runs on eight hits, striking out seven over 5 2/3 innings while falling to 15-6.

The Cubs need all hands on deck for the final stretch of games. They don't have a day off until Sept. 20 because of a makeup game scheduled for Thursday against the Nationals.

"It's tough. It's really tough," Cubs shortstop Addison Russell said of the club's current stretch. "I feel like this year -- the rain delays have been the story of this year. We played a tough schedule, and then this back stretch, being on for 23 days, and then maybe even going back to Washington. The schedule has been brutal this year, but we have no choice but to go through it and strap it on whenever it's game time."

Before this week's showdown, Maddon was asked why the Cubs haven't been able to eliminate the Brewers.

"Because they're good," Maddon said. "We have to play at the top of our game to beat them. It's not easy putting the Brewers away."

MOMENTS THAT MATTERED

Scoring opportunities: The Cubs tied the game at 1 in the first when Kris Bryant doubled with one out, moved up on a throwing error by Miley on a botched pickoff attempt, and then scored on Anthony Rizzo's groundout. In the fifth, Contreras' hustle paid off as he doubled, then advanced on Lester's flyout. Both Russell and Daniel Murphy walked to set up a sacrifice fly by Bryant that tied the game at 2.

"We gave ourselves some chances today, but probably not as many as we would've liked," Murphy said. "Unfortunately, at the top of the lineup, I had two chances to start innings off. Couldn't do it in the first and the [third]."

In the Cubs' last three losses to the Brewers, they've scored six runs. It doesn't help that they have to deal with lefty reliever Josh Hader, who struck out all six batters he faced over two innings on Monday.

"What are you going to do with that? He's basically Chris Sale from a relief standpoint with his angle," Lester said of Hader.

"We have to be tighter with our pitching, and beyond that, we have to hit the ball," Maddon said. "We pitched well enough to win that game, no question. The games we've lost recently, we've pitched well. We've got to get our offense back in order. ... We haven't been making the hard contact that we're capable of. To score two runs again, we have to be more offensive."

SOUND SMART

The Brewers' Christian Yelich and the Cubs' Ben Zobrist began this series first and third in the National League batting race, respectively. However, the Reds' Scooter Gennett went 4-for-5 on Monday night and took over the lead with a .320 average. Yelich has reached base in a season-high 26 straight games, the longest active streak in the NL. He is batting .315. Zobrist went 2-for-4 and is batting .314.

THEY SAID IT

"I think we're fine. Other than the first game of the doubleheader on Saturday [against the Nationals], I don't feel like we're playing bad baseball. Tonight we beat ourselves, but that happens. I feel like there is a game in Milwaukee when we beat ourselves as well. Any time you go on the road for however many days that was, if you come out a game or two at .500 with the amount of games we played in a row, I think guys feel good about it. It just so happens we catch these guys on the back end of this stretch. Tonight was a good, clean baseball game. You've got to tip your hat sometimes." -- Lester

"As long as we take care of business, that's all we can control. Obviously, we've been playing some pretty good baseball, but you know, that's a great team over there, and they're not going to go away. They're not going to just give it up. We have to go out there every single day, keep fighting, keep grinding and go to win a ballgame each and every night." -- Moustakas

MITEL REPLAY OF THE DAY

Domingo Santana was at second with one out in the ninth when Cubs reliever Brandon Kintzler threw to Murphy at second base. Santana was called out on the pickoff, as he slid into Murphy's foot and never reached the bag. The Brewers challenged, but the ruling was confirmed after review.

UP NEXT

Jose Quintana (12-9, 4.14 ERA) will start the second game of the Cubs' NL Central showdown against Jhoulys Chacin (14-6, 3.59) and the Brewers at 7:05 CT Tuesday night in the MLB Network Showcase Game. Quintana is 6-3 with a 4.88 ERA at Wrigley Field. This will be a rematch of a game last Wednesday at Miller Park, where Quintana gave up two earned runs over 6 2/3 innings for the win. Chacin took the loss, serving up five runs (three earned) over 4 2/3 innings.

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Cubs.com

Smyly done for season, but Morrow progressing

By Carrie Muskat

CHICAGO -- Left-hander Drew Smyly's bid to pitch this season after undergoing Tommy John surgery is over, but the Cubs were encouraged after injured reliever Brandon Morrow's workout.

Morrow threw 25 pitches in the bullpen on Sunday, the first time the right-hander has thrown off the mound since mid-July.

"He was optimistic in a sense," manager Joe Maddon said of Morrow, who was projected to be the Cubs' closer this season. "When I spoke to him afterward, the face was easy, a little bit of a smile, felt pretty good. Hopefully, it's a good first step."

The Cubs are counting on Morrow's feedback to determine the next step. He's been sidelined with a bone bruise in his right arm.

"We're relying a lot on what he says to us," Maddon said.

Cubs president of baseball operations Theo Epstein said he's optimistic about Morrow's return as well.

"The best-case scenario would be full strength, ready to go," Epstein said. "He's doing everything he possibly can. He wants it. He signed here to pitch in October."

The Cubs weren't counting on Smyly as much. When he signed, the team made it clear that anything he could do this year would be a bonus. Smyly underwent Tommy John surgery on his left elbow in early July 2017.

"He did a great job to get back, fought through a lot of obstacles, pitched in a Minor League game, pitched a clean inning, which was awesome for him," Epstein said. "He wanted to keep pushing. He really wanted badly to help this team, but realistically, we kind of ran out of time, ran out of Minor League games."

Epstein said Smyly can have a normal offseason and possibly be part of the Cubs' rotation next year.

Weather may be an issue for Thursday's makeup game

With Sunday's game postponed until Thursday, the Cubs are in a stretch of 30 consecutive days with a game scheduled. It's a first for Maddon.

"Not even as a fence installer or a hoagie maker," Maddon said of having to work 30 straight days. "As a hoagie maker, limosine drive, fence installer, I've never gone 30 in a row."

Because of rain in Washington, D.C., on Sunday, the Cubs are scheduled to play Thursday at Nationals Park. The weather forecast may not be much better. Hurricane Florence is headed toward the East Coast.

"There's no maybe's yet," Maddon said. "For right now, we're planning on going to Washington."

"It's on the schedule, but obviously the biggest story in the country right now is the hurricane," Epstein said. "We wish everyone the best for their safety. We're just going to keep an eye on that. Common sense will prevail, I'm sure."

Cubs outfielder Albert Almora Jr. understands how quickly the weather can change.

"It's tough to predict what's going to happen with a hurricane," Almora said. "Being from Florida, I know they can shift, they can turn, they can go back right to the ocean. We'll see what happens."

Would Maddon prefer to play the game on Oct. 1 if necessary?

"Of course, I think that would be optimal if we could do that," Maddon said. "Even when you get a day off when you get rained out, it's not a day off. Your motor is still running. You got up, you went through your routine, you practice like you normally practice. You get ready, then you sit when the game's not played. For us, the better outcome would be that the game would not be played, but if it is, we'll be there."

The Cubs have had to deal with nearly 11 hours of rain delays over the last three days.

"I'm going through mold remediation right now," Maddon joked.

Injury update: Heyward

Jason Heyward (right hamstring tightness) remained in Chicago to do his rehab rather than accompany the Cubs to Milwaukee or Washington, and on Monday, the outfielder was able to test his right leg by running outside. There have been no setbacks, Heyward said.

"Today is the most I got my legs involved outside," Heyward said. "I've been hitting inside off the tee, flips and I hit some [batting practice] off an arm today."

"The confidence is there. I just have to do the smart thing now and build my way back up to running and stuff like that."

Is there enough time?

"I'm going to do everything necessary to be smart about it," he said. "I plan on playing baseball. ... It's too late in the year to have any setbacks. I have to be smart."

Worth noting

- Class A Eugene opened the best-of-five Northwest League championship series with a 3-2 win over Spokane on Sunday. Levi Jordan hit a game-winning solo homer in the eighth inning. Nelson Velazquez and Luis Vazquez each had two hits and one RBI. The series continues on Monday.
- The Class A South Bend Cubs will host the 2019 Midwest League All-Star Game, presented by Four Winds Casino, on June 17-19.
- Funeral services will be held in Westchester, Ill., on Tuesday for Gene Da Cosse, who worked for more than 50 years with Wilson Sporting Goods. He died Sept. 6 at the age of 93.

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Cubs.com

Cubs fan delivers well-earned national anthem

By Matthew Martell

CHICAGO -- Stefan Xidas' lifelong dream to sing the national anthem at a Cubs game came true on Monday night before the club's series opener against the Brewers.

Xidas, a 30-year-old Special Olympian with Down Syndrome, wrote to Cubs owner Tom Ricketts with a proposition. Xidas would get to sing the anthem before a game if he raised \$5,000 for the Special Olympics Organization. As of Monday, his GoFundMe campaign had raised more than \$18,000.

"I'm feeling really, really awesome," Xidas said before singing. "I'm so excited. I just met the best Cubs players I have ever seen in my whole life."

About 10 minutes before first pitch, Xidas stepped to the microphone, took it all in and started to sing. When he was finished, the Wrigley Field crowd gave him a huge ovation, so loud that it was hard to hear him shout: "Go Cubs. Let's play ball!"

Chicago Cubs



@Cubs

What an honor to host Stefan Xidas at #WrigleyField! #EverybodyIn

This wasn't the first time Xidas has performed the national anthem at a Major League game. In 2005, he sang the anthem before a White Sox game at what was then U.S. Cellular Field -- now Guaranteed Rate Field. But being a Cubs fan, nothing could compare to singing at Wrigley.

"He's always said since then that he'd love to come here and do it," said Stan Xidas, Stefan's father. "Here we are. It's awesome."

Stan said there were over 100 friends and family members at Wrigley cheering Stefan on, all wearing red Cubs shirts with his name on the back.

"To be on the field, it just feels really awesome," Stefan said. "This is my shining moment right here."

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ESPNChicago.com

Jon Lester's departure leads to Brewers closing gap on Cubs

By Jesse Rogers

CHICAGO -- First, it was Jon Lester's back, then it was Josh Hader's arm. Both contributed to the Milwaukee Brewers' 3-2 win over the Chicago Cubs on Monday, drawing them to within one game of the two-time defending National League Central Division champions.

Lester had to leave after 5⅔ innings due to back spasms, handing the ball to much maligned reliever CJ Edwards, who promptly threw a wild one on his first pitch, allowing the winning run to score. Lester thought he might have hurt his back on a swing earlier in the game.

"I think it will be fine," he said afterward. "It's not anything painful, just kind of uncomfortable."

Painful was watching Edwards enter a tie game with men on second and third and two outs. It's a decision by Cubs manager Joe Maddon worthy of second guessing: Over his past 15 appearances, Edwards had walked 10 and given up eight hits. With a rested bullpen -- the Cubs were rained out Sunday -- Maddon could have chosen any number of arms, but instead, called upon the least reliable of his top relievers.

"I just wanted to reduce his outing tonight to one out," Maddon explained. "Once Jon was in the situation he was in, I thought, 'Get Carl out there, get one out, let him walk off the field, feel good about himself, and then you have the other guys for the rest of the game.'

"We need to get Carl straightened out. The symmetry of the bullpen is different without him out there. His skill set is really important to us. We have to get him right."

The Cubs do, indeed, need a good Edwards for October, but they might not get there by pitching him in a high-leverage situation right now. To add insult to injury, Edwards didn't exactly hustle to cover home on the wild pitch. And so after taking the lead, Brewers manager Craig Counsell called on Hader, the dynamic lefty, for the next two innings. He struck out all six batters he faced, the first time that has happened (facing at least six and striking them all out) for a pitcher since 2013, according to ESPN Stats & Information research.

"What are you going to do with that?" Lester said rhetorically. "The guy is throwing 97 mph. He's basically Chris Sale from a relief standpoint, with his angle and everything."

The Cubs stranded the tying run at second in the ninth, after Hader had already left. The Brewers have now won four in a row while the Cubs have dropped their past three after spending more time waiting to play during rain delays over the weekend in Washington than actually playing. Cubs second baseman Daniel Murphy was asked how he views a lead of just one game now.

"It's all through the lens you look at," he said. "We have 20 games left? [Actually 19.] We have a game lead? A lot of people would have taken that. I know I would have coming out of spring training or the All-Star break. We still have two games against Milwaukee here. Hopefully we can put up some crooked numbers and even the series up."

Scoring is a whole other issue for the Cubs right now. They aren't getting much production but from a few guys near the top of the lineup.

"After it gets past four/five, it really falls off a cliff a bit," Maddon said. "We really have to get the bottom part playing."

According to ESPN Stats & Information research, since Aug. 1, the Cubs' top five hitters in their lineup have an OPS of .807, good for seventh in the league. Their bottom four hitters rank 11th in the NL over that time frame, with a .605 OPS. On top of it all, because of rainouts, the Cubs are in the midst of reporting to the ballpark for 30 consecutive days. That stretch doesn't end until Sept. 20. And right now they're facing a hot rival, who's putting their third consecutive division title in jeopardy.

"They have a nice group and they have a nice bench," Maddon said of the Brewers. "And a variety of different arms in the bullpen. They are a really formidable opponent, no question."

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NBC Sports Chicago

Cubs see division lead dwindling: 'Tonight we beat ourselves'

By Jared Wyllys

In a division race between two teams so closely matched as the Cubs and Brewers, winning or losing sometimes comes down to the minutiae.

"Tonight we beat ourselves," Cubs starter Jon Lester said after Monday's 3-2 loss. "But that happens. Tonight was a good, clean baseball game. You gotta tip your hat sometimes. You gotta make the other team beat you with swinging the bats. Sometimes the other team throws the ball just a little bit better than you do."

Lester survived a wobbly first inning and was on his way to cruising through the 6th with a 2-2 tie when he struck out Jonathan Schoop, but he stood up awkwardly after, trying to shake off low back tightness.

After the game, both Lester and Cubs manager Joe Maddon indicated that there was no pain in his back, only discomfort, and for now it appears as though Lester will be fine to make his next start.

But it was the back issue that set up the decisive sequence as Lester was forced out of the game after allowing back-to-back hits.

After surrendering a broken-bat single to Mike Moustakas single, Lester threw an 0-1 fastball to catcher Erik Kratz, who dumped it into right field and moved Moustakas to third.

"I really can't throw a fastball down and away better to Kratz, and he does a good piece of hitting and hits it down the line," Lester said.

Maddon went to Carl Edwards, Jr. for what he hoped would be the final out of the inning. Instead, Edwards' first offering scooted to the backstop, allowing Moustakas to score the game-winning run.

"That was important there, again, because I just wanted to reduce his outing tonight to one out, and once Jon was in the situation that he was in, I thought, get Carl out there, get one out, let him walk off the field, feel good about himself," Maddon said. "We did get the one out, we just had a wild pitch, and all of a sudden a run scores."

Edwards got his one out by striking out Curtis Granderson to end the inning, but it was too late. Despite the undesirable outcome, Maddon recognizes the need to keep turning to Edwards in those spots.

"We need to get Carl straightened out. The symmetry of the bullpen is different without him out there," Maddon said. "His skill set is really important to us. We gotta get him right."

The wild pitch led to the decisive score, but the offense only managed two runs, striking out eight times in the final three innings.

"We gotta hit the ball," Maddon said. "We pitched well enough to win tonight, no question. You can dissect it any way you want, but just to score two runs again, you have to be more offensive."

The lead in the division is down to just one game and with two remaining in this series, the time is now for the Cubs to really separate themselves. They have played in plenty of big games before, so it does not appear that this pressure creates any sense of worry in the clubhouse.

Daniel Murphy saw no cause for concern after Monday's loss.

"I think it's all through the lens you look at," Murphy said. "So we've got, what, [19] games left? And we have a game lead. I think a lot of people would have taken that."

Murphy is playing alongside the group that he faced in both 2015 and 2017 in the crucible of the playoffs, and even in a loss like this one, he said he is impressed with how his teammates handle the big moments.

"The level of consistent approach. There's never any panic. There wasn't any panic in Milwaukee when we lost the first two and we won that last game on the way out of there," Murphy said. "And I don't feel that now."

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NBC Sports Chicago

Theo Epstein cautiously optimistic Brandon Morrow can be big part of Cubs' October bullpen

By Tony Andracki

The Cubs and Brandon Morrow didn't reach an agreement on a free-agent deal this winter by dreaming about the veteran right-hander picking up saves in May.

No, this was a move with October in mind on both sides.

After a career marred by injury, Morrow rose to prominence again last fall when he emerged as a dominant force out of the Dodgers bullpen and appeared in all seven games of the 2017 World Series.

It's hard to envision Morrow throwing all seven games for the Cubs in the World Series next month, but he and the team are cautiously optimistic he's moving toward a return and hoping he can be some sort of factor in the postseason.

Morrow has thrown off a mound just twice since the All-Star Break — once Aug. 18 in Pittsburgh and then Sunday in Washington D.C. as the Cubs got rained out.

Morrow only threw 25 pitches Sunday, but said he felt great and threw again from flat ground Monday afternoon/evening. He will throw another bullpen Wednesday at Wrigley Field and will presumably face his teammates in a simulated game a few days after that second bullpen.

That would put Morrow on track to return to the active roster at some point near the end of the weekend or early next week, fitting the timeline he laid out last week.

The bone bruise in Morrow's right forearm isn't fully healed and it's probably unrealistic to count on him being 100 percent at any point this fall.

But even if Morrow can't pitch on back-to-back days and is still effective while pitching through pain or discomfort, the Cubs will certainly take that.

"Once we understood what we were dealing with in terms of bone bruise and how you want to give as much time as possible to let that heal, but that there would probably come a time where if he's gonna give it a shot, he's gotta push to get back in game action to give him enough time to make an impact on

the season to get ready for October," Epstein said. "We did it with the hope of getting him enough appearances where he could be ready to roll by October.

"So we'll see if that comes to be. He's doing everything he possibly can. He really wants it. He signed here to pitch in October and obviously he's a weapon."

The Cubs have 19 games left after Monday night but with the possibility Thursday's rain makeup in D.C. gets moved again due to weather and becomes an "as needed" situation, time is starting to run out.

Morrow said over the weekend he and the team were targeting the end of this current Cubs homestand or beginning of next week's series in Arizona as a possible return date.

But that would leave only two weeks of action in a best case scenario, where the Cubs could script maybe three or four appearances for Morrow in the regular season before October hits.

The Cubs are not yet entertaining any notion that Morrow couldn't make it back to game action in September.

"Right now, there's plenty of time to get him multiple appearances in the regular season if things continue trending the right way," Epstein said.

If Morrow only has a certain amount of "bullets" in his arm, so to speak, the best use for him would be in October, when bullpens and closers become a huge part of every postseason game.

Without Morrow the last two months, Pedro Strop has seen most of the Cubs' save chances but Joe Maddon has also mixed and matched with guys like Jesse Chavez and Justin Wilson.

"We like our bullpen," Epstein said. "We've been a Top 5 bullpen all year and a lot of that has been without Brandon. But I'm optimistic he's gonna come back. That's what we do for the most part anyways — we match up, trying to play to guys' strengths, put them in a position to succeed, find a part of the lineup that can be most effective.

"When we have Brandon, we work from the eighth inning backward in that regard."

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NBC Sports Chicago

Cubs shut down Drew Smyly for the season

By Jared Wyllys

Just a week ago, there was still hope that the Cubs would be able to add Drew Smyly to their bullpen for the home stretch of the regular season, but news on Monday from team president Theo Epstein quashed that.

Speaking to reporters from the dugout at Wrigley Field, Epstein announced that Smyly would not be returning to the active roster in 2018.

"We had a conversation with him the other day where we shut him down for the season," Epstein said. "He did a great job to get back, fought through a lot of obstacles. Pitched a minor-league game, pitched a clean inning, which was awesome for him. He wanted to keep pushing and he really wanted badly to help this team, but realistically, we ran out of time. Ran out of minor-league games."

There had been the possibility that Smyly could pitch with the Triple-A Iowa Cubs on Labor Day, but a rainout there eliminated any chance of Smyly pitching in another minor league rehab assignment after his August 30 appearance with the Single-A South Bend affiliate.

"We want him to have a normal offseason, and he's been rehabbing for a long, long time," Epstein said. "We want him to have the benefit of a rest and a full winter to come back."

With only 20 games remaining on the schedule and Smyly not likely to be able to make back-to-back appearances, there would have been little opportunity for him to get back to full strength in time for the playoffs. Without that as an option, the choice to shelve Smyly was a little easier.

"Once we got to the point of ruling him out as a postseason roster candidate because he couldn't pitch back-to-back games, it really helped dictate the decision for us," Epstein said.

It wasn't an easy choice, Epstein admitted, especially because Smyly had worked so hard and was pushing hard to make at least one appearance in the majors this season, an important mental milestone for someone on such a long road of recovery.

In the end, however, the value of each of the remaining 20 games was too great for such an opportunity, and Epstein said that Smyly understood.

"At this point in the season, we have 20 games left, [and] every game is really important, we don't necessarily have that luxury. Also, it would cost someone their roster spot, so we didn't want to do that," Epstein said. "We just felt it was more important to end his season in order to get him the right kind of rest going forward, so we took it out of his hands. He felt strongly about wanting to push and contribute, but after explaining it to him, he accepted it and understands that we're operating on his best interest."

Smyly has not pitched since 2016 thanks to a left elbow injury that required Tommy John surgery over a year ago, and Epstein said that the plan for 2019 will be for him to go in to spring training as a starter.

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NBC Sports Chicago

No time for setbacks: Jason Heyward cautious, but expects to play in September

By Jared Wyllys

Jason Heyward is officially eligible to return from the 10-day disabled list after right hamstring tightness sidelined him on August 31, but he is choosing to resist the temptation to hasten his return to the Cubs.

Heyward told reporters Monday that he ran outside of the first time, and that he didn't experience anything that would cause him concern about his recovery.

"Confidence is there," Heyward said. "I just have to do the smart thing now and build my way back up."

For Heyward, this means getting to a point where both he and the team feel comfortable with him returning to the lineup, he said. If he were to rush back, aggravating the injury would potentially mean he is done for the season and possibly October as well.

But given the date on the calendar and number of games left, Heyward said that there is no wiggle room in his rehab.

"It's too late for me to have any setbacks," Heyward said, "so I just have to be smart and make sure I'm all the way there."

In Chicago while the team was finishing its lengthy road trip through Philadelphia, Milwaukee, and then Washington, Heyward said he worked on hitting off of a tee and having the ball flipped to him, as well as taking traditional batting practice.

It wasn't until Monday that he went outside and really tested his leg. With the closeness of the NL Central race, a more aggressive timeline might have been understandable, but the Cubs expect to need Heyward for more than just September. The right fielder avoided speaking to the postseason, but he said he expects to be back well before then, even with a more conservative approach to his injury.

"I'm going to do everything necessary to be smart about it, but I plan on playing baseball," Heyward said.

Along with his ever-present glove, Heyward has been a catalyst for the offense this season in ways not seen in 2016 or 2017. Before his injury, Heyward was hitting .275 on the season with 21 doubles. Getting him back in the remaining weeks of the regular season would likely be a boost, both in September and in the postseason.

In the meantime, Heyward is watching a very meaningful stretch of games and looking forward to his return.

"That's a no-brainer. I want to play baseball," Heyward said. "I want to play baseball at this time of year and help my team get the job done."

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Chicago Tribune

Cubs' lead cut to 1 game after loss to Brewers; Jon Lester leaves with lower-back tightness

By Mark Gonzales

With three weeks left in the season, Cubs President Theo Epstein declared this isn't the time to look for "trends and nitpick," especially with the Cubs trying to protect a shrinking National League Central lead entering Monday night's opener of a three-game series against the second-place Brewers.

"We're in a nice position to control your own destiny," Epstein said. "It's time to play. It doesn't matter if you're in a slump or walked a couple guys your last time out. You show up with an opportunity to win important ballgames. That's enough to get you going."

Unfortunately for the Cubs, veteran left-hander Jon Lester couldn't finish the sixth inning because of lower-back tightness. Inconsistent reliever Carl Edwards Jr. threw his first pitch to the backstop and was late to cover home plate, allowing Mike Moustakas to score the go-ahead run as the Brewers won 3-2 to cut the Cubs' lead to one game.

The lead is the Cubs' smallest since the morning of Aug. 6.

"It's all through the lens you look at," second baseman Daniel Murphy said of the Cubs' shrinking lead. "We got (19) games left, and we have a one-game lead. I think a lot of people would have taken that."

Brewers left-hander Josh Hader dampened the Cubs' outlook for a comeback, striking out all six batters he faced — including Kris Bryant, Anthony Rizzo and Javier Baez — in the seventh and eighth innings, using only 24 pitches.

The Cubs put the tying run on second with two out in the ninth, but Jeremy Jeffress struck out pinch-hitter Tommy La Stella to end the game.

Meanwhile, Lester's ailment was described as a spasm that shouldn't sideline him.

"I think it will be fine, hopefully," said Lester, who said the discomfort initially surfaced shortly after an at-bat earlier in the game. "It's not anything painful, just uncomfortable."

Edwards' failure to stabilize the situation was the latest in a series of recent shortcomings for the Cubs as they try not to dwell on the possibility of returning to Washington on Thursday after the rescheduling of Sunday's rainout.

Lester rebounded after allowing five hits in the first two innings, but he hopped briefly after delivering a third strike to Jonathan Schoop for the second out of the sixth. Lester received medical attention but stayed in the game, only to allow a single to Moustakas and a double to Erik Kratz before he left with trainer PJ Mainville.

After the wild pitch, Edwards issued a four-pitch walk to light-hitting Orlando Arcia before finishing the inning with a strikeout of pinch-hitter Curtis Granderson.

"We did get the one out, we just had a wild pitch and all of a sudden the run scores," manager Joe Maddon said. "We need to get Carl straightened out. The symmetry of the bullpen is different without him out there.

"His skill set is important to us. We got to get him right."

It was the latest in a series of stumbles for Edwards, who has walked five in 1 2/3 innings in his last four outings.

The wild pitch also stalled some of the momentum the Cubs built as they heeded Epstein's theme of concentrating on the present and forgetting about past failures.

Before the game, Cubs manager Joe Maddon said he couldn't recall being involved in a stretch of 30 days without a scheduled day off as the Cubs are facing.

"Not even as a fence installer, a hoagie maker, a limo driver," Maddon quipped. "I've never gone 30 in a row."

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Chicago Tribune

Cubs need to tidy up their offense, Carl Edwards Jr.'s woes after 3-2 loss to the Brewers

By Mark Gonzales

After Jon Lester said his back spasms shouldn't prevent him from making his next scheduled start, the Cubs left-hander emphasized he wasn't irritated by Friday's postponement of his start in Washington after only one inning.

"I don't think that's any lingering effect," Lester said after Monday's 3-2 loss to the Brewers.

"I can't control that stuff. I'm told when to pitch. I'm told when the game is supposed to start, and I go out there and try to perform. That's all I try to do. I'm not worried about any stuff I can't control. I can't control the weather. Neither can anyone else.

"I'm sure, especially a kid (Nationals pitcher Joe Ross) coming off Tommy John surgery, I highly doubt they wanted to start that game and screw with him. You can't control it. You have to try to combat it is best you can. If I'm told to pitch, I'll go out there and pitch."

Lester said he didn't feel great entering Monday's start, but that he's felt worse before.

The bigger issue for the Cubs, however, is generating more offense after they went 1-for-6 with runners in scoring position and stranded nine runners Monday. They also scored only once in the second game of Saturday's doubleheader against the Nationals after Victor Caratini's grand slam in the fourth inning, and they failed to score in the first six innings against Max Scherzer in a 10-3 loss in the first game.

The bottom of the order, in particular, has been stagnant.

The Cubs held a season-high five-game lead prior to their three-game series in Milwaukee on Sept. 3. They lost two of three there, and the Brewers now have a chance to seize the division lead by taking the next two games.

"There never was any panic when we lost the first two (in Milwaukee), and we won that last game on the way out of there," Cubs second baseman Daniel Murphy said. "And I don't feel that now.

"All we can do is control the process as players. The coaching staff is doing a great job of preparing us."

But even the simplest of duties can be difficult to execute, as embattled reliever Carl Edwards Jr. threw his first pitch to the backstop and was late in covering home plate in allowing Mike Moustakas to score the winning run in the sixth inning.

"I just wanted to reduce his outing to one out," manager Joe Maddon said.

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Chicago Tribune

Injured Brandon Morrow and Jason Heyward report progress in their quest to rejoin Cubs roster
By Mark Gonzales

With virtually no margin for error, closer Brandon Morrow and outfielder Jason Heyward took small strides toward rejoining the Cubs before the end of the regular season.

"I'm fine," Morrow said Monday, one day after throwing a light bullpen session and before he went to play catch. "So far, so good. I didn't wake up feeling terrible. It's good."

Heyward, who hasn't played since suffering a Grade 1 strain of his right hamstring on Aug. 30, ran outside for the first time under the supervision of the Cubs medical staff. He has continued to play catch and take batting practice.

Heyward declined to set a target date for his return.

"I'm just saying I'll do everything necessary to be smart about it, but I plan on playing baseball," Heyward said. "Nothing set me back. Everything is good there, but I have to do everything for them to clear me and for me to clear myself.

"It's too late in the year for me to have any setbacks."

Cubs President Theo Epstein expressed optimism that both players would return, even in the case of Morrow, who hasn't pitched since July 13 because of a bone bruise on his right forearm.

"He signed here to pitch in October, and he's obviously a weapon," Epstein said. "Right now, there's plenty of time to get him multiple appearances in the regular season if things continue to trend the right way."

Unfortunately for left-hander Drew Smyly, the Cubs shut down his attempt to return 14 months after undergoing Tommy John surgery.

Smyly pitched a scoreless inning for Class A South Bend on a minor league rehab assignment 10 days ago and threw in a few simulated games.

But Cubs officials felt Smyly ran out of time because they wanted Smyly to throw in more game situations instead of simulated games, and the minor-league season ended last week.

Also, the Cubs would have needed to make room for him on their 40-man roster.

"We wanted him to have a normal offseason," Epstein said. "He's been rehabbing for a long, long time. We wanted him to have the benefit of rest and a full winter to come back."

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Chicago Tribune

Anthem brings shining moment to Stefan Xidas, a Cubs fan with Down syndrome

By Phil Rogers

With a group of about 100 friends and family members watching from the upper deck at Wrigley Field, Cubs fan Stefan Xidas belted out the "The Star-Spangled Banner" before Monday's game against the Brewers.

Xidas, a New Trier High School graduate who has Down syndrome, wore a smile as big as the players' in the Cubs' World Series parade of 2016.

"This is my shining moment right here," he said. "It's been the best time I've ever had in my whole life."

Xidas rocked the anthem, standing tall and never missing a note. If it were possible for a crowd that was already standing to give someone a standing ovation, he would have received one.

"I have practiced so many times," the 30-year-old said beforehand. "Then I had some hot tea. Now that I'm on the field, I'm going to enjoy it. It's going to be the best."

Xidas challenged Cubs Chairman Tom Ricketts to allow him to sing the anthem in a GoFundMe campaign that raised \$18,600, to be donated to Special Olympics. The Cubs will match that donation, so Stefan's willingness to sing raised \$37,200 for the charity.

Stan Xidas, Stefan's father, credited two lifelong friends of his son for organizing the event.

"Since kindergarten, Stefan has had two really great friends, Tommy Molitor and John Rucinski," Stan said. "They were friends in neighborhood. They literally have enveloped his life, have done everything with him and for him. They have blessed Stefan beyond belief in his life, but it's so reciprocal."

Stefan sang the national anthem at U.S. Cellular Field before a White Sox game in 2005. Stan said he's wanted to try at Wrigley Field since then but wasn't able to arrange it until Molitor got the idea of using social media to bring attention to his campaign.

"Tommy, who happens to be a videographer, suggested we do a GoFundMe campaign," Stan said. "He put the whole thing together. This is all Tommy. It's awesome. Here we are."

The campaign hit home with those who know Stefan, and even some who don't.

"It just kind of took off after we put it on Facebook," Stan said. "Everybody was really supportive of it. We got calls after calls from friends and family. Donations started coming in. It was tremendous."

Stefan received a tour of the clubhouse before singing the anthem. He said it was great meeting Willson Contreras, Kyle Schwarber and Kris Bryant.

He's sending his good fortune the Cubs' way, just as he did with the Sox in '05.

"After I sing the national anthem, I told them that the Cubs will definitely go to the playoffs and they will win," he said. "I will make sure of it."

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Chicago Tribune

With hurricane looming, MLB should change venue for Thursday's Cubs-Nationals game or schedule it for end of season

By Paul Sullivan

The Cubs can't complain or cry about the decision to postpone Sunday's game in Washington because of nonstop rain.

And they won't complain or cry about losing their day off and having to fly back to Washington on Thursday to play a late afternoon makeup game.

But they should complain and cry about Major League Baseball's decision to play the game in Washington with a potential Category 4 or 5 hurricane bearing down on the mid-Atlantic region.

Hurricane Florence is expected to hit land south of Washington, but playing dodgeball with a hurricane is the best-case scenario. The Cubs would have to get in town, get the game in and leave before the

heavy rain and wind hits the area. The worst-case scenario is they would spend even more time waiting out a rain delay, compounding the half-day rain delays from Friday through Sunday, and have the whole trip go for naught.

“It’s on the schedule, but obviously the biggest story in the country right now is the hurricane,” Cubs President Theo Epstein said before Monday’s game against the Brewers. “And we wish everyone the best in terms of safety. So we’re just going to keep an eye on it. Common sense will prevail I’m sure.”

If common sense prevails, that suggests MLB will not ask two teams to play a game in a city with a hurricane approaching.

“The things we can control internally, we’re taking a look at to see what we can do to make things more manageable,” Epstein said. “As far as the makeup game itself, that’s an MLB issue.”

Epstein said the Cubs have no say in MLB’s decision.

“Our voices have certainly been heard,” he said. “But we don’t have any control.”

Of course, it would be much easier for MLB to simply schedule the Cubs-Nationals game for the day after the season ends and then cancel it if it has no implications in the National League playoff race or for best record. But that would be too easy.

“That would be optimal if we could do that,” manager Joe Maddon said. “I know what the rules are. But even when you get a day off when you get rained out, it’s really not a day off. People have to understand that. Your motor is still running. ... Of course for us, the better outcome would be the game would not be played, possibly. But if it is, we’re going to be there.”

The Cubs could also ask to change Friday’s game time to give them more rest returning home, but so far that hasn’t been pushed, Maddon said.

if they don’t cancel the makeup game, switching it to a day game in Chicago — or even in Milwaukee if the Nationals are worried about giving the Cubs home-field advantage — makes sense. It’s not unprecedented, and it’s obviously doable.

Last year MLB switched a mid-September Marlins-Brewers series from Miami to Milwaukee because of Hurricane Irma and an Astros-Rangers series to Tropicana Field in St. Petersburg, Fla., because of Hurricane Harvey.

In 2004 officials moved a Marlins home game against the Cubs to Wrigley Field because of Hurricane Frances and a pair of home games against the Expos to U.S. Cellular Field because of Hurricane Ivan.

The Cubs and Astros relocated from Houston’s Minute Maid Park to Milwaukee’s Miller Park in 2008 because of Hurricane Ike, playing a Sunday night game that resulted in Carlos Zambrano tossing a no-hitter. The teams played another game that Monday and the third game was canceled, leaving both with 161 games that season.

The Nationals are in Philadelphia on Wednesday. Rain is expected there most of the week, and Monday night’s game was postponed and will be made up as part of a doubleheader Tuesday. They would have to fly to Chicago (or perhaps Milwaukee) for a makeup game Thursday, then fly south to Atlanta to start a weekend series against the Braves.

The Cubs are home all week, so they would be set if they played at home or at a nearby venue.

Maybe the Brewers, Cardinals, Braves, Dodgers, Rockies and Diamondbacks would complain and cry, but so be it.

Still, the best option would be no game at all. After cursing the rain all weekend, the Cubs might want to pray for rain Thursday to get out of going to Washington.

“If the weather cooperates, maybe we get that day off,” Epstein said. “I don’t mean to be glib. We don’t want anyone to suffer at all in the hurricane. But if it’s raining in D.C. on Thursday and we get that day off, it would be nice for our guys to get a well-earned off day.”

Hopefully common sense prevails and MLB makes the right call. But what are the odds of that? Officials made the wrong call Friday by starting a game in Washington when they knew it would be delayed by showers after a couple of innings.

It would be nice if MLB could focus on the great races in the NL and not making sure everyone plays a 162-game schedule.

“There’s 20 games left,” Epstein said. “We’re in a really nice position and control our own destiny. How many cliches do you want? It’s time to play.”

And Thursday should be time to take a day off.

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Chicago Tribune

Mike Montgomery waiting in the wings to start Thursday at Nationals

By Mark Gonzales

The Cubs were victims of two rainouts in Washington last weekend, but manager Joe Maddon didn’t lose his sense of humor when asked if he’s no longer wet.

“I’m going through mold remediation right now,” Maddon said Monday.

If the Cubs actually play Sunday’s postponed game on Thursday, left-hander Mike Montgomery said he was informed to be ready to pitch against the Nationals, who likely will send ace Max Scherzer to the mound.

The rotation will remain intact throughout the week unless Thursday’s game is postponed.

Meanwhile, Maddon all but ruled out Montgomery’s availability as a reliever for the current three-game series against the Brewers. Montgomery has not pitched since Tuesday.

Also, Cubs President Theo Epstein likes the quality and depth of his bullpen even if closer Brandon Morrow doesn’t return from a bone bruise on his right forearm.

“We’ve been a top-five bullpen all year,” Epstein said. “A lot of that has been without Brandon. We’re optimistic he’s going to come back. (Matchups) are what we want to do for the most part. We try to play to the guy’s strengths. Put them in a position to succeed and put them in a position where they’re most effective.”

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Chicago Sun-Times

Jon Lester exits with stiff back, Cubs' lead down to one after loss to Brewers

By Gordon Wittenmyer

And you thought Packers quarterback Aaron Rodgers was going to be as bad as it got for Chicago fans this week.

Less than 24 hours after the Bears' collapse in Green Bay, the baseball season got very real very quickly for the Cubs, who have led the National League Central and have had the best record in the league the entire second half.

Five-plus innings into the opener of a critical series against the second-place Brewers, the Cubs watched 15-game winner and ace Jon Lester leave the game because of tightness in his lower back. They went on to lose 3-2 to see their division lead shrink to one game.

That's the smallest the Cubs' lead has been since Aug. 5. The Brewers have made up 3½ games since Thursday, with the last two games of the season series coming up the next two days.

"They're good," manager Joe Maddon said of the Brewers, who have won 10 of their last 12 games. "When Liston fought Ali, it wasn't just a walk in the park for Ali.

"We have to play at the top of our game to beat them. . . . It's not easy putting the Brewers away."

It might be harder for the Cubs to put anybody away if Lester's back continues to bother him into Tuesday and if slugger Kyle Schwarber's back pain lingers much longer.

Maddon said he considers Lester's back to be a minor issue after he seemed to improve quickly after leaving the game.

"I think it'll be fine — hopefully," said Lester, who allowed back-to-back two-out hits in the sixth before leaving. "It's not anything painful, just kind of uncomfortable. After I got out of the game and came up here, it felt a lot better. Hopefully tomorrow will be the same."

Lester said he's not sure whether he hurt it on a swing-and-miss in the fifth.

"I came back in, sat down and was fine," he said. "And then I went to stand up to go out there, and it didn't feel all that great. I don't know if that was it or just [pitching one inning before a rainout] Friday to today or what. But I don't think it's going to be anything that's going to stick around."

With the score tied 2-2, Lester struck out Jonathan Schoop for the second out of the sixth. But third baseman Javy Baez and catcher Willson Contreras immediately signaled to the dugout and approached the mound. After a brief visit from the trainer, Lester stayed in the game.

Mike Moustakas then singled to right-center before Erik Kratz followed with a double into the right-field corner. That brought Maddon and the trainer back to the mound to retrieve Lester.

In came reliever Carl Edwards Jr., who promptly uncorked a wild pitch to allow what proved to be the winning run to score.

Lester's next start would be Saturday. And if weather forces another postponement of the makeup game Thursday against the Nationals in Washington, the Cubs wouldn't need a fifth starter until Sept. 19 should Lester be sidelined or need extra time.

Meanwhile, a team in the 21st day of a scheduled 23-games-in-23-days grind now faces potentially its toughest stretch drive of this four-year competitive window.

The Brewers are hot. The Cubs have lost three games in a row and five of their last seven. The bullpen is teetering. A rotation that already has plugged in its sixth starter (Mike Montgomery) and traded for another (Cole Hamels) now monitors the health of its ace. And the lineup is an abyss after the first five in the order, especially with Schwarber out for at least a few more days.

"I'm really pleased with how our guys have fought through all this," Maddon said.

With maybe their biggest fight of the season facing them in the final 19 games.

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Chicago Sun-Times

Cubs hopeful 'common sense' results in no return to D.C. on Thursday

By Gordon Wittenmyer

Cubs president Theo Epstein said he's counting on the likelihood that "common sense will prevail" when it comes to Major League Baseball's final call on whether the Cubs and Nationals must return Thursday to Washington with a hurricane bearing down on the region to make up the game that was rained out Sunday.

MLB? Common sense?

Enjoy the rain in Washington, boys.

If the ugly forecast for Thursday persists, MLB could decide to push the scheduled 3:05 p.m. makeup game to Oct. 1, when it would be played only if necessary to determine a playoff berth.

The Cubs and Nats sat through three hours of rain Sunday at Nationals Park before MLB's unpopular decision to reschedule the game for Thursday.

That's what the Cubs wanted from the outset as they sat through more than three hours of rain Sunday before the postponement.

Epstein said the lines of communication with MLB remain open as all parties monitor the weather updates.

Meanwhile, the Cubs are looking into whether they can push back the 1:20 p.m. start time for their home game Friday against the Reds should they be forced to make the one-game trip to Washington.

"The things we can control internally, we're taking a look at to see what we can do to make things more manageable," Epstein said. "As far as the makeup game itself, that's an MLB issue."

With at least a small amount of team lobbying.

“Our voices certainly have been heard,” Epstein said. “But we don’t have any control.”

The Cubs were already in the final series this week of a scheduled 23-games-in-23-days stretch, a season-worst grind that would turn into 30 consecutive days at a ballpark if they play Thursday.

“Not even as a hoagie-maker, limousine driver or fence-installer did I ever go 30 days in a row,” manager Joe Maddon said.

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Chicago Sun-Times

Cubs’ Jason Heyward on timeline after testing hammy: ‘As soon as possible’

By Gordon Wittenmyer

Right fielder Jason Heyward made no promises and dodged any talk of timelines, but he seemed upbeat after the first on-field test of his injured right hamstring Monday.

Heyward, who stayed back in Chicago for treatment when the Cubs traveled to Washington last week, said his first jogging session since suffering the injury Aug. 30 went well.

“It’s good stuff; the confidence is there in it,” Heyward said. “I just have to do the smart thing now and build my way back to running and stuff like that.

“No setbacks. But I just have to do everything for them to clear me and for me to clear myself to be able to go out there and do everything I need to do to help us. It’s too late in the year to have any setbacks, so I’ve just got to be smart and make sure I’m all the way [back].”

Heyward felt his right hamstring "pop" trying to make a diving catch on this play in Atlanta on Aug. 30.

Back this month with a primary focus on being ready for October?

“I’m just going to do everything I can to be back and play as soon as possible,” he said.

Morrow still possible . . .

Closer Brandon Morrow played catch again, and team president Theo Epstein and manager Joe Maddon continued to express optimism about his return this season from a bone bruise in his right elbow.

“I think it would be an open-minded situation, really relying a lot on what he says to us,” Maddon said a day after Morrow threw a light bullpen session.

Epstein said he expects Morrow to throw another bullpen in the next few days. Maddon said he thinks it’s possible Morrow will be back in a game by the end of the month.

. . . but Smyly not

Left-hander Drew Smyly has been shut down for the rest of the season despite making strong progress in his rehab from Tommy John surgery and his desire to pitch for the Cubs down the stretch. He had a strong rehab appearance before the minor-league season ended.

“We want him to have the benefit of rest and a full winter,” said Epstein, who has Smyly penciled into the rotation picture next spring. “Once we got to the point of ruling him out as a postseason-roster candidate because he couldn’t pitch back-to-back games, it really helped dictate the decision for us.”

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