



CHICAGO CUBS DAILY CLIPS

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May 12, 2018

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- Chicago Tribune, **Column: Willson Contreras' huge day exposes big-as-ever gap between Cubs and White Sox**
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NBC Sports Chicago

The most mind-boggling facts about Willson Contreras' monster day

By Tony Andracki

Maybe the Cubs ought to think about having a Willson Contreras bobblehead day more often.

On the day fans at Wrigley Field received a tiny plastic Contreras figurine, the Cubs catcher went BIG in real life in the first game of the 2018 Crosstown series.

Contreras hit a grand slam in the first inning, picked a runner off second base and then proceeded to hammer another homer and two doubles to finish with a career-high 7 RBI.

It's days like these why I was all aboard the Contreras MVP bandwagon before the season.

And it's weeks like these why so many people have valid arguments that Contreras is the best catcher in baseball right now.

Friday's performance in the Cubs' 11-2 victory over the White Sox was certainly legendary, but Contreras had a game to remember Wednesday, too, collected two triples and a double while scoring a pair of runs and driving in one.

He woke up Wednesday morning with a .230 batting average, .315 on-base percentage and .354 slugging percentage (.669 OPS). Two games later, he now boasts a .268/.343/.488 slash line with an .831 OPS.

Yes, over the course of just two games, Contreras raised his season OPS 162 full points.

He's also the only Cub ever to collect seven extra-base hits in a two-game span (research goes back to the 1913 season).

"I think we all knew it was coming," Friday's Cubs starter Tyler Chatwood said. "It was just a matter of time before he broke through a little bit."

Contreras can't point to anything specific behind his big game.

"I just think that it's part of the game," he said. "Baseball is one of ups and downs and it was just a matter of getting in the right rhythm. I think of the beginning of this year to that of last year, I'm not expecting myself to have the same start to every season, but it's just a matter of making adjustments necessary on the field."

Here are more mind-boggling facts on Contreras' monster game:

FanGraphs rated him as worth .4 WAR just for the one game:

So what led to such an explosive game from the Cubs catcher?

"He's just good," Joe Maddon said. "When a guy's good, if he's not hurt, I think he's eventually gonna show up. You know how hard he is on himself. He's getting the ball on the barrel. ... I just think it was a matter of time."

So it had nothing to do with his bobblehead?

"You know what? I didn't even realize that," Maddon joked, "but more than anything I just said, that's absolutely correct. It had everything to do with the bobblehead."

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NBC Sports Chicago

The state of the National League is good news for the Cubs

By Tony Andracki

Now is the time for the Cubs to strike in the National League.

Yes, it's only May and the season isn't even a quarter of the way over yet.

But the NL powerhouses may not get any weaker than it is at this very moment and the Cubs are primed to take advantage.

Take the Los Angeles Dodgers, for example.

The team that made it all the way to Game 7 of the World Series and the squad that bounced the Cubs from the postseason last year woke up Friday morning with a 16-21 record after losing to the Cincinnati

Reds Thursday night. For perspective, the Dodgers have only 5 more wins this year than the Reds — a rebuilding team without a prayer of contending and already fired their manager weeks ago.

"We talk about it in the clubhouse: This isn't a 'try' league," Dodgers manager Dave Roberts said Thursday night. "Everyone is trying. You've got to get production. When you can't get separation, it stresses everyone. We've got to be better at all facets of the game, to be honest."

The Dodgers will not play a single game with both Corey Seager and Justin Turner in their lineup in 2018, given that Turner is still not back from a wrist injury and Seager is now done for the year after Tommy John surgery. Given their importance to the L.A. lineup, that's the equivalence of the Cubs never playing a game with both members of Bryzso in the lineup together at the same time.

As Joe Maddon has astutely pointed out twice in the last week, the Dodgers always use the 10-day disabled list liberally, but they're also currently without Clayton Kershaw, Logan Forsythe, Tony Cingrani and Hyun-Jin Ryu (who is expected to be out for months) and they just got Yasiel Puig and Rich Hill back off the shelf. That's a significant chunk of the roster's impact players.

The Dodgers' best hitter all year has actually been Matt Kemp (.333 AVG, .913 OPS), who was acquired as a flyer of sorts in a salary dump trade with the Atlanta Braves.

Let's move to the NL East, where the Washington Nationals haven't had much better luck on the injury front.

It was just announced late Thursday Adam Eaton would be out indefinitely after undergoing surgery on his tricky ankle. He's played just 31 games in a Washington uniform since coming over in the deal with the White Sox before the 2017 season.

Daniel Murphy hasn't played a game yet this season, Anthony Rendon and Matt Wieters have missed time and a slew of pitchers (Joe Ross, Koda Glover, Joaquin Benoit, Matt Grace, Jhonatan Solano) are on the disabled list recovering from arm injuries.

All that has led to Bryce Harper in the leadoff spot (the only way new manager Davey Martinez can find protection in the lineup for Kris Bryant's bestie), a mildly disappointing 21-18 record and third place standing in the division behind both the Atlanta Braves and Philadelphia Phillies.

Coming into the season, the Dodgers and Nationals were seen as the Cubs' main competitors in the race to the NL pennant and both teams have gotten off to slow starts.

In the Cubs' own division, they sit in fourth place, but just 1.5 games behind the leading Cardinals who just swept Bryzso and Co. in St. Louis last weekend.

The Cardinals also just lost their ace and the NL leader in ERA — Carlos Martinez — due to a lat injury. Of course, St. Louis is also without its heartbeat as Yadier Molina will miss more than a month after taking a Kris Bryant foul tip to the groin last Saturday.

Meanwhile, the Milwaukee Brewers woke up Friday morning with a run differential of 0, which would normally not lend itself to a 22-16 record. Josh Hader and the Milwaukee bullpen have been incredible, but the first six weeks of the season have not answered many questions about the longevity and staying power of the Brewers rotation.

The Cubs will tell you they only care about themselves and can't waste their energy focusing on their competitors in the NL. But now could be a prime time to stack a bunch of wins together and this is the right part of the schedule to do so.

The Jekyll and Hyde Cubs offense has received a major gift from the MLB schedule-makers, beginning with the three games against the Marlins earlier in the week. That kicked off a stretch where 9 of 13 Cubs games come against three of the six worst pitching staffs in baseball (Marlins, White Sox, Reds). The other four games are against a Braves pitching staff that has been overperforming to date based on their peripheral stats.

Sure, the Cubs embarked on an 11-games-in-10-days run beginning with Game 1 of Crosstown Friday, but when 7 of those games come against the lowly White Sox and Reds and a team has as much position-player depth as the Cubs do, it shouldn't be too hard to put together a couple of nice weeks in a row offensively.

Now it's just a matter of the Cubs taking care of business and doing what they're supposed to do against a soft part of the schedule.

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NBC Sports Chicago

How a White Sox hat led Andre Dawson to the Cubs

By Tony Andracki

Andre Dawson knows what it's like to be on both sides of Chicago's Crosstown rivalry.

Well, not really.

But he at least knows what it's like to wear a White Sox hat, even if he never played on the South Side.

Dawson tried on a White Sox hat one time in the middle of the 1986 season, just months away from his first foray into free agency. He was being connected to the Sox in trade rumors and was convinced once by a grounds crew member to put on a White Sox hat.

That one moment of fate helped lead Dawson to Chicago's North Side, where he won the National League MVP Award the next summer.

Let him explain:

"Year 10 when I was a free agent, I was being mentioned in rumors about a trade involving myself going to the White Sox for Daryl Boston. My name was mentioned and it was prior to my having 10-and-5 status. I met a guy that was on the grounds crew and he was a big White Sox fan. He had a Chicago White Sox hat on while he was out tending to the ground crew duties.

"I walked over to him and said, 'do you mind if I borrow your hat?' and he said 'no.' And he said 'you can keep it if you want it.' I said 'no, I don't really want it.' Anyway, I took that hat and I put it on and I can remember asking Warren Cromartie how I looked in this hat. Cro started laughing and said you know somebody is probably going to take a picture of you with this hat on.

“It didn’t even dawn on me that I was doing something inappropriate, I just wanted to see how I looked with the hat on. Well, as it turned out, they just didn’t appreciate that I was out on the field with the White Sox hat on. The trade never came to fruition. I wound up ending the season in Montreal, but Chicago, just the thought of Chicago, not the White Sox per se, but Chicago, I kind of think it had a ring to it.”

Dawson was granted free agency after the '86 season and inked a deal with the Cubs, where he spent the next 6 seasons.

"The Hawk" led the league with 49 homers and 137 RBI in 1987, taking home MVP honors for a last-place club.

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Chicago Tribune

Column: Willson Contreras' huge day exposes big-as-ever gap between Cubs and White Sox
By David Haugh

Pausing long enough to take a selfie, Cubs catcher Willson Contreras admired his 435-foot shot into the left-center-field bleachers in the sixth inning of Friday’s 11-2 laugher over the White Sox at Wrigley Field.

Contreras’ solo home run on a historic day for him was something to behold — unlike the lopsided game itself.

“I was able to keep everything simple,” Contreras said after going 4-for-5 with two homers and seven RBIs.

This appears as far away as the Cubs and Sox ever have been from each other, and the gap stretches considerably more than the eight miles that separate the ballparks. They play the same game in the same city but compete on different planes. This resembles rock bottom for a Sox team on pace to lose 120 games. The Cubs, meanwhile, look like the Cubs again after finishing a productive work week with their fourth straight victory.

The schedule gods blessed the Cubs with back-to-back patsies in the Sox and Marlins, two of the worst teams in baseball, and they responded the way good teams should. They dominated. After exploding for 31 runs in a three-game sweep of the Marlins, Cubs hitters whacked the batting-practice fastballs Sox pitchers offered for 11 more. As the Sox’s fifth starter, Carson Fulmer looked like a middle reliever.

Sox manager Rick Renteria finally pulled Fulmer after 59 pitches with two on and two outs in the second, likely afraid left-handed slugger Kyle Schwarber would hit the ball to Lake Michigan. If Fulmer was bad, the Sox bullpen was worse, with Contreras doing the most damage. On Willson Contreras Bobblehead Day, he sent two souvenirs into the seats and supplied a keepsake performance. Contreras had nine RBIs in the first 34 games. He drove in seven runs Friday.

“It had everything to do with the bobblehead,” Cubs manager Joe Maddon kidded.

And Cubs fans nodded in agreement.

Besides two homers and two doubles, Contreras relished picking Matt Davidson off second base most.

“The turning point of the game,” Contreras said.

His enthusiastic fist pump after the play added oomph to an atmosphere that needed it.

Besides no comparison between the teams, there was noticeably no Hawk Harrelson, no warmth as the temperature dipped to 49 degrees and no buzz beyond Clark and Addison. By the ninth inning, a crowd of 39,585 had thinned to fewer than 10,000 fans.

The Sox checked out much earlier. The pickoff and failure to execute a two-strike bunt in the third inning reminded everybody why the Sox have only nine victories.

Before the game, Maddon related to the Sox's struggles as he reminisced about the 197 games he lost as manager of the Rays in 2006 and '07. A 97-victory breakthrough came in 2008 after the Rays added established leaders such as Cliff Floyd and Eric Hinske before losing became a habit among younger players.

"Guys get used to that," Maddon said. "They have to understand it's really easy to lose but very difficult to win. That's where the veteran guys come in."

Maddon repeated what he believes are the five stages of being a major-league baseball player, a process worth considering every time another Sox prospect gets a long look on the South Side.

Level 1: Players are just happy to be in the majors.

Level 2: Players realize how much they enjoy being a professional and will do anything necessary to survive and stay in the big leagues.

"It has nothing to do with winning and everything to do with not screwing up — and that's not going to help you win," Maddon said.

Level 3: Players commit to doing whatever they can to see how long their career can last.

Level 4: Players want to make as much money as possible.

Level 5: All players want to do is win.

"It takes awhile to get there," Maddon said.

In the clubhouse of a winning team like the Cubs, how many players have reached Level 5?

"I think at least 90 percent because if you're not, the guys that are are going to grab you," Maddon said. "It's about showing up and putting the well-being of the team ahead of your own well-being. Quantifiably, you can't build a chart or a matrix to say how important that is."

Nor can outsiders gauge the impact of the intangibles Maddon references. The Cubs underwent a similar metamorphosis in 2014 after two historically bad seasons, a culture change signaled in a July 10 game that season when Anthony Rizzo threw his glove down in Cincinnati and walked toward the Reds dugout willing to take on all comers. Renteria, who managed that Cubs team, referenced the incident Friday when praising Rizzo's leadership.

"A big moment," Renteria said.

The Sox need something similar to happen this season.

“There are a lot positives going on as much as it seems like it is not,” Renteria said. “It’s tough to see it when you’re going through it. The biggest thing is (players) realize that nobody is going to feel sorry for us. We have to continue to grind.”

The Sox expected this. They created this. Eventually, they will be better for this.

One day in the next few years, the Sox envision again challenging for city supremacy instead of being the ant to the Cubs’ shoe. A baseball romantic asked Maddon if he ever considered an all-Chicago World Series.

“I’d love to be there for that,” Maddon said. “That probably is the epitome. I can’t even imagine what that would be like.”

This was hardly a day that captured the imagination for such an occasion.

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Chicago Tribune

Column: Willson Contreras' 2 homers, 7 RBIs launch Cubs to 11-2 victory over White Sox

By Paul Sullivan

The Cubs have been waiting patiently for Willson Contreras to bust out of his early season slump, knowing his power stroke eventually would return.

The wait ended on a cold Friday afternoon at Wrigley Field when the Cubs catcher celebrated his bobblehead day promotion with a pair of home runs and a career-high seven RBIs in an 11-2 romp over the White Sox.

Has to be the bobblehead, right?

“That’s absolutely correct,” manager Joe Maddon cracked. “It had everything to do with the bobblehead.”

Of course it had nothing to do with the bobblehead and everything to do with Contreras’ talent. He established himself as one of the game’s best-hitting catchers last year and was the club’s most valuable player when the Cubs made their big run at the start of the second half before he suffered a hamstring injury in August.

But he has struggled to live up to the hype in 2018, failing to deliver when it mattered most. Contreras came into the opener of the City Series with only one home run and nine RBIs, hitting .147 with runners in scoring position, the 11th worst average in the majors.

That all changed on freaky Friday when he cranked a first-inning grand slam off Carson Fulmer to make it 5-0, hit a solo home run in the sixth and added a two-run double in the seventh. In one afternoon, all his worries drifted away like a hot dog wrapper floating across the outfield grass.

Willson was back to being Willson again.

Contreras wound up 4-for-5 with two doubles to go along with his two homers, becoming the first Cub with seven extra-base hits over two games since at least 1913, as far as those records go back.

“Baseball is a game of ups and downs, and it was just a matter of getting in the right rhythm,” Contreras said through an interpreter. “I think of the beginning of this year to that of last year, and I’m not expecting to have the same start to every season. It’s just a matter of making the adjustments necessary on the field.”

In his last two games, Contreras is 7-for-10 with three doubles, two triples, two homers and eight RBIs. He’s the first Cub with three or more extra-base hits in back-to-back games since Billy Williams on Sept. 8-10, 1968, and the third to do so since 1908, joining Randy Hundley (1966).

“I definitely think the last couple of games have been two of my best so far,” he said. “But just like I’ve had two really good back-to-back games I’ve also had some games where I was making solid contact but hitting it right at people.”

Contreras enjoyed watching both of his shots, and who could blame him?

Despite a 17 mph wind blowing in from right, the first one landed in the front row of the left-field bleachers. He ran sideways out of the box, confident the wind would not hold it back. The second one nearly hit the video board, and he barely moved after crushing the pitch from Chris Beck.

Maddon pointed out a defensive play by Contreras was just as important. With runners on first and second and no outs in the third, Contreras picked Matt Davidson off second base.

“I think it was the turning point in the game for us,” Contreras said.

While the Sox are having an awful season, even by rebuild standards, most thought they could ramp up their game for a showdown against their crosstown rivals. During the Sox rebuild in 1999, they swept the red-hot Cubs at Wrigley and it precipitated an epic plunge from which the North Siders never recovered.

But Friday was not that day.

The Cubs capitalized on the Sox weaknesses, pounding Fulmer and the bullpen.

Kris Bryant also homered and drove in two runs, and the Cubs knocked out 15 hits. Tyler Chatwood (3-3) notched the victory with an uninspiring five-inning outing in which he allowed two runs on three hits and five walks.

Contreras said he was thankful to the Cubs for giving him a bobblehead. The Cubs were thankful the old Contreras returned.

“Honestly I’m just glad that I was able to keep everything simple,” he said. “That was my approach today and I was able to do pretty well today.”

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Chicago Tribune

Yu Darvish moved back one more day in Cubs rotation

By Paul Sullivan

Yu Darvish avoided the possibility of being booed again Monday at Wrigley Field when he was pushed back in the rotation.

Manager Joe Maddon said Jose Quintana will start Monday in the makeup game against the Braves at Wrigley, replacing Darvish, who was booed in his last start against the Rockies and later was placed on the 10-day disabled list with the flu.

Maddon said the Cubs wanted to give Darvish "one extra day" off, though he didn't elaborate.

Darvish, who has missed one start, appears to be fine and now will start Tuesday in Atlanta. Darvish is 0-3 with a 6.00 earned-run average after signing a six-year, \$126 million deal just before the start of spring training.

Walk away: Starter Tyler Chatwood added to his league-leading walk totals with five more in a five-inning outing in the 11-2 victory over the White Sox, giving him 32 in 37 2/3 innings.

The Cubs don't seem all that concerned that he has given up five or more walks in five of his seven starts. His opponents batting average was a miniscule .204 entering Friday's game, so the only thing really hurting him is the walks.

"His spin rate is ridiculous," catcher Willson Contreras said. "Honestly, it reminds me a lot of (Jake) Arrieta's sinker. It moves a lot and it's just a matter of him making the necessary adjustments. I'm sure he will because he's a great pitcher."

Chatwood said: "I'm putting myself in bad spots rather than making them hit it, especially with the lead I had. I need to do that a little more."

Low key affair: Chicago police patrolled the outside of Wrigley Field like it was a playoff game Friday, with several officers on horseback on Clark Street as though they were expecting trouble. But the cold weather and lopsided score convinced most of the fans to leave early, and the heavy police presence was unnecessary.

Most observers agreed there were far fewer White Sox fans in attendance than in past years, but Kyle Schwarber said it wasn't much different.

"I had a couple yelling at me in the outfield," he said. "I'm sure as this weekend keeps going it'll keep going."

Schwarber had a beer thrown at him at Sox Park in 2015, which he laughed about.

"That was the first and only time I've had a beer thrown at me," he said. "It was half full. I was like, 'C'mon man, someone wasted a great beer here.'"

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Chicago Sun-Times

Bobble power? Willson Contreras brings life to Cubs-Sox series, doll in rout

By Gordon Wittenmyer

The annual Cubs-Sox series opened Friday on a damp, windy 49-degree afternoon with little hoopla or buzz.

So Willson Contreras brought his own.

The Cubs catcher had the biggest offensive game of his career on the day the team handed out 10,000 Contreras bobblehead dolls in an 11-2 rout against the tanking White Sox at Wrigley Field.

Manager Joe Maddon said it was only a matter of time until Contreras would break out. He has put in the work, and it has paid off as his swing has improved. He's using more of a gap-to-gap approach now.

But none of those career-high 12 total bases or career-high seven RBI happened until the bobblehead arrived in the morning.

"You know what, more than anything, I just said, that's absolutely correct," Maddon said. "It had everything to do with the bobblehead."

Contreras — who tripled twice and doubled in his previous game — opened with a grand slam to cap a five-run first, then added a bloop double to right in the fourth, a solo homer to left in the sixth and a two-run double to right in a four-run seventh.

"We all know what kind of hitter he is," Kyle Schwarber said. "He's an energetic player, and when he gets going, it brings a lot of energy to us. If he keeps this up, there's going to be a lot of good things coming."

Contreras, who had been the National League Player of the Week last August when he suffered a hamstring injury that cost him a month, is believed to be the first Cub with seven extra-base hits in a two-game span (records go back to 1913).

He also picked off Matt Davidson at second base for the first out of the third inning after starter Tyler Chatwood (3-3) walked the first two batters.

"It's unbelievable," said Chatwood. "I think we all knew it was coming. It was just a matter of time before he broke through."

Contreras said it was just a "simple approach" that resulted in the big outburst. He saw a 37-point spike in his batting average and 127-point jump in slugging percentage.

"It's just part of the game," Contreras said. "Baseball is a game of ups and downs. It's a matter of making adjustments."

He became only the third catcher since the dead-ball era (pre-1920) with at least four extra-base hits and seven RBI in a game, according to ESPN Stats and Info, and the first since Mike Piazza in 1995. Cubs catcher George Mitterwald was the other, in 1974.

The Cubs picked up their fourth consecutive victory — three of them by blowout scores — during the seven-game homestand.

The Cubs' sixth victory in their last seven games against the White Sox also included another torrid day at the plate for Kris Bryant, who hit his fifth home run in eight games on a day he reached base five out of six times.

Bryant has reached on a hit, walk or hit-by-pitch in nine of his last 11 plate appearances and 13 of 18 during the homestand (four games).

“When he’s on base, it sets it up for everybody else,” Maddon said of the No. 2 hitter in his lineup.

The Cubs’ 10 extra-base hits Wednesday and seven more Friday marked the first two games in which they’d hit that total since 2011.

Most of which started with Contreras — maybe even before the game began.

“I’m just really thankful to the team for giving me my bobblehead day,” he said.

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Chicago Sun-Times

Yu don’t say: Cubs’ Yu Darvish (flu) won’t pitch at home in return from DL

By Gordon Wittenmyer

Cubs right-hander Yu Darvish won’t have to worry about any adverse weather or fan reaction when he returns from the disabled list after a bout with the flu.

Instead of returning to the rotation Monday, when he’s eligible, at home against the Braves, Darvish will start Tuesday against the same team in Atlanta.

“We arranged that,” manager Joe Maddon said. “We want to give him one extra day, so we’re going to push him to Tuesday, and Quintana will come back on Monday.”

Darvish (0-3, 6.00 ERA) has failed to pitch out of the fifth inning in four of his six starts, including May 2 against the Rockies, when he was booed as he left the mound in an 11-2 loss.

He was scratched from his next start, Tuesday against the Marlins, because of the flu. His subsequent move to the 10-day DL allowed the Cubs to add bullpen help while he recovered.

Farquhar recognition

During the fifth inning Friday, the Cubs recognized White Sox pitcher Danny Farquhar on the left-field video board:

“The Cubs extend best wishes to White Sox pitcher Danny Farquhar — get well soon, Danny!”

Farquhar suffered a brain aneurysm after collapsing in the dugout after pitching against the Astros on April 20. He remained in critical condition for several days and was eventually released from the hospital Monday.

Doctors said Farquhar eventually will be able to pitch again but not this season.

Beer funny

Kyle Schwarber will always have a warm spot for the crosstown series — if not a cold one.

That goes back to his first experience three years ago as a rookie when a fan threw a beer bottle at him in left field at Guaranteed Rate Field.

He's ready if it happens again.

"I might drink it," said Schwarber, who threw out Nicky Delmonico trying to score to end the fifth inning.

"If it was half full, I would say, 'Come on! What a waste of great beer here.' "

Fix not so 'simple'?

After his last start Saturday in St. Louis, Tyler Chatwood said he knew exactly what he was doing wrong mechanically that was leading to so many walks and vowed to make the "simple fix," which he wouldn't divulge.

Whether it was a version of pitching out of the stretch with nobody on or something else, it didn't work for long Friday. He walked five batters in five innings, marking the fifth time in seven starts he has finished with at least as many walks as innings pitched.

In fact, Chatwood is the only pitcher in the majors with five or more walks in more than three starts, according to ESPN Stats & Info.

He said he thought it was working the first two innings (six up, six down), but he started "drifting" after that.

"I'm kind of battling," Chatwood said.

But Chatwood once again pitched well enough with men on base to allow only two runs and leave the game in line for the victory.

Despite a major-league-leading 32 walks, Chatwood has a 3.35 ERA.

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Chicago Sun-Times

Delusion is a great survival tool for getting through the White Sox' season

By Rick Morrissey

There are three approaches that White Sox fans can choose from while their team goes through its rebuild.

The most human approach is to despair, as some of them surely were doing during the first inning of a Sox-Cubs Crosstown Showdown game Friday. It's to watch Willson Contreras' grand slam off Carson Fulmer, whom the Sox took with the eighth overall pick in the 2015 draft, and get caught up in the darkness of now. It's to look at an 11-2 loss and a major-league-worst 9-26 record after Friday's game and say, "This makes me want to do unspeakable things to myself."

The hopeful approach allows you to have faith that things will get better while the losses pile up and the top prospects (hopefully) improve in the minor leagues. Hope gives you permission to get on board with the idea that success very well could be around the corner.

The delusional approach allows you to declare that the rebuild already is a massive success. It lets you tell people to pay no attention to the lack of victories and to start preparing for a World Series in whatever year you're thoroughly convinced it's going to happen. The kids in the minors are that good, you scream to the world.

Delusion has always gotten a bad rap, often from me, but as I sit here during the first game of the series, I can't help but think that delusion is the way to go for Sox fans. If you're deluded, you don't know you're deluded. Reality can't kill your buzz. And how great is that?

Consider this a Survival Guide for White Sox Fans.

It's hard to argue that the Sox have been anything but awful so far this season, but if you're deluded, if you're absolutely certain that the franchise is headed for greatness, you give that awfulness as much attention as you'd give an ant.

As hard as this might be to swallow for Sox fans, Cubs fans can be your inspiration. I know: You'd rather swallow pickle juice. But put aside your enmity and learn from them.

While the Cubs were rebuilding in 2014, Cubs fans didn't care that Edwin Jackson was on his way to a 6-15 season. They very much cared that Kris Bryant was on his way to a combined .325 average, 43 home runs and 110 RBI at two minor-league stops.

If you told them there were no guarantees that any of the top prospects the Cubs had amassed through tanking would be successful, they looked at you as if you were drunk. If you told them you just saw their toddler playing with matches, they asked you what that had to do with Anthony Rizzo's WAR.

So do as they did, Sox fans. Ignore Contreras' grand slam and Fulmer's struggles. Instead, imagine Michael Kopech, now playing for the Sox' Triple A affiliate, throwing a 102-mph fastball past Bryant in a 2020 World Series game at Wrigley Field. No, don't imagine it. Know it.

Know that top prospects Eloy Jimenez, Luis Robert, Dylan Cease, Alec Hansen, Jake Burger and Blake Rutherford will join Yoan Moncada, Tim Anderson and Jose Abreu at the big-league level. That, friends, is how delusion is done.

You want that frown turned upside down? Listen to Kyle Schwarber, who was part of the Cubs' rebuild, talk about the Sox: "They got a bunch of good ballplayers, and they've got a bunch of good guys down in the minor leagues, too. I think they took a couple of our young guys [Jimenez and Cease in the Jose Quintana trade]. You've got a really promising group down there."

So, a Cubs-Sox World Series in 2020? If the scouting reports on the Sox' minor-leaguers are accurate and the buildup by the true believers is anything close to the truth, I suppose it's possible. You know, as long as the Cubs hold up their end of the bargain. I love that last sentence. It's so Chicago, so emblematic of North Side-South Side antagonism. A 2020 crosstown World Series might be delusional, but it's better than moping about the poor brand of baseball the Sox are foisting upon Chicago.

What else is there to do but believe?

"Wow, I'd love to be there for that," Cubs manager Joe Maddon said. "That probably is the epitome, I would imagine. When we got here, the first goal was to get there and win it. We have. We're looking to get back, but to do it inner-city like that would be pretty spectacular. I can't even imagine what that would look like. Talk about energy, oh, my God. I hope I'm around for that moment to occur."

A lot of things had to go right for the Cubs to go from wretched losers to World Series champions. It was not a given that everything would go as planned during the rebuild, but there were plenty of Cubs fans who were sure it was. Every move that president Theo Epstein made was greeted with hosannas.

A lot of things have to go right for the Sox' rebuild to succeed. There's no harm in telling yourself it will. It won't be delusion if it happens.

In the meantime, pay no attention to Contreras' sixth-inning home run. Or his seven RBI.

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Daily Herald

Cubs push back Darvish's next start until Tuesday

By Bruce Miles

Maybe the Cubs are trying to take some of the pressure off pitcher Yu Darvish.

Manager Joe Maddon said Friday Darvish will not pitch Monday, as originally scheduled, in a makeup game against the Atlanta Braves at Wrigley Field. Instead, the Cubs will hold Darvish back until Tuesday night when the two teams shift sites to Atlanta.

"We've rearranged that," Maddon said. "We want to give him one extra day. So we're going to push him to Tuesday, and (Jose) Quintana will come back on Monday. The day off (Thursday) permitted us to do that."

Darvish has been on the 10-day disabled list, retroactive to May 4, with parainfluenza virus.

It's not been a good start to his Cubs career for Darvish, who signed a six-year, \$126 million contract on the eve of spring training. He is 0-3 with a 6.00 ERA, and he was booed by the Wrigley Field crowd during his last start. He has had trouble in the fifth innings of 4 of his starts.

Here comes Bryant:

Catcher Willson Contreras had a big day in Friday's 11-2 victory over the White Sox. But third baseman Kris Bryant had another good game.

He homered (No. 7), singled, walked twice (once intentionally) and was hit by a pitch. Bryant has homered in five of his last eight games. His line is up to .302/.434/.612.

"He's starting to hit the ball hard," said Joe Maddon. "It's getting to the barrel. That home run was really crisp. I loved the double down the line. His defense, his baserunning. He's just plays a complete game. When he's on base, it sets it up for everybody else."

Don't run on Schwarber:

Left fielder Kyle Schwarber picked up an outfield assist, easily throwing out Nicky Delmonico at the plate to end the fifth inning. Delmonico tried to score from second base on Jose Abreu's single, which scored Adam Engel.

"I always want to pride myself on my defense," he said. "Just being able to be accurate with throws is a big thing for me. There I had a decent amount of time. He hit a scorcher right to me. Take your time and put a good throw there."

This and that:

STATS Inc. notes that Willson Contreras is the fourth major-league player since at least 1913 to record at least 2 doubles, 2 triples and 2 homers in a two-game span, joining Colorado's Larry Walker (1996), the Braves' Hank Aaron (1960) and the Giants' Dusty Rhodes (1954). Contreras is the second Cub since at least 1908 to record at least 4 extra-base hits and 7 RBI in a single game, joining George Mitterwald (April 17, 1974).

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Daily Herald

Contreras has grand day as Cubs rout White Sox, 11-2

By Bruce Miles

It was only appropriate that Friday was Willson Contreras bobblehead day at Wrigley Field.

The Cubs catcher has been quite the real-life action figure these last couple days.

Contreras had himself quite the day in the Cubs' 11-2 dismantling of the White Sox, and he's piled up some numbers over the last two games.

His grand slam in the first inning helped the Cubs to a 5-0 lead. He later hit a solo homer and added a pair of doubles, the second of which drove in 2 runs. That gave him a career-best 7 RBI.

"I'm just really thankful to the team for giving me my bobblehead day," he said through a translator. "But honestly, I'm just glad I was able to keep everything simple. That was my approach today. I was able to do pretty well today."

Over the past two games, Contreras has gone 7-for-10 with 3 doubles, 2 triples, 2 homers, 8 RBI and 4 runs scored. According to STATS Inc., he is the first Cubs player since at least 1913 to record 7 extra-base hits in a two-game span.

For as much power as Contreras possesses -- he hit 21 homers last year -- Friday's home runs were only his second and third of this season.

"I just think that it's part of the game," he said. "Baseball is a game of ups and downs. It's just a matter of getting in the right rhythm. I think of the beginning of this year to that of last year. I'm not expecting myself to have the same start to every season. But again, it's just a matter of making all the adjustments necessary on the field."

Contreras hit his grand slam off White Sox starter Carson Fulmer. The solo shot came in the sixth against Chris Beck.

But that wasn't all. With the Cubs up 5-0 in the top of the third, Contreras picked Sox baserunner Matt Davidson off second base with Hector Santiago up trying to bunt two runners ahead.

"How about his pickoff at second base?" asked manager Joe Maddon. "That really kind of like turned the thing around a little bit because they had something going on."

Maddon might have been a little charitable there. The Sox have lost six in a row, falling to 9-26 while the Cubs (20-15) have feasted on the Marlins and Sox, winning four in a row and outscoring their hapless opponents 42-11. That will help the run differential.

About the only concern Friday was continued command woes by starting pitcher Tyler Chatwood, who walked five in 5 innings as he gave up 3 hits and 2 runs. Chatwood, the team's No. 5 starter, evened his record to 3-3 with an ERA of 3.35.

But the walks do remain a red flag. He has yielded a team-high 32 in 37⅔ innings pitched. On the bright side for Chatwood on Friday, he didn't give up a hit until the fourth inning.

"In the first two innings, I felt like I had really good command," he said. "In the third inning, I started spraying a little bit. So I think it's just a matter of carrying that feeling I had the first two innings throughout the game because I'm putting myself in bad spots rather than making them hit it, especially with the lead I had. I needed to do that a little more."

Chatwood didn't see a whole lot of Contreras when he pitched for the Colorado Rockies. He sounded glad to have him on his side Friday.

"Playing against him, you know the great arm he has," Chatwood said. "You see what he features back there (behind the plate). But just seeing how solid he hits the ball, his approach at the plate and obviously his behind-the-plate skill is pretty special as well. Being able to do that while getting beat up essentially by us pitchers bouncing stuff at him and still having the offensive production that we know he's capable of is pretty impressive."

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Daily Herald

Rozner: White Sox misery part of rebuild process

By Barry Rozner

It's tempting for White Sox Nation to look at the Cubs and attach a calendar to this rebuild.

Especially during a weekend like this one, when the Sox are visiting Wrigley Field, it's easy to think about the Cubs' teardown and wonder if the Sox are creeping closer to 2015 -- when the Cubs got to the NLCS ahead of schedule -- or if they're still much closer to 2012.

The answer seems obvious after another miserable day for the Sox in miserable weather on the North Side Friday afternoon, but it has been apparent for quite some time.

When their rebuild began, the Cubs' lineup frequently included the likes of Tony Campana, David DeJesus, Alfonso Soriano and Darwin Barney, along with starters like Travis Wood, Paul Maholm and Chris Volstad.

That seems like a long time ago now, but it's a reminder of how many miles must be traveled.

It's worth remembering that the Sox are only 17 months into the process and ahead of schedule because of the trades they were able to make and the prospects collected along the way.

But progress is not linear, as Theo Epstein was known to mutter occasionally, and this is something GM Rick Hahn has tried to convey in his own way.

"We know the baseball gods can be cruel," Hahn said prophetically during spring training. "Remember that Mike Trout got sent back down after he was called up.

"Our goal is to contend for multiple championships over an extended period of time. As to the exact date on which that starts, we're not prepared to put the specific target out there because, in all candor, I would have given you a farther out date a year ago at this time."

Prospects, however, are unpredictable. Some move precisely how they are supposed to, like Yoan Moncada, Michael Kopech and Eloy Jimenez, and some do not.

Others get hurt, witness Jake Burger. Talk about cruel.

The big-banging third baseman -- drafted in the first round only a year ago -- suffered an Achilles rupture in late February, costing him a year on the shelf. A setback, to be sure, but nothing critical.

Last week, while walking in the backyard of his Arizona home, Burger's Achilles popped again and the clock restarts on the year it will take to get him back on the field.

"It appears nothing could've been done to prevent this," Hahn said. "Much like the first one, it's just something that happens."

You will not see Burger for another year.

Jimenez was slowed by an injury and is now catching fire.

Alec Hansen, so dominant last year, just started throwing from a mound after recovering from forearm soreness.

Outfielder Luis Robert should be back on a minor-league field soon after a thumb injury sidelined him for more than a month.

Those are four very big names, four very big parts of the future that have had some bad luck over the last few months.

It happens. It will happen to more players. It's baseball.

That doesn't even take into account poor performances and disappointments, which is why the Sox continue to stockpile prospects, acquiring them in any way possible.

It's a numbers game and the Sox are playing the percentages, knowing the more they have, the better chance there is they'll be able to field most of their team without having to fill their needs with dollars.

They will have to do that, spend in free agency when the time is right, but that is for finishing the process, not beginning it.

They are going about it the right way and making great progress, but the players will decide how many years it will take, not the calendar itself.

So while it's tempting for Sox fans to look up at the World Series flags flying at Wrigley Field and wonder about their own timeline, there is no way to speed the progression.

Patience, hard as it may be to remember sometimes, is the word of the day.

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The Athletic

By the Numbers: Willson Contreras' offense, Tyler Chatwood's walk rate show no signs of coming down
By Sahadev Sharma

With an 11-2 drubbing of the White Sox, the Cubs continued to dominate during a weeklong stretch against inferior opponents. After a five-game losing streak that included a gut-punch sweep in St. Louis, the North Siders will take wins any way they can. And Friday continued a trend of the offense busting out as they've now scored 42 runs in their last four games, all wins.

The crosstown series didn't quite have the buzz one would hope, and the chilly weather along with some rain, a blowout and a horribly slow pace early on led to a sparse crowd at Wrigley Field by the final few frames. If you've lamented how Yu Darvish's struggles or Tyler Chatwood's wild ways can slow a game to a crawl, spend some time watching Carson Fulmer. The young White Sox starter failed to get out of the second inning for the third time this year. Watching that will help anyone realize that perhaps the game is just going in a direction no one really wants to watch. But that's a story for another time.

You know what people do want to watch? Dingers! There were a few of them from the Cubs on Friday as one former MVP continued a torrid pace and a possible future MVP has emerged from an early season slumber. Let's take a look at the numbers, both good and bad, from the Cubs' fourth straight victory as they pushed their record to 20-15 on the season.

41: On his bobble head day, Willson Contreras put together an impressive performance. After slugging a pair of homers on Friday, including a grand slam, and adding two doubles, Contreras is 7-for-10 over his last two games. All seven hits have been for extra bases, including two triples and a double on Wednesday. He drove in seven runs on Friday and according to STATS Inc., going back to 1913, he's the first Cubs player to have seven extra-base hits in a two-game span.

"You know what?" manager Joe Maddon said after listing off the reasons why Contreras was swinging a hot bat. "I didn't even realize that, but you know, more than anything I just said, that's absolutely correct. It had everything to do with the bobble head."

Contreras hit a grand slam in the first inning in left center and added another long homer that likely would have gone off the video board in left if not for a stiff wind in from right field.

"Not a bad day," Maddon said. "I love when he hits the ball to left-center. Of course, when it goes out, it's even better. My take on him is when he's driving the ball in that gap, he's probably on top of his game. That's what I saw last year, that's what I saw today. And I love the little butt-out double down the first-base line. That's another thing, covering the outside edge."

Contreras went into Wednesday with a pedestrian 85 wRC+. But a pair of monster games has pushed that total up 41 points to 126. Last season, one in which Contreras emerged as one of the best catchers in baseball, he posted a wRC+ of 121.

"Baseball is a game of ups and downs and it was just matter of getting in a rhythm," Contreras said through a translator. "I'm not expecting to have the same start to every season, but it's just a matter of making the adjustments necessary on the field."

Contreras also bailed out Chatwood after he walked back-to-back batters to start the third. With pitcher Hector Santiago at the plate looking to bunt, Matt Davidson strayed too far off second and Contreras rifled a throw from behind home to back-pick Davidson and get the first out of the inning. Santiago struck out on a failed bunt attempt with two strikes and Chatwood retired Nicky Delmonico to wriggle out of the jam. Contreras called it “the turning point in the game” and Maddon agreed.

“How about his pickoff at second base?” Maddon asked. “That really kinda turned the thing around a little bit, because they had something going on. That pickoff really helped Chatwood navigate that stuff.”

It was a 5-0 game at that point and Contreras helped make sure the White Sox wouldn't get any momentum going in their favor. Contreras and Kris Bryant ensured that any chance of a White Sox comeback would be fleeting.

182: That's the wRC+ of the National League leader in that category. It's where Bryant sits after a 2-for-3 day with a home run, a single, two walks and a hit by pitch. His slash line is a gaudy .302/.434/.612 and he's looking primed to compete for MVP once again. What else must a player do to become a superstar?

“He sets the table,” Maddon said of his No. 2 hitter. “Great base-runner and he's starting to hit the ball hard. It's getting to the barrel. That home run was really crisp. I loved that double down the line. His defense, his base-running, he just plays a complete game. When he's on base it just sets it up for everybody else.”

The Cubs offense has been maddeningly inconsistent at times this season, but outside of a few games when he first returned from being beamed with a 96-mph heater to the head, Bryant has been the type of offensive force you could set your watch to. At the moment, he's near the top of the NL leaderboard in WAR and if he continues at this pace, perhaps by September, the Cubs and Cardinals won't be merely competing for a division title, but Bryant and the red-hot Tommy Pham could be battling it out for MVP as well.

8.2 percent: With seven walks on Friday, the Cubs are starting to look more like the team that's been no worse than third in walk rate each of the previous three seasons. Their performance on this day pushed their rate to 8.2 percent on the season, up two-tenths of a percentage point. Still not where they need to be, but certainly headed in the right direction.

“I think we've been really patient the last few games,” Contreras said. “That's what's helped us be successful. We've been able to work the counts into our favor, hitter's counts. That's what's helped us score all these runs.”

When the Cubs see pitches and make the opposing pitchers work, they usually find themselves with men on base and in good counts. It pushes up the starter's pitch count and forces the opposing manager to go to the bullpen much earlier, likely exposing the weaker relievers to an offense hungry to feast on poor pitching. The Cubs have done that of late and to really beat up on the better arms in baseball, they'll have to continue to hone their approach and find a rhythm they've lacked for much of this season.

19.3 percent: Unfortunately, the Cubs starting pitchers are often doing the same for the opposition. Chatwood walked five batters in five innings, giving him an insanely high 19.3 percent walk rate for the season, easily the worst for qualified starters in baseball. One theory is that Chatwood's stuff moves so much, it can actually lead to the bouts with wildness.

“His spin rate is ridiculous,” Contreras said. “It reminds me a lot of [Jake] Arrieta’s sinker. It moves a lot and it’s just a matter of him making the adjustments necessary. I’m sure he will because he’s a great pitcher.”

Chatwood said after his last start that it was just a matter of making a slight adjustment, one he believed he’d identified. After starting the game with two perfect innings in which he struck out two and induced four ground-ball outs, Chatwood quickly reverted to his wild ways.

“The third inning I started spraying a little bit,” Chatwood said. “So it’s just a matter of carrying that feeling I had in the first two innings throughout the game. I’m putting myself in bad spots rather than making them hit it. Especially with the lead I had, I needed to do that a little more.”

Despite the impossibly high walk rate, Chatwood still sports a solid 3.35 ERA. He can point to his .197 batting average against, eighth-best in baseball, as to why he’s able to still suppress runs despite the free passes.

“You don’t want [the walks],” Chatwood said. “Right now, I’m kind of battling a little bit. But I feel like I’m still able to keep us in games. So at the same time with that, there is a positive there. Obviously, I need to clean that up a little bit.”

Chatwood said he knew how to clean it up after his last start and explained that a little more on Friday.

“It’s just a feeling out there when you’re going,” Chatwood said. “You feel strong on the mound and you’re in good positions. I felt that in the first two innings and then I think I drift a little bit on the mound rather than gathering myself.”

The pure stuff, which translates into that batting average against, is impressive and shows exactly why the Cubs were so keen on Chatwood in the offseason and why some believed he was a breakout candidate this season. But the walk rate is exactly why he’s been held back from that breakout now and in the past. And while Chatwood has always shown issues with the free pass, he’s never been this bad. Few are.

With what he’s doing in other areas, even last season’s career-high 12.2 percent walk rate would suffice. If he can start to reduce that walk rate, continue to limit the hits and keep his strikeout rate at a respectable level (he’s currently at a career-high 22.9 percent), it will start to look exactly like the Cubs had hoped. Of course, it’s just as possible this all goes in the other direction: the walks continue and he’s no longer able to work around them with any consistency and becomes a liability on the mound. At some point, the walks need to drastically decrease. Or things could get ugly for Chatwood and the Cubs.

For now, a 4-0 stretch against some of the worst teams in baseball is nothing to complain about. If they keep this up over the weekend, perhaps that’s just the confidence boost they’ll need when they head to Atlanta to face a young, upstart Braves team that’s likely eager to try and make their mark against a team that’s established themselves as the class of the National League.

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The Athletic

Taking apart the myths behind Cubs’ rebuild and what it means for White Sox

By Patrick Mooney

Theo Epstein showed up in Chicago as one of the most famous sports executives on the planet, the architect of two World Series winners for the Boston Red Sox, the franchise with the most parallels to the Cubs. After chairman Tom Ricketts made the home-run hire in October 2011 — and before the Cubs turned Wrigleyville into their version of Disney World — the shop windows on Clark Street displayed T-shirts like “Theology” and “In Theo We Trust.”

But Epstein knew it wouldn't last forever. He called it during his first spring training in Arizona, trying to disarm beat writers by predicting they would all eventually write, “The honeymoon is over.”

The Sun-Times back page that featured Epstein walking on water before the 2012 season imagined him drowning in Lake Michigan after 101 losses that year, putting “S.O.S” above his head.

By the time Epstein fired handpicked manager Dale Sveum after 96 losses in 2013, he felt the need to announce this at the news conference: “We know what we're doing.”

Progress isn't always linear, as Epstein likes to say, but it sure feels like the honeymoon is never over around the White Sox and everyone assumes they know what they're doing.

Of course, the White Sox plan could work. Kenny Williams and Rick Hahn have 2005 World Series rings and Bulls/White Sox chairman Jerry Reinsdorf has overseen seven championships in this city. The Chris Sale/José Quintana trades helped build a top-tier farm system and open up new possibilities.

But this was a wet, no-drama Friday afternoon at Wrigley Field as the Cubs cruised to an 11-2 win in front of 39,585. “Hit the Road Jack” blasted from the sound system as Carson Fulmer walked off the mound with two runners on and two outs in the second inning and the White Sox already down by five runs. Willson Contreras went 4-for-5 with two doubles, two homers and seven RBIs on his bobblehead day. The White Sox are 9-26 and on pace for 120 losses.

And none of this is guaranteed: Yoán Moncada, Eloy Jiménez, Luis Robert and Michael Kopech becoming stars on the South Side. The White Sox spending huge money on free agents (even though Jose Abreu's six-year, \$68 million guarantee is the biggest contract in franchise history and multiple big-market teams have been saving up for this coming winter). Ricky Renteria being the manager to lead them back to the playoffs for the first time since 2008.

“They got a bunch of good ballplayers,” Cubs outfielder Kyle Schwarber said. “They got a bunch of good guys down in the minor leagues, too. I know they took a couple of our young guys and they got a really promising group down there.

“This is going to be a good series. There is no underestimating these guys. I feel like they're a good ballclub and we got to go out there and play our game.”

With the White Sox on the North Side this weekend, it's worth remembering that “The Plan” was a messy, frustrating process that still got the Hollywood ending in Cleveland. Epstein's baseball operations group didn't magically create a “Cubs Way.” The 2016 team wasn't all warm and fuzzy or a homegrown juggernaut or even a sure thing.

The loyalty the White Sox show their employees is admirable and continuity matters. The Cubs are running the risk of taking this to an opposite extreme by firing multiple coaches from the World Series team within a year of the championship parade. But what would the White Sox do with Renteria if their version of Joe Maddon suddenly became a free agent?

Maddon managed the Cubs to their first World Series title in 108 years — and he still faced an avalanche of criticism and skepticism within his own clubhouse. The constant second-guessing about his lineup choices and bullpen decisions hasn't gone away, either.

A drafted-and-developed pitcher didn't throw a single pitch during the 155 innings the Cubs had to cover in the 2016 playoffs. Kyle Hendricks, their World Series Game 7 starter, had been viewed as the secondary prospect in the buzzer-beater deal with the Texas Rangers minutes before the 2012 trade deadline. Maybe if the Cubs didn't have a communication breakdown with Ryan Dempster earlier that summer, the veteran pitcher would have approved that trade to the Atlanta Braves for Randall Delgado instead.

The Cubs lucked out when the Houston Astros selected Stanford University pitcher Mark Appel with the first overall pick in the 2013 draft, allowing them to take Kris Bryant at No. 2 and watch the low-maintenance superstar become the National League MVP three years later.

A finishing piece to that World Series team came in spring training, when Dexter Fowler shocked the baseball world by showing up in Mesa, two days after reports on his three-year, \$33 million agreement with the Baltimore Orioles surfaced.

This wasn't just some group that played together in Iowa and Tennessee and bonded in the minors. Between Fowler, Ben Zobrist, Jason Heyward, Jon Lester and John Lackey, the Cubs invested \$440 million in those free agents. The ultimate mercenary — rental closer Aroldis Chapman — arrived after a blockbuster trade with the New York Yankees.

"It's not easy, man," Maddon said, thinking back to the Tampa Bay Devil Rays teams he managed in 2006 and 2007 that lost 197 games combined before storming into the 2008 World Series. "The biggest thing I remember about that is we started to get some veterans around the young guys in the clubhouse, which really mattered.

"At the end of 2007, we traded Ty Wigginton for Danny Wheeler. That doesn't sound like a whole lot — and I love Wiggy, Wiggy was one of my favorites — but that really brought form to the bullpen. He taught these bullpen pitchers how to work, pure and simple.

"That offseason, we acquired [Troy] Percival, Cliff Floyd and Eric Hinske. The influence it had on the clubhouse among these young guys — you cannot analytically determine how important that was. You had to be there.

"As this [White Sox] group continues on, they have really fine young players. However they put it all together, the point to me was we were good youth-wise — we made a nice trade or two — but it was these veterans that grab you by the scruff of the neck sometimes and say, 'We just don't do that around here.'

"There's a balance to be achieved. When you talk about chemistry in a room, if you have never done it before, people tend to mock that or don't quite understand why it's important. It cannot be more important."

Epstein could also afford to make mistakes (Edwin Jackson's \$52 million contract) and absorb \$40 million for a veteran presence who essentially became a third catcher (Miguel Montero). At the same 2014 winter meetings where Cubs officials finalized the Montero trade with the Arizona Diamondbacks — and toasted Lester's six-year, \$155 million megadeal at a San Diego hotel bar — they left Contreras exposed in the Rule 5 draft.

The most important deal in franchise history might have been shipping Scott Feldman and Steve Clevenger to Baltimore for Jake Arrieta and Pedro Strop on July 2, 2013.

So who do the White Sox have to flip at the trade deadline?

“Nobody,” said a scout who covers the American League Central.

Even in winning the World Series, the Cubs had to survive a first-round matchup against the San Francisco Giants that hinged on a Javier Báez basket homer in a 1-0 win and a ninth-inning comeback to avoid an elimination game against Johnny Cueto, Madison Bumgarner and all the potential bad vibes at Wrigley Field.

The Cubs recovered from a 21-inning scoreless streak against the Los Angeles Dodgers in the NLCS and needed Schwarber to defy all the medical odds and become the World Series designated hitter — six months after major knee surgery. It took until the 10th inning of Game 7 to finally beat a Cleveland team with Corey Kluber and Andrew Miller running on fumes, a post-drone accident Trevor Bauer, and Carlos Carrasco and Michael Brantley sidelined with injuries.

This isn't diminishing the elite talent on that Cubs' roster or the guts and creativity it took for Epstein's front office to put it all together or Maddon's unique leadership skills in changing the culture and boosting young players' confidence.

It's understanding how difficult that undertaking really is and how special it is when it happens. This was literally and figuratively the perfect storm that set up Heyward's Rain Delay Speech. And it doesn't happen overnight.

“It's really easy to lose, and it's very difficult to win,” Maddon said. “Guys get used to that and the motivation is not to win. And if you don't win, it's just, ‘We'll go home and show up the next day.’”

“Chartered airplanes, meal money, the nice lifestyle, it's kind of cool. I've always wanted to do this. But you got to get them to the point where winning does matter.

“At first, the young guys, they're just totally happy to be there and [have] the perks that go with it. You got to get them beyond that. They have to understand it is really easy to lose, but it's very difficult to win.”

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The Athletic

Greenberg: White Sox need a new Pierzynski to annoy the Cubs. I found at least one taker.

By Jon Greenberg

What the annual Cubs-White Sox rivalry doesn't need: More people talking about the old days.

What the annual Cubs-White Sox rivalry does need: Eloy Jiménez trading dingers with Javy Báez. Dylan Cease facing Anthony Rizzo. José Quintana going up against Yoán Moncada. And Tim Anderson bugging everyone.

The White Sox not giving up a first-inning grand slam in the biannual series would help too.

Jiménez is still in Double-A Birmingham — possibly at a Southern League Waffle House, where James Fegan found him earlier in the week — for this series, though in all likelihood he'll be up for the second leg of the season series in late September.

The Sox got off to a bad start Friday as the Cubs kept rolling with a 11-2 win. The Cubs (20-15) have won four in a row, while the Sox (9-26) have lost their sixth straight and 10th out of their last 11 games.

This series isn't going to be close, but think ahead a few months, when the Cubs could still be fighting for a division title on Sept. 21-23 and Jiménez could play the spoiler against his old franchise. That could create the drama we're craving in local press boxes, radio studios and taverns.

The best way to make the Cubs-Sox more interesting in the present than the past is, of course, with two competitive teams. But that's not enough. This is an entertainment business, after all. That's why I give the White Sox of yesteryear credit. They didn't feign disinterest in this series. They played up the rivalry because they knew their fan base loved it and not-so secretly, they did too. When the White Sox are at their best, they're reveling in their Second Citizen status.

The underpinning of this rivalry is the perfectly natural insecurity of White Sox fans and the Sox organization because of their place in Chicago sporting society. It's a classic formula replayed over and over again in movies: the plucky, middle class underdog facing off against the wealthy jerks. In the end, we all learn that we have more in common than we thought.

The Sox grouchers have a point, though it's kind of like complaining about the weather. What can you do about it?

After the White Sox won the World Series, they were annoyed they still weren't bigger than the Cubs (though 2006 was as close as the attendance margin has been in some time) in some circles. Lazy national media acting like the 2005 White Sox didn't exist during the Cubs' 2016 run certainly didn't help any remaining complexes.

Sox fans constantly downplay the authenticity of Cubs fans — Remember when Pres. Obama said Cubs fans weren't serious fans? — while Cubs fans mock Sox fans, sometimes with more than a tinge of classicism and/or racism.

You wouldn't be wrong to say Sox fans take this rivalry more serious than the Cubs ones do. That's why it felt personal when A.J. Pierzynski and Ozzie Guillen stuck up for their people when the rivalry was at its toastiest.

"I think the [fans'] mindset is to do better than the Cubs," Sox slugger Paul Konerko told me one season.

So for the rivalry to heat up, to become truly interesting on a semi-annual basis, it's really up to the White Sox to instigate it. That's when it is at its best, right?

So before the game, before White Sox "starter" Carson Fulmer gave up a grand slam in the first inning and put the White Sox in an immediate five-run hole, I went up to Anderson and Yolmer Sanchez to see if I could convince them to jazz up this series with some antics.

"Who's going to do it?" I asked.

"We both are," Anderson said with a smile. "We're going to have fun, bring a lot of energy and be ourselves."

But which one is more likely to do it this weekend?

“He may annoy Cubs fans,” Anderson said. “Or me. Anybody.”

Anderson, who walked twice in the game but didn’t steal any bases, has already annoyed some opponents with his comportment this season, bothering red asses like Justin Verlander and Salvador Perez for stealing bases in, uh, non-traditional situations and celebrating his own feats “too much.” But the Sox are always better when they have an edge and while no one foresaw Anderson becoming the team’s new heel, it suits him in a way. Anderson isn’t playing the jerk role like Pierzynski did so well. He’s more like Guillen the player, albeit with a better bat and much-worse glove.

“Man, I just go out and it’s not my job to read how people feel about it,” Anderson told me. “But there’s pros and cons. People are not going to like it, people are going to like it. But it’s all about what goes on in the locker room and how my teammates react to it. They’re all right with it and they like the way I play, so I keep playing how I’m playing and bringing a lot of energy to the team.”

Baseball doesn’t need a pitch clock or a limit on mound visits. It needs pitchers who work fast (not you Tyler Chatwood) and hitters with some personality. Anderson can be the shit-stirrer the Sox need, just as long as he keeps hitting.

When it comes to this series, and any series really, Anderson understands the value of entertainment. The Sox don’t draw so well, but maybe if they can create an identity that fans appreciate, it will help spur interest down the line.

“Got to give the fans a good show,” he said. “They don’t pay their money to come out and see a boring game, so we’ve got to come out and do something that a fan can remember.

“We all likable and lovable,” Anderson added. “Just be relatable to the fans and we get it. These fans pay their money to come to the game, so why not entertain them or talk to them or show a little love? We’re trying to be relatable more so than robots.”

Sanchez made national news by dumping a bucket of Gatorade on himself after Trayce Thompson hit a walk-off shot last week.

“I put on a show because that’s a goal,” Sanchez said. “To see a smile on their face so they can they want to see that again and come to the ballpark again.”

The Sox haven’t been likable or lovable so far at home, where they’re 3-15 and have been outscored 104-62 (a deficit that is heavily weighted by a 27-2 aggregate in the Astros series), while averaging 15,486 fans per game.

On Friday, playing without an injured Moncada for the fifth-straight game, they wasted scoring chances against a nibbling Chatwood and played like they want manager Rick Renteria pink-slipped by a second Chicago team. Ricky’s Boys aren’t quitting, but they aren’t finishing many plays either. Last year, they were a well-liked lousy team. So far this season, they’re just lousy.

The future of the Sox was always going to be more interesting than the present early this season, so hoping that this series would be old-school and fun is more of media wishcasting than anything rooted in reality.

Still, it would be nice to see the Sox manufacture some drama in the next two games to keep it interesting. With Jiménez in the Southern League, I'm looking at Tim and Yolmer to carry the load. If that doesn't happen, we can always look ahead to September.

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Cubs.com

Contreras' grand 2-HR day leads Cubs over Sox

By Carrie Muskat

CHICAGO -- The Cubs may want to have Willson Contreras bobblehead day every day.

The catcher celebrated his bobblehead day on Friday afternoon in grand fashion, hitting his second career grand slam and finishing with a career-high seven RBIs to power the Cubs to an 11-2 victory over the crosstown-rival White Sox in the first game of the Interleague series at Wrigley Field.

"I love when he hits the ball to left-center, and when it goes out, it's even better," Cubs manager Joe Maddon said of Contreras. "My take on him is when he's driving the ball in the gap, he's on top of his game. That's what I saw last year. That's what I saw today."

Contreras' slam came in the first inning to give Tyler Chatwood all the runs he needed. The catcher also hit a double in the fourth, a solo homer in the sixth and a two-run double in the seventh.

"I've been having really good at-bats and seeing the ball with both eyes and having good at-bats, working good counts," Contreras said. "I consider myself a rhythm batter. It's just a matter of getting that timing, getting that rhythm down."

Contreras, who hit two triples and a double on Wednesday, notched his fourth career multihomer game. Before his breakout game Wednesday, his slash line was .230/.315/.354, and it's now .268/.343/.488. He increased his OPS from .669 to .831 (a difference of .162) in two games. The exit velocity on Contreras' second homer registered at 109.6 mph, which tied his third-hardest hit homer in his career, including the postseason.

"Just repetitions," Maddon said when asked what the difference was for Contreras. "He's just good. When a guy's good, if he's not hurt, he'll eventually show up. He's getting the ball on the barrel."

Contreras was busy behind the plate, too. Walks continued to bother Chatwood, who issued five to raise his season total to a Major League-leading 32 over 37 2/3 innings. Chatwood gave up three hits, including RBI hits by Daniel Palka and Jose Abreu, and he struck out six over five innings.

"Obviously, you don't want [the walks]," Chatwood said. "Right now, I'm kind of battling a little bit. I think I'm just battling myself now. I feel I'm still able to keep us in games."

Contreras' bobblehead features him in his catcher's gear, and he showed off his skills in the White Sox third. Chatwood walked both Matt Davidson and Tim Anderson to open the inning, and on the Cubs' starter's first pitch to pitcher Hector Santiago, Contreras fired to shortstop Addison Russell, who made the tag to pick off Davidson. According to Statcast™, Contreras' throw was clocked at 91 mph.

"I think it was a big play for us," Contreras said. "Chatwood had a good game, but he was having a little trouble finding the strike zone. I'm glad I was able to pick him up. I think that was the turning point in the game for us."

"It's unbelievable," Chatwood said of Contreras' day. "He made a great play for me picking the guy off second, he got me out of a jam there, and then obviously what he did at the plate. I think we all knew it was coming, and it was just a matter of time before he broke through. It was nice to see."

Contreras had some help. Kris Bryant smacked a solo homer in the fourth and added an RBI single in the seventh for the Cubs, who have won six of the past seven games between the intracity rivals. The White Sox still lead the series, 58-55.

Was it the bobblehead that made the difference for Contreras?

"I didn't realize that," Maddon said of the figurine giveaway. "More than anything, I just said, 'That's absolutely correct. It had everything to do with the bobblehead.'"

Maybe it's because Contreras now has been married one week?

"I'm really happy to be part of this team. I'm really happy with everything that's going on. I'm happy to have my family here in Chicago and happy to have my wife here," Contreras said. "I'm just happy about everything that's going on."

MOMENTS THAT MATTERED

Cubs' first: The Cubs had two on in the first against Carson Fulmer, and took a 1-0 lead on Anthony Rizzo's RBI single. One out later, Kyle Schwarber walked, prompting White Sox pitching coach Don Cooper to check on Fulmer. Contreras fell behind, 0-2, against Fulmer, then took the next three pitches before he smacked a fastball into the basket rimming the outfield wall in left-center. It was his first home run since April 24.

"I don't think of home runs -- I try to pick a good pitch and make solid contact," Contreras said. "I can't start thinking about home runs. I just want to make contact as much as I can."

Cubs' fourth: Bryant led off the fourth with his 101st career home run and second in as many games. He's now homered in five of his past eight games. Bryant connected on an 0-1 sinker from Santiago and launched it into the left-field bleachers at 103.1 mph, per Statcast™. Schwarber followed two outs later with a bloop single with an exit velocity of 39 mph.

"He sets the table," Maddon said of Bryant, who is 8-for-17 (.471) with four home runs, two doubles, seven RBIs and 11 runs scored in his past five home games. "He's starting to hit the ball hard. He just plays a complete game."

SOUND SMART

Contreras is the seventh Cubs player to hit a grand slam in the crosstown series, joining Ricky Gutierrez (July 12, 2001), Aramis Ramirez (June 25, 2005), Derrek Lee (May 19, 2007), Travis Wood (May 30, 2013), Mike Olt (May 8, 2014) and Addison Russell (July 27, 2016).

Contreras is also the first Cubs player with three extra-base hits in consecutive games since Hall of Famer Billy Williams did so on Sept. 8 and Sept. 10, 1968.

And one more Contreras note: He's the first Cubs player to total four hits and seven RBIs in a game since Aramis Ramirez did so on Sept. 18, 2006, and the first to do so at Wrigley Field since Andre Dawson on June 2, 1987.

HE SAID IT

"It's always fun. Any time you have a legitimate rivalry, it's good, and it's good for the fan bases on both sides, and it's good for baseball. It's entertaining. It's interesting. I have not been here long enough, but I'm starting to catch the vibe. Even though the one team is not not doing so well, they'll be ready to play." -- Maddon, on the crosstown series

UP NEXT

Jon Lester will start Saturday in the second game of this intracity Interleague series. Rain interrupted Lester's last outing twice, but he stayed in the game for 5 1/3 innings against the Cardinals, giving up two runs on six hits. The lefty is 1-0 with a 2.16 ERA in three starts at home. He's 7-6 with a 4.30 ERA in 15 career starts vs. the White Sox. First pitch is scheduled for 1:20 p.m. CT at Wrigley Field, and righty James Shields will start for the White Sox.

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Cubs.com

Maddon understands rebuild of intracity rivals

By Carrie Muskat

CHICAGO -- Can you imagine what it would be like if the Cubs and White Sox met in the World Series?

"I'd love to be there for that," Cubs manager Joe Maddon said Friday prior to the start of the intracity Interleague series between the two teams. "That probably is the epitome. When we got here, of course, the goal was to get there and win it, and we have [in 2016], and we're looking to get back. To do it intracity like that would be pretty spectacular. Talk about energy -- oh, my God. I hope I'm around for that moment to occur. I think it would be pretty spectacular."

The White Sox last won the World Series in 2005, but this season has been more about rebuilding and having young players get experience. Maddon knows what that's like. His 2006 Devil Rays team lost 101 games, and they followed that with a 66-96 record in '07. In '08, the Rays reached the World Series.

What helped the turnaround? Maddon said it was a balance of veteran players with the youngsters.

"We started to get some veterans around the young guys in the clubhouse, which really mattered," Maddon said of the acquisitions of Danny Wheeler, Troy Percival, Cliff Floyd and Eric Hinske.

"The influence in the clubhouse among these young guys was key," Maddon said. "You cannot analytically determine how important that was. I think as this [current White Sox team] continues on, they have some really fine young players. The point about it to me is we were good youth-wise and made a nice trade or two, but it was the veterans who grab you by the scruff of the neck sometimes and say, 'You don't do that around here.'"

Percival, Floyd and Hinske were the key pieces in the Rays' turnaround.

"At first, the young guys are totally happy to be there and the perks that go with it, and you've got to get them beyond that," Maddon said. "They have to understand it's really easy to lose, but it's very difficult to win."

Worth noting

- Yu Darvish, on the disabled list with flu-like symptoms, will be activated on Tuesday and start against the Braves in Atlanta. Darvish is eligible to come off the DL on Monday, when the Cubs play a makeup

game against the Braves at Wrigley Field. But Maddon said they are going to take advantage of Thursday's off-day and give the right-hander an extra day.

Jose Quintana will start Monday against the Braves, pitching on regular rest.

- Maddon said athletic trainer PJ Mainville reported that outfielder Jason Heyward, on the seven-day concussion disabled list, had a "good day" on Wednesday. The Cubs had Thursday off, and Maddon had yet to check on Heyward's status on Friday. Heyward was injured trying to catch Dexter Fowler's walk-off home run on Sunday night in St. Louis.

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ESPNChicago.com

After Cubs fans receive his bobblehead, Willson Contreras slams White Sox

By Jesse Rogers

CHICAGO -- It was a day of milestones and bobbleheads for Chicago Cubs catcher Willson Contreras.

After pulling off the rare feat of hitting two triples in the Cubs' last game, Contreras picked up where he left off Friday, hitting two home runs -- including a first-inning grand slam -- and driving in seven runs in the Cubs' 11-2 win over the White Sox.

"We all knew that it was coming," winning pitcher Tyler Chatwood said after the game. "It was just a matter of time before he broke through a little bit. It was nice to see."

Contreras raised his OPS from .669 to .831 in the two games. His first blast Friday came not long after chilly fans were handed a bobblehead of Contreras as they entered Wrigley Field, where the temperature was just 49 degrees at game time. Subsequently, the catcher's bat provided the heat the Cubs needed for their fourth win in a row.

"I'm thankful to the team for giving me my bobblehead day, but I'm just glad I was able to keep everything simple," Contreras said through his interpreter. "That was my approach today."

The Cubs have been streaky lately, winning five, then losing five before this four-game win streak began. A shaky offense has woken up as the Cubs have scored 42 runs in four games as the heart of the order has been on fire. Kris Bryant was on base five times Friday, while Anthony Rizzo, who has been sizzling this month, reached three times. But it's Contreras who carried the team the last two days, just as he did much of last August, before injuring a hamstring. After a slow start this season, he has picked up his game, especially this week.

"The last two games have been two of my best so far, but just like I've had two really good back-to-back games, I've also had some games where I've made solid contact but hit it at people," Contreras said.

Consider his milestones:

- He's the third catcher in the live ball era (since 1920) with at least four extra-base hits and seven RBIs in a game, joining Mike Piazza (1995) and fellow Cubs catcher George Mitterwald (1974).
- Contreras is just the fourth NL player in the live ball era -- and the first since 1999 -- with multiple doubles and home runs and seven or more RBIs in a game.

- Contreras is the fifth player with four extra-base hits and seven RBIs in a game at Wrigley Field. Three of the previous four to accomplish that feat are in the Hall of Fame.
- According to Elias Sports Bureau, Contreras is the first Cubs catcher with 20 or more total bases in a two-game span since Randy Hundley on August 10-11, 1966.

On top of it all, Contreras picked off a runner from second as the White Sox were attempting to get back into the game, down just 5-0 at the time. Then came his second home run and a double with the bases loaded.

"Baseball is a game of ups and downs," Contreras said. "It was just a matter of getting into the right rhythm."

After the game, manager Joe Maddon went into a lengthy dissertation, describing what's clicking for Contreras. It involves driving the ball to left-center field, where his first home run went, as well as using the opposite the field -- his double was hit down the right-field line.

"He's getting the ball on the barrel," Maddon said. "My take on him is, when he's driving the ball in that [left-center] gap, he's probably on top of his game."

After the manager was done with his long explanation, he was asked how much of it all was due to his bobblehead.

"More than anything, I just said [about the mechanics of hitting], that's absolutely correct," Maddon quipped. "It had everything to do with the bobblehead."

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