



CHICAGO CUBS DAILY CLIPS

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

April 12, 2018

- Daily Herald, **The Javy Baez Show: Cubs win 13-5**
<http://www.dailyherald.com/sports/20180411/the-javy-baez-show-cubs-win-13-5>
- Daily Herald, **Cubs adjusting to new dugouts, grass**
<http://www.dailyherald.com/sports/20180411/cubs-adjusting-to-new-dugouts-grass>
- The Athletic, **Forget launch angle and exit velocity, Javier Báez is going to do it his way**
<https://theathletic.com/310990/2018/04/12/forget-launch-angle-and-exit-velocity-javier-baez-is-going-to-do-it-his-way/>
- The Athletic, **Grandpa Lester? Nah. Jon Lester says he doesn't need the kids to carry him just yet**
<https://theathletic.com/310926/2018/04/12/grandpa-lester-nah-jon-lester-says-he-doesnt-need-the-kids-to-carry-him-just-yet/>
- The Athletic, **Wrigley Field buzz: All-Star Game bid; plans for college football bowl game; dugout changes coming**
<https://theathletic.com/310715/2018/04/11/wrigley-field-buzz-all-star-game-bid-plans-for-college-football-bowl-game-dugout-changes-coming/>
- The Athletic, **Welcome to the Gilded Age of the Chicago Cubs**
<https://theathletic.com/310017/2018/04/11/welcome-to-the-gilded-age-of-the-chicago-cubs/>
- Cubs.com, **Baez blasts off twice again as Cubs rout Bucs**
<https://www.mlb.com/cubs/news/javier-baez-homers-twice-as-cubs-rout-pirates/c-271868618>
- Cubs.com, **Heyward receives 5th Gold Glove Award**
<https://www.mlb.com/cubs/news/jason-heyward-receives-5th-gold-glove-award/c-271827254>
- ESPNChicago.com, **You wouldn't like Eddie Butler when he's angry**
http://www.espn.com/blog/chicago/cubs/post/_id/46601/you-wouldnt-like-eddie-butler-when-hes-angry
- NBC Sports Chicago, **The main lesson Javy Baez learned during an incredible game actually came from a popout**
<http://www.nbcsports.com/chicago/cubs/main-lesson-javy-baez-learned-during-incredible-game-actually-came-popout-engaged-multi-homer-cubs-history>
- NBC Sports Chicago, **How the Cubs are stealing bases without stealing bases**
<http://www.nbcsports.com/chicago/cubs/how-cubs-are-stealing-bases-without-stealing-bases-heyward-bryant-javy-butterfield>

- NBC Sports Chicago, **The value of a unicorn like Tommy La Stella**
<http://www.nbcsports.com/chicago/cubs/value-tommy-la-stella-unicorn-rizzo-maddon-votto-rendon>
- NBC Sports Chicago, **While waiting for offensive breakthrough, Jason Heyward honored with fifth Gold Glove**
<http://www.nbcsports.com/chicago/cubs/while-waiting-offensive-breakthrough-jason-heyward-honored-fifth-gold-glove>
- Chicago Tribune, **Cubs starter Jon Lester aiming to lower his high walk total**
<http://www.chicagotribune.com/sports/baseball/cubs/ct-spt-cubs-jon-lester-walks-20180412-story.html>
- Chicago Tribune, **Javier Baez hits 2 HRs to power Cubs to 13-5 win over Pirates**
<http://www.chicagotribune.com/sports/baseball/cubs/ct-spt-cubs-pirates-20180411-story.html>
- Chicago Tribune, **Column: Cubs' 1914 Club at Wrigley Field is a windowless hideaway at new-car prices**
<http://www.chicagotribune.com/sports/baseball/cubs/ct-spt-cubs-1914-club-wrigley-field-rosenthal-20180411-story.html>
- Chicago Tribune, **Cubs continue push for All-Star Game while improving Wrigley facilities**
<http://www.chicagotribune.com/sports/baseball/cubs/ct-spt-cubs-all-star-game-notes-20180411-story.html>
- Chicago Tribune, **Column: Pirates hoping to overcome doubters and hang with Cubs in NL Central**
<http://www.chicagotribune.com/sports/baseball/cubs/ct-spt-pirates-challenge-cubs-sullivan-20180411-story.html>
- Chicago Sun-Times, **Big-swinging Javy Baez scores big (twice) and small as Cubs rout upstart Pirates**
<https://chicago.suntimes.com/sports/big-swinging-javy-baez-scores-big-twice-and-small-as-cubs-rout-upstart-pirates/>
- Chicago Sun-Times, **On Gold Gloves & cold bats: Cubs manager gives Jason Heyward vote of confidence**
<https://chicago.suntimes.com/sports/on-gold-gloves-and-cold-bats-jason-heyward-gets-vote-of-confidence-from-cubs/>
- Chicago Sun-Times, **It ain't easy being green, but Cubs' Albert Almora Jr. makes it look easy in win**
<https://chicago.suntimes.com/sports/it-aint-easy-being-green-but-cubs-albert-almora-jr-makes-it-look-easy-in-win/>

--

Daily Herald

The Javy Baez Show: Cubs win 13-5

By Bruce Miles

If the Cubs have been looking for someone to make things happen on offense, they need look no further than Javier Baez.

Baez makes things happen whether he's hitting home runs or striking out.

The Cubs' second baseman continued doing all that Wednesday night in a 13-5 victory over the Pittsburgh Pirates at Wrigley Field. With the win, the Cubs moved back over .500 at 6-5.

One day after hitting a pair of homers, Baez launched a massive opposite-field 3-run shot to right-center in the bottom of the second inning, as the Cubs rallied from a 3-0 deficit. He added a blast to left field in the eighth.

"His whole game is spectacular," said Cubs manager Joe Maddon. "As he matures as a hitter, I have no idea what he's going to do because he is one of the more exciting players in the game right now."

Baez has been known to make regular strikeouts exciting enough as he often swings out of his shoes and lands on the ground.

It was a Baez strikeout that got another 4-run inning going in the sixth. He led off with one, but he reached first base on a dropped third strike as Pirates pitcher Tyler Glasnow uncorked a wild pitch.

Baez went to second on Jason Heyward's groundout to first before he stole third base with pinch hitter Tommy La Stella at bat. It was homeward bound for Baez when La Stella grounded to second baseman Josh Harrison, who was playing in. Baez slid home ahead of Harrison's errant throw. That enabled the Cubs to break a 4-4 tie, and they scored three more times in the inning.

Here's something else, and it may be right to Maddon's point about Baez maturing. He popped up to shortstop in the seventh, flipped his bat and didn't run the ball out. The next inning, he homered.

"You know what I really got out of today?" Baez asked. "You know what I learned? About how ugly I looked on that flyball. I tossed the bat really high, didn't run to first base. One of my teammates came up to me. He said it in a good way, and obviously you learn from it. Especially me, I don't take my AB before to the plate. After I hit that flyball and tossed the bat really high, I was kind of mad about it, not because of the flyball, just the way I looked, obviously for the kids and everybody that follows me. I learned that from today."

Jon Lester made his third start of the season for the Cubs, and he lasted 5 innings, giving up 7 hits and 4 runs. He threw 34 of his 96 pitches in the second, when the Pirates scored 3 runs, and after the half-inning, he came in for a few words with home-plate umpire Dan Bellino. It was more for clarity than anything else. Lester was not happy on a walk to Gregory Polanco that preceded a 3-run homer by Sean Rodriguez.

"Dan's great," Lester said. "I've had him a lot. And I know he's an umpire you can talk to. That's why I went directly to him. The big thing with him is that he knows when you're confronting him it's not an argument. I had some questions, and he answered a couple of them."

In the end, Lester and everybody else knew this night belonged to Baez.

"Javy's obviously feeling pretty comfortable out there right now," Lester said. "Four homers in two days is OK. Right? I'm glad he's on our side. A couple years ago, we were talking about this guy playing center field for us. Now he's kind of plugging in at all different positions and bringing a lot of excitement to the baseball game. It's pretty cool to watch. There's not a lot of things he can't do."

--

Daily Herald

Cubs adjusting to new dugouts, grass

By Bruce Miles

There are a couple of things about Wrigley Field that are new or different this year.

First are the dugouts. Both the home and visiting dugouts have been expanded and are now bi-level. The Cubs' dugout has been expanded from about 7 feet in width to 12 feet. The dugouts also have been moved farther down the baselines.

Cubs manager Joe Maddon said he is adjusting to the different sightlines. Assistant general manager Randy Bush and ballpark expansion vice president Carl Rice were out Wednesday afternoon looking at the entrance to the dugout from the field.

Plans are in the works for a ledge in the front row for players to stand on to get a better view of the field.

"Everybody expected some kind of an adjustment period," said manager Joe Maddon. "The fixes that we're talking about are relatively simple. Talked to Carl and Randy Bush today. Everybody's on the same page. I think the adjustments are minimal. It's just something that permits us better egress and (ingress) out of the dugout for the hitters and just some sightlines from a coaching perspective, too."

The other difference at Wrigley is the grass. It's much shorter and plays faster than it has historically. Expect that to change.

"They just had to put that turf down late, so I think you're seeing a real compressed, probably some kind of bluegrass," Maddon said. "That's what they normally grow up here or play up in this neck of the woods. It almost plays like a Bermuda cut right now. But it's quick. There's a lot of topspin on the ball.

"Like that ball that bounced out of Addy's (Addison Russell's) glove on the backhand side (Tuesday). It had so much spin coming off the dirt. It's nobody's fault. Just with everything going on, it just took longer to get everything rolling. But the dirt looks like it's in good shape. The grass is just really compressed. It'll fluff out and it will grow when the weather warms up a bit. It's just where we're at right now stadium wise. Same for both sides. It'll slow down."

He's Gold again:

Right fielder Jason Heyward was presented with the Rawlings Gold Glove he won for his defense last year. Heyward has won four straight Gold Gloves and five overall.

"I don't know how many times I've told him, 'I feel so much better when you're on the field,'" Joe Maddon said. "I think the receiving of the Gold Glove is one of the top awards in all of baseball. I love having guys that win that award. Normally if you have a couple of those, you've probably had yourself a pretty good year as a group. I think it's outstanding.

"He has not achieved on the offensive level that he'd like to ... normally a lot of times that award goes to offensive player. It's almost an offensive award. So the fact that he's really been able to hold serve in the eyes of the industry while he's still working to get to the level that he's capable of offensively, I think it's pretty impressive."

--

The Athletic

Forget launch angle and exit velocity, Javier Báez is going to do it his way
By Patrick Mooney

The crowd chanted “JAV-Y! JAV-Y!” before Javier Báez popped out of the new dugout at 9:59 p.m. on Wednesday at Wrigley Field. The announced attendance of 35,596 had thinned out by that eighth-inning homer. It was a school night in mid-April with a first-pitch wind chill that made it feel like 39 degrees. But Báez is always one pitch away from a curtain call or a viral video clip.

“Go Cubs Go” blasted from the stadium’s sound system as the massive video board showed Báez highlights while Báez did the postgame on-field WGN interview with Len and JD. Javy Being Javy became the overriding theme of this 13-5 win over the Pittsburgh Pirates.

Yet when the reporters converged on his locker in the underground clubhouse, Báez took an easy question about making things happen and didn’t give himself a pass. He could have talked about his two home runs or slick fielding or alert baserunning. He focused on the seventh-inning moment when he popped out to Pirates shortstop Jordy Mercer.

“You know what I really got out of today?” Báez said. “You know what I learned? How ugly I looked on that fly ball. I tossed the bat really high. I didn’t run to first base. A lot of teammates came up to me, and they said it in a good way.

“You learn from it. Especially me, I don’t take the AB before to the plate. After I hit that fly ball where I tossed the bat really high, I was kind of mad about it. Not because of the fly ball, just the way I looked for the kids and everybody that follows me. That’s not a good look, so I learned that from today.”

It is too simple to say that Báez is maturing (though a PR rep did send an email on Wednesday morning offering images of the engagement ring he recently gave his longtime girlfriend, Irmarie Marquez, who is pregnant with their first child).

It would be more accurate to say that for all the flash in his game, Báez is still pretty quiet and humble. He has a tight inner circle and a serious dedication to his craft that matches his sharp instincts for the game.

Báez also began the game as the most electric .194 hitter in baseball, coming off an otherwise forgettable home-opener loss in which he launched two home runs off Pittsburgh starter Ivan Nova. This time, Báez changed the game with one swing in the second inning, crushing Steven Brault’s 3-1 fastball into the right-center field bleachers, turning a 3-1 deficit into a 4-3 lead.

“I’ve been working and focusing on just me and the pitcher out there,” Báez said. “Forget about the whole field ... launch angle, the miles [per hour] off the bat. I was hitting with all this stuff and I cleared my mind. It’s all about: ‘Compete.’ That’s how I’ve been taking it. And, obviously, you guys have seen it’s been great for me.”

Báez is also the type of player who can swing at a strike three that bounces in front of home plate and then capitalize on Tyler Glasnow’s wild pitch. Báez moved to second base on a ground ball, stole third base and then scored on a chopper toward second baseman Josh Harrison, sliding into the dirt and touching home plate with his left hand.

“Oh yeah, he had the long-drive contest thing out tonight,” manager Joe Maddon said. “He had his John Daly hat going on. But he caught a curveball from the last guy (Dovydas Neverauskas). And, man, he drilled the one to dead center. That left hot. (But) the baserunning and the slide and going on contact — forcing Harrison into a double pump — he does all that stuff. He knows how to play the game of baseball.”

Báez also got the game’s final out with a diving stop at second base, again making a Gold Glove-caliber play look routine. He wore a ski mask that covered his ears and neck. He feels like it usually takes him extra time to get his offense flowing in the cold weather. Imagine what it will be like when the wind’s blowing out and you don’t have to wear a winter jacket to Wrigley Field.

“Hopefully, I haven’t gotten warm yet,” Báez said. “I come every day ready to do my routine and work on seeing the pitcher, whoever’s starting. But just making adjustments is my biggest thing. A lot of people say I got a lot of power. But to be honest, the pitcher makes the power with the velocity.

“I’m really strong with my legs, and my swing starts with my legs pushing forward. I’m going to swing hard most of the time, but it’s something I don’t control, in a way. I try to stay under control, but it’s really hard for me. As long as I stay under control, I’ll be really good.”

That is the next level Maddon keeps talking about, the point where the game slows down for Báez in the batter’s box the same way it does in the field and on the bases.

“His whole game is spectacular,” Maddon said. “Now as he matures as a hitter, I have no idea what he’s going to do, because he is one of the more exciting players in the game right now.”

Báez is going to do it his way, literally patting himself on the back after hitting home runs in what seems to be the new celebration move for the 2018 Cubs. Forget exit velocity. Sometimes all you need is a little positive reinforcement.

“I’m going to let somebody else explain it,” Báez said with a laugh, “but it’s just a funny story from our hitters and our hitting coach. It’s just when we get a base hit or whatever. We did something good, so we got to pat our guys on the back.”

--

The Athletic

Grandpa Lester? Nah. Jon Lester says he doesn’t need the kids to carry him just yet

By Sahadev Sharma

It was only a matter of time before the Cubs bats broke out. It’s not as if all is fixed with the erratic Cubs offense after a 13-5 win over the Pittsburgh Pirates on Wednesday night. They’ve done the disappearing act often enough for anyone paying attention to realize that. But offensive outputs like this are expected to be at least a semi-regular occurrence with the talent gathered in the Cubs clubhouse.

As Jon Lester eases into his age-34 season, one has to wonder whether he’s entering a phase in his career when rather than being the ace who helped deliver a Cubs World Series championship in 2016, he can lean on his potent offense to cover up the flaws that are being exposed more often as he continues to show signs of aging.

Wednesday’s performance was hardly disastrous for Lester. But his line of seven hits, three walks and four runs allowed in five innings of work doesn’t really bring about images of what the dominant lefty

has been throughout his career. Lester seemed especially perturbed by the walks, pointing to the one he allowed after not getting a close pitch to Gregory Polanco prior to Sean Rodríguez's big homer in the Pirates' three-run second inning.

"I gotta clean that up, gotta figure it out," Lester said. "In the first I had two outs and walked [Starling] Marte. That can't happen. At least make him put the ball in play. It just prolongs the inning. That for me is first and foremost. That'll get cleaned up. I can deal with making mistakes and giving up home runs if we don't walk people to get to that mistake to give up the home run. If they string hits together and hit a three-run homer, then you tip your hat. But if you're allowing extra baserunners based on free passes, then that's where I'm beating myself and not allowing them to beat me."

Lester, who has never been afraid to flash a questioning look to an umpire when a close call doesn't go his way, seemed a bit frustrated after he believed he had Polanco struck out in the second. That brought Rodríguez to the plate with two outs and one on. Lester surely would have attacked him differently had the previous plate appearance gone his way, but in the end, he left an 0-1, 92-mph sinker over the heart of the plate that Rodríguez drilled off the roof of the Fanny May Bleacher Sweet in center field.

After the inning, Lester had a chat with home plate umpire Dan Bellino about the 1-2 pitch to Polanco that Lester felt he should've gotten.

"Dan's great. I've had him a lot. I know he's an umpire you can talk to," Lester said. "That's why I went directly to him. The big thing is with him, he knows when you're confronting him, it's not an argument. I had some questions and he answered a couple of them. The one that I really needed was the Polanco ball. I needed that ball. He said he had it out."

"He said if I'm wrong, come tell me," Lester continued. "I went and looked at it, I got to hit that inning and I said, 'Hey man, that's a pitcher's pitch. If you call it, he's probably pissed, if you don't call it, I'm pissed.' It's good to have that dialogue. Because as a pitcher you know I can at least get answers."

Individual performances, and more importantly, games, can swing on little moments like that. Lester was able to gather himself after that 34-pitch frame and work three more innings, allowing just one more run along the way. Then his offense immediately went to work. The Cubs delivered four runs in the bottom half of the second, highlighted by a three-run homer for Javy Báez, the first of three four-run innings for the Cubs on the night.

"That's always an added bonus for us as a pitching staff," Lester said. "The big thing, when you have teams like that that are swinging the bat so well, just keep your team in the ballgame. That's huge. You give our lineup enough chances, they're going to score runs. Tonight was a perfect example of that."

But just because Lester has looked erratic early on doesn't mean he or manager Joe Maddon believes he's entering the wind-down phase of his career just yet.

"Pittsburgh's hot right now," Maddon said. "They're just swinging the bats well. He didn't have bad stuff early on at all. The home run, that's the three points right there, otherwise he might have pitched six innings tonight. He gets in trouble but he's able to get out of trouble because he knows what he's doing out there. The game doesn't get fast for him. I really anticipate, as we move this forward, he's going to pitch well. I'm seeing good stuff."

The Pirates entered the day with an NL-best 127 wRC+ and an MLB-best .318 BABIP. They're putting the ball in play often, striking out a mere 15.7 percent of the time, and finding holes more often than any other team in baseball.

While he would have preferred to get a few more innings in, Lester's wild ways and the Pirates' hot bats didn't allow it. But the Cubs offense more than made up for it. And while the results suggest otherwise, Maddon isn't off base in saying Lester had solid stuff on the night. His velocity on his four-seam fastball averaged 91.4 mph, nearly a full tick up from his season average thus far. His cutter was up to 88.7 mph, 1.2 mph above his season average. He garnered an impressive 14 swings and misses on the evening and 15 looking strikes. It's little signs like that which could lead one to believe Lester isn't just headed toward a season in which he'll merely be an innings-eater whose job is to keep his team close.

"I feel like I made some pretty good pitches that still were hit for hits," Lester said. "I like my odds when it comes down to the whole season. If I continue to make those pitches, they're eventually going to get hit at somebody and I'll get outs. I gotta keep that mindset. I can't overanalyze things."

During spring training, Lester seemed to suggest to The Athletic's Patrick Mooney that it was time for the youngsters to carry the team while he could move to a bit of a lesser role.

"Like I told 'Rizz' [Anthony Rizzo]: 'You got to carry me for at least one more,'" Lester said. "I kid with him: 'I'd love to get the thumb ring.' But I want at least one more before I'm done."

Lester doesn't need to be the Cy Young candidate everyone expected him to be — and that he was in 2016 — when the Cubs signed him to a six-year, \$155 million contract prior to the 2015 season. Lester has always thrived off doubters.

"I try to use the negative that people say about me [and turn it into] a positive," Lester said this spring. "And say, 'OK, I can't do this or I'm not a true No. 1. OK, well, I'm going to go out and continue to do what I do.' At the end of the day, you look up and it's fairly decent years."

For his career, 'fairly decent' would probably be an understatement. But with all the talent on this Cubs team surrounding Lester, fairly decent from him would be perfectly acceptable. But it doesn't seem like the veteran is in any mood to just be average, he may joke, but he's not satisfied with merely riding on the coattails of his talented teammates. To Lester, Wednesday's outing isn't indicative of what's to come in 2018. Performances like that or his rough 3 1/3-inning Opening Day start only serve as motivation to Lester to once again go out and prove the doubters wrong. And even if he's unable to do that, he'll happily lean on his offense to carry him through a rough patch.

--

The Athletic

Wrigley Field buzz: All-Star Game bid; plans for college football bowl game; dugout changes coming
By Patrick Mooney

The home dugout is a small piece of the puzzle as the Cubs try to turn Wrigley Field into a year-round destination. While Joe Maddon's spot is a work in progress — and the Cubs are studying the traffic flow in and out of the dugout — there are bigger plans once the \$1 billion development is finished.

That incomplete section on the team's joint bid with City Hall for the 2020 All-Star Game likely worked against the Cubs and Mayor Rahm Emanuel. Major League Baseball commissioner Rob Manfred announced his selection on Wednesday with a Dodger Stadium news conference, citing three factors that should eventually work for the Cubs: a city that can showcase young stars; an iconic backdrop; and the event returning to Chavez Ravine for the first time since 1980.

The last time Wrigley Field hosted the All-Star Game was 1990, or before Kris Bryant, Addison Russell, Javier Baez, Willson Contreras and Kyle Schwarber were born.

“Our application stays on file,” Cubs president of business operations Crane Kenney said. “We’ll probably — as we continue to solve the issues around here — supplement our application.

“We’re in line and we’re as deserving as anyone.”

The Cubs are also deeply involved in talks to bring college football back to Wrigley Field and stage an annual bowl game, according to a source with knowledge of the team’s plans.

With the new home dugout, that would appear to be a more straightforward process with less political maneuvering than Manfred’s All-Star rewards system. The Pinstripe Bowl launched at Yankee Stadium in December 2010 and would be the model, partnering with two college conferences on a long-term arrangement and selling the media rights and corporate sponsorships off that alliance.

Meaning the Cubs are not looking at a bowl game as a one-off event. The latest round of renovations allows for a football field to essentially run from the home dugout toward the right-field bleachers.

A section of seats off the left-field line are now movable and the dugout top can be taken down, addressing some of the safety concerns that forced Northwestern and Illinois to use one end zone during a regular-season game in November 2010.

The Cubs are already in the concert business and branching out with Hotel Zachary and locally known restaurants like Big Star, Smoke Daddy and West Town Bakery. The Cubs see a future All-Star Game as another economic engine.

Manfred has tried to steer the marquee event toward cities that poured public money into stadiums — even when those investments are misguided and full of regrets. Just look at empty Marlins Park and former Miami owner Jeffrey Loria, who sold the team to Derek Jeter’s group after hosting last year’s All-Star Game.

The Ricketts family has relied on private financing to restore and modernize Wrigley Field and transform the neighborhood. The Cubs will continue to work with Emanuel, who sold NFL officials on moving the draft to Chicago in 2015 and 2016.

Washington will get its chance to host the All-Star Game this summer at Nationals Park. The optics made it look like Manfred used the 2019 All-Star Game to push the Cleveland Indians to stop using the Chief Wahoo logo, beginning next season at Progressive Field.

The Cubs need to find more common ground with Alderman Tom Tunney and put the finishing touches on a ballpark that opened in 1914. After Tuesday’s home opener, Maddon bounced some dugout ideas off Carl Rice — the vice president of stadium restoration and expansion — and assistant general manager Randy Bush.

“Everybody’s on the same page,” Maddon said. “Everybody expected some kind of an adjustment period and the fixes that we’re talking about are relatively simple.

“I think the adjustments are minimal. It’s just something that permits us better egress and regress out of the dugout for the hitters and just some sight lines from a coaching perspective.”

By moving the home dugout roughly 30 feet toward the left-field foul pole, Maddon's perch went from near the on-deck circle to in range of the third base coach's box.

Do you like being that close to Brian Butterfield?

"I don't know, his wife might get jealous," Maddon joked. "I just got to figure out angles. Don't get me wrong, it's not hard. It's just awkward. I don't want to make it awkward for [Butterfield]. I want to make it easier for him. That's my concern. It's easy for me. I just want to make it easier for him."

There has been nothing easy about updating The Friendly Confines. But this offseason marked the most challenging — and most expensive — phase of the project. Now it's hard to remember Wrigley Field without video boards, an office tower and a state-of-the-art clubhouse.

"It's like anything else," Maddon said. "You just got to get used to it. Once you get used to it, it will be fine."

--

The Athletic

Welcome to the Gilded Age of the Chicago Cubs

By Lauren Comitor

HOTEL ZACHARY, WRIGLEY TOWNE — The moment you step from the Wrigley Field concourse over the threshold of the American Airlines 1914 Club, you're struck by the fact that such a cavernous, heavily gilded space shouldn't exist inside of a century-plus-old ballpark.

That's kind of the point of the subterranean home plate club, the first (and biggest) of four planned premium club spaces at Wrigley Field. It's almost like being transported to another world — or maybe a new River North restaurant.

But 1914 was the aim of the design, which incorporates elements from that era, from old photos to actual bricks from the original ballpark embedded in the walls. The Cubs even borrowed a framed copy of an old drink recipe book from a Kentucky club, which includes one of the original recipes for the old fashioned (they have to give it back in six months).

The club measures 7,500 square feet and features elements of Cubs and Chicago history. Cubs senior vice president of sales and marketing Colin Faulkner said part of the inspiration was drawn from architect Louis Sullivan, who designed the Auditorium Building, among other since-demolished structures. There are mostly subtle, vintage airline posters scattered around the walls to pay homage to the club's naming rights partner. While it seems like a place to get away from baseball, that is the main focus of the space. The Cubs asked their wealthier fans what they wanted, and it is still baseball.

"The things that [fans] told us were they really enjoyed baseball, they enjoyed the view from their seats, but they wanted more baseball, and they wanted less time waiting for restrooms, less time waiting for concessions and things like that, and more comfortable seats," Faulkner said. "So we took all that kind of survey research and feedback from fans and incorporated it into the club during the design process."

Much of the club, which can accommodate all 700 people whose tickets are connected with it, is designed to keep fans in their seats as much as possible. Like the Cubs' new dugout, it's tough to see the game in here. There are plenty of places to sit, but there aren't many TVs — Faulkner says they didn't want it to feel like a sports bar, despite it being located in the world's largest beer garden. There are also

two grab-and-go food and drink stations on either end of the club, near the exits that lead to the seats. The restrooms are also strategically located near those exits, which are accessible by both stairs and elevators.

The seats, which are the first seven rows of the club box section from dugout to dugout, include service from a dedicated set of premium vendors. Unlike other home plate clubs around the league, there are no high-back, plush chairs — the seats look just like every other one in the stadium, save for a cushioned bottom, which was done to maintain the “aesthetic” of the ballpark.

Another “interesting” feature is the bunker suite. There are six of these spaces, which are perfect for anyone who wants to watch a bunch of TVs in a swanky room below the ballpark. It would also be a great spot to spend the End Times — you could sip wine out of 1914-emblazoned glasses and be none the wiser to what's going on above you. Even better, bunker suite holders have access to the suites throughout the year, including when the team is out of town. Each suite is associated with eight tickets, plus four additional guest passes for others with tickets elsewhere in the ballpark.

There's also a small retail area that features items you won't find anywhere else — the aforementioned 1914 wine glasses, cardigans, flasks, cufflinks, leather koozies — and lockers in which to store them, complete with phone chargers.

The Cubs are late to the party when it comes to offering these premium experiences, but they're catching up quick. Over the last three or four years, the Cubs did a grand tour of premium experiences and clubs around sports, from every other Major League Baseball team that has a similar kind of home plate club, to the Kentucky Derby, to the Masters. Faulkner said they were able to take the best ideas from those experiences, and learn from others' mistakes.

As the Wrigley Field restoration nears its end, the remaining three clubs will come online next season. The first base (Maker's Mark Barrel Room) and third base (W Club) clubs, as well as the upper-deck Catalina Club, will all have different feels than the 1914 Club, but the amenities will be very similar. The first- and third-base clubs will also have views into the batting tunnels on either side, something the 1914 Club does not have.

It's clear that the Cubs' focus is marrying a premium fan experience with one that's as game-focused as possible. It's a tough tightrope to walk, especially with tickets in the 1914 club ranging anywhere from \$450-\$695 (though some seats are going for as low as \$150 on StubHub). While it's obviously a certain kind of fan the Cubs are catering to (and they haven't left the average Joe Cubs fan completely in their dust), the Cubs went to great lengths and left no detail unfinished to perfect the so-called “premier” experience. So far, so good, but time will tell whether the Cubs' measures to keep fans in their seats are as effective as they'd like.

“The level of service is very, very good, and I think we also tried to be really responsive to our fans and take their feedback on it,” Faulkner said. “And I know other people probably do that, but I think we put a lot of time into making that happen. And we’ve been listening to the feedback. And I think it’s showed in just the response in the last couple days, we had the soft opening with the people down here, we had the opening day, and it’s blown away people’s expectations. So I think it’s been a good formula. We did it on the video boards, we did it with other things, where we said, tell us what you want, and then do that. It’s been a good formula. And I don’t know if that makes it unique to our club, but I do think other people just, they build a club and then they try to sell it. And I think ours is based on a ton of feedback and research with our fans.”

Cubs.com

Baez blasts off twice again as Cubs rout Bucs

By Carrie Muskat

CHICAGO -- See Javy hit. See Javy run. See Javy create havoc on the bases once again.

Javier Baez provided the spark Wednesday night, hitting a pair of home runs for the second straight game and scoring the tiebreaking run in the sixth inning after some heads-up baserunning to help the Cubs post a 13-5 victory over the Pirates.

"There's not a lot of things he can't do," Cubs pitcher Jon Lester said of Baez. "Obviously he does it with a lot of flair. It's fun to watch, it really is."

Baez, who hit a pair of solo homers on Tuesday, belted his third of the season in the second when he connected on a 3-1 pitch from Pirates starter Steven Brault to take a 4-3 lead.

"Steven had the 3-0 swing from Baez on a changeup down, then we get a fastball up and he hits a three-run homer," Pirates manager Clint Hurdle said. "It's all part of the hard learning curve up here at times."

The Pirates tied the game at 4 on Francisco Cervelli's RBI single in the fifth, but Baez answered in an adventurous sixth. He struck out to open the inning yet reached first on a wild pitch by Pirates reliever Tyler Glasnow. Baez then advanced on a groundout by Jason Heyward and stole third.

The Pirates brought the infield in, and pinch-hitter Tommy La Stella hit a chopper to second baseman Josh Harrison, who double pumped before he threw home. Baez slid in safely to give the Cubs a 5-4 lead.

"I went a little late on that," Baez said of his dash home. "I was going on contact. I saw the ball. I was paying attention for the ball in the dirt. It kind of caught me in-between, but I scored."

He wasn't the only one. Kris Bryant hit a pair of RBI doubles, Ben Zobrist added a two-run single and Ian Happ gave the Cubs a cushion with a two-run pinch-hit homer in the seventh, his first since Opening Day.

But as much fun as Baez is having scampering around the bases, he also is maturing as a ballplayer. He popped up in the seventh and threw his bat.

"You know what I learned today? How ugly I looked on that fly ball," said Baez, who also announced his engagement on social media on Wednesday. "I tossed the bat really high, I didn't run to first base. One of my teammates came up to me [in the dugout] and he said it in a good way and you learn from it."

"After I hit that fly ball that I tossed the bat really high, I was kind of mad about it, not because of the fly ball but just the way I looked, for the kids and everybody who follow me," he said. "That's not a good thing. I learned that from today."

What Cubs manager Joe Maddon has learned watching Baez is that he's one of the most exciting players in the game today.

"You're going to go scout, watch guys run the bases and they'll tell you what they're instincts are like in the game of baseball," Maddon said. "[Good players] see things. It's like a good running back. ... He's among the best I've ever seen or ever had."

Baez also is providing some power. He's the first Cubs player to post consecutive multi-homer games since Alfonso Soriano did so May 16-17, 2008, and the first player to do so in the Major Leagues this season.

"I've been working on focusing on me and the pitcher out there and forget about the whole field, everything really, launch angle, the models of the bat," Baez said. "I cleared my mind and it's all about competing. That's how I've been taking it. You're seeing it's been great for me."

MOMENTS THAT MATTERED

Sean gone: The Pirates jumped on Lester in the second. With one out, David Freese singled to center and Gregory Polanco walked to set up Rodriguez's home run. Rodriguez entered the game 11-for-48 against Lester with two homers and 20 strikeouts. He launched an 0-1 sinker 422 feet to center.

"Pittsburgh is hot right now," Maddon said. "[Lester] didn't have bad stuff. The home run, that's the pitch, that's the three points right there. He might have gone six innings [if he didn't give that up]."

Lester was upset about the three walks he gave up.

"I can deal with making mistakes and giving up home runs if we don't walk people to get to that mistake to give up the home run," Lester said. "If they string hits together and hit a three-run homer, you tip your hat. If you're allowing extra baserunners based on free passes, that's where for me, I'm beating myself and not allowing them to beat me."

Javy stays red hot: The Cubs loaded the bases in the second when Zobrist reached on a bunt single, Addison Russell doubled and Victor Caratini was hit by a pitch. Zobrist then scored on a wild pitch during Baez's at-bat. Baez smacked a 3-1 fastball from Braut for his third homer of the season to take a 4-3 lead. According to Statcast™, the ball sailed a projected 434 feet.

"A lot of people say I've got a little power, but to be honest, the pitcher makes the power with the velocity," Baez said. "I'm a guy who is really strong with my legs. My swing starts with my legs pushing forward. ... I'm trying to stay under control but it's really hard for me. As long as I stay under control, I'll be really good."

QUOTABLE

"As he matures as a hitter, I have no idea what he's going to do because he is one of the more exciting players in the game now." -- Maddon, on Baez

"I'll let somebody else explain it. It's a funny story from the hitting coach. When we get a base hit, we do something good, so we have to pat our guys on the back." -- Baez, on why the Cubs players pat themselves on the back after they get on base

SOUND SMART WITH YOUR FRIENDS

The Cubs totaled seven doubles and three home runs in the game for the first time since Aug. 18, 1995, at Colorado. All eight starting position players recorded a hit.

WHAT'S NEXT

Kyle Hendricks will close the Cubs' series against the Pirates on Thursday. This will be Hendricks' first start at Wrigley Field for the season. The right-hander does not have a decision in his first two outings. In

his last game, he served up multiple homers for the seventh time in 101 career starts in a loss to the Brewers. Last season, Hendricks was 4-3 with a 3.20 ERA at Wrigley Field, and posted a 2.83 ERA on the road. First pitch is scheduled for 1:20 p.m. CT.

--

Cubs.com

Heyward receives 5th Gold Glove Award

By Carrie Muskat

CHICAGO -- Cubs right fielder Jason Heyward was presented his fifth Rawlings Gold Glove Award prior to Wednesday's 13-5 win over the Pirates, and it's well deserved, manager Joe Maddon said.

"I don't know how many times I've told him, 'I feel so much better when you're on the field,'" Maddon said. "I think the receiving of the Gold Glove Award is one of the top awards in all baseball. I love having guys win that award. Normally, if you have a couple of those, you have a pretty good year as a group."

Heyward, who has won the award in 2012 and '14-17, hasn't had the same success offensively with the Cubs, batting .243 since he signed an eight-year deal in December 2015.

"Right now, he has not achieved on the offensive level he'd like to, because normally that award goes to an offensive player," Maddon said of the defensive honor. "The fact that he's been able to hold serve in the eyes of the industry, while still working to get to the level he's capable of offensively, is impressive.

"He does make a huge difference for us," Maddon said. "When he's on the field and Javy [Baez] is on the field, we have all of our defense on the field, from the dugout, I promise it feels a whole lot better. We haven't arrived offensively where we want to arrive yet with [Heyward], however, he's been a grand part, a great part of our success the last three years."

Cubs adjusting to new Wrigley dugout

Maddon met with Cubs officials to discuss the new dugouts and some possible changes.

"Everybody expected some kind of adjustment period," Maddon said. "I think the adjustments are minimal. We want something that permits better egress and regress out of the dugout for the hitters and some sightlines from a coaching perspective, too."

Because the dugouts are about 28 feet further down the line, Maddon has a view of home plate from a different angle, and that will take some getting used to. The good news is that he was warm enough.

"It's really a well-designed dugout," Maddon said.

The Cubs also noticed that the grass is playing fast.

"They just had to put that turf down late," Maddon said. "You're seeing a compressed bluegrass. It almost plays like a Bermuda cut. It's quick -- there's a lot of topspin on the ball. It'll slow down."

Maddon's foundation pitches in

Maddon's Respect 90 Foundation joined the Cal Ripken Sr. Foundation, Sports Fields, Inc., and Clearwater for Youth to ensure the Kiwanis Club Miracle League of the Gulf Beaches will have a baseball season this spring. The Miracle League provides opportunities for children with disabilities to play baseball, regardless of their abilities.

The league's original rubber field was installed in 2006 and had deteriorated enough to force the cancellation of the '17 fall season because of safety concerns. The Respect 90 Foundation led the effort to build a new field, which will be installed in time for the season opener on Saturday.

--

ESPNChicago.com

You wouldn't like Eddie Butler when he's angry

By Jesse Rogers

CHICAGO -- It was a rivalry game.

Greenbrier Christian Academy, in Virginia, was playing nearby Bishop Sullivan. Emotions were running high. Several pro scouts were in the stands to watch Greenbrier senior right-hander Eddie Butler. Instead of trying to impress those who had a say in his future, Butler wanted some revenge.

"This kid just kept running his mouth the whole time," Butler recently recalled of the 2009 game. "He ran his mouth in the fall and ran his mouth all winter. He went to a rival school. So I hit him on purpose. We cleared benches. A couple guys got ejected."

It wouldn't be the first or last time emotion overcame Butler. Now a member of the Chicago Cubs bullpen, Butler admits he had -- or even has -- an "anger problem." In fact, he's still trying to overcome it -- or at least put it in its place.

"I did it this spring training," Butler said. "I had a bad inning. Threw my glove against the bench then kicked it under the bench."

The irony is Butler might be the last guy on the Cubs you would think has a short fuse. Usually there's a smile on his face, but underneath it all, he has struggled to maintain control.

"He would get in trouble for doing stupid stuff," Eddie's dad, Tim Butler, said via a phone interview. "But he would give everything up just to go to baseball. We took everything else away from him. He lost his TV in his room. He would have to go to bed right after dinner and no friends. But he got to go to practice."

Eddie summed it up: "I used to hold things in, hold things in, then explode."

A day in middle school provided quite the scene.

"I got angry and yelled at a girl in the middle of class and got suspended," Butler said. "That's when my parents sat me down and said, 'Look, you need to get this under control.' It was either losing baseball or stop hanging out with friends and no TV and stuff. I chose baseball."

It was a good choice, as Butler was eventually drafted in the first round by Colorado after attending Radford University. Before spring training in 2017, he was traded to the Cubs for James Farris, who has since retired.

Baseball should have been his release. Instead, it only fueled his anger, especially when things didn't go his way. Fortunately, the thrown bats, kicked gloves and punched water coolers never resulted in real harm -- for himself or his teammates.

"You would see him do that stuff, but I think it was just a maturing thing," said teammate Tyler Chatwood, who played with Butler in the Rockies system. "He was pretty young, getting called up. He's been able to mature."

"We were in a conference championship game, and he pitched two days earlier. He wanted to close out the championship game. His velocity was way up when he came in. He stepped it up a notch and blew them away. I saw him use his emotions to help himself."

Gary Lavelle, Eddie Butler's high school coach

While Butler has grown on the mound, his past actions earned him a reputation across baseball -- for better or worse.

"The Cubs were aware," Cubs president Theo Epstein said. "The industry was aware."

Maybe that's because of those scouts in the stands the day Butler hit a high school kid on purpose, leading to that brawl. One of those scouts in attendance worked for the Cubs.

"There were three scouts there that day, and I was one of them," Cubs area scout Billy Swoope said. "I don't know how to say this, but it kind of perked me up a little bit. I was like, 'OK, this guy doesn't fool around.' It kind of intrigued me about him to the point where I wanted to sign him out of high school."

Yes, Butler's anger problem actually made Swoope take notice of him, but taking out frustrations on equipment isn't usually viewed as a positive.

"I'd throw a bat or helmet and accidentally hit a guy on my team, and I'd feel like an idiot," Butler said. "I'd have to go apologize to them for getting mad and slamming something down and hitting someone else. ... Then I'd be yelling at umpires, doing all kinds of stupid stuff like throwing at the other team and punching coolers. I punched a wall once."

Butler didn't have to be reminded that the wall never loses in those battles. Epstein was quick to point out that many players show their anger in the moment; it can happen after a bad at-bat or poorly pitched ball -- or, in Epstein's experience, in the office.

"There were times when you have to release a guy, and you want a big body in the room," he said with a half-smile.

Fortunately, Butler was good enough to advance in baseball even as his anger got the best of him at times, but he didn't exactly light the world on fire with the Rockies and is still finding his way with the Cubs. He surprised even himself with his performance in a 17-inning marathon in the second game of the season, when he threw seven stellar innings in relief -- all in extras.

"Pitching with your back against the wall was kind of cool," Butler said. "I was surprised with how well I handled it. I didn't let it get to me too much. I threw my best game I ever threw in the big leagues. ... I wasn't sure how I would respond to one pitch forcing the game to be over. I didn't think about it once I left the bullpen."

He actually suffered the loss against the Marlins, but only after Brandon Morrow gave up the winning hit while Butler was looking on from the dugout. Did that infuriate him?

"No," Butler said with a chuckle. "I wanted to win that game, but I pitched well. I wasn't mad."

His defenders -- such as his parents and perhaps even Swoope -- will say the anger comes from his being overly competitive. Butler allows for that notion but also understands that he has to stay in control.

"It actually fizzled out in baseball more than off the field," Butler said. "Things would aggravate me and stay with me all day."

His mom remembers one incident in particular.

"We had an unattached garage," Monica recalled. "He was on his four-wheeler. Dad got on him about something, and he had a little bit of an attitude. When he came around the back of the garage, the door was closed, and he ran the four-wheeler right into the door and tore it all up. A brand new door. He told us he hit the garage door not because his attitude, but because the brakes weren't working. He had to replace the cost with doing chores around the house."

Somewhat amazingly, Butler didn't get any formal anger therapy. Things slowly got better when he realized he was headed down a bad path. And, of course, he had help along the way. His coaches and parents were there for him.

"After years of working on it and being aware what gets me mad and how to react, I've gotten better," Butler said. "When I was at Radford, the coaches took me out to dinner. They wanted to make sure I was all right."

Butler's college coach at Radford, Joe Raccuia, didn't mince words when talking about Butler's issues. He and the other coaches saw the talent in the freshman, who turned down the Texas Rangers after being drafted out of high school, but also saw a player headed in the wrong direction.

"One of the things Eddie does is talk about how good he is before he performs," Raccuia said. "He probably did it at the Cape [Cod League]. He probably did in the minors. He probably did in a big league clubhouse. He did it at Radford when he first got here. Then when you get hit around, it's a humbling experience."

The dinner with Raccuia helped, and though there are those negative stories about Butler, he garnered praise at every level of baseball for being a fierce competitor who used his emotions to help him.

"I think Eddie is a super competitor," said Gary Lavelle, his high school coach. "We were in a conference championship game, and he pitched two days earlier. He wanted to close out the championship game. His velocity was way up when he came in. He stepped it up a notch and blew them away. I saw him use his emotions to help himself."

How do the people closest to Butler know he's getting better? They see little signs on the mound -- not the exaggerated emotions he used to portray.

"The worst thing he does now is twist the baseball trying to rub the major league emblem off," Butler's dad said. "If he's having a great time, he doesn't fidget with that baseball. If he's struggling or someone makes a bad play, we know it's because he rubs that baseball."

Has the anger issue been conquered? Butler doesn't think so, as he believes he might have to deal with it in one form or another for the rest of his life. But he's getting there.

Realization is the word used to describe Butler's progress. Realizing the problem is the first step to a solution.

"I just knew I had a short fuse," Butler said. "When something didn't go my way, I usually let it be known. Looking back, it wasn't the greatest thing. I've had umpires miss calls, and the next thing you know, I'm trying to throw the ball 100 mph. I'm like, 'What am I doing?'"

--

NBC Sports Chicago

The main lesson Javy Baez learned during an incredible game actually came from a popout

By Tony Andracki

It's been one hell of a week for The Most Exciting Player in Baseball.

Javy Baez got engaged, put his name in the Cubs history books and helped his team win a handful of games with highlight-reel plays at bat, on the bases and in the field.

It's Javy's world. We're just living in it.

How does he feel about an epic performance in the first two games of the Cubs' 2018 slate at Wrigley Field?

"I'm excited; look at my face," he said, smiling in front of the cameras.

But after hitting a pair of homers for the second night in a row (and becoming the first Cub to do so since Alfonso Soriano in May 2008) Wednesday, Baez actually spent more time talking about his seventh-inning popout than his two dingers.

"You know what I really got out of today and what I learned?" Baez asked a gaggle of reporters that crowded around his locker for the second time in a 29-hour span. "How ugly I looked when I got out today on that fly ball. I tossed the bat really high, I didn't run to first base.

"One of my teammates came up to me and he said it in a good way and he said, 'You learn from it.' After I hit that fly ball and tossed the bat really high, I was kinda mad about it. Not because of the fly ball, just the way I looked for the kids and everybody that follows me.

"That's not a good look. So I learned that from today."

To be fair, even when Baez pops out or swings out of his shoes, he's still a delight to watch play the game.

The bat-throw and reaction he referenced made more than a few people in the Wrigley Field press box giggle. All those wild, crazy, out-of-control swings-and-misses that result in Baez falling to his knee or on his back? Fans eat that stuff up.

Especially when he's going like he is now.

Over the last week, Baez has turned heads with his prowess on the bases in Milwaukee, tallied a Little League homer thanks to a ball that bounced off the back of his head, flashed the ever-popular #JavyTags and collected 5 extra-base hits and 9 RBI.

The free-swinging infielder has even drawn 5 walks in the last 6 games, thanks in large part to other teams intentionally placing him on first base.

And then there's the dropped-third strike in the sixth inning Wednesday when he reached first base, advanced to second on a groundout, stole third and then broke on contact when Tommy La Stella hit a grounder to the drawn-in Pirates infielder. That run gave the Cubs a lead they did not relinquish in a 13-5 victory.

"He knows how to play the game of baseball," Joe Maddon marveled after the game.

Baez is a self-proclaimed slow starter, yet will wake up on April 12 with a .714 slugging percentage and 1.086 OPS through 11 games.

He credits that success with all the areas of his game he's worked on, from improving his focus when he's at the plate and blocking out all the noise to trying to stay within himself.

"I'm gonna swing hard most of the time, but it's something I can control," Baez said. "I'm trying to stay under control, but it's really hard for me. As long as I stay under control, I'll be really good."

How good can he be if he starts consistently using the whole field and stops trying to hit every ball onto the rooftops across the street from Wrigley?

"As he matures as a hitter, I have no idea what he's gonna do because he is one of the most exciting players in the game right now," Maddon said.

Maddon and his coaching staff have always made sure not to coach the Javy out of Javy. They don't want him to lose any of the incredible instincts that make him so great defensively or as a baserunner.

That freedom has allowed the real Javy to shine through, and we may just be scratching the surface of the complete player he can be.

"Just gotta be you," Baez said. "A lot of people put a lot of pressure on themselves and you're gonna make mistakes, but you gotta make them to learn."

--

NBC Sports Chicago

How the Cubs are stealing bases without stealing bases

By Tony Andracki

The Cubs may not have the fastest team in the league, but they're definitely going to try to force the issue on the basepaths this season.

They've always been aggressive running the bases, with guys like Kris Bryant, Javy Baez, Addison Russell and Jason Heyward all earning positive marks with their legs the last two seasons.

But they've taken things to another level on the basepaths in 2018, courtesy of new third base coach and baserunning specialist Brian Butterfield.

It's still very early obviously, but the Cubs have jumped from 24th in the league (2017) to 12th in baserunning value to kick off the 2018 campaign despite entering the day tied for last with only three stolen bases.

How are they doing it?

They're taking the extra base whenever possible, putting pressure on the opposing defense.

"We talked about that a lot in spring training," Joe Maddon said. "We want to be that group. You don't have to be fast to be a great baserunner. So we don't have impressively great team speed, but you can still run the bases smartly and I think we've done that to this point.

"You don't want to run into outs. Just being aggressive, opportunity arises and you want to be opportunistic. I think we've been that so far."

Aggressive baserunning helped give the Cubs the lead Wednesday night as Baez reached on a dropped third strike, moved to second on a fielder's choice, stole third and then motored home on Tommy La Stella's groundball to a drawn-in infield.

The baserunning helped lead to several runs and seven Brewers errors throughout the course of the four-game series in Milwaukee last weekend, most notably with Baez's highlight-reel trip around the bases Thursday.

In the first inning last Friday, the Cubs went first-to-third on three straight hits, jumping out to a 2-0 lead on the Brewers.

Aggressive baserunning also keyed a comeback in that wild ninth-inning comeback Saturday in Milwaukee.

It wasn't taking an extra base, but 36-year-old Ben Zobrist busting it down the line on an infield grounder snared by diving Milwaukee first baseman Eric Thames helped keep the inning alive.

"Good, hard baserunning from us," Ian Happ said. "I think we've been doing that all year. And just keep pushing that pace there. Awesome by Ben Zo getting down the line there and everybody moving around, making it tough on them."

Of course, the good does come with the bad when you're talking about a high-risk, high-reward endeavor.

Willson Contreras tried to take third base on Kyle Schwarber's single through the shift on the left side in the first inning Tuesday night and the Cubs catcher was initially ruled safe on the play before replay showed his foot came off the bag.

It was a moment Joe Maddon pointed to as a turning point in a game the Cubs eventually lost 8-5, giving Pirates starter Ivan Nova a first-inning bailout when the Cubs felt like they had him on the ropes.

For a team that doesn't steal many bases and a young offense that often goes into quiet spells in the situational hitting department, aggressive baserunning is an under-the-radar way the Cubs can manufacture a few more runs a week.

--

NBC Sports Chicago

The value of a unicorn like Tommy La Stella

By Tony Andracki

A Cubs player turned to his right, saw Tommy La Stella sitting in a chair in the Miller Park visiting locker room, smiled and said:

"Dude, you're the best pinch-hitter ever."

La Stella laughed it off and resumed watching The Masters.

"Best Pinch-Hitter Ever" may not rival "Greatest Leadoff Hitter of All-Time" in terms of importance to a Cubs team with World Series expectations, but La Stella's role has always been under the radar.

The 29-year-old utility man has only tallied 353 at-bats over his four seasons in a Cubs uniform, but he's been a mercenary of sorts for manager Joe Maddon, who can deploy La Stella at the most opportune times in a game.

He appeared in all but one of the Cubs' first 10 contests in 2018, though had just one start. Still, he's gone 3-for-8 in a pinch-hitting capacity, smacking two doubles with a pair of RBI.

Those numbers would be even higher if not for a Milwaukee official scorer who ruled La Stella's hard-hit grounder an error Sunday, though La Stella's aforementioned teammate clearly disagreed.

Last year, La Stella posted a ridiculous .290/.488/.419 slash line (.908 OPS) as a pinch-hitter, going 9-for-31 with four doubles, seven RBI and 10 walks against only five strikeouts.

"He knows what he's doing," Maddon said. "He knows how to do it. He doesn't try to force anything. He's not trying to appease me or anybody else with his preparation. He just prepares, which I love.

"He's a different cat. He's a very valuable commodity in today's game, in the National League, especially because of his pinch-hitting abilities. I anticipate and believe he will remain this way for several years to come."

Once upon a time, Maddon said La Stella may be the best pure hitter on the Cubs roster, using that as rationale for why the infielder was hitting fifth in the 2015 wild-card playoff in Pittsburgh.

Then there's the uber-popular "3 a.m." nickname that's taken on a life of its own after a comment Maddon made in spring training a few years ago, saying La Stella could wake up at 3 a.m. and hit line drives all over the field.

And there was the hilarious prank war between La Stella and Theo Epstein/Jed Hoyer in spring training, showing there were absolutely no hard feelings after the August 2016 incident where La Stella left the organization and nearly quit baseball.

While the rest of baseball is focused on launch angles and strikeouts are coming in record numbers, La Stella has stayed true to who he is as a hitter, sticking with a throwback style that makes him something of a unicorn in today's game.

He struck out only 18 times in 73 games last year, ranking as the 17th-toughest hitter to strike out in the game.

Among players with at least 150 plate appearances in 2017, La Stella was one of just seven MLB hitters who had more walks than strikeouts, joining the ranks of NL MVP candidates Anthony Rizzo, Joey Votto and Anthony Rendon, among others.

"He has such an old-school swing," Maddon said. "He's tension-free, he's flat through the zone, he doesn't try to lift anything, he's got a good eye, he'll work a count.

"He's unique in a lot of ways, meaning that he's not into the launch angles, not trying to power the ball. He's into using the whole field. He's got a really great base and he doesn't overthink it, that's for sure.

"He doesn't swing too often. He's not out there taking extra BP. He doesn't overanalyze himself. For me, a lot of old school tenants about the way he hits and I think we all appreciate that."

--

NBC Sports Chicago

While waiting for offensive breakthrough, Jason Heyward honored with fifth Gold Glove
By Tony Andracki

Jason Heyward may not be the hitter Cubs fans want him to be, but he's still one of the game's best defenders.

The Cubs right fielder was honored before Wednesday's game with his sixth career Gold Glove and fourth straight dating back to the 2014 season with the Atlanta Braves.

He's been credited with 18 DRS (Defensive Runs Saved) each of his two seasons in a Cubs uniform. That total of 36 DRS is second in baseball among outfielders, behind only Boston's Mookie Betts.

Cubs manager Joe Maddon has always told Heyward how much more at ease he feels in the dugout when the elite defender is patrolling the outfield.

"The receiving of the Gold Glove Award is one of the top awards in all of baseball," Joe Maddon said before Wednesday's ceremony. "...He makes a huge difference for us. When he's on the field and Javy [Baez] is on the field — when all our defense is on the field — from the dugout, I promise you, it feels a whole lot better.

"I know we haven't arrived offensively where we want to arrive with him, however he's been a great part of our success over the last three years."

Heyward is hitting the ball harder than ever in 2018, but that hasn't helped his offensive numbers overall.

In a Cubs uniform, he's hitting just .243 with a .315 on-base percentage and .353 slugging percentage, good for a paltry .668 OPS. He's hit 19 homers and driven in 114 runs in 278 games.

"He hasn't achieved on the offensive level that he would like to, cause normally that award goes to an offensive player," Maddon said of the Gold Glove. "It's almost an offensive award, so the fact that he's

really been able to hold serve in the eyes of the industry while he's still working to get to the level he's capable of offensively, I think it's pretty impressive. It really is."

--

Chicago Tribune

Cubs starter Jon Lester aiming to lower his high walk total

By Mark Gonzales

A three-run home run to Sean Rodriguez inflated Jon Lester's pitching line Wednesday night, but the Cubs' left-handed ace seemed more concerned with a disturbing trend dating back to last season when his ERA swelled by nearly two runs.

Lester was agitated by three walks in five innings, including a walk to Gregory Polanco that preceded Rodriguez's home run that gave the Pirates a short-lived 3-0 lead in the second inning of the Cubs' 13-5 win Wednesday night.

"For me, it's about walks," Lester said. "That stuff I can control, deep at-bats, and I let a couple of them get away from me. If I don't walk Polanco, I don't get to Rodriguez with the three-run homer.

"But with that being said, I feel like I made some pretty good pitches that were hit for hits. So I like my odds when it comes down to the whole season, if I continue to make those pitches, they're eventually going to be hit at somebody and they're going to be outs.

"I've got to keep that mindset. I can't over-analyze things. But, at the end of the day, for me it's the walks. I've got to clean that up, figure it out, figure out a way."

Lester's walks per nine innings increased from 2.3 in 2016 to 3.0 in 2017, and he's walked seven in 14 1/3 innings this season.

Lester also was bothered that he issued a walk to Starling Marte with two outs and nobody on base in the first.

"At least make him put the ball in play," Lester said. "It just prolongs the inning.

"That will get cleaned up. I can deal with making mistakes and giving up home runs if we don't walk people to get to that mistake to get to the home run."

Lester spoke with home plate umpire Dan Bellino after the second inning but praised Bellino's willingness to listen.

"The big thing he knows when you're confronting him, it's not an argument," said Lester, who was seeking clarity on a pitch to Polanco that was called a ball.

Lester said he was told by Bellino that the pitch was outside but to let him know if he was wrong after looking at a replay.

Lester provided a candid assessment to Bellino when he came to the plate in the bottom of the second.

"I told him, 'that's a pitcher's pitch if you call it.' (Polanco is) probably (upset). If you don't call it, I'm (upset). It's good to have that dialogue. As a pitcher you know I can at least get answers.

“You get some guys that you can never get an answer from, and that makes it more frustrating.”

--

Chicago Tribune

Javier Baez hits 2 HRs to power Cubs to 13-5 win over Pirates

By Mark Gonzales

Javier Baez joked with Anthony Rizzo that he usually doesn't get a hit when the Cubs collect 16 of them.

But these days, Baez is doing his best to carry a Cubs offense that won't have the services of their slugging first baseman at least through Sunday because of lower back stiffness.

Baez continued his power surge Wednesday night with two home runs as the Cubs to pulled away to a 13-5 victory over the Pirates at cold Wrigley Field.

Baez became the first Cubs player to produce consecutive multi-homer games since Alfonso Soriano on May 16-17, 2008 as he had two in Tuesday night's loss.

“As he matures as a hitter, I have no idea what he's going to do because he's one of the more exciting players in the game right now,” manager Joe Maddon said. “He had the long drive contest thing out. He had his John Daly hack going on.”

The 8 mph winds blowing in from Lake Michigan didn't intimidate Baez as he smacked a three-run homer to right-center field off left-hander Steven Brault to give the Cubs a 4-3 lead in the second.

Then, after looking foolish on a breaking pitch, Baez cranked a solo homer to left field off reliever Dovydas Neverauskas to cap the scoring in the eighth.

With six RBIs in his last two games, Baez leads the Cubs with 10 in addition to his four home runs.

“I've been working on focusing on me and the pitcher and forgetting about the whole field,” Baez said. “Everything — the launch angle, the miles off the bat. I was hitting with all this stuff. I cleared my mind and it's all about competing. That's all I've been thinking. And it has been great for me.”

One pitch before his first homer, Baez swung ferociously and missed at a 3-0 pitch, falling to one knee before regaining his composure and balance.

“A lot of people say I have a lot of power,” Baez said. “But to be honest, the pitcher makes the power with the velocity. I'm a guy who is really strong in the legs. And my swing starts with my legs pushing forward.

“I'm going to swing hard most of the time, but it's something I don't control. I'm trying to stay under control, but it's really hard for me. As long as I stay under control, I'll be very good.”

Baez also made the most out of his strikeout in the sixth when he reached safely on a wild pitch. He stole third base and scored the go-ahead run on a fielder's choice.

His home run in the eighth made up for a mistake he made in the seventh when he hit a high popup and flipped his bat several feet in the air before reaching first.

“What I learned about was how ugly I look on that (popup),” Baez said. “I tossed the bat very high. I didn’t run to first base. One of my teammates came up to me and said it in a good way, and I learned from it.

“Especially me, I don’t take the at-bat before to the plate. After I hit that (popup) I t I was mad about it. Not about the (popup) but the way I looked in front of the kids and anyone who follows me. That’s not a good look.”

--

Chicago Tribune

Column: Cubs' 1914 Club at Wrigley Field is a windowless hideaway at new-car prices

By Phil Rosenthal

There’s no glass to press one’s nose against to see how the elite live it up in the Cubs’ long-anticipated, newly opened and windowless American Airlines 1914 Club at Wrigley Field.

You’ll just have to take our word for it.

It’s nice.

Nice enough, you may wonder, to justify shelling out between \$32,400 and \$56,295 per seat per season?

Alas, even after a guided tour Wednesday, I have no idea. I don’t have gubernatorial candidate money to throw around. For that price, my frame of reference is miles-per-gallon, payment plans and resale value.

Even with all-you-can-consume food and beverages included, your mileage may vary for the 1914 Club, the first, largest and most expensive of four planned Cubs premium clubs at Wrigley.

The other clubs are supposed to be ready next season. Meanwhile, the available 700 or so spots for the 1914 Club already have been snapped up, so you don’t have to feel tempted.

With dark wood, vintage bricks and soft lighting, this 7,500 square foot lair carved out below the stands behind home plate as part of the multiyear renovation of the ballpark aims to suggest a hotel lobby bar of a century ago.

Paper napkins, grab-and-go stations with sandwiches, chips and other snacks to eat upstairs in the stands and a few flat-screen TVs around the club are a tad anachronistic to that motif.

They are no more jarring, however, than other Wrigley updates to reap revenue since the Ricketts family acquired the Cubs, which some adore and others abhor.

Either way, clearly, it’s not 1914 anymore. It’s not even 2014, when the ballpark marked its 100th anniversary.

Ticket prices in the 1914 Club section, which include the first seven rows from relocated dugout to relocated dugout, are certainly cutting edge 21st century: They top out at \$695 in the first row and \$400 in row G. (There appear to be some relative bargains to be had in the resale market for some games this week, if \$250 or so can be considered a bargain.)

If you break down the price, the biggest part of the investment has to be for the first-rate location of the seats, which have wooden arm rests and a bit of cushion.

Some of the price is for the soft drinks, craft beer, wine, premium liquor and food, which includes grill stations that offer freshly made artisan pizzas and other comestibles.

Some is for having a place to hang out if the weather gets ugly and maybe a bit is snob appeal, although, mercifully, there is no physical barrier separating club seats and non-club seats so often found in other ballparks.

It would be a mistake, though, to underestimate the perceived value of the club's presumably oft-scrubbed and likely uncrowded rest rooms not far from the well-heeled's padded seats.

There are other amenities, to be sure. Among them is a stand selling exclusive Cubs merchandise said to be available only in the club. There also are lockers to store that merchandise or a purse or charge a phone during the game.

But Colin Faulkner, the Cubs' senior vice president for sales and marketing, said surveys of potential customers prioritized maximizing time in their seats, which meant minimizing time spent waiting for concessions and, yes, rest rooms.

Faulkner said the reason there are only five big TVs and four smaller ones in the 1914 Club is because people said they wanted to enjoy their seats, not hang out in a sports bar.

Besides, there's no sense incentivizing people to watch games in the club, exposing coveted seat locations empty on TV.

That said, for people or companies with even more to spend, however, there are a handful of private rooms within the club that come with eight primo seats. Bunker suites, they're dubbed. Each has a private bar and a lot of TVs for use whether there's a game going on or not.

Moving the dugouts down the line to accommodate the 1914 Club seating has required some adjustments elsewhere.

Some season ticketholders say the just-installed seats they got in the latest renovations are much narrower than before. The Tribune's Paul Sullivan quoted one saying they seemed built for "middle school students."

Carl Rice, the Cubs vice president overseeing the restoration and expansion of Wrigley Field, said there are seats of various widths throughout Wrigley Field, at least partly because of how different seating areas turn and bend as well as the location of aisles. Some are as narrow as 18 inches and others as wide as 20 inches.

"There was some reconfiguration of the seating bowl and we put some new seats in and some of those new seats might be slightly smaller," Rice said.

"Maybe in that section the seats got a tad smaller. If anything, with the new plastic seats, they might have lost an inch, but they didn't lose anything more than that. We have to take a look."

If those fans' counterparts in the 1914 Club ranks feel in any way squeezed, it's not because of their seats and one can only assume they knew the price before signing up.

--

Chicago Tribune

Cubs continue push for All-Star Game while improving Wrigley facilities

By Mark Gonzales

Major League Baseball's decision announced Wednesday to award Dodger Stadium as the site of the 2020 All-Star Game hardly put a dent in the Cubs' plans to bring the Midsummer Classic to Wrigley Field in the near future.

The team will continue its pursuit of being host for the game as upgrades and renovations continue to enhance Wrigley's chances.

Along those lines, many Cubs executives from the business and baseball operations departments have spent hours going over issues manager Joe Maddon and players brought up regarding the new dugouts, which were widened and received a warm response.

Some tweaking is in store, particularly the widening of the entrance from near the bat rack to the on-deck circle.

"Everyone expected some kind of adjustment period," Maddon said. "The fixes we're talking about are relatively simple."

Maddon acknowledged that the placement of the dugouts farther down the lines put everyone on alert.

"As a group, we really have to be on our toes for the foul ball that is smoked in that area," Maddon said "It's going to take a couple of games. It will be fine."

Dodger Stadium, which experienced a broken sewage pipe that caused postponement of an exhibition game two weeks ago, will be host to its first All-Star Game since 1980. The stadium opened in 1962.

The Cubs had their last All-Star Game in 1990.

Heyward's hardware: Maddon believes right fielder Jason Heyward's recognition as a five-time National League Gold Glove Award winner is more impressive in light of his recent offensive struggles.

"It's almost an offensive award," Maddon said about two hours before Heyward received his fourth consecutive Gold Glove Award on Wednesday. "The fact he has been able to hold serve in the eyes of the industry while he's still working to get to the level he's capable of offensively is pretty impressive. And he makes a huge difference for us."

Two at second: Javier Baez became only the sixth Cub to hit two or more home runs in a game as a second baseman, joining Ryne Sandberg (24), Rogers Hornsby (2), Todd Walker (2), Heinie Zimmerman (2), Ben Zobrist (2). Baez achieved the feat in Tuesday's loss and repeated Wednesday.

--

Chicago Tribune

Column: Pirates hoping to overcome doubters and hang with Cubs in NL Central

By Paul Sullivan

The Cubs' losing streak stood at one game Wednesday when manager Joe Maddon was asked how "difficult" it was when fans expected them to win every game.

Apparently the poor Cubs had to endure some mild criticism over another listless offensive start to the season. They were hitting .228 going into their night game against the Pirates, with a .184 average with runners in scoring position and an average of 10 strikeouts per game.

"I think we handle it well," Maddon said before the 13-5 victory over the Pirates. "It's so hard to win a major-league baseball game. That's what people don't understand. It's very difficult."

Well, that's not exactly "embracing the target," an oldie but goodie "Maddonism" from their championship season, when they also were supposed to win and, of course, did.

I'm not sure "It's so hard to win a major-league baseball game" is really T-shirt material. Besides, most knowledgeable Cubs fans understand this team is going to get its act together sooner or later, preferably before the All-Star break, and maybe even before May. It can happen quickly. Javier Baez's home run barrage — four in two games after a pair Wednesday — is a prime example of how a player can go from cold to smoking hot in only a few days.

So there's no reason to feel sorry for Maddon or the Cubs, who remain heavy favorites to win the National League Central again and are one of a handful of teams that can win it all.

They can handle some minor grumbling that comes with a mediocre start. It's an occupational hazard for any team accustomed to winning year after year.

Meanwhile, Pirates manager Clint Hurdle is trying to tamp down expectations after his team's surprisingly hot start.

Asked about the atmosphere in the clubhouse after Tuesday's victory, Hurdle said: "Again, I think this is going to get overcooked. We've played 10 ballgames (8-2)."

Hurdle is not the type to start cheerleading before Tax Day, if ever. He's not going to guarantee a spot in the playoffs, as new Phillies manager Gabe Kapler foolishly did in his first week.

Surely he knew six of the Pirates' victories going into Wednesday night had come over the rebuilding Tigers and Reds.

This is a team that's going to have to earn its respect the old-fashioned way, and it's probably going to take a couple of months of playing this well to get the attention of their fans.

But with the Cubs starting so so-so and the Pirates looking stronger than expected, is it too early to suggest the NL Central could be a four-way race?

Maybe, but Maddon said offensively the Pirates are "at the top of their game," while their pitching will be the key.

"On the field, they can play with anybody," he said. "Their record is legit, based on a really good group on the field that is clicking on all cylinders offensively."

There are reasons to believe the Pirates' early success is sustainable. Hurdle is as good an in-game manager as anyone in the business, and Starling Marte is back for a full season, presumably, after serving an 80-game PED suspension last year.

The lineup improved with the recent addition of Rays outfielder Corey Dickerson, who was acquired for next to nothing. Gregory Polanco led the majors with 13 RBIs Wednesday, first baseman Josh Bell is a budding star and third baseman Colin Moran, acquired from the Astros in the Gerrit Cole trade, looks like the real deal.

In spite of the team going backward since the 98-win season in 2015 that ended with the wild-card game loss to the Cubs, the Pirates handed general manager Neal Huntington and Hurdle four-year extensions last September.

The head-scratching began in earnest because it seemed like their window to win had closed. The Pirates dropped 83 games and finished third in 2016, then lost 87 games while finishing fourth in 2017.

Adding to the malaise, Huntington dealt Cole and popular outfielder Andrew McCutchen over the winter. Huntington repeatedly denied it was the start of a rebuild, but no one believed him.

Now the Pirates are hot, and the players are starting to believe in themselves

"We came together really well in spring, got to know a few new faces in the clubhouse," Bell said. "This is the closest team we've had, at least teams I've played on. I'm excited to have this start we've had and hope to continue to progress."

Whether their fans are buying in is debatable. They currently are occupied with the Penguins' defense of the Stanley Cup title, giving the Pirates a month or two of cover.

"I can't really speak for the fans," Bell said. "I just speak for us in the clubhouse. It's one of those things where the fans felt a certain way in the offseason, as well they should. They had two faces (of the organization) get traded away. Hopefully the new faces are stepping up here. We've seen it so far."

--

Chicago Sun-Times

Big-swinging Javy Baez scores big (twice) and small as Cubs rout upstart Pirates
By Gordon Wittenmyer

If this is what Javy Baez is going to do in April, with game-time wind chills in the 30s during a week that has included snow and rain, what might he do in June?

"I feel really great, especially [considering] the weather," said Baez, whose two homers Wednesday gave him four in two games. He also played a key small-ball role in the Cubs' four-run sixth inning in a 13-5 rout of the division-leading Pirates.

Baez, who hit a go-ahead, three-run shot to right-center in the second and a solo shot to left in the eighth, is the first Cub with back-to-back two-homer games since Alfonso Soriano in May 2008.

"I'm a guy that I keep warming up during the season," Baez said. "I know that. So I don't have any pressure. I'm not rushing to get hot. I'm just trying to see the ball and make good contact."

That doesn't mean he's not swinging out of his helmet at times when he thinks a 3-0 cookie might be on the way — as he nearly did one pitch before the second-inning home run — or any number of other times in the game.

"He had the long-drive contest out tonight. He had his John Daly hat going on," manager Joe Maddon said.

With no apologies.

"I'm going to swing hard most of the time," said Baez, who is hitting only .229 but has a .714 slugging percentage because only one of his eight hits is a single. "I'm trying to stay under control, but it's really hard for me. As long as I stay under control, I'll be real good."

Baez has been productive enough on the bases, in the field and at the plate in the early going to provide some of the Cubs' bigger impact moments.

"His whole game is spectacular," Maddon said. "Now as he matures as a hitter, I have no idea what he's going to do. Because he is one of the more exciting players in the game right now."

Baez struck out swinging big at a wild pitch leading off the sixth but got out of the box fast and was able to reach first easily.

After taking second on a grounder to first, he stole third. He later scored the go-ahead run on a grounder to drawn-in second baseman Josh Harrison, who double-pumped and threw wide of the plate.

The Cubs would then pounce on the Pirates' bullpen on a night starter Jon Lester labored to get through five innings with the game tied at 4.

For all of the Cubs' highlights, Baez was a spotlight for what this game showed in his approach-minded return to being himself at the plate — and a growth moment involving a teammate in the dugout.

"I've been working on focusing on just me and the pitcher out there and forgetting about the whole field — everything really," he said. "Launch angle, the [velocity] off the bat. I was hitting with all this stuff [in my mind]. I cleared my mind, and it's all about competing. That's how I've been taking it, and it's been great for me."

But then came the seventh inning, when he swung big with a runner at second and nobody out for a high pop to short. He then flipped his bat nearly as high in frustration before slow-boating it to first.

"You know what I really got out of today?" he said. "How ugly I looked on that [play]. And one of my teammates came up to me and he said it in a good way, and you learn from it."

"After I hit that fly ball and I tossed the bat really high, I was kind of mad — not because of the fly ball, but just the way I looked for the kids and for everybody that follows me. That's not a good thing."

Said Lester: "I'm glad he's on our side."

--

Chicago Sun-Times

On Gold Gloves & cold bats: Cubs manager gives Jason Heyward vote of confidence

By Gordon Wittenmyer

A brief pregame ceremony at Wrigley Field offered a reminder Wednesday of the one consistent source of value big-ticket free agent Jason Heyward has brought to the Cubs — just a couple of hours after his manager delivered another vote of confidence about his continued favored status in the lineup.

“I know we haven’t arrived offensively where we want to arrive yet with him,” manager Joe Maddon said. “However, he’s been a grand part, a great part, of our success over the last three years.”

Heyward, the only Cubs left-handed hitter in the lineup against Pirates lefty Steven Brault, received his 2017 Gold Glove award before the game for his work in right field.

It is the fourth consecutive and fifth career Gold Glove for Heyward, who entered the 11th game of the season just 7-for-31 (.226) with a .660 OPS.

“Listen, I don’t know how many times I’ve told him, ‘I feel so much better when you’re on the field,’ ” Maddon said. “The Gold Glove award is one of the top awards in all of baseball. I love having guys that win that award.

“Normally, if you have a couple of those, you probably had yourself a pretty good year as a group.”

It has worked out well enough for the Cubs as a team during the outfielder’s first two seasons, but the tension between his exceptional fielding and tepid hitting is something that could reach a tipping point against his playing time before he gets much deeper into his eight-year, \$184 million contract.

“A lot of times that award goes to an offensive player,” Maddon said. “The fact that he’s really been able to hold serve in the eyes of the industry while he’s still working to get to that level he’s capable of offensively, I think it’s pretty impressive.”

Wednesday night, Heyward grounded to second in his first two at-bats — including the third inning with the bases loaded after a two-out intentional walk to Javy Baez.

“He makes a huge difference for us,” Maddon said. “When he’s on the field and Javy’s on the field, and we have all our defense on the field, from the dugout, I promise you it feels a whole lot better.”

Bullpen intrigue

So did they dance or didn’t they?

“We can’t always tell you everything,” reliever Carl Edwards Jr. said while talking about whether his bullpen crew did its famous home run dance for either of Baez’s home runs during Tuesday’s home opener.

“It’s like a box of chocolates: You never know.”

Although the Cubs’ bullpen camera failed to show the happenings in the hidden bullpen on the video board after the homers, a left-handed source said they danced for Baez’s first one but did not for the second, in part because Eddie Butler was warming up.

“They made such a big deal about it, and then they didn’t show it on the board,” lefty Brian Duensing said. “That was kind of disappointing.”

Duensing got his airtime Wednesday night when Baez did it again — his three-run homer in the second gave the Cubs a 4-3 lead.

Dugout questions

Maddon has talked to ballpark operations about a few alterations to the new dugout that might include widening one of the entrances to the field and building a step for the players to stand on, just behind the rail.

--

Chicago Sun-Times

It ain't easy being green, but Cubs' Albert Almora Jr. makes it look easy in win
By Gordon Wittenmyer

For much of last season, and into this one, the Cubs' leadoff spot often has been an exercise in queasy.

Albert Almora Jr. might have taken that to the extreme on Wednesday.

"Almora was not feeling well at all today. He was kind of the color of Kelly's jacket most of that game," Cubs manager Joe Maddon said of broadcaster Kelly Crull's jaundice-green coat after the Cubs' 13-5 victory over the Pirates at Wrigley Field.

"So I was really concerned about him," Maddon said. "But he battled through it.

Almora singled twice and doubled, scored two runs, and robbed Pirates pitcher Steven Brault of a hit with a diving catch in the sixth inning.

"Give him credit," Maddon said. "He wanted to play, and I let him make that decision for himself. And he had himself a great night."

--