



CHICAGO CUBS DAILY CLIPS

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May 14, 2018

- Chicago Sun-Times, **Cubs seek answers to \$310 million questions in coming week against Braves, Reds**
<https://chicago.suntimes.com/sports/cubs-seek-answers-to-310-million-questions-in-coming-week-against-braves-reds/>
- Chicago Sun-Times, **Roller-coaster Cubs blow sweep against woeful Sox just ahead of tougher schedule**
<https://chicago.suntimes.com/sports/roller-coaster-cubs-blow-sweep-against-woeful-sox-just-ahead-of-tougher-schedule/>
- Chicago Sun-Times, **White Sox survive another ugly first inning to come back and beat Cubs 5-3**
<https://chicago.suntimes.com/sports/white-sox-survive-another-ugly-first-inning-to-come-back-and-beat-cubs-5-3/>
- Chicago Sun-Times, **In Ben Zobrist spikes flap, MLB fails to see that the players are the product**
<https://chicago.suntimes.com/sports/chicago-cubs-ben-zobrist-mlb-kris-bryant-kyle-hendricks/>
- Daily Herald, **Chicago Cubs' Maddon says Darvish mentally strong**
<http://www.dailyherald.com/sports/20180513/chicago-cubs-maddon-says-darvish-mentally-strong>
- Daily Herald, **Sloppy play, and Chicago Cubs let one get away**
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- Daily Herald, **Sox overcome wildness, come back to beat Cubs**
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Chicago Sun-Times

Cubs seek answers to \$310 million questions in coming week against Braves, Reds

By Gordon Wittenmyer

Flu-stricken Yu Darvish remains on track for a return from the disabled list Tuesday, but whether he looks any healthier as a pitcher is the bigger issue.

Meanwhile, right fielder Jason Heyward won't be activated Monday, when he's eligible to return from the concussion DL. However, he'll travel with the team to Atlanta and remain day-to-day during the weeklong trip, which also has a visit to Cincinnati.

They are the \$310 million questions this week for the Cubs, who will try to carry the success from a 5-1 homestand against the Marlins and White Sox into a four-game run against the Braves, the surprising leaders of the National League East.

"He's still working on the whole thing right now," manager Joe Maddon said of Heyward, who hit his head on the wall trying to catch Dexter Fowler's walk-off homer May 6 in St. Louis. "I'm still waiting to hear back from the doctors. There's nothing new to report necessarily."

If Heyward's trip to the DL was a surprise — it came two days after the incident — Darvish's was more unusual. The flu bug knocked him out of his scheduled start against the Marlins and prompted the Cubs to put him on the 10-day DL.

Darvish, who threw a 40-pitch bullpen session Saturday, told Japanese media Sunday that he still was congested and coughing during his bullpen but felt much better.

He cautioned that he still might not be 100 percent Tuesday but that he vowed to "try to do my best to help the team win."

Darvish is eligible to return Monday, but the team pushed him back a day, using the recent day off to move Jose Quintana up one slot in the rotation on his regular rest.

Among other things, it assures that Darvish, who was booed by the home fans when he left the mound in the fifth inning of his last start, avoids making his next start at Wrigley Field.

“I know that that’s going to be easy to look at and say that we did do that [for that reason],” Maddon said. “But we were just trying to gather as much time as we can coming off of being ill. We just took advantage of the schedule.”

Darvish’s inability to fight through adverse moments has been a theme in his first season after signing a six-year, \$126 million contract. He has failed to pitch out of the fifth inning in four of six starts, struggling at times with the Cubs’ highly detailed pitching game plans and unraveling at other times after mistakes such as a two-out walk to the pitcher or a balk.

Maddon said he isn’t concerned about Darvish’s mental state.

“The guy’s been good for so many years; he has an outstanding arm,” Maddon said. “I think sometimes he gets a little bit speeded up in what he’s doing. He and I have talked about that. But there’s too much success there for me to be worried about that. He would not be in the position he is if that were in fact true.”

Maddon said the struggles of Darvish, 31, are similar to other pitchers, including veterans, he has managed and coached in his career.

“It’s just having the skill set in-game to control moments better,” Maddon said.

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Chicago Sun-Times

Roller-coaster Cubs blow sweep against woeful Sox just ahead of tougher schedule

By Gordon Wittenmyer

This one didn’t make any sense.

Which is to say it made about as much sense as anything else going on in the Cubs’ season so far.

With a series sweep dropped like a gift at their feet by Lucas Giolito in the first inning Sunday, the Cubs struggled to score against a pitcher with no command, then let a small lead slip away against a White Sox team that had all of seven victories in the last six weeks.

The 5-3 loss snapped the Cubs’ five-game winning streak and left them wondering how they didn’t score more than two runs during a first inning in which Giolito walked three, threw two wild pitches, surrendered four stolen bases and threw 17 of 27 pitches out of the strike zone.

Make that 18 of 27. The only hit of the inning was Javy Baez’s two-run single on a 3-0 pitch well out of the zone.

By the time the Cubs got done squandering Sunday, Giolito was the winning pitcher.

Make sense of that.

Or this: Are these Cubs the team that won five consecutive games against the Brewers and Rockies, or the one that followed that by losing five straight to the Rockies and Cardinals, or the one that followed that by winning five straight over the Marlins and Sox?

“Are we playing good?” first baseman Anthony Rizzo said.

If you have to ask . . .

After the blowout victory Saturday, manager Joe Maddon made a point to say that he wasn’t proclaiming the Cubs’ early issues were behind them.

One week against tanking opposition isn’t enough to clarify whether some of the hitting struggles are over. And newly signed starter Tyler Chatwood hasn’t solved his walks problem yet. And newly signed starter Yu Darvish isn’t back from his flu yet — or his fifth-inning nausea.

If anything, the next four days against the young, surprising Braves should offer some measure of where the Cubs stand and of the work to be done as summer approaches.

“You’re going to see a tough competition for the next four games,” Maddon said of the top-hitting, top-slugging, top-scoring team in the National League. “They have really good pitching, too. I really like their starting pitching and the bullpen guys. They’re a really good group.”

After what projected to be perhaps the softest homestand of the season, the schedule looks more formidable, with eight of the next 10 series against teams that finished the weekend with winning records.

“I feel pretty confident in our offense,” said Addison Russell, who had a rough fourth inning on the bases, eventually running into an out at the plate on Kyle Hendricks’ grounder to third. “We still haven’t hit that spark, and we’re still playing pretty good baseball. I can only imagine when it all clicks.”

Even the Cubs’ largely impenetrable bullpen had issues.

If Brian Duensing was going to wait until the middle of May to give up a run, does it make any sense that it would be scored by one of the worst-hitting, lowest-scoring teams in the majors? And it came after a leadoff walk by Tim Anderson, who had only 13 walks last season?

Hendricks outpitched Giolito by most measures, including zero walks to Giolito’s seven, but wound up with a loss to show for his six innings.

“Regardless of results, even during that losing streak, we were locked in,” Hendricks said. “Guys were putting together good at-bats. Guys on the mound were making good pitches. It’s just the nature of the game sometimes, you just get beat.

“But we’re playing good baseball right now. If we stick with where we are and take it day by day, we’ll end up where we need to be.”

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Chicago Sun-Times

White Sox survive another ugly first inning to come back and beat Cubs 5-3

By Gordon Wittenmyer

The worst team in baseball?

The White Sox played the part right on cue in the first inning Sunday, but then a funny thing happened on the way to another loss during their historically slow start.

Matt Davidson hit a home run, Yolmer Sanchez took advantage of an error to single home a run in the third, and when the Sox scored two in the sixth, they were on the way to beating the Cubs 5-3 at Wrigley Field to avoid a series sweep and snap a seven-game losing streak.

For those scoring at home, that was victory No. 10 for the Sox — the last team in the majors to reach double digits.

It also snapped the Cubs' five-game winning streak.

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Chicago Sun-Times

In Ben Zobrist spikes flap, MLB fails to see that the players are the product

By Rick Morrissey

Ben Zobrist would look ponderous on the base paths if he wore blue spikes, white spikes or tie-dye spikes. But black spikes take a few clicks off his and any player's top speed, for reasons that science can't explain. When you're about to turn 37, as Zobrist is later this month, wise guys start to ask if black spikes are the new comfort shoes.

But it's the thought that counts, and the thought behind Zobrist's black cleats is that the past is worthy of being honored. And no one could be against the past, as long as the slice of history being recognized is good, right?

Wrong, you foolish people!

Major League Baseball, in all its backwardness, has identified fun and self-expression as the enemy. MLB recently sent Zobrist a cease-and-desist letter over his choice of footwear, a choice that was meant to pay homage to a time when black spikes were the only kind of spikes. Regulations require players' shoes to be at least 51 percent of a team's designated color. In the Cubs' case, that's blue.

At first blush, something as trifling as a nonregulation shoe or an outlawed arm sleeve might seem unworthy of attention. But this has the potential to turn into something more and something nasty.

Baseball has had labor peace for the better part of 25 years, but the people running the game seem intent on picking a fight with the people who play the game. It's a fight MLB can't win.

The players are the game. The players are the product. The players are the reason the average worth of a franchise is \$1.3 billion.

The owners already won the offseason. The free-agent market was frigid, despite the fact that teams were rolling in money. It angered the players' union, and there were accusations of collusion thrown around.

Before the season, a few players talked openly about a strike.

“I think a strike is the very last thing you want to get to,” Kris Bryant, the Cubs’ player rep, said during spring training. “But if it does [get to that], a lot of people have expressed their opinions, so people can put two and two together.”

Why MLB keeps jabbing the golden goose with a stick is hard to figure. Perhaps to commissioner Rob Manfred, this really is about keeping uniforms uniform. To the players, it’s about feeling Manfred’s wingtip on their throats again.

Are those dark clouds on the horizon?

“I think it’s our players’ duty to stand up for what we believe in,” Rays outfielder Kevin Kiermaier said of the shoe flap to USA Today.

Some players’ style choices do cross the line. Cardinals outfielder Marcell Ozuna wears a florescent green sleeve on his right arm for no apparent reason. You can easily make the argument that it could be a distraction to a pitcher. But MLB has not told him to remove it. Ozuna’s sleeve has a Nike swoosh on it, and Nike is an official MLB apparel provider. Would it be wrong to ask if that played a role in his not receiving a letter from MLB? Only if you believe baseball is a nonprofit organization.

Zobrist’s spikes aren’t a problem. Cubs catcher Willson Contreras used to wear an arm sleeve with the Venezuelan flag on it. Who was that bothering? But he stopped wearing it under threat of a fine. Zobrist wore pink spikes on Mother’s Day, as part of MLB’s push to raise awareness of breast cancer. He hasn’t said whether he’ll continue wearing black cleats, as he has during day games since last season. If he does, he will face a fine. He did not speak to the media after the Cubs’ 5-3 loss to the White Sox on Sunday at Wrigley Field.

There’s stupid, there’s more stupid and then there’s what MLB is doing. The sport needs to market itself to a younger audience. That’s its future. And that’s the irony in Zobrist’s ode to the past. He’s showing some flair by going back to a time when there wasn’t flair in the game.

“It kind of takes away from what the players can express and connect with the fans in a way,” Cubs pitcher Kyle Hendricks said. “You can go out there and wear neon arm sleeves, but you can’t wear gray spikes with your away uniform? So there are a few things that don’t make a lot of sense to me.”

What do kids care about today? Shoes, as the NBA has so clearly and successfully demonstrated. What do they see when they turn to baseball? A sameness. If MLB wants to get a younger audience interested in the game, it sure has a strange way of showing it.

“Guys wear tattoos, guys do earrings. A lot of this stuff that was unacceptable years ago is much more main line today,” Cubs manager Joe Maddon said. “When I was a young manager and coach, I did not like earrings and tattoos. I thought this was an abomination. [Angels bullpen coach Bob Clear] said, ‘Don’t look. What difference does it make?’ Bob was right. I eventually changed my attitudes on a lot of those things.

“With our game right now, if you’re really looking to attract youngsters, which we are, I think that appeals. It’s an appealing part of what we do out there.”

Zobrist is an improbable rabble-rouser. He's a straight arrow, though one with knee-high baseball pants, horizontally striped socks and those black spikes. He criticized MLB on Instagram, calling its threat to fine him "ridiculous."

"If you attack something he believes in, I promise you he's coming back at you," Maddon said. "That's who he is. He's very convicted in his belief system."

Let's see how convicted players are on the topic of fashion. This very well could be the other shoe dropping on the labor front.

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Daily Herald

Chicago Cubs' Maddon says Darvish mentally strong

By Bruce Miles

The Chicago Cubs open a rare home-and-home set with the Atlanta Braves this week.

A rainout on April 15 necessitated Monday's makeup game between the two teams. When that's over, both clubs will fly to Atlanta to begin a three-game series.

The Cubs are holding right-hander Yu Darvish back until Tuesday, even though he is eligible to come off the 10-day disabled list Monday.

Cubs manager Joe Maddon is aware there is a perception the Cubs are keeping Darvish from pitching at Wrigley Field so that he doesn't get booed at home again. Sooner or later, though, Darvish will have to pitch in his home park. He is on the DL after he battled a flu-like illness.

"We just took advantage of the schedule," Maddon said Sunday. "I know that's going to be easy to look at and say that we did do that. But just trying to gather as much time as we can coming off of being ill and that fact that we could.

"We just decided to go ahead and do that. If that day was not available, if it did not turn out this way regarding the days in between starts, we could not have done it, and he would have pitched. Because we could, we chose to do it that way."

Maddon added he believes Darvish's mental state is strong.

"The guy's been really good for so many years," he said. "He's got an outstanding arm. I think sometimes he gets a little bit speeded up in what he's doing. He and I have talked about that. But there's too much success there to be worried about that.

"He would not be in the position he is if that were in fact true. I just think there are things he needs to do to slow things down, not unlike some other guys I've worked with who have pitched for a bit or played for a bit.

"I think it's more that. It's just having the skill set in game to control things better."

Not quite yet for Heyward:

Right fielder Jason Heyward is eligible to come off the seven-day concussion disabled list Monday, but Joe Maddon said that will not happen.

Heyward is expected to travel with the team to Atlanta.

"There's nothing new to report, necessarily, but he's not going to play (Monday)," Maddon said. "He won't be activated."

Honoring Jackie Robinson:

The Cubs and the Atlanta Braves will honor the legacy of Jackie Robinson during Monday's makeup game, with players wearing uniform No. 42 in honor of Robinson breaking the modern-day color line in 1947.

The anniversary of that game was April 15, but the Cubs and Braves were rained out that day at Wrigley Field.

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Daily Herald

Sloppy play, and Chicago Cubs let one get away

By Bruce Miles

Sometimes baseball doesn't compute.

Take a look at the two pitching lines from Sunday's 5-3 victory by the Chicago White Sox over the Chicago Cubs at Wrigley Field.

Sox starter Lucas Giolito was all over the place early, and he wound up walking seven and uncorking 3 wild pitches.

Cubs starter Kyle Hendricks turned in a quality start, giving up 3 earned runs in 6 innings while walking none and striking out seven.

Giolito got the win. Hendricks took the loss.

"Just focusing on me, I felt like I threw better," said Hendricks, who fell to 3-3 with a 3.20 ERA. "It was better than my last start. The fastball command was better. Good changeup. So, yeah, it was a couple bad pitches today. That's just the nature of the game."

Simply put, the Cubs let one get away, and they did so with some sloppy play. On the bright side for them, they took five of six from a pair of last-place clubs, the Marlins and White Sox.

But they'll have to be more tidy than they were Sunday with the Braves coming up for four games -- a makeup game Monday at Wrigley Field, then three in Atlanta.

Just as they did Friday and Saturday, the Cubs scored in the first inning Sunday. After getting 5 runs in the first Friday and 4 in the first Saturday, they scored twice against Giolito in the first Sunday to grab a 2-0 lead.

They also stole four bases and took advantage of a pair of wild pitches, getting their runs on a 2-run single by Javier Baez.

But the Cubs would manage only 2 more hits the rest of the way, and they ran themselves out of an inning in the fourth, getting 1 run to take a 3-2 lead when they could have scored more.

Kyle Schwarber and Addison Russell began with walks against Giolito. Ian Happ crushed a double to the gap in right-center. Schwarber scored, but Russell made it only to third.

Russell then was tagged out in a rundown when Hendricks chopped the ball to third baseman Matt Davidson. Happ did not advance to third, and Ben Zobrist ended the inning by grounding into a double play.

"Just a bad read," Russell admitted on getting thrown out. "Just overaggressive, just wanting to score. Hard-hit by Kyle. It's either you go one way or you go the other way. I chose the wrong way."

Manager Joe Maddon absolved Russell of any blame for not scoring on Happ's double, saying Russell had to be careful not to overrun Schwarber.

"Nobody out, he was held up by Schwarber in front of him," said Maddon whose team fell to 21-16. "Nobody out, they're not going to be as aggressive. In case the ball's caught, you want to be able to tag up and advance. I think that's what I saw."

Still the missed opportunities and the failure to put Giolito away were lamentable.

"It's always that way when you have opportunities and they slip," Maddon said. "You always are concerned about that. Absolutely I am."

The Sox got an unearned run in the third after Cubs catcher Willson Contreras tried to pick Adam Engel off first base but threw the ball into right field for a two-base error. A single by Yolmer Sanchez scored an unearned run.

The White Sox got 2 more runs off Hendricks in the sixth.

Now, the Cubs take a big step up in class against the Braves, the first-place team in the National League East.

"I like Atlanta a lot, I liked them when they were here (last month)," Maddon said. "You're going to see tough competition for the next four games. They have really good pitching, too. I like their starting pitching. I like some of the bullpen guys. They've got a nice club."

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Daily Herald

Sox overcome wildness, come back to beat Cubs
By Bruce Miles

The Chicago Cubs scored early against the Chicago White Sox for a third straight game Sunday, but the Sox were able to overcome wildness by starting pitcher Lucas Giolito and come back to win 4-3 at Wrigley Field.

The Cubs won the first two games of the three-game series.

Giolito managed to last 5⅓ innings despite walking seven and uncorking 3 wild pitches.

Cubs starting pitcher Kyle Hendricks worked 6 innings, giving up 6 hits and 4 runs, 3 earned.

The White Sox (10-27) snapped a seven-game losing streak while the Cubs (21-16) had their winning streak snapped at five.

The Cubs scored 5 runs in the first inning against the Sox on Friday and 4 in Saturday's first inning. On Sunday, they picked up a pair of runs in the first to take a 2-0 lead. Ben Zobrist led off with a walk, and after Kris Bryant flied out, Zobrist advanced to second and third on 2 wild pitches by Giolito. Anthony Rizzo walked and stole second base. Willson Contreras grounded into a fielder's choice, with Zobrist being tagged out at the plate. Contreras stole second base, and Javier Baez followed with a 2-run single.

The Sox' Matt Davidson hit a solo homer (No. 11) in the second. Some sloppy fielding hurt the Cubs in the third. With two outs, Adam Engel singled. With Volmer Sanchez up, Contreras tried to pick Engle off first base, but the catcher's throw sailed into right field for a two-base error. Sanchez then drove Engel home with a single.

Ian Happ's RBI double gave the Cubs a 3-2 lead in the fourth.

The Sox got 2 in the sixth. Jose Abreu singled with one out. Nicky Delmonico tripled Abreu home, and Davidson hit a sacrifice fly.

An RBI single by Leury Garcia gave the Sox a 5-3 lead in the seventh.

The Cubs managed only 3 hits for the game.

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The Athletic

Up-and-down Cubs still searching for their 'spark'

By Sahadev Sharma

In most cases, only the most pessimistic onlookers would complain about one loss after the team had spent five games beating up on two of the worst teams in baseball. But considering the way the Cubs lost to their South Side rivals Sunday, it was hard not to feel as if they let one slip away. With some missed opportunities, highlighted by some poor baserunning, the Cubs dropped the finale against the White Sox 5-3.

The game may have turned in the fourth. With the score tied 2-2 and runners on first and second, Ian Happ drove a ball deep to right-center field. With no outs, Kyle Schwarber stayed close to second to make sure he could tag up if it were caught while Addison Russell kept his distance from Schwarber to ensure he wouldn't pass him should the ball drop. It did, and Schwarber scored standing while Russell ended up at third on the double by Happ.

"Nobody out, they're not going to be as aggressive just in case the ball's caught; you want to be able to tag-up and advance," manager Joe Maddon said. "I think that's what I saw. Addison might have been close to second, but he was concerned about passing up Schwarber. That's what I saw."

Russell explained his thought process.

“In that situation, I’m thinking that ball in the hole all day, if not off the wall or a home run,” Russell said. “But you can’t overrun the guy in front of you. My whole mindset was: at least get to third.”

As easily as Schwarber was able to score, perhaps Russell could have kept on his teammate’s tail and scored as well. But with no outs, it does make sense to play it safe in that situation. What happened next, however, was inexcusable. With the Cubs now leading 3-2 and poised for a big inning, pitcher Kyle Hendricks hit a hard grounder to third base. Russell should have been headed straight back to the bag, but for some reason broke for home, stopped and was eventually tagged out. Happ inexplicably remained at second, although that wouldn’t matter as Ben Zobrist later hit into an inning-ending double play and a potentially big inning quickly fizzled.

“Just a bad read,” Russell said. “Just over-aggressive. I just wanted to score. It was a hard-hit ball by Kyle. You either go one way or the other way. I chose the wrong way.”

Russell is considered an above-average base-runner (he has a 0.3 BsR, FanGraphs’ base-running metric, nothing special, but hardly bad) and first-base/base-running coach Will Venable praised his abilities in the spring. On this day, though, Russell’s blunder would cost the Cubs dearly as the team managed just one hit — a two-out single in the ninth — the rest of the way.

White Sox starter Lucas Giolito looked like he was in for a very short day in the first inning as he walked three batters, tossed two wild pitches and allowed four stolen bases in the initial frame. But after allowing five and four runs, respectively, in the first inning of the first two games in the series, holding the Cubs to just two runs in that frame seemed like a win for the White Sox.

“It’s always that way when you have opportunities and they slip,” Maddon responded when asked if there was a bad feeling when they failed to capitalize more often early. “You always are concerned about that, absolutely.”

Giolito walked seven batters on the day (the Cubs had walked seven or more times just three times entering the weekend before accomplishing the feat in each game of the crosstown series) and struck just three in 5 2/3 innings, but allowed just three runs. He limited the Cubs to two hits despite allowing a .266 average on the season, 11th-worst for eligible starters in the American League.

“We did hit the ball better than those numbers indicated,” Maddon said. “We hit it right into their defense. They were positioned well today and they made some big catches that kept us out of innings. Otherwise, stolen bases. One base-running gaffe on our part. But for the most part, I thought they played really good defense today. Hit the ball pretty hard in moments and a lot of base-runners through walks. It’s just one of those games.”

There were a couple hard-hit balls by the Cubs, but not nearly enough to suggest they were victims of bad luck. Anthony Rizzo said Giolito was able to work around traffic because the Cubs couldn’t line up anything he offered often enough.

“We scored early, but Giolito did a good job of staying off our barrel for the most part,” Rizzo said. “I know he walked a lot of guys, but we didn’t hit him too well. Put pressure on him, but we came up short.”

Giolito’s 17.2 percent soft-contact rate is below the MLB average rate of 18.3 percent, but when it comes to hard contact, he’s at 29.3 percent, tied for the ninth best among eligible pitchers in the AL. Still, it felt like there were multiple missed opportunities for the Cubs, particularly in the first and fourth innings.

After scoring 50 runs over the previous five games, the Cubs struggled to take it to a pitcher who entered the day with a 7.25 ERA and did nothing against a bullpen that has a 4.85 ERA, fifth-worst in baseball. In isolation, that's hardly cause for panic. But considering the Cubs have scored 142 runs in 13 games and just 58 in the other 24, it's understandable why one would begin to shake their head at such inconsistent play.

But the Cubs won't allow doubt to seep into their clubhouse.

"Are we playing good?" Rizzo shot back when asked whether they were good or not. "I just try to do day to day. Try to keep everyone loose, everyone having a good time. That's really the best you can do. Where we're at is just have fun and guys seem to be having fun. People aren't hanging their heads around here at all. It's been a good vibe."

Having fun has never been an issue for this group. They enjoy every win as much as any team in the game. There's no reason not to as Maddon has made it very clear how hard it is to win any big-league game, whether it's May or October.

"Day to day" is a common theme for this team. Or really any athlete looking to shoot clichés at a doubting media member. Hendricks said he believed the team as a whole has been locked in, if not hitting on all cylinders, and Russell is confident the offense will catch fire soon enough.

"We still haven't hit that spark, you know," Russell said. "We're playing some pretty good baseball right now. I can only imagine when we all click."

The Cubs are at 21-16, in fourth place, but only a good day away from first in a division that's clumped up at the top. They've followed one five-game winning streak with five straight losses already, so it's understandable if there are doubters after five games of beating up on lowly opponents, only to end the weekend with a thud.

But this week was never supposed to be a real test of who they are, not if they won more than they lost. By taking five of six, the Cubs mostly did their jobs. Now they must face an upstart Atlanta Braves team that's emerging as a real threat in the National League and likely itching to prove themselves against an already established power in their league.

It's easy to get caught up in one bad loss to a bad team, but these Cubs know how to move on quickly. As John Lackey used to tell questioning reporters after a tough game, "You all think it's 162 seasons." This is definitely one of those games where it can feel much larger than one game, but that's all it was.

But the real test comes now. With the Cincinnati Reds starting to look better than first expected, there might not be many more rollover series against teams like the Marlins and White Sox coming up in the near future. It's still hard to figure out who the real Cubs are, but that's what the next four and half months are for.

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The Athletic

It's gotta be the shoes: What Ben Zobrist vs. MLB says about the state of play

By Patrick Mooney

Ben Zobrist ran out toward right field in pink New Balance cleats on Sunday afternoon at Wrigley Field. Zobrist saluted the bleacher bums before first pitch against the White Sox at 1:20 p.m. A WGN camera zoomed in on Zobrist's lower legs covered in pink-and-black striped socks — no black shoes — during his leadoff at-bat against Lucas Giolito.

Major League Baseball's Mother's Day promotions created a ceasefire between Zobrist and commissioner Rob Manfred's office. The day before, Zobrist posted an open letter and a collage of photos on an Instagram account that has 306,000 followers and sent it out again to his 200,000 followers on Twitter, guaranteeing it would go viral.

This might say more about the state of play in 2018 than anything that happened on the field during this crosstown weekend. Zobrist shared a warning letter from Manfred's office dated May 11 that threatened "further discipline, including discipline of a fine" if he doesn't wear shoes that comply with the uniform regulations within the collective bargaining agreement. At issue: Zobrist's black high-top P.F. Flyers and the black New Balance spikes with "18 ZO" flaps that cover the shoelaces.

This seems especially petty when the tanking epidemic has seven teams on pace for around 100 losses, essentially telling their customers to come back in a few years. Year-over-year paid attendance is down by 1.1 million fans across the majors, according to research on Baseball-Reference.com. The product itself is too slow and doesn't show enough action. The Elias Sports Bureau reported there were more strikeouts than hits in April — the first time that's happened in the sport's history that goes back almost 150 years.

This also seems to reflect the frustration and distrust that could spark a labor war when the collective bargaining agreement expires Dec. 1, 2021. The brutal winter for free agents reenergized a union that lost sight of core economic issues during the last round of negotiations and got distracted with quality-of-life items. Major League Baseball Players Association executive director Tony Clark put it this way after his annual meeting with Cubs players during spring training: "The group that we have now is more focused than they have ever been."

Zobrist didn't make himself available to reporters after Sunday's disappointing 5-3 loss to the rebuilding White Sox. Team officials indicated Zobrist — a meticulous self-made player with a long postgame routine — was hitting in the cage and eventually closed the clubhouse to the media. Zobrist declined to comment after Saturday's 8-4 win over the White Sox, saying he wanted to gather more information from the union and speak with MLB first.

"When I was a kid, I was inspired by highlights of the greats such as Ernie Banks and Stan Musial in the 1950s-60s and was captured by the old uniforms and all-black cleats with flaps," Zobrist wrote on his Instagram account. "I am curious as to why @mlb is spending time and money enforcing this now when they haven't done it previously in the last year and beyond. I have heard nothing but compliments from fans that enjoy the 'old school' look. Maybe there is some kid out there that will be inspired to look more into the history of the game by the 'flexibility' that I prefer in the color of my shoes."

Cubs manager Joe Maddon laughed when a reporter described Zobrist as an "unlikely outlaw." Yes, Zobrist is the son of a minister, a non-prospect who grew up in downstate Illinois and once thought his last competitive baseball game would be at Eureka High School. But Zobrist is also comfortable speaking his mind and seems like one of the last guys MLB officials should be targeting, given his stature as a two-time World Series champion and a three-time All-Star with more than 10 years of big-league service time.

“‘Unlikely Outlaw,’ that would be a great poster,” Maddon said. “No, if you attack something he believes in, I promise you, he’s coming back at you. That’s who he is. He’s very convicted in his belief system.

“Regardless — if it’s shoes or his religion — he’s going to tell you what he thinks. When he’s convicted, which he is, his thoughts are not nebulous. They’re all Zo, so that’s what he believes. He felt he was somewhat attacked, in a sense: ‘This is why I was doing it. I didn’t think I was doing anything wrong. I thought I was actually promoting the game.’

“That’s exactly where he was coming from.”

Maddon presents himself as an anti-rules guy who wants to make the game more accessible to a younger audience and developed a close relationship with Zobrist during their years together with the Tampa Bay Rays.

“You have to wear the uniform,” Maddon said. “You wear the uniform — I think that’s respecting the game. The touches within the uniform — of course the sleeves and the hat and all that’s got to be uniform. But I think the one area that’s available for individualism might be the shoes. I think it’s what goes on in the other games, too. Guys wear tattoos. Guys do earrings. A lot of the stuff that was unacceptable years ago is much more mainline today.”

Cleveland pitcher Mike Clevinger received a similar reminder that all players are required to wear shoes designed with at least 51 percent of the team’s designated primary shoe color.

“I play first base for the Chicago Cubs,” Anthony Rizzo said. “My opinion doesn’t matter.”

But the Cubbie bubble can sometimes block out how much the game is struggling in other markets where the players aren’t treated like rock stars and crowds of 40,000 aren’t expected every night.

This certainly is an interesting time for the fan police to crack down on uniform regulations. Citing the tension between the two sides, the New York Post recently reported that the union rejected an MLB proposal to change the All-Star voting system in ways that could increase attention for the event and boost Home Run Derby incentives and pool money for the winning All-Star team.

“It is the rule where 51 percent has to be your color, but they haven’t been enforcing it until now,” said losing pitcher Kyle Hendricks, the team’s assistant union representative. “It kind of takes away from what the players can express and connect with the fans.

“You can go out there wearing neon arm sleeves, but you can’t wear gray spikes with your away uniform, so there are a few things that don’t make a lot of sense to me.

“But that’s the rules and you just got to listen.”

What about the spirit of the rules? Maddon remembered something that one of his mentors, Bob Clear, told him at the beginning of his career with the California Angels.

“When I was in the mid-80s as a young manager and coach, I did not like earrings and tattoos,” Maddon said. “I thought this was an abomination. ‘Why would you ever?’ And then he said, ‘Don’t look. Don’t look, what difference does it make?’ Bob was right, so eventually I changed my attitudes on a lot of those things.

“But with our game right now, if you’re really looking to attract youngsters — which we are — I think that appeals. It’s an appealing part of what we do out there, whether it’s the way Javy [Báez] plays the game with his slide or I think of great defensive plays that really stand out.

“Hair has been an issue — or not an issue — but an individual method also to express yourself. Oscar Gamble wore it as well as anybody [with his Afro]. There’s been all kinds of different methods employed for years. A lot of it’s been based on the mores or the attitudes of the group that’s been playing.

“At the particular moment, whoever’s in charge has their ability to impart whatever they think is the right way to do things. But in today’s game, I think the one area that is wide open would be footwear. I think it shows up in basketball a lot — and I think kids really glom onto that. But the rest of the uniform, I do believe in being uniform.”

Do you think MLB is looking harder given the state of labor relations right now?

“Wow, I have no idea,” Maddon said. “I have no idea on that.”

At the bottom of Zobrist’s locker after Sunday’s game, there were at least three pairs of the P.F. Flyers and those black New Balance spikes. The Atlanta Braves will be at Wrigley Field on Monday for another 1:20 p.m. start. Your move, Zobrist.

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Cubs.com

Hendricks loses unusual duel as streak ends

By Carrie Muskat

CHICAGO -- The Cubs' Kyle Hendricks knows exactly what Lucas Giolito was going through on Sunday, and he was impressed at how the White Sox starter was able to stay in the game despite himself.

It's hard to pick the winner in the Cubs' 5-3 loss to the White Sox on Sunday at Wrigley Field if you only looked at the pitching lines of the two starters. Hendricks gave up four runs (three earned) and did not walk a batter over six innings. Giolito issued seven free passes over 5 2/3 innings, threw three wild pitches and hit a batter. Of his 100 pitches, half were strikes. And Giolito got the win.

"I've had games like that and you go out and you have nothing," said Hendricks, who did record his fourth straight quality start. "He really battled through it and got better as the game went on. It was good to see from a young guy. He made some tough at-bats for us. He was effectively wild at the start. His stuff was moving. He dialed it in late."

The White Sox ended the Cubs' five-game win streak and finally reached double digits in victories with the decision. Matt Davidson smacked a solo homer in the second and hit a tie-breaking sacrifice fly in the sixth.

Cubs manager Joe Maddon wasn't concerned about bragging rights after capturing two of three against their crosstown rivals.

"We're just trying to win series," Maddon said. "It doesn't matter who we're playing. I really like their team on the field, and I think there's a lot of offensive talent there."

The Cubs took a 2-0 lead in the first on Javier Baez's two-run single, and Ian Happ hit a tie-breaking RBI double in the fourth on the one-year anniversary of his promotion to the big leagues. Happ was using a pink bat, part of Major League Baseball's "Going to Bat Against Breast Cancer" initiative on Mother's Day. Happ didn't get to use a pink bat a year ago; they didn't arrive in St. Louis in time for his debut.

Hendricks didn't use one on Sunday, but that had nothing to do with his outing.

"I felt I threw better," Hendricks said. "It was better than my last start -- fastball command was better, good changeups. A couple bad pitches today, and they got hit. It's just the nature of the game. You just have to stick with it and stick with the routine."

It's the second straight start in which Hendricks hasn't walked a batter. Giolito, on the other hand, admitted it was a battle.

"Grind is the key word," Giolito said. "Obviously, not really in sync. Just trying to make pitches the best that I can. The one thing that was unwavering was my confidence in myself. I knew that if I executed the next pitch, they were going to get themselves out. It was one of those really good team victories."

Despite the loss, the Cubs have outscored opponents, 53-20, in their last six games.

"I feel pretty confident in our offense," Addison Russell said. "We haven't hit that spark. We're playing some pretty good baseball now. I can only imagine when we all click."

MOMENTS THAT MATTERED

Start me up: The Cubs were on the run in the first. Giolito walked Ben Zobrist on four pitches to start the inning and one out later, he moved up on two wild pitches. Anthony Rizzo then walked and Willson Contreras hit a grounder to first baseman Jose Abreu, who threw home and Omar Narvaez's tag got Zobrist. Baez singled off a 3-0 pitch from Giolito to drive in Rizzo and Contreras and take a 2-0 lead.

The Cubs now have scored 34 runs in the first, the most of any inning this season.

"Giolito did a good job staying off our barrel for the most part," Rizzo said. "We didn't hit him too well. We put pressure on him but came up short."

A misstep: Kyle Schwarber and Russell walked to open the fourth. Happ followed with an RBI double to go ahead, 3-2. But Russell was caught in a rundown trying to advance on Hendricks' grounder for the second out.

"It was just a bad read," Russell said. "I was over-aggressive and wanted to score. It was a hard-hit ball by Kyle. You either go one way or the other way. I chose the wrong way."

Added Maddon: "He was held up by Schwarber in front of him [on the double]. There's nobody out, so they're not going to be as aggressive just in case the ball is caught. You want to be able to tag up and advance. Addison might have been close to second, but he was concerned about passing up Schwarber. I think that's what I saw."

Relief work: Reliever Brian Duensing started the White Sox seventh and walked Tim Anderson, who moved up on a sacrifice by Narvaez and scored on Leury Garcia's single. The run was the first off Duensing this season, ending a string of 12 scoreless innings. It was the longest streak among qualifying relievers. It also gave the White Sox an insurance run.

SOUND SMART

Rizzo, Contreras, Baez and Schwarber each stole a base in the first inning, the latter two coming on a double steal. The Cubs are the second team in the Majors and first National League team to steal four bases in one inning this season. It marked the first time the Cubs have swiped four in one inning since April 28, 2015.

HE SAID IT

"Regardless of the results, even during the losing streak, we were locked in and putting together good at-bats. It's one of those things where it just has to come together. It's the nature of the game, and sometimes you just get beat. I think we just run into some teams that get the best of us. We're playing good baseball now. If we stick with it, we'll end up where we need to be." -- Hendricks on the Cubs, who had a five-game winning streak, followed by a five-game losing skid, followed by a five-game winning streak.

UP NEXT

The Cubs and Braves will play a makeup game on Monday, and celebrate Jackie Robinson Day as well. Jose Quintana gets the start. The lefty is 2-0 with a 4.70 ERA in three home starts. He's coming off a win over the Marlins in which he gave up one run over six innings. Quintana has three quality starts out of his seven outings. This is a makeup of April 15's rainout, which is when the rest of Major League Baseball celebrated Jackie Robinson Day. Players will wear No. 42 jerseys. First pitch is scheduled for 1:20 p.m. CT from Wrigley Field. Julio Teheran gets the nod for the Braves.

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Cubs.com

No timetable for Heyward's return (concussion)
By Carrie Muskat

CHICAGO -- Cubs outfielder Jason Heyward is eligible to be activated from the seven-day concussion disabled list on Monday, but manager Joe Maddon said there is no timetable for his return.

Heyward has been sidelined since last Sunday's game in St. Louis, when he tried to catch Dexter Fowler's home run in the 14th inning. Heyward appeared to hit his head on the wall during the play.

"We're still working through the whole thing and I'm still waiting to hear back from the doctors," Maddon said on Sunday. "There's nothing new to report."

Heyward, whose family lives in the Atlanta area, will accompany the team on the next road trip there.

Darvish to return Tuesday

Yu Darvish, who has been sidelined with flu-like symptoms, will be activated from the DL and start on Tuesday against the Braves.

"I saw him walking around [Saturday] and talked to him briefly and his kid," Maddon said. "He's doing well."

Darvish was originally expected to start on Monday in the Cubs' makeup game against the Braves, but Jose Quintana will get the nod instead. Darvish (0-3, 6.00 ERA) is still looking for his first win with the Cubs. He's 0-2 with a 5.40 ERA in three outings at Wrigley Field. The Cubs aren't trying to avoid having Darvish pitch at home.

"We took advantage of the schedule," Maddon said. "I know that's going to be easy to look at and say we did that. We wanted to gather as much time as we can coming off being ill."

Maddon isn't concerned by Darvish's outings so far. The right-hander has been unable to get through the fifth inning in four of his six starts so far.

"The guy's been really good for so many years and has an outstanding arm," Maddon said. "I think sometimes he gets a little bit speeded up in what he's doing. He and I have talked about that. There's too much success there for me to worry about that. I think he needs to slow things down, not unlike some other guys I've worked with who have pitched for a bit and played for a bit."

The Cubs did suggest Darvish adjust his delivery and eliminate the double leg kick that he used all spring as well as in his first three starts.

"It probably is [an adjustment], but I still think it makes him cleaner," Maddon said. "I think he has a better chance of being a strike thrower with his fastball by doing that. Also, I think there's the fatigue factor -- thinking about poom, poom, lifting your leg twice as you go to pitch. I don't know how [Juan] Marichal did it for so many years. It has to be more difficult physically to do it that way."

Worth noting

The Cubs and Braves will play a makeup game on Monday at Wrigley Field and wear their No. 42 jerseys honoring Jackie Robinson. The game had originally been scheduled for April 15, which was the day Major League Baseball saluted Robinson.

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Cubs.com

Cancer survivor honored by Cubs at Wrigley

By Carrie Muskat

CHICAGO -- Sunday was a special day for Kristin Root, who celebrated being cancer free with her parents and husband, Jonathan, at Wrigley Field.

Two weeks before her 36th birthday, Kristin was diagnosed with breast cancer. She was undergoing testing for possible in vitro fertilization and found a lump on the right side of her breast.

"The ironic thing is I went for a mammogram, it was two weeks before my 36th birthday and the lump was nothing," Root said. "I had breast cancer on the other side. Thank God, my doctor found that lump."

The director of the health department for the Village of Rosemont and a nurse, Root, 37, opted for a double mastectomy with reconstruction. Last August, she finished four rounds of chemotherapy.

On Sunday, Root was honored as the Cubs' Honorary Bat Girl, part of Major League Baseball's "Going to Bat Against Breast Cancer" initiative. Her parents, Donald and Sandee Greene, and her husband also were on the field to hold a giant-sized pink ribbon during the singing of "God Bless America" and the national anthem. Kristin delivered the lineup card with first-base coach Will Venable prior to the game.

"It's so cool -- my mom is here with me and doing the ribbon on the field and my dad and my husband," Kristin said. "It's a really nice day to celebrate."

Cubs and White Sox players wore pink caps, pink ribbons on their jerseys and pink socks, and some opted for pink bats and batting gloves as part of MLB's efforts to raise awareness of breast cancer.

Louisville Slugger will donate proceeds from the sale of its pink bats, which will be stamped with the MLB breast cancer awareness logo, to Susan G. Komen and Stand Up To Cancer. MLB will again donate its licensed uniform royalties through Mother's Day apparel to Susan G. Komen and Stand Up To Cancer, which is celebrating its 10th season.

There was plenty of pink at Wrigley Field, as the first 5,000 bleacher fans received pink T-shirts presented by Advocate Health Care.

Advocate and the Cubs also invited Chicago Public School teacher Vandana Suthar Patel, 32, to the game. The mother of a 2-year-old daughter, Patel still has one more chemotherapy treatment to go, and it's scheduled for this coming week.

"The most important thing I want to tell others is to make sure regular doctors' appointments are made and kept," Patel said. "I have a friend who never used to go to the doctor. Ever since my diagnosis, she has scheduled all her screenings and kept her appointments. If I can make a difference in one person's life, that's reason enough for me to share my story."

Getting tested is key. Root had gone for a routine exam.

"It was a legit fluke," Root said. "By the time I would've been 40, I would've been in really bad shape with kids and the whole dynamic would've changed. I'm really lucky and fortunate at how this worked out.

"They changed the protocol at Advocate now," Root said. "Anybody who goes to Advocate for in vitro, 35 or older, will require a mammogram if you score on this test. They're changing protocol because of my situation, which makes me so proud. That's such an honor. They took such great care of me."

So, is she a Cubs fan?

"I'm a Chicago fan, but how can you not love the Cubs?" Root said.

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ESPNChicago.com

Inside Javier Baez's MVP-grade month without a walk

By Jesse Rogers

CHICAGO -- His teammates had looks of disbelief on their faces. They didn't believe the numbers at first. Some -- including closer Brandon Morrow -- just stared into space, standing at their lockers, while trying to do the math. Is it really possible for a hitter to compile anything close to a 1.000 OPS over the course of a month or longer without earning a single walk?

It is if your name is Javier Baez.

That's right. The Cubs' lead-off hitter on Saturday hasn't taken a free pass in over a month. The last one came on April 11 -- and that was an intentional walk. His last regular walk was April 7. Yet from April 8 through Saturday's game against the White Sox, he compiled an eye-popping 1.003 OPS.

“Really?” slugger Kyle Schwarber said. “Over .900 for a month without a walk? That’s hard to do.”

The ultimate work-the-count and take-a-walk guy, Ben Zobrist, was equally impressed as he was shocked.

“With no walks? That’s amazing,” Zobrist said. “I did not know that. That’s really crazy. You have to be able to hit every kind of pitch all around the zone. And some outside the zone, for sure.”

All those asked agreed there’s only one way to accomplish such a feat: by swinging. A lot. According to ESPN Stats & Information, Baez leads the majors, swinging at 61 percent of all pitches and 54 percent of first pitches in an at-bat. He swings at 46 percent of pitches outside the strike zone, also the highest in baseball. The last Cub to accomplish an OPS of .900-plus over course of a month without a walk was Starlin Castro in 2010.

“He’s always been a bad-ball hitter,” Morrow said. “You just had to miss the bad spots that he was good at hitting. Right now, he’s probably still swinging at those bad pitches that he’s good at hitting but not swinging at the bad pitches that he’s bad at hitting.”

It took an Abbott & Costello answer by Morrow -- after thinking about it for a minute -- to half-explain what Baez is doing. It really is hard to comprehend.

“That would be like hitting .450 on singles,” Schwarber said without really making a point.

In fact, Baez has kept his numbers up in a variety of ways, beginning with earning an inordinate amount of extra-base hits during his walk-less time. Of the 35 hits he had between April 8 and Saturday, 20 went for extra bases, including 10 that left the park.

“It means you’re slugging,” shortstop Addison Russell said while shaking his head at the thought of Baez’s numbers. “Walking in this game is significant whenever you’re talking about final batting averages and stuff, but if anyone can do it [keep his numbers up], it’s him.”

Players who walk often were the most amazed at the work Baez has been able to do while his batting average and on-base percentage have stayed exactly the same since his last free pass.

“He’s fouling off more pitches to get to another pitch where it might be a mistake,” Anthony Rizzo said. “You don’t change someone’s approach. That’s not the objective. Walking is a product of great at-bats. He’s not walking but still having great at-bats.”

And that’s what makes Baez unique. When Rizzo fails to take a walk for a long period of time -- he just came off one of those stretches -- it means his offensive game isn’t right. For Baez right now, it means nothing.

“That’s still the one item I’d like to see him get better at,” manager Joe Maddon said. “[But] when he does make contact, something good usually happens.”

Before Schwarber was informed of Baez’s walk-less month, he opined on what someone’s stat line might look like without taking a free pass for that long.

“That slash line would be low because you’re not eliminating any at-bats,” Schwarber said.

After being told of Baez's OPS, Schwarber had the look of a confused kid at school trying to do a math problem.

"Wow," he finally said. "Really? That's really good. He's just locked in with that swing, I guess."

Zobrist was asked what those numbers would mean even without seeing an at-bat by Baez during that time frame.

"It tells me when he's seeing the ball and his swing is on, there is no way to pitch him," Zobrist responded. "Unless you just walk him like you have to walk him. Almost an intentional, unintentional walk."

Perhaps teams have tried that tactic, but they haven't been successful because Baez keeps swinging while mostly making contact. He struck out only 24 times in 114 plate appearances during his month-plus stretch without a walk. But there was one player who wasn't as shocked as everyone else. Perhaps it took a free swinger to understand another one.

"The plan isn't to get a walk," outfielder Albert Almora Jr. said. "Hitters are going to hit."

Almora has just eight walks on the season, which looks like a large total compared to the two unintentional free passes Baez has taken so far. Some guys just don't have it in them to hold the bat on their shoulder. Almora has been on base often when Baez has come to the plate.

"I'm on my toes every time he's up to bat," Almora said. "He's trying to hit; he's not trying to walk. He's trying to do damage."

Damage he's done. Plenty of it. Without a free pass. And to the amazement of most his teammates.

"I've never heard of it," Russell said with another shake of his head. "Only Javy."

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NBC Sports Chicago

Kyle Schwarber invites opponents to continue testing his arm in the outfield

By Tony Andracki

Kyle Schwarber smiled and shrugged.

He doesn't take it personally when opponents try to take the extra base on a ball hit to him in the outfield. Why would he? It just gives him another opportunity to show off his arm and steal an out for his team.

Schwarber threw out two runners at home plate over the last week — one in St. Louis last weekend and then one in Friday's Game 1 of the Crosstown Series at Wrigley Field.

"I love throwing to the bases and if they want to keep challenging, go for it," Schwarber said. "Obviously they're not all going to work out, but I'm just gonna keep trying to put some good throws out there and try to get those guys.

"I always want to pride myself with my defense. Just being able to be accurate with my throws is a big thing for me."

Those are the only two outfield assists Schwarber has in 2018, but he threw seven guys out last year from left field, a position he's still learning on the fly.

The book clearly isn't out yet on Schwarber's arm, but it will be soon if he keeps this up.

"He's a good thrower," Joe Maddon said. "He's got great technique with his throwing. He comes and gets the ball, he uses his feet well, he gets it on a line and it's got that one-hop skip.

"He works on things, give him credit, but definitely I think that part of his game is underrated."

Schwarber's defense has been a point of national contention since the 2015 National League Championship Series when he had an adventure in left field against the New York Mets.

Baseball fans and pundits alike are quick to label Schwarber as a "DH-only" player but Schwarber worked incredibly hard this offseason to shed weight and improve his outfield play.

He's gotten more athletic and it shows, rating as a positive defender in the first quarter of the 2018 season: +1 Defensive Runs Saved, according to FanGraphs. He was rated at -9 DRS during the 2017 season.

Part of that is the strong, accurate arm, which could be tied to his experience at catcher.

Schwarber said his background as a catcher has helped him calm down when he's approaching the ball and understand how to work quickly without rushing his body. That helps lead to the deadly accuracy that gives Willson Contreras a chance to make a tag on runners trying to score.

"Footwork matters," Maddon said. "You saw how he came up on that ball [in St. Louis], one-handed, came up a little bit, but he still got that clean and he worked his feet well and the line was direct.

"And that's why the throw didn't vary. So he did a lot of good things technically. When you're a catcher, you work on your feet all the time, so maybe there is something there."

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Chicago Tribune

Cubs lose a game the White Sox tried to give away

By Paul Sullivan

White Sox starter Lucas Giolito tried to gift-wrap a game for the Cubs on Sunday at Wrigley Field, but they politely refused his generous offering.

Despite seven walks and three wild pitches in just under six innings, Giolito managed to hang in long enough to let the Cubs beat themselves, which they eventually did in a 5-3 loss to the Sox before 40,537.

"We scored early, but Giolito did a good job at staying off our barrel for the most part," Anthony Rizzo said. "I know he walked a lot of guys, but we didn't really hit him too well. Put pressure on him, but we just came up short."

"He was effectively wild, I think, at the start," losing pitcher Kyle Hendricks said. "But his stuff was moving. And he dialed it in late."

Still, this was a series the Cubs should've swept. They were playing a team that not only is the worst in baseball but is threatening to challenge for the unofficial title as worst in modern baseball history.

But manager Joe Maddon was satisfied with the series win, no matter the opponent.

"Any time you win a series, we'll take it," he said.

Most of the time two out of three ain't bad. But this was, after all, the White Sox.

"I know they're going through some issues, but I really like their team on the field," Maddon said. "There is a lot of offensive talent, and they're actually missing some people right now too."

The Cubs had scored 50 runs in the first five games of the homestand against the lowly Marlins and Sox, after averaging 2.5 runs per game in their previous 11 games.

On Sunday they managed only three hits off Sox pitching, which came in with a 5.41 ERA, the highest in the majors. But thanks to Giolito's wildness and five steals, they had plenty of chances.

"One baserunning gaffe on our part," Maddon said, referring to Addison Russell getting thrown out at the plate in the fourth on Hendricks' sharp grounder to third. "But for the most part I felt they played really good defense today."

Russell called it "just a bad read," adding he was "overaggressive" on the hard-hit ball. He probably could've scored from first base on Ian Happ's double to deep right earlier in the inning but was forced to hold up at third for Kyle Schwarber, who was just rounding the base.

"You can't overrun the guy in front of you," Russell said.

No one seemed too concerned about the offensive no-show, which followed a hot streak. Rizzo said the offense is "day to day," just like life itself.

"Some days (we) come out banging," he said. "And some days we come out cold."

At least Rizzo and Willson Contreras have come out of their slumps, and Javier Baez continues to mash the ball, as he did with a two-run single in the first on a 3-0 pitch.

"I can only imagine when we all click," Russell said.

One thing the Cubs will have to do is pick up the defense. Rizzo failed to make a scoop on Adam Engel's infield hit to shortstop in the third. Russell made a great defensive play, but his one-hop throw escaped Rizzo. It was a difficult play but one Rizzo usually makes.

Contreras then tried to pick Engel off first, but his throw sailed into right field, allowing Engel to advance to third, where Yolmer Sanchez's two-out single to center brought him home.

Maddon said he had no problem with Contreras making that throw. Contreras' ability to catch runners napping is part of what makes him such a valuable catcher.

"I encourage him to throw whenever he wants," Maddon said. "And I'll continue to do so."

Now the young-and-hungry Braves come to town for a makeup game Monday, followed by a three-game series in Atlanta. When asked if the Cubs knew how good they were, Rizzo replied: "We're playing good?"

Well, good enough to be among the leaders in the National League Central, where none of the four early contenders looks like they're planning to run away.

But perhaps not up to the high standards the Cubs set for themselves, or what fans expect from a core that dared to dream of a dynasty after 2016.

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Chicago Tribune

Joe Maddon says Cubs aren't worried about Yu Darvish's mental state

By Paul Sullivan

When the Cubs moved Yu Darvish's return to the rotation back one day, many assumed they didn't want him pitching at Wrigley Field, where he was booed in his last outing before going on the 10-day disabled list with the flu.

Cubs manager Joe Maddon said they simply took advantage of an off-day in the schedule that allowed them to move Jose Quintana into Monday's slot in the makeup game against the Braves.

So the Cubs didn't want Darvish to pitch in a different environment than the Friendly Confines?

"I know that that's going to be easy to look at and say that we did do that," Maddon said. "But just trying to gather as much time as we can coming off him being ill, and we just decided to go ahead and do that.

"If that day (off) was not available, if it did not turn out this way regarding the days in between starts, we could not have done it and he would've pitched (Monday). But because we could, we chose to do it that way."

Maddon said the Cubs aren't worried about Darvish's mental state.

"Honestly, I'm not," he said. "The guy has been good for so many years. He's got an outstanding arm. I think sometimes he gets a little bit speeded up in what he's doing. He and I have talked about that. But there's too much success there for me to be worried about that. He would not be in the position he is if that were in fact true. (He just) needs to slow things down."

Darvish will start Tuesday in Atlanta. In his last start against the Braves on April 13 at Wrigley, he allowed four runs on nine hits and four walks over 4 2/3 innings in a 4-0 loss.

"I don't care if I pitched only five innings, (with) eight runs allowed or something like that, if this team won the game," Darvish told Japanese reporters on Sunday. "The Braves are a good team, as they show in the standings. All I can do is do my best."

Darvish said he's still not 100 percent healthy but is close.

Shoe business: Ben Zobrist was not available Sunday to discuss his shoe controversy, one day after his Instagram post protesting MLB's threat to fine or discipline him for wearing black shoes, a violation of uniform regulations.

Zobrist said Saturday he wanted to speak to MLB and the union before speaking with reporters. He wore pink shoes Sunday, so it wasn't an issue.

Cubs starter Kyle Hendricks said the recent spate of MLB letters to players about uniform violations was difficult to comprehend.

"It kind of takes away from what the players can express and connect with the fans in a way," he said. "You can go out there and wear neon arm sleeves, but you can't wear gray spikes with your uniform. So there are a few things that don't make a lot of sense to me."

The mild-mannered Zobrist, who wore the shoes Saturday despite the threat, is an unlikely outlaw. But Maddon said it wasn't surprising to him.

"If you attack something he believes in, I promise you he's coming back at you," Maddon said. "That's who he is. He's very convicted in his belief system. Regardless if it's shoes or religion or playing second base or whatever, he's going to tell you what he thinks when he's convicted, which he is."

"His thoughts are not nebulous. They're all 'Zo.' That's what he believes. He felt he was somewhat attacked in a sense. And (he wrote) 'This is why I was doing it. I didn't think I was doing anything wrong and I thought I was actually promoting the game.'"

"So he told you that, and that's exactly where he was coming from."

Extra innings: Jason Heyward will not be activated Monday from the seven-day concussion disabled list. Maddon said, "We're still working through the whole thing right now." ... The Cubs' five stolen bases Sunday were their most since Sept. 16, 2015, in Pittsburgh, also a five-steal game. ... Javier Baez had his 10th multi-RBI game of the season, tied for third in the majors.

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Chicago Tribune

White Sox rally for 5-3 win to prevent Cubs sweep at Wrigley Field

By Paul Sullivan and Teddy Greenstein

The White Sox came from behind for a 5-3 win over the Cubs in the finale of the City Series at Wrigley Field, snapping their seven-game losing streak before a crowd of 40,537.

Lucas Giolito (2-4) notched the win despite a hairy first inning and seven walks overall. Bruce Rondon, a surprise choice as closer, pitched the ninth for the save.

After a two-out single by Tommy La Stella, Ben Zobrist flied out to end it. The Cubs wound up with only three hits on the afternoon as their win streak ended at five games.

After being pounded in the first two games, the Sox grabbed their first lead of the series with a two-run sixth inning off Kyle Hendricks, who fell to 3-3.

Nicky Delmonico's triple tied the game at 3-3, before Matt Davidson's sacrifice fly put the Sox on top. Leury Garcia's run-scoring single off Brian Duensing in the seventh extended the lead to two runs.

Giolito walked seven over 5 2/3 innings, throwing only 50 strikes in 100 pitches. He threw three wild pitches and hit a batter, while yielding two hits.

The Cubs took advantage of Giolito's control problems to take an early lead. Giolito walked three, threw two wild pitches and allowed four stolen bases in the first as the Cubs scored in the opening inning for the third straight game.

Javier Baez's two-run single on a 3-0 pitch gave the Cubs a 2-0 lead. But the Sox answered with a solo home run by Davidson off Hendricks in the second, and tied it on Yolmer Sanchez's RBI single in the third.

A throwing error by Willson Contreras on an attempted pick-off play at first preceded Sanchez's hit, making it an unearned run.

Ian Happ's RBI double in the fourth gave the Cubs a brief 3-2 lead, but Addison Russell stopped at third and was then thrown out at the plate on a grounder to first.

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