



# CHICAGO CUBS DAILY CLIPS

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## Daily Herald

Cubs' Contreras proving to be a quick learner

By Bruce Miles

Welcome to the education of a young catcher.

The coursework is accelerated, and the curriculum includes Calling Pitches 101, Setting up Behind the Plate and Practicum in Working with Veteran Pitchers.

Instructors include some of the top faculty members in baseball, as well as active practitioners of the craft.

The prized pupil is 24-year-old Willson Contreras, a confident, inquisitive sort who hails from Venezuela.

Contreras made his major-league debut on June 19, and he did so with a bang, hitting the first pitch he saw for a home run against the Pittsburgh Pirates at Wrigley Field.

Where does one go from there? As it turns out, there has been plenty to learn, and Contreras seems eager to soak it up.

"I want to learn every day," he said. "I want to get to the field and improve a little bit every day. Like I've said before, I have confidence in myself that I know what I can do."

Contreras was a hot prospect in the minor leagues, much of it due to his bat. Last year at Class AA Tennessee, he led the Southern League with a .333 batting average to go along with a .413 on-base percentage, a 478 slugging percentage, 8 homers and 75 RBI.

The Cubs called up up this year after he went .353/.442/.593 with 9 homers at Class AAA Iowa.

Since arriving in the big leagues, Contreras has gone 271/.363/.443 with 5 homers and 10 RBI. He has started 17 games behind the plate, 17 in left field and 2 at first base.

As with any young player, there are going to be growing pains, especially at a position as crucial as catcher. But overall, Contreras is making the grade.

"There's nothing that he does that surprises me," said manager Joe Maddon. "He is so in the moment. He loves this game. He loves to play. He's not intimidated by anything or anybody. I'd like to be his boxing manager in the off-season. I'd like to be in his corner. I think he could compete in that sport, also. This guy's not afraid of anything."

Contreras got a ringing endorsement Tuesday night from veteran pitcher Jason Hammel, who tossed 6 scoreless innings against the Miami Marlins with the rookie behind the plate.

"He's a great kid; I love him," Hammel said. "He basically has gotten better every start that I've worked with him, with the game calling, blocking. He's even coming up to me giving me hugs now. He saw that I was frustrated coming out early, and he was like, 'Hey, nice job.' He's got kind words, wise words (beyond) his young years. Obviously, very proud of him."

For help, Contreras can turn to veteran catchers Miguel Montero (also a Venezuelan) and David Ross. Montero says he operates from the premise Contreras has all the ability he needs.

"It's all about the mental approach," Montero said. "I think this game is 70 percent mental and 30 percent abilities. It's not about, 'Catch the ball like this. Catch the ball another way.' He knows how to catch a ball. He knows how to hit. Sometimes as a player, you want to help him with a little tweak, a little tweak maybe about hitting. But the most important thing for me is the thought process as a catcher is so important to stay focused on your catching and your pitchers.

"He's got all the tools. Obviously, it's tough for a young guy to come in and catch big-leaguers, established pitchers. It's not that he gets intimidated, but he doesn't want to mess it up, either. He doesn't want to create (a situation) where a pitcher says, 'I don't like how he calls a game.' So he stresses that a lot, and he works hard to get better at that."

For that kind of help, Contreras seems grateful.

"A lot, especially with Miguel Montero and David Ross," he said. "They help me, and I'm just thankful for those guys."

Contreras has been playing regularly again of late after Maddon backed off a bit and gave him a breather in late July.

Now, things seem to be on the upswing again. He is 5-for-15 with 3 walks and 3 RBI in his last 4 games.

"We gave him a couple days off," the manager said. "I thought he was getting a little bit ragged with a lot of things just because he was playing too much. Again, just be aware of that. We want to stretch him deep into the season. We can't push him too hard because I think diminishing returns will set in at some point. I thought he needed a break.

"We backed off. He looked really fresh at the plate the last couple nights. So yeah, you've got to keep an eye on these guys. They're young. They're not used to this stuff. They're not used to the major-league game on a daily basis, the scrutiny and just the grind of the day-game, night-game thing that we do here."

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### **Cubs.com**

Russell looking dominant in second year

By Carrie Muskat

CHICAGO -- When Addison Russell showed up at Wrigley Field last Aug. 7, he checked the lineup and saw he was starting at shortstop against the Giants. Everyone knew Russell was a gifted shortstop, but he had played second base when he was promoted to the big leagues in late April 2015, because Starlin Castro was in the lineup at short.

It's been a crazy year since that move. Castro is playing second for the Yankees, and Russell, 22, not only is the Cubs' mainstay at short, he was voted as the starter there for the National League team in the 2016 All-Star Game presented by MasterCard in San Diego.

"I've got an All-Star Game under my belt, a few more months of experience," Russell said. "Overcoming all that adversity early on has made me a pretty strong player already. I'm learning more and more as time goes on. The whole experience has been awesome. Even though it's been a short amount of time, I've gained so much knowledge in that short amount of time."

Russell had to work to make the switch to second last year, but he wanted to play in the big leagues.

"Initially [I wasn't comfortable], but being here at the big league level, you try and you learn to make adjustments," Russell said. "I had to learn second base on the fly, but I think I played a pretty good second base and then got

moved back over to shortstop. Things were a little more comfortable [at short]. In just under two years service time, I feel pretty comfortable right now."

Cubs manager Joe Maddon didn't call Russell into his office to tell him about the switch.

"They never really said anything to me -- it was just day to day, I looked at the lineup and started playing shortstop more and more, and Castro started playing second base," Russell said. "That's how the transition went."

Russell was supposed to be the Athletics' starting shortstop, and he will play his first game at Oakland Coliseum on Friday when the Cubs face the A's in an Interleague series. Oakland selected Russell 11th overall in the 2012 Draft. He was then traded to Chicago in July 2014 as part of the deal for Jeff Samardzija and Jason Hammel.

Now, Russell finds himself a key piece of the Cubs' offense. After playing the majority of 2015 in the No. 9 spot in the order -- Maddon would bat the pitcher eighth -- Russell is now hitting fifth or sixth. He's second on the Cubs in batting with runners in scoring position (.261) behind Anthony Rizzo.

"It's given me a lot of confidence," Russell said of batting higher in the order. "It puts me in these situations where it's not forcing me to produce, but I feel I want to produce. I want to step up in situations. It's fun overall and my confidence is up right now. It makes me happy whenever Joe puts me up there in the lineup. Hopefully, he believes that I can knock in some runs for us."

Russell ranks third in the NL in home RBIs (47), and he led the team with 22 RBIs in July. He and Rizzo (21 RBIs) became the first Cubs duo to reach 20 RBIs in the month of July since Aramis Ramirez (25) and Geovany Soto (20) did so in 2010.

"He likes it," Maddon said of Russell moving up in the order. "It brings out the best in him. He's got 65 RBIs hitting from a low spot in the batting order, for the most part. I feel really good about him up there when something is going on. He gives you his best at-bat. I think he chases less and will accept walks more often."

The Cubs are 7-5 when Russell bats fifth and 11-6 when he's hitting sixth. He will likely see more time there.

"He's just grown -- he's growing and growing," Maddon said. "That's the beauty of development. The biggest thing I used to focus on in the Minor Leagues is what did a guy look like in April, and what does he look like in August. You see the development. He's a perfect example -- everything's gotten better."

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### **ESPNChicago.com**

No turning back: Target squarely on Cubs

By Jesse Rogers

CHICAGO -- If the target painted on the Chicago Cubs faded just a touch before the All-Star break, when they briefly lost ownership of the best record in baseball, it reappeared with the addition of closer Aroldis Chapman. This is once again the team to beat, just as it was about five months ago when manager Joe Maddon said they would embrace the high expectations.

"We're in a good position," right fielder Jason Heyward said Wednesday before the team headed out on the road. "And a good mental state. We're getting everyone's best every night, it feels like. That's what you want. You want to be challenged."

If they weren't challenged before, they will be from here on out, especially after hearing starting pitcher John Lackey speak. It's not that he's providing bulletin-board material, he's simply raising the bar so high that there's only one way this season can be judged a success: "We're here to win a World Series," Lackey began on Wednesday, delivering the makings of an instantly famous quote. "I didn't come here for a haircut. We're trying to get it on. I came here for jewelry."

Talk like that might carry the Cubs through August and all the way to October, but their sparkling 13-6 second-half record will be tested this month with two West Coast trips on tap, including one this weekend in Oakland. They're bound to hit a rough patch again before the final stretch.

"Before the All-Star break we weren't playing good baseball," Jon Lester said. "That's when you start looking behind you. I think this team does a good job of staying the course. ... We'll take the one-game approach."

If the Cubs are going to "embrace the target" over the next month as Maddon has had them doing since spring training, at least they're going to do it with rest. Maddon has a belief about August, which is different from how he views the final month of the season: This is not the time to push players, even as the division races heat up. It's the time to back off.

"This is the time of the year, man, I think not being on the field too much, [no] batting practice, coming to the ballpark later, all those different things matter right now," Maddon said recently. "It's not about extra work. It's about extra rest, as far as I'm concerned. You have to have a fresh mind in order to really play well."

Maybe a nine-game lead in the division and a deep roster make it easier on Maddon this season, but he had the same philosophy last year when the Cubs were chasing the St. Louis Cardinals and Pittsburgh Pirates in the National League Central. He didn't put the pedal to the medal last August -- in fact he did the opposite. Hot and humid games combined with teammates entering their seventh month together can make for a long 31 days.

"This is where tempers flare," first baseman Anthony Rizzo joked. "We start not liking each other as much. We just need to keep going. Keep your head down one day at a time."

The one-game approach is how most teams get out of a funk, but in the Cubs' case, getting rest at the break did the trick for them. Going a day at a time now is probably best simply because, besides getting the other team's best effort, the Cubs don't have as much to play for. Of course they need to maintain their lead in the division, but it's not as though St. Louis or Pittsburgh is breathing down their necks. August will be about challenging themselves as much as being challenged.

Having said that, Maddon should keep an eye on the National League's other division leaders. The team with the best record plays the wild-card winner, and though last year's wild-card Cubs knocked out the division-winning Cardinals, it's still desirable to play a team in a best-of-five series that has probably just had to pitch its ace in the wild-card game. As the division leaders this time around, the Cubs have been the hunted this year, the reverse of last season.

"When we play other teams, we do get their best," catcher Miguel Montero said. "Sometimes they press a little bit, like trying to do too much. Sometimes it works for them and they raise their game, but they can also get in trouble. Trying too much can be bad, and we've taken advantage."

Being the team that is everyone else's target can work for and against the Cubs. Their 66-41 record says it has worked mostly in a good way. As long as the dog days of August don't get to them, they should be fine heading into the stretch run -- target or no target.

"August is tough whether you're fighting uphill or the position we're in," Lester said. "If you stay focused on you, it's not too hard."

The Cubs have been focused on themselves since bowing out in the NL Championship Series last season. They exorcised demons against the Pirates and Cardinals -- especially St. Louis -- during last year's playoffs, and have maintained this year was just a continuation of that success.

Except now they have the best team in baseball, and every expert is picking them to win it all -- and that was before adding Chapman. Or Lackey declaring it's World Series or bust.

"We've been there the whole year," Montero said, shaking his head. "Nothing has changed. They're all coming for us."

So for now, this isn't about the next two months and then the postseason. It's about the next 27 days, taken one day at a time. Maddon isn't stressing anything but staying fresh. The standings will take care of themselves.

"I think you still have to fight to get through August a bit," Maddon said. "You still have to be mindful of giving people rest. Getting people in and out of there, you design this whole month with that in mind. Having a couple of off days is going to be very, very helpful. Beyond that, I think September creates its own energy. This next 30 days will be the 30 to really make sure that we stay the course, play as well as we have. Rest people and continue to build into that September moment."

With that target still squarely on their backs.

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### **CSNChicago.com**

How Oakland helped redirect Jon Lester and turn Cubs into contenders

By Patrick Mooney

Maybe institutional arrogance would have inevitably driven Jon Lester out of Fenway Park. The Boston Red Sox lowballed their homegrown ace – really their only consistently reliable drafted-and-developed starting pitcher in a generation – with a no-chance spring-training extension offer in 2014.

But Oakland A's baseball czar Billy Beane gave the Cubs another assist at that trade deadline – four weeks after the Jeff Samardzija/Addison Russell deal – by shipping out Yoenis Cespedes and acquiring Lester in a move that shocked the industry.

That meant Lester – a creature of habit comfortable in Boston – would get an eye-opening experience outside Red Sox Nation and broaden his horizons a little bit. The Red Sox couldn't seriously play the loyalty card anymore, while the A's couldn't tag Lester with a qualifying offer after his no-decision in an American League wild-card loss to the Kansas City Royals.

The Oakland Coliseum doesn't have a reputation for being family-friendly, and the Cubs played up all the planned amenities at a renovated Wrigley Field during Lester's recruiting visit to Chicago, paving the way to a six-year, \$155 million megadeal with a last-place team that needed to show the franchise would be serious about winning.

The butterfly effect is a fascinating concept while looking back on how Theo Epstein's baseball-operations group built the team with the best record in baseball. Seeing Lester (11-4, 2.95 ERA) pitch against a green-and-gold backdrop on Friday night on the same lot where the Golden State Warriors built a Super Team will be another reminder.

"It was a big surprise," Lester said. "I didn't actually think I would get traded. I knew that was a possibility. But I was just thinking if things didn't work out, they would want that draft pick, knowing those guys (in Boston). It ended up working out."

Lester will always remember July 31, because it's his oldest son's birthday. Hudson turned four the day Lester got traded from the organization that drafted him out of high school in 2002 and gave him two World Series rings.

"We were having a party," Lester said, at the family's house in suburban Boston. "I had found out that morning. I went and got some stuff from the (clubhouse). We all sat around and we were watching MLB (Network). Somebody would get up and take a phone call and we'd be like: 'Oh, OK.'"

"And then Andrew Miller would come (back) in and (say): 'Yeah, I'm going to Baltimore.' It would come up on the screen: 'Andrew Miller traded to Baltimore.' And then Stephen Drew got traded to the Yankees, who we were playing at the time. 'Lack' (John Lackey) got traded (to St. Louis).

"We were all sitting around just watching MLB (Network) while the kids were going crazy. And paused for some cake and went back to watching MLB.

"It was just a really weird day that will definitely go down as a lasting memory for my family."

The Cubs focused most of their energy on upgrading the bullpen before this week's non-waiver deadline, getting game-over closer Aroldis Chapman and a few more complementary pieces. While supply-and-demand dynamics, long-range planning and intradivision/crosstown politics factored into those decisions, the bottom line is the Cubs already made their biggest moves.

"We're all kids here in the toy aisle," Lester said. "We're all trying to play GM and say: 'Why don't you get this guy?' There's always logistics that we don't understand, (things) that we don't see. 'Just get this guy and give him \$10 million bucks next year' – we don't understand the ramifications of that.

"It's still fun to sit back and say: 'What if? What if we get this guy? What if we get that guy?' You're definitely paying attention to it. (But) I pay less attention to it now that I don't have to worry about it."

Epstein's front office ignored the rule already broken for Lester and gave no-trade protection – and \$240 million combined – to Ben Zobrist and Jason Heyward with October power pitching in mind. How much is enough? A lineup anchored by MVP candidates Anthony Rizzo and Kris Bryant – with All-Star leadoff guy Dexter Fowler at the top – is either good enough or it's not.

Jake Arrieta must perform at a Cy Young Award winner-level in the playoffs. Lackey will show up for the Big Boy Games or he won't. And the Cubs aren't going very far in October without Lester living up to his reputation as one of the best big-game pitchers of his generation.

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### **Chicago Tribune**

Better to be Cubs than A's? Jon Lester, Addison Russell, Chris Coghlan know  
By Mark Gonzales

Jon Lester, Addison Russell and Chris Coghlan need only look across the diamond this weekend to be reminded of Cubs President Theo Epstein's recent declaration that "every chance to win is sacred."

Those players treasure their chance to compete for a World Series with the Cubs after missing out on an opportunity with the Athletics or being traded from Oakland to the Cubs.

"There's that saying of, 'We'll get them next year,' " Lester said. "You never can predict the future. Look at last year. Nobody could have predicted where we ended up. You don't know how many shots you have."

Lester was part of a short-lived A's rotation — along with Jeff Samardzija and Jason Hammel — that was eliminated in the 2014 American League wild-card game by the eventual league champion Royals.

Lester pointed to the fragility of a team's mission, as the Cubs have coped with the loss of slugger Kyle Schwarber, which eventually led to the June 10 reacquisition of Coghlan, who was dealt to the A's on Feb. 25 to make room for Dexter Fowler.

"When you go to a team and you're not winning, it's really tough," said Coghlan, who went spent 2 1/2 months with the A's, who are in last place in the AL West. "It doesn't matter how good of a year you're having. It's really tough on older guys.

"You realize it's not about winning and it becomes a political game. Younger players need to play, and rightfully so because the season is a wash and why not give them exposure? ... And when you come to a team that's about winning like the Chicago Cubs and at all costs, you realize everything gets played to 'Is this for the win or not?' And that's what it essentially was about when we first started playing (as kids), anyway. So it becomes more pure."

It's not uncommon for A's fans to wince on social media when Russell's achievements are documented. It didn't help the A's that they failed to win a playoff game in 2014 after trading Russell, their first pick in the 2012 draft, in a five-player trade involving Samardzija and Hammel.

Russell appreciates that the A's accelerated his process in the minors and is glad to see former minor-league teammates Max Muncy, Ryon Healy and Billy Burns have reached the majors. But the chance to win at an early age isn't lost on him.

"I never planned on being in this type of organization, but I'm very fortunate that I am and that I'm with a close-knit, young and diverse ballclub," Russell said.

Coghlan knows how lucky he is to be back with the Cubs. He has had his share of ups and down, starting his career with a mercurial Marlins organization. He produced for a 2014 Cubs team that lost 89 games, then lost some playing time toward the end of the 2015 season when the Cubs advanced to the NL Championship Series.

"I'm so grateful I'm here," Coghlan said. "And it makes it more special with the guys I'm doing it with, the relationships I've formed here and the history we're chasing. We're chasing history, not just a World Series.

"And it makes the challenge that much sweeter. That's more difficult to deal with, but it makes it so precious. I wouldn't want to be on any other team."

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### **Chicago Tribune**

Mark Prior: 'I don't blame Dusty Baker'  
By Phil Thompson

In a revealing career postmortem he wrote for Sports Illustrated, former Cubs ace Mark Prior absolves Dusty Baker for injuries that ended his major-league career at 26.

For years, Baker has borne the brunt of criticism for Prior's missed potential. The thinking being that the former Cubs manager overworked his pitchers — particularly Prior during a run-up to the National League Championship Series in 2003 — which contributed to Prior's chronic shoulder and elbow troubles and wore out Kerry Wood's arm.

"(Fans) believe that (Baker) overused me in 2003 and blah, blah, blah. Only, here's the thing: I don't blame Dusty for what happened to me," Prior writes for SI's The Cauldron. "I wouldn't change a single thing that happened during that season — beyond us failing to bring a World Series championship to Chicago, of course. No matter how many pitches I threw, I never asked to come out of a game — doing so would have been unthinkable."

Now 35 and the Padres' minor-league pitching coordinator, Prior also noted that two injuries that didn't relate to pitching — a collision with the Braves' Marcus Giles in 2003 and a line drive that broke his elbow in '05 — may have played a role in shortening his career.

Prior's Cubs career ended in 2006, and he has made several failed attempts to return to the majors, including a final comeback bid with the Reds in 2013 that reunited him with Baker.

Baker has long been haunted by the ghosts of Prior and Wood.

"Prior and Wood, that's all I hear about," he told the Tribune's Paul Sullivan in June. "Where was my pitching coach, Larry Rothschild, in this whole equation? People think I was the pitching coach, the everything coach. That was one of the saddest days in my life when they told me about Mark Prior's (shoulder injury) when I got to spring training (in '04)."

Prior also turned the lens on himself in the article, acknowledging that he played a part in fans' perception that he was aloof.

"Whether it was talking to the media or going out in public, my instinct was always to close myself off," he writes. "To protect myself. I think that's where people in Chicago got the impression I was standoffish. That I was too measured or even defensive.

"And in a way — at the time, anyway — I was."

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### **Chicago Tribune**

Series preview: Cubs at Athletics  
By Staff

All games on WSCR-AM 670.

Season series: Cubs 5-4 all-time.

Friday: 9:05 p.m., CSN-Plus, CLTV.

LH Jon Lester (11-4, 2.95) vs. LH Dillon Overton (1-2, 9.33).

Saturday: 3:05 p.m., CSN.

RH Jake Arrieta (12-5, 2.75) vs. RH Sonny Gray (5-10, 5.84).

Sunday: 3:05 p.m., WGN-9.

RH Kyle Hendricks (10-7, 2.22) vs. LH Sean Manaea (3-6, 4.68).

Storylines: The Cubs make their first trip west since a three-game series at San Francisco and St. Louis May 20-22. The Athletics had lost five consecutive games entering Thursday.

Trending: Jon Lester needs one more victory to surpass his 2015 total of 11. Dillon Overton has allowed 16 runs in his last 12 2/3 innings.

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### **Chicago Tribune**

Jorge Soler closer to rejoining Cubs  
By Mark Gonzales and Paul Skrbina

Despite Jorge Soler's struggles, there's a chance that the Cubs outfielder could be closer to rejoining his teammates soon.

Soler flew Thursday from Birmingham to Chicago, apparently for an examination. Soler hasn't played with the Cubs since suffering a left hamstring strain on June 6.

Soler, who has been plagued by a history of hamstring woes, is batting .162 (6-for-37) with 16 strikeouts in 11 games on his minor league rehabilitation assignment.

Soler started his assignment with Triple-A Iowa but was transferred to Double-A Tennessee after two games. He batted .167 (5-for-30) with the Smokies.

The Cubs, who left for the Bay Area following a 5-4 win over the Marlins on Wednesday, currently are carrying nine relievers.

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## **Chicago Tribune**

Ronnie Woo recovering (Woo!) from knee surgery (Woo!)

By Paul Sullivan

Credit the Blackhawks with a save in the rehab of Cubs fan Ronnie "Woo-Woo" Wickers, who is recovering from knee surgery after a recent spill at Wrigley Field.

Hawks physician Dr. Michael Terry performed the surgery on Wickers at Northwestern Memorial Hospital and told Wickers he would be out of action for four months while his leg heals.

Wickers, rehabbing at a Near North Side facility, insisted he would be back at Wrigley for the second round of the postseason, assuming the Cubs make it that far.

"Me and (Kyle) Schwarber," he said, referring to the injured Cubs slugger, who is recovering from ACL surgery and is out for the season.

Wickers, 74, has been doing his shtick at Wrigley Field since the 1960s, leading cheers in the bleachers with his memorable "Cubs, Woo!" scream. Wickers once had a CD issued in which he did nothing but recite the names of the 1998 Cubs, followed by the "Woo!" chant.

While endearing to some fans, his ubiquitous "Woo!" has been compared to a shrieking car alarm by others. Even Wickers' admirers know he can wear you out after a few minutes of nonstop woo-ing.

"The best way to appreciate Ronnie is when he's about 100 feet away and not in your ear," former bleachers regular Bill Veeck once said.

Wickers, who has no official association with the Cubs, said he slipped in Section 131 during a July 19 game against the Mets and fell into some seats. After being examined in first aid, he was sent home with his knee wrapped in a bandage.

When Wickers' knee began swelling, he went to a clinic the next day and was sent to Northwestern, where he underwent the surgery last week. He's expected to be in a brace for eight weeks.

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## **Chicago Sun-Times**

Hendricks — like all the Cubs' starters — much better at home

By Steve Greenberg

You've likely heard all about it by now: Kyle Hendricks is Cy Young at Wrigley Field and Joe Blow everywhere else.

Hendricks — can we stop referring to him as the Cubs' No. 5 starter? — is 8-1 with a 1.19 ERA at home. He has the lowest WHIP (0.89) and the highest strikeout-to-walk ratio (4.9-to-1) on the starting staff, and has surrendered only two home runs.

Yet on the road, he's 2-6; the ERA more than triples to 3.75. The WHIP inflates to a staff-high 1.31, and the puny 2-to-1 strikeout-to-walk ratio brings up the rear as well. Away from the Friendly Confines, he is indeed a No. 5.

But guess what? All the Cubs' starters are, for the most part, hitting the road as mere shadows of their home selves.

Jason Hammel is 6-1 with a sparkling 2.24 ERA at home. Elsewhere? A more run-of-the-mill 5-4, 3.80.

John Lackey has a 2.83 home ERA. That's why the Cubs just had to have him, right? Unfortunately, the 4.68 road ERA reads like a real disappointment.

Jon Lester's road numbers may be skewed by one utterly atrocious outing against the Mets, but the cold, hard facts say his road ERA of 4.03 is more than twice his sweet-home 1.99.

And then there's Jake Arrieta — 8-2 on the road, much more impressive than his 4-3 record in his own backyard. The lone exception? Not even. Arrieta is far stingier at home, where he has a 1.71 ERA and has yet to serve up a gopher ball. His other road numbers — 3.66 ERA, eight homers allowed — are nothing special.

By itself, the Hendricks story line is quirky. Bigger picture, the Cubs starting staff has a home-road story that isn't entirely comforting.

### THREE UP/DOWN

Up: It sure was exciting two weeks ago when — in his first at-bat after a 27-game absence — Dexter Fowler homered in Milwaukee. Fowler hasn't been tearing the cover off the ball since, but he has been wonderfully steady in his leadoff role. He has scored at least one run in six consecutive games.

Down: Ten bucks says you can't name the last Cub to hit a home run. Hello? Anybody?

It was David Ross, in last Friday's series opener against the Mariners. Since then, the team has gone homerless in five straight games — the first time in over a year that has happened to the Cubs. It's also their first five-game homerless streak at Wrigley Field since August of 2014.

Down: Kris Bryant's power has gone missing. Well, relatively speaking. At June's end, Bryant had 22 home runs in 298 at-bats, a rate of one launched every 13.5 at-bats. Since then, he has four homers in 103 at-bats, or one per 25.7 at-bats.

But that's nothing compared to Bryant's RBI drop-off — he had 60 by the end of June, but has only eight since and has fallen out of the top 10 in the N.L. in this category.

### 1 THROUGH 9

1. Cubs: They're coming off a 7-1 homestand in which they allowed two or fewer runs in five of those victories. Recent ninth-inning heroics added serious kick to an already potent mix.

2. Nationals: In the Cubs' shadow all season, they're continuing to put together a comparable résumé. Opponents have managed only 20 runs over the last eight games.

3. Blue Jays: They've surrendered the fewest runs in the A.L. and are the only team with winning records against each A.L. division, plus interleague foes.

4. Orioles: Win four straight; lose four straight. Win five straight; lose five straight. The streaky O's are (somewhat) hot again, but will it last?

5. Indians: They're 5-8 against the last-place Twins and 11-1 against the second-place Indians. Because that totally makes sense.

6. Giants: Perhaps they should be lower in light of their sorry 5-13 mark since the All-Star break. Then again, it's an even-numbered year so, you know, the World Series is already over.

7. Rangers: How is it possible that the team with the best record in the A.L. has — 100-plus games in — a run differential hovering around zero? That's one crazy intersection.

8. Tigers: Bad news: Their eight-game winning streak was snapped Thursday by the White Sox. Good news: No dates with the Indians for another seven weeks.

9. Dodgers: Ex-Cub Rich Hill, acquired this week, has bubbled back up as a heck of a starting pitcher. He's just what this team needs (until he gets hurt, as all Dodgers pitchers do).

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### **Chicago Sun-Times**

Tunney cracks door open to relaxing plaza rules for playoffs

By Fran Spielman

Ald. Tom Tunney (44th) on Thursday cracked the door open to relaxing hard-fought rules governing the sale of beer and wine at an open-air plaza adjacent to Wrigley Field if the Cubs make a deep playoff run that could culminate in a World Series championship.

Tunney was in the mood to celebrate. After 10 years of fits and starts, ground was finally being broken on Addison & Clark, a mixed-use development on a 2.3-acre site across the street from Wrigley Field.

That's \$1 billion in new development, counting the Cubs' \$750 million plan to renovate Wrigley and develop the land around it.

That's when the question was raised about temporarily lifting a 12-event limit on the plaza to pave the way for watch parties for both home and road games if the team with the best record in Major League Baseball goes deep into the playoffs and even wins the World Series.

The Cubs stand to make a ton of money on those plaza watch parties, provided the team is allowed to sell beer and wine during those celebrations.

"The Cubs will have to ask. [It will depend] where they're at in terms of the construction. ... [But], we're ready for excitement. My life is always about compromise and about bringing people to tougher. This is gonna be a historic moment," Tunney said.

"We're not forecasting. We're not getting overly optimistic. We take each day as it comes. They've still got the best winning record. We, as a city, will handle it like we have in the past. This is a first-class team and a first-class city. We will have a first-class security plan for sure."

Mayor Rahm Emanuel brokered the agreement that gives the Cubs the limited right to sell beer and wine on the plaza, but in a way that, team officials claim, will tie the hands of the billionaire Ricketts family that owns the team.

Liquor sales on the plaza would be limited to beer and wine. Those drinks could only be sold during "stadium events" such as games and concerts and at a maximum of 12 special events per year, each requiring its own special permit.

The new rules would remain in place for three years to give the congested neighborhood time to adjust to a plaza with up to 6,000 patrons and a hotel and office building with more than 100,000 square feet of new food and beverage space.

Asked Thursday whether he would be willing to relax those plaza rules to accommodate a World Series run by the Cubs, Emanuel ducked the question, on the grounds that it was "premised on an event that has yet to happen." He accused the reporter who asked of being "in a different business, which is taking bets in Vegas."

Turning serious, the mayor said, "First of all, I'll be celebrating like the rest of the city something that hasn't happened for over 100 years. That's No. 1. How we celebrate, I'm gonna work with the alderman and the surrounding community and the owners. We figured out how to celebrate three times the Blackhawks. We'll figure out how to celebrate something that hasn't happened for over 100 years. But, I'm not gonna answer a question without consultation because that's the partnership that Tom [Tunney] and I have."

The Cubs are unhappy with rules that bar fans without tickets from the plaza on game days.

They're equally concerned about a restriction on concerts that was tucked into the deal.

Those big-money events now cannot be held at Wrigley during the Chicago Public Schools academic year. The team says that violates a 2013 agreement on concerts at the ballpark and it may be entitled to financial compensation.

As for the transit-oriented development known as Addison & Clark, it will include 148 luxury apartments and 150,000 square feet of retail space anchored by a 10-screen CMX luxury movie theater.

In 2009, Wrigleyville residents concerned about game day congestion lined up against a project that had included a hotel, retail and residential complex.

They were concerned the building's precedent-setting height — 91 feet at its tallest point — would turn their residential neighborhood into a "downtown, tall-building commercial district." They were not appeased when M&R Development shrank the project and lowered the height to below the Wrigley roofline.

But that was before the City Council approved the Cubs' plan to renovate Wrigley and develop the land around it with its own boutique hotel.

That prompted a developer who had struggled to secure financing to drop the hotel, raise the number of residential units to 148 and increase the minimum number of parking spaces from 399 to 493.

On Thursday, Tunney predicted that a second hotel would be coming to Wrigleyville.

"Trust me. Ten years from now, we'll have two hotels around here. I don't know where they're gonna be. But, I've never seen [just] one hotel in an exciting place like Wrigley Field or any sports stadium," he said.

He added, "Everything that's happening around Wrigley Field — if you put all the investment together and the jobs and the transformation for a community — this is close to a \$1 billion in investment. ... This is like, 'Make no small plans.' The combination of what's happening basically on all four corners is transforming this part of our neighborhood. We hope it's a 365-days-a-year experience — on the plaza too."

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### **Chicago Sun-Times**

Mark Prior reflects on Cubs stint and defends Dusty

By Chris De Luca

Mark Prior won 18 games for the Cubs as a 22-year-old during an All-Star season in 2003. He helped get the Cubs five outs from the World Series. And he represented a promising future for the Cubs before injuries derailed his career.

Now Prior is a minor-league pitching coordinator for the San Diego Padres. He hasn't thrown a pitch in the majors since 2006, when he went 1-6 for the Cubs.

Prior knows exactly what his legacy is in Chicago, and he detailed his feelings in a personal essay he wrote for Sports Illustrated's The Cauldron.

"Even now, when people hear my name, they still think about the hype and the potential. And, inevitably, the injuries," Prior wrote.

"Some people pointed to problems with my delivery and arm action," Prior continued. "Others — mostly Cubs fans — still blame my manager, Dusty Baker, for the series of injuries that derailed my career. They believe that he overused me in 2003 and blah, blah, blah. Only, here's the thing: I don't blame Dusty for what happened to me. I wouldn't change a single thing that happened during that season — beyond us failing to bring a World Series

Championship to Chicago, of course. No matter how many pitches I threw, I never asked to come out of a game — doing so would have been unthinkable.

“Dusty was hired to manage each game like it was his last. And over the course of a season (or even multiple seasons), that meant an endless series of decisions — especially when it comes to balancing pitcher workloads against the need to win games. Ironically, this is part of my job with the Padres now — the job pitching coaches at all our affiliates have — and it’s not an easy one. Like anything else, you do the best you can.

“I believe Dusty did the best he could, and anyone who thinks he is responsible for what happened to me or Kerry Wood, I would strongly disagree.”

Prior believes much of the blame goes to two freak injuries he suffered during his short career: His collision with the Atlanta Braves’ Marcus Giles in 2003 and the Brad Hawpe line drive that broke his elbow in 2005.

“That collision could’ve stretched my shoulder capsule out without my ever really knowing it,” he wrote. “I’ll never know, but I’ll always wonder.”

Prior also admits to being aloof with the media in Chicago, but stresses he enjoyed his too-brief time on the North Side.

“I loved my time in Chicago, too, despite how things turned out,” he wrote. “If I would have signed with New York out of high school, maybe I would’ve crashed and burned years earlier. Or maybe I would’ve pitched for a decade and never made it to The Show. It’s impossible to say.

“I do know that I’ll never have any regrets.”

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