



# CHICAGO CUBS DAILY CLIPS

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## Cubs.com

Lester uses Soler power in Bay Area joy ride  
By Mark Chiarelli and Rick Eymer

OAKLAND -- The funk that enveloped the Cubs through the end of June and early July continues to feel more like a distant memory, as does the A's postseason run with Jon Lester just two seasons ago.

Lester, making his return to the Coliseum for the first time since spending two months with Oakland in 2014, allowed two runs over seven innings, and Jorge Soler hit a three-run homer as the Cubs pounded A's starter Dillon Overton en route to a 7-2 win, their fifth straight.

"Any time you've been on the home side and come back as a visitor, it's different," Lester said. "There aren't many guys left from when I was there. It makes it hard to form a game plan."

Chicago is now 15-6 over its last 21 games, a swift reversal from its 5-15 record between June 29 and July 10, and own the Majors' best record at 67-41.

The A's, meanwhile, are 13 games below .500 (48-61), tying a season high for the sixth time.

Overton gave up seven runs on nine hits and was removed after three innings. His struggles with the long ball didn't take long to resurface, either, as Dexter Fowler led off the game with a homer and Soler's three-run shot came in the same inning as the Cubs staked Lester to a 4-0 lead.

"Believe it or not, I was actually hitting my spots better tonight," Overton said. "They just hit everything I threw."

It was more than enough for Lester, who retired 14 of the first 15 batters he faced before Brett Eibner homered to lead off a two-run sixth. The lefty struck out eight and improved to 12-4 with a 2.93 ERA.

"He pitched extremely well," Cubs manager Joe Maddon said. "He had a little bump there but he settled back in. That was impressive."

Lester wasn't the only former A's player to make an impact. Addison Russell, drafted by Oakland 11th overall in 2012, reached base three times and turned in an impressive backhanded defensive play in the fifth inning. Ben Zobrist, who played half of last season with the A's, made a remarkable play at second base to tag Khris Davis out on a steal attempt in the second inning.

## MOMENTS THAT MATTERED

Soler-powered first inning: In his first at-bat after two months on the disabled list with a left hamstring strain, Soler belted a three-run homer to help the Cubs open a 4-0 lead before Lester threw a pitch.

"I just wanted to put a good swing on the ball," Soler said. "I was happy to be called up and I came ready."

Overton's woes continue: Overton entered Friday's game having allowed the most runs (19) and hits (34) of any pitcher in A's history over his first four starts, and his fifth only got worse. The Cubs were locked in early, rifling several sharp liners to left field, including the pair of first-inning homers, and Overton needed 84 pitches to get through three innings. Friday's start was the third time the lefty has been unable to finish more than 3 1/3 innings, and he's allowed 11 homers in his first 21 1/3 innings, seeing his ERA rise to 10.97.

"You know, I was telling my parents after my last outing: For a rookie, I might've given up the most home runs through four and five starts," Overton said. "It's a crappy feeling. You don't want to do that. I'm still adjusting to this league."

A run in with Fowler: Fowler went 2-for-5 and scored a run for the seventh straight game, his longest such streak in four years. The Cubs are 21-4 when he reaches base safely at least twice.

Eibner homers in debut: Eibner briefly jolted the Coliseum to life in his A's debut, opening the sixth inning with a homer just hours after being recalled from Triple-A Nashville. Eibner, who was acquired from the Royals July 30 in exchange for Billy Burns, hit .231 with three homers in 26 games with Kansas City this season.

"We can see what we like in him," A's manager Bob Melvin said. "The power is probably his biggest tool, as far as offensively."

#### QUOTABLE

"Sometimes a guy just has to show up and he gets the adrenaline going." -- Maddon on Soler's first-inning home run

#### SOUND SMART WITH YOUR FRIENDS

Overton is the first pitcher since at least 1913 to allow more than nine homers over the first five games of his career.

#### WHAT'S NEXT

Cubs: Jake Arrieta (12-5, 2.75 ERA), having lost three straight decisions, takes the mound against the Oakland Athletics for Saturday's 3:05 p.m. CT contest at the Coliseum. The Cubs have lost the last five games the right-hander has started, and he is winless against the A's in three career games (two starts), though Arrieta's last appearance against them was in 2012 while with the Baltimore Orioles.

A's: Sonny Gray (5-10, 5.84 ERA) starts the 1:05 p.m. PT contest for Oakland, hoping to put Sunday's setback against the Indians behind him. Gray allowed seven runs in three innings in that one. It was the second time in three starts he allowed seven runs, and he has the highest ERA among qualifying starters in the Majors. The righty has never faced the Cubs.

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#### **Cubs.com**

Soler homers in first at-bat off disabled list

By Rick Eymer

OAKLAND -- Jorge Soler wasted no time before making an impact in his return to the Cubs' lineup after spending two months on the disabled list rehabbing a left hamstring strain. He belted a three-run homer in the first inning as the designated hitter in Friday night's 7-2 win against the A's.

"I just wanted to put a good swing on the ball," Soler said. "I was happy to be called up and I came ready."

Soler spent the previous two weeks with Double-A Tennessee, hitting .176 in 11 games, but he was 3-for-7 with a couple of runs scored over his past two games.

"We wanted to get Jorge back up, with this being an American League game," Cubs manager Joe Maddon said. Soler is batting .224 for the Cubs this season.

"He always swings the bat well. His biggest obstacle is figuring out a way to stay on the field," said Cubs starter Jon Lester, who picked up Friday's win. "He's young though, and any time he's in our lineup he's definitely a presence. I'm happy he's back and helping us out."

Right-hander Joe Nathan, 41, was designated for assignment to make room on the roster.

"Nathan needs more time, and he didn't work out immediately," Maddon said. "I do believe he's on the right track, but with the DH coming up, there are a lot of things to consider."

Worth noting

- Trevor Cahill (right knee) could be in line to start one of the games in the Aug. 16 day-night doubleheader against the Milwaukee Brewers. He's been starting at Triple-A Iowa.

"We need to get him going up here," Maddon said.

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### **Cubs.com**

Lester shines in return to Oakland

By Rick Eymer

OAKLAND -- Cubs left-hander Jon Lester was looking forward to facing former teammates Coco Crisp and Jed Lowrie. Neither made an appearance.

"When you have a bunch of new guys, it makes it harder to form a game plan," Lester said after pitching the Cubs to a 7-2 victory over the Athletics on Friday night. "When you get four runs, that changes the game plan going in. Now it's about throwing strikes, putting them on the defense and attack them."

Lester, who made 11 starts for the A's during the 2014 postseason run, won his third straight decision and improved to 8-1 since May 21. He remained unbeaten (8-0 with a 2.55 ERA) in 12 night games.

"It went according to plan, and Jonny pitched really well, which made it all work," Cubs manager Joe Maddon said. "He had that bump there and then settled back in."

The Cubs are on another run, having won five straight, eight of nine and 15 of 21.

Putting four runs on the board before he had to throw a pitch gave Lester the luxury of rearing back and firing, rather than being more cautious against guys he's never seen before.

"It eases your mind and let's you think about throwing strikes," Lester said. "That's a good thing."

Lester is one of several Cubs who spent time in A's organization. Ben Zobrist played half of last season in Oakland, and Addison Russell was drafted by the A's 11th overall in 2012. Both of them contributed on Friday night.

"It's a little different," Lester said. "Any time you've been on the home side and come back as a visitor, it's different. I enjoyed pitching here. I wish it turned out a little different, but I was with a good team and great fans. It's unbelievable to come here as a home player as opposed to a visitor."

Lester faced the minimum through five innings, thanks to Zobrist's slick tag when David Ross caught Khris Davis stealing in the second inning. After giving up four hits in the sixth, Lester came back to pitch an efficient seventh before Carl Edwards Jr. and Joe Smith each pitched a scoreless inning.

Lester gave up six hits, did not walk a batter and struck out eight.

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## **Cubs.com**

Arrieta, Gray set to duel in Oakland

By Rick Eymer

When the Cubs and A's square off in an Interleague matchup at the Coliseum on Saturday night, aces Jake Arrieta and Sonny Gray will both be trying to get back to their usual dominant selves.

Arrieta has lost his last three decisions and his most recent victory was due to a lively Cubs offense rather than a dominating performance by the reigning National League Cy Young Award winner.

Over the past six games, Arrieta has seen his ERA shoot up a full run to its current (gasp) 2.75. Now that he's proven to be human, he's looking to recover the form that led him to last year's honors.

Gray's situation is a little more confounding. Even a stint on the disabled list has not helped cure what ails him. The A's right-hander owns the Majors' worst ERA among starters at 5.84 and his 15 wild pitches are five more any other pitcher. He'll be making his first career start against the Cubs.

Things to know about this game

- Dexter Fowler, Ben Zobrist and Jason Heyward are the only Cubs regulars who have faced Gray. They're a combined 4-for-12 against him and Heyward went 0-for-3. Both of Zobrist's hits off his former teammate are doubles.
- Outfielder Khris Davis is the A's hitter with the most at-bats against Arrieta, batting .211 (4-for-19) with two doubles and an RBI. Billy Butler seems to have the best approach against Arrieta. He's 3-for-7 and has walked twice against him.
- The Cubs, who lead the Majors in bases on balls, have drawn at least five walks in eight games since the All-Star break and are undefeated in those games.
- The A's used the DL for the 24th time on Friday. They used the DL on 23 occasions all of last year.

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## **ESPNChicago.com**

Jorge Soler returns to Cubs' lineup in a big way

By Jesse Rogers

OAKLAND, Calif. -- Well, that didn't take long.

Chicago Cubs outfielder/designated hitter Jorge Soler made his presence felt immediately after a nearly two-month hiatus due to a hamstring injury, homering in his first at-bat Friday against the Oakland Athletics. Cubs manager Joe Maddon's gut told him Soler would fare better being back in the big leagues after the team recalled him despite a .162 batting average during a rehab stint in the minors.

"Sometimes a guy has to show up, and he gets the adrenaline going," Maddon said after the 7-2 victory.

Soler's adrenaline was going right away, as he hit the line-drive shot on the third pitch he saw from A's starter Dillon Overton in his first at-bat since June 6. That's the day he went down with his latest leg injury; it has been a recurring problem for him since joining the Cubs.

"His biggest obstacle is just making sure he figures out a way to stay on the field," said lefty Jon Lester, Friday's winner. "I'm just happy he's back and helping us out. All the other stuff we'll worry about as we go."

Soler presents a wild card for the Cubs down the stretch as he remains the one young player who continues to confound observers. There are moments when his physical abilities match his keen eye at the plate, or at least the eye he showed coming up through the minors. Other times he's not very patient, and the hulking physical specimen ends up breaking down.

"I was a little bit frustrated being out two months," the 24-year-old said through translator Henry Blanco. "I want to keep a positive attitude and do my best."

Any defense of Soler typically focuses on the 2015 postseason, specifically the National League Division Series, when Soler reached base against the St. Louis Cardinals in his first nine career postseason plate appearances to set a major league record. But that actually highlights his inconsistency during the 2015 regular season, as Soler admitted this past spring he focused much more on his game during the playoffs. It begs the question: What if he focuses all the time?

"Anytime he's in our lineup he's a presence," Lester said. "We know that, and I think the other team knows that."

With Soler's return, Maddon will have daily lineup decisions to make, but given the manager's stated intentions to rest Cubs starters this month, they might not be as difficult as all that. A nice rotation which includes Soler should be in order, but here's the question when it comes to him and even Javier Baez: Will they get meaningful time against right-handed pitching? Considering the absence of Kyle Schwarber and the struggles of Miguel Montero, the Cubs could be one lefty bat short in the lineup. That's where Baez, Soler and Willson Contreras come in. Contreras will play a lot, but if one of the other two takes off against righties, he could emerge as a factor. For now, Maddon will find time for them all.

"The National League game permits you to play these guys almost daily," he said. "I'm not so concerned right now."

Indeed, despite all that time on the disabled list, Soler now has one more home run than Jason Heyward. The talent is locked in there; it just has to come out on a more consistent basis, as it did early Friday.

"I was looking for a fastball," Soler said. "I got a fastball and put a good swing on. I'm trying to help the team win some games."

Mission accomplished in Game 1 of his return.

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### **ESPNChicago.com**

How they won: Cubs take advantage of another rookie starting pitcher early  
By ESPN Stats & Information

The Chicago Cubs started fast and scored all seven of their runs in the first three innings of their 7-2 win against the Oakland Athletics on Friday.

How were they able to get their league-leading 67th win?

### **Hit. The. Rookie.**

Oakland sent out rookie Dillon Overton and the Cubs took advantage, scoring all seven runs and racking up nine hits off the lefty. It was not a one-off performance against a rookie this season for the Cubs, as they have dominated rookie opposition.

Rookie pitchers are 2-11 with a 6.34 earned-run average in 19 starts against the Cubs this season. That ERA is third-worst in the MLB, behind the Orioles (7.44, seven starts) and Tigers (7.11, four starts), according to the Elias Sports Bureau. Rookie starting pitchers do not last long against the Cubs this season. They average less than five innings pitched per start against the Cubs.

## **Lester continues to get the K's**

Jon Lester struck out eight Athletics hitters Friday, following up on consecutive seven-strikeout performances. In his past three starts, Lester's 22 strikeouts rank tied for third-most in the majors in that span, trailing only Justin Verlander (25) and J.A. Happ (23). Eleven of his 22 strikeouts have come via his fastball in that span. He had 10 strikeouts via fastballs in his six previous starts combined.

## **Score early**

Entering Friday, the Cubs ranked sixth in the majors in runs scored over the first three innings, though they had struggled of late in that span. Over the past five games, the Cubs had scored a combined four runs in the first three innings of games.

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## **ESPNChicago.com**

Cubs take on Pebble Beach before taking on the A's

By Jesse Rogers

OAKLAND, Calif. -- A day off in the San Francisco Bay Area meant a day of golf at the famous Pebble Beach Golf Links for several Chicago Cubs on Thursday.

Pitcher Jon Lester led a group that included Miguel Montero, Anthony Rizzo, John Lackey, David Ross, Kris Bryant, Jake Arrieta and assistant hitting coach Eric Hinske.

"It was awesome," Montero said Friday. "It's good to get away. It was a great time."

Montero said Lester was "low man" but that Ross also "shot well."

"I think I was about a 90 or 92," Montero said. "That's not bad on that course."

Montero and Arrieta wore shorts on the chilly afternoon about two hours southwest on the Monterey Peninsula as the Cubs enjoyed the fact they came to Northern California two nights before beginning a series with the Oakland Athletics.

"I forgot the temperature is cooler," Montero said with a laugh. "It wasn't that bad."

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## **ESPNChicago.com**

Cubs' Jorge Soler homers in return to lineup; reliever Joe Nathan DFA'd

By Jesse Rogers

OAKLAND -- The Chicago Cubs activated outfielder Jorge Soler from the disabled list and designated relief pitcher Joe Nathan for assignment on Friday.

Soler, 24, batted sixth and played designated hitter in his first game since June 6, a 7-2 win over the Oakland Athletics.

In his first at-bat, he hit a three-run home run in the first inning. Soler also reached on a fielder's choice and scored on Javier Baez's double in the third.

Soler injured his hamstring two months ago, which continued his yearly trend of spending time on the disabled list because of leg problems. Soler split his rehab time between Double-A and Triple-A and hit .162, which led manager Joe Maddon to indicate that Soler needed to work on his timing before he was recalled.

The team changed course this weekend, knowing that it could install Soler in the DH role and admitting that an extended stay in the minors wasn't energizing him.

"I think you're going to see better," Maddon said Friday afternoon. "I've seen that with guys that have to go back to Triple-A for an extended period of time. ... I'm not saying it's right or wrong, it just happens."

Maddon said there are no "restrictions" on Soler, who will be watched carefully as he restarts his season. He had five home runs and a .223 batting average in 130 at-bats in the first part of this season.

"I want to see how he responds to all this," Maddon said.

Nathan, 41, returned this season after having his second major elbow surgery and was signed by the Cubs in May, well before they added lefties Mike Montgomery and Aroldis Chapman via trades. The Cubs didn't have time to bring Nathan along as they begin their pennant push.

"He needed more time," Maddon said. "We had so many other people to get involved. It just didn't work out immediately in a sense."

The Cubs want to bring second baseman Tommy La Stella back from the minors, though he was given "personal time" after being optioned last weekend.

"He's taking batting practice, staying active," Maddon said of La Stella. "We're trying to get him back up here. It's not clear-cut."

"We have so many tough decisions to make. ... I'm not bemoaning anything."

This is the first time in a long time that the Cubs have had a healthy roster.

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### **ESPNChicago.com**

The week in interesting and unusual Cubs stats

By Doug Kern, ESPN Stats & Information

The Chicago Cubs spoiled the Seattle Mariners' first Sunday Night Baseball appearance since 2004 by rallying from a 6-0 deficit to send the game to extra innings and eventually win on Jon Lester's squeeze bunt in the 12th. Brian Matusz allowed three homers, becoming the first pitcher to do so in his first start with the Cubs since Brian McNichol got a September call-up and did so against the Cincinnati Reds in 1999.

The Cubs had not come back to win a game in which they entered the ninth inning trailing by three (or more) runs since 2008, when Geovany Soto's two-out homer tied it and Derrek Lee walked off in the 12th.

As for Lester, he became the first pinch-hitting pitcher to record a walk-off anything since Yovani Gallardo's double for the Brewers two years ago, and the first Cubs pitcher with any walk-off (pinch hitting or not) since Les Lancaster doubled home Curt Wilkerson to beat the Giants on July 20, 1989.

After the Cubs tied Sunday's game on a wild pitch, they followed that up Wednesday by winning on a wild pitch; Marlins reliever A.J. Ramos uncorked one to score Matt Szczur. That marked the first time the Cubs had won on a "bounce-off" since 2009; that game was the second straight blown save opportunity for Kerry Wood of the Cleveland Indians in his first series against his former team.

John Lackey added two doubles to his own cause Wednesday, the first Cubs pitcher with two doubles since Ismael Valdes at Coors Field on May 24, 2000, and the first to do it at Wrigley since Dick Ruthven (against the Pittsburgh Pirates) on April 20, 1984.

Anthony Rizzo reached base five different ways in Monday's game, recording a triple, a double, a single and a walk and getting hit by a pitch. He's the first Cubs batter in the live ball era to do all of that in a game, and the first in the majors since current Cubs second baseman (but then Tampa Bay Ray) Ben Zobrist in 2012.

Kyle Hendricks threw the Cubs' second shutout of the season Monday; their only other was Jake Arrieta's no-hitter. Hendricks scattered seven hits and three walks, the first Cubs pitcher to allow 10 baserunners but still complete a shutout since Jon Lieber (also seven hits, three walks) against the Atlanta Braves on May 14, 1999.

Dexter Fowler's leadoff triple Tuesday was the first one of the season for the Cubs, though it was the fifth of his Cubs career. That matches his total from his years with the Rockies. The last players to have five leadoff triples for the Cubs were Don Kessinger, who had five in the 1975 season alone (and 18 in his career), and Rick Monday, whose fifth was the Cubs' only leadoff triple of 1976.

**Record watch:** This week's series sweep of the Miami Marlins was the Cubs' first at Wrigley Field since July 2002, and the Cubs' all-time record against the Marlins now stands at 93-92. Of all the possible National League matchups, only one other has been played more than 100 times to within a one-game margin: The Milwaukee Brewers lead their all-time series with the Arizona Diamondbacks 65-64.

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### **CSNChicago.com**

How Addison Russell can help Cubs take off again

By Patrick Mooney

Around this time last year, the Cubs bumped Starlin Castro off shortstop and strengthened their up-the-middle defense with Addison Russell's sense of calm and explosive athleticism. That decision helped catapult a borderline wild-card team toward 97 wins and the National League Championship Series.

Could the Cubs take off again by moving Russell into the middle of their order? It's already happening, with the Cubs going 13-6 since the All-Star break and last year's rookie No. 9 hitter starting to establish himself at fifth or sixth in Joe Maddon's lineup matrix, where only Anthony Rizzo (78) and Kris Bryant (68) have driven in more runs than Russell (65) this season.

"It brings out the best in him," Maddon said. "He's taken advantage of all those opportunities. I feel really good about him up there when something is going on. He gives you his best at-bat.

"For the most part, he chases less. He'll accept his walks more often. He does a lot of good things when there's folks on base."

Russell is quiet, even around teammates, with super-agent Scott Boras describing his client as an old soul, even at the age of 22. Inner confidence helps explain why Russell has put up an .822 OPS with runners in scoring position and notched eight game-winning RBI this season, finishing tied for second in the NL with 22 RBI in July.

Russell is seeing 3.94 pitches per plate appearance, on pace to finish with almost 20 homers and coming off what could be the first of several All-Star appearances. Around this time last year, people wondered how a young group would handle the pressure of a pennant race, forgetting that a kid born in 1994 doesn't worry about the weight of the franchise's history.

"We just want to play, man," Russell said. "Go out there and prove a point. The players that we have are here to battle – and we're trying to win it all."

That motivation pushed Oakland A's executive Billy Beane to give up Russell in the blockbuster Jeff Samardzija trade on the Fourth of July 2014. There will be what-could-have-been reminders during this weekend's three-game series at the Oakland Coliseum, but props to the A's for trying to win, refusing to go into tanking mode and not being so obsessed with what Baseball America and Baseball Prospectus thinks of their farm system.



That's why you collect prospects – not for top-five placements in the minor-league rankings – but the chance to win a World Series. President of baseball operations Theo Epstein credited Beane for his bold, decisive move during the conference call after the Samardzija/Russell deal – and just gave up his best prospect (Class-A shortstop Gleyber Torres) and another former Oakland first-round pick (Double-A outfielder Billy McKinney) in the 4-for-1 Aroldis Chapman trade with the New York Yankees.

Epstein's front office didn't acquire a hitter at this week's non-waiver deadline, believing in the lineup that got the Cubs to this point. Now a team with the best record in baseball (66-41) looks ready to take off again, with Russell helping power that engine.

"He's just growing," Maddon said. "That's the beauty of development. The biggest thing I used to always really focus on in the minor leagues was: What did a guy look like in April? And then what does he look like in August? Did you see any real growth, development? The things you talked about and worked on in spring training and the first month of the season – do you see it as being better now?"

"He's the perfect example of everything's gotten better."

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### **CSNChicago.com**

Jorge Soler to start Friday, Cubs DFA Joe Nathan  
By Staff

After missing nearly two months with a left hamstring strain, Jorge Soler is back in the lineup Friday against the Oakland Athletics.

To make room for the 24-year-old outfielder, the Cubs announced that Joe Nathan has been designated for assignment. Nathan has pitched just two innings for the team this season.

Soler has five homers, 13 RBI's and a slash line of .223/.322/.377 with the Cubs this year. In his minor league rehab assignment, he batted .162/.347/.162.

He will DH and hit sixth in his return.

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### **Chicago Tribune**

Cubs maintain low-key approach after 5th straight victory  
By Mark Gonzales

After their 7-2 victory Friday night over an overmatched Oakland Athletics team, the Chicago Cubs are 26 games over the .500 mark.

But Jon Lester wouldn't be goaded by a reporter probing if the Cubs were looking ahead to the playoffs.

"We got a long way to go from the finish line," Lester said after pitching seven innings of two-run ball. "I hope nobody's worried about the finish line right now. We have a good team. We feel good about ourselves."

"Since the middle of last year, I've felt Joe (Maddon) has done a good job of making sure everyone in this clubhouse plays one game at a time and not be worried about September or October right now. So we're worried about Aug. 6. We'll enjoy this (win) and show up (Saturday) ready to go again."

Lester then repeated a phrase Maddon brought up during the winter meetings in December that has stuck with the Cubs since spring training.

"We know we have the target on our backs, and everyone wants to beat us," Lester said. "We've got to make sure we show up to play every day."

Afterward, Lester reminisced about how times have changed in Oakland since his two months during the 2014 season, when the A's lost the American League wild-card game to the Royals.

"Anytime you're on the home side and come back as a visitor is different," Lester said. "I enjoyed pitching here. I would have liked things to have gone different when I was here, but they have a great coaching staff. Not many guys left I played with.

"It was a good time with great fans."

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### **Chicago Tribune**

Jorge Soler makes sudden impact in Cubs' win

By Mark Gonzales

Cubs manager Joe Maddon had a inkling that Jorge Soler would succeed despite not playing in a major league game in nearly two months and batting only .162 with no home runs in 50 plate appearances during a minor league rehabilitation assignment.

"I think you're going to see better," Maddon said. "I really do. I've seen that with different guys. They have to go back to Triple-A for an extended period of time. I'm not saying it's right or wrong. It just happens."

Soler didn't disappoint Maddon or the Cubs, who have waited patiently for his return and a semblance of production that he displayed during the National League playoffs.

Soler lined a three-run home run in his first at-bat Friday night to cap a four-run first inning against left-hander Dillon Overton that helped enable Jon Lester and the Cubs to cruise to a 7-2 victory over the Athletics at the Coliseum.

"Sometimes a guy just has to show up, and he gets the adrenaline going," Maddon said. "That was a big hit. I didn't think it was hit high enough to go out."

The timing couldn't have been better for the Cubs and Soler, who handled the designated hitter duties in the first game of this three-game interleague series. Maddon said there are no restrictions on Soler, who has experienced numerous leg injuries during his time with the Cubs and hadn't played in a major league game since injuring his leg while rounding first base at Philadelphia on June 6.

"I was a little frustrated being out for two months, but I wanted to keep a positive attitude and try to do my best," Soler said.

A strong return by Soler could give the Cubs more balance, especially against left-handed pitchers.

"Everybody has to play," said Maddon, adding that a return to National League rules Tuesday will allow Maddon to use more players. Days off scheduled for Monday and Aug. 15 provide "a lot of built-in rest," Maddon said.

"The National League game permits you to play these guys daily. I'm not so concerned right now. I'm going to try to match them up over the next two days and give guys at-bats and get them on the field. "

Soler admitted before the game his rehab took longer than he expected but that he felt fine.

"Hopefully it doesn't happen again," Soler said.

There was no letdown or lethargy following Wednesday's dramatic 5-4 win over the Marlins that was accompanied by Thursday's day off in which many players went as far as Pebble Beach to golf or enjoyed the sights of San Francisco.

Dexter Fowler led off the game by smacking a home run off Overton, and a broken bat single by Anthony Rizzo and hit by Addison Russell set up Soler's first home run since May 27 against the Philadelphia Phillies.

"Scoring that many runs early permitted that game to take form," Maddon said.

That was plenty of support for Lester (12-4), who surpassed his 2015 win total by pitching to the minimum 15 batters over the first five innings and scattered six hits in seven innings.

Lester has allowed two earned runs or fewer in three of his four starts since the All-Star Game.

The large early lead enabled Lester to change his game plan against an A's lineup that was radically different than the one that played behind him for the final two months of the 2014 season.

"It makes it tougher to prepare," Lester said. "We kind of winged it. After the first (inning), we went to normal and attacking and throwing heaters."

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### **Chicago Tribune**

Friday's recap: Cubs 7, Athletics 2

By Mark Gonzales

Dexter Fowler led off Friday night's game with a home run and Jorge Soler smacked a three-run shot in his first at-bat since coming off the disabled list as the Cubs cruised to a 7-2 victory over the Athletics at O.com Coliseum.

#### At the plate

Fowler battled back from an 0-2 pitch to smack a 3-2 offering from left-hander Dillon Overton over the left-field fence. Soler's homer was his first since May 27 against the Phillies. Soler didn't hit a home run in 50 plate appearances while on a minor-league rehabilitation assignment. Javier Baez had a two-run double in the third.

#### On the mound

Jon Lester pitched to the minimum 15 batters through the first five innings. Brett Eibner hit a home run to start the sixth.

#### In the field

Right fielder Jason Heyward robbed Jake Smolinski of a hit in the first. Catcher David Ross threw out Khris Davis on a steal attempt for the first out of the second. Third baseman Javier Baez made a diving stop and threw from his knees to retire Marcus Semien in the eighth.

#### Key number

5: Leadoff home runs for Fowler this season.

#### The quote

"I'm not hearing about any restrictions. I'd rather (Soler) just go play." — Joe Maddon

#### Up next

Vs. Athletics at O.co Coliseum, 3:05 p.m. Saturday; CSN.

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### **Chicago Tribune**

Jon Lester likes Cubs' position, thanks in part to return of Jorge Soler  
By Mark Gonzales

The worst is over, for now, as far as Jon Lester is concerned.

"I think everyone is in a good position," Lester said before taking the mound Friday night and helping the Cubs to a 7-2 victory over the Athletics.

Lester and fellow Cubs starters Jake Arrieta, John Lackey and Jason Hammel each have bounced back after experiencing miserable finishes in the first half. Their collective rebound, along with the striking dominance of Kyle Hendricks, has brought the Cubs' rotation back to the high level it attained during the first two months of the season.

And it's a good sign for a Cubs team aiming to secure a National League Central title, earn home-field advantage in the playoffs and triumph in the World Series.

The Cubs' push toward a division title got a boost Friday night when Jorge Soler cranked a three-run homer in his first at-bat since returning from the disabled list after a two-month absence with a left hamstring strain.

Soler's homer, along with a leadoff homer from Dexter Fowler, gave the Cubs a 4-0 lead in the first inning and they cruised the rest of the way.

Soler batted .162 (6-for-37) with no extra-base hits during his rehab assignment at Triple-A Iowa and Double-A Tennessee, yet he looked ready as he hit a few home runs off the windows of outfield suites in batting practice. Veteran reliever Joe Nathan was designated for assignment to make room for Soler.

"Usually this time of year you're battling uphill a little bit on physical things, whatever it may be," Lester said. "For the most part, it seems like the other four (starters) are in good places, and I feel a lot better than I did a while ago."

Two days off in the past two weeks has enabled the starters to pitch on extra rest, and Lester took the mound Friday night on six days' rest because of the insertion of since-departed Brian Matusz last Sunday and Thursday's day off.

The rest paid off for Lester and the Cubs as he limited the A's to two runs on six hits with eight strikeouts and no walks in seven innings of work.

Lester, who entered Friday's start with 128 innings, has been leery of the 50-to-100 and 160-180 marks because in he has experienced lulls in those areas before rebounding.

After winning NL Pitcher of the Month honors for June, Lester sputtered in his final two starts in the first half and struggled in a start at Milwaukee on July 24 that he described as his lull.

Hopefully I put myself in a good position to be fine at the other end," Lester said. "In my last start (six scoreless innings against the Marlins) the sharpness was there."

Lester, however, who has won two World Series with the Red Sox (2007, 2013) and fell short of advancing in the playoffs with the A's (2014), knows how fickle the final two months can be regardless of a dependable rotation.

"I've been on teams where we struggled and were hurt at the beginning, and then come August everyone is full bore, healthy, and everyone made a good push," Lester said. "(With the A's), it just seemed like things always went against us at the end of that year."

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### **Chicago Tribune**

Cubs' Joe Maddon stressed by roster decisions

By Mark Gonzales

Manager Joe Maddon seemed flustered Friday night when assessing the Cubs' roster decisions.

"Believe me, these are tough decisions, discussions," Maddon said in response to the decision to designate reliever Joe Nathan for assignment to make room for outfielder Jorge Soler and the personal time allotted to infielder Tommy La Stella, who was optioned July 29 to make room for outfielder Chris Coghlan, to report to Triple-A Iowa.

"But these are good ones. Hopefully no one is going to get hurt. But we're just trying to keep all that in mind. The inventory component with Joe, we just decided to go in this direction right now and now figure to have it covered in other ways coming up.

"We just got to keep playing through it and that we're covered if something happens."

The Cubs decided not to option Justin Grimm, who had been sent to Iowa on July 30 but recalled Wednesday after Jason Hammel went on the bereavement list, partly because Grimm hasn't allowed a run in his past 11 appearances.

Nathan, 41, was activated on July 23 after recovering from his second Tommy John surgery and hadn't allowed a run in three appearances.

But, "with Nathan, he just needed more time and we had so many other people to get involved, it just didn't work out immediately in a sense," Maddon said. "I do believe he's on the right path. I hope he gets another opportunity. Part of it is we'll miss him in the clubhouse. This guy immediately demonstrated why he's so good in the clubhouse, the professional that he is. That part is tough. Again, we have so many folks to get involved, it was the only way we possibly do it."

But the status of La Stella, whom Maddon said was visibly upset after being optioned despite batting .295 in 105 at-bats, seemed to puzzle the manager – who said La Stella "wasn't ready to play yet."

"We're trying to get ready to get him to come back up there," Maddon said. "He's taking batting practice. He's staying active. We're trying to figure out how to get him back up here. It's not clear cut yet. That's why you talk about getting Jorge (Soler) back up here. Tommy is next, and getting Trevor (Cahill) back up here."

Maddon confirmed that Cahill remains a strong candidate to be activated in time to pitch in one of the games of a doubleheader Aug. 16 against the Milwaukee Brewers. Cahill has started four games on a minor league rehabilitation assignment for Iowa.

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### **Chicago Tribune**

New art of the deal: Cubs' Jon Lester on how baseball trades have changed

By Mark Gonzales

Chicago Cubs left-hander Jon Lester will face the Oakland Athletics Friday night for the first time since leaving them for free agency following the 2014 season.

Lester reminisced earlier this week about how times have changed since he reached the majors in 2006 and how trades have been sculpted much differently since he was dealt from the Boston Red Sox with outfielder Jonny Gomes for outfielder Yoenis Cespedes.

"When I first got called up, the first four or five years you heard about big leaguers getting traded for each other," Lester said. "And then maybe a prospect. Now everything is based on prospects. You don't want to have to sell your farm for something you don't know if you're going to get (such as a World Series).

"There's that fine line of, 'well, we can't just sell off everybody for one year when we want to be good for a long time.' The player and competitor says, 'who cares? Let's get rid of him. Let's bring in this guy right now and make a fantasy team and go after it.' But you must have that mindset of still protecting that future a little bit."

Lester knew a World Series title was at stake as A's President Billy Beane acquired Jeff Samardzija and Jason Hammel in a trade that sent shortstop Addison Russell to the Cubs.

"Billy even said that we're trying to set up a rotation to win it," Lester recalled. "You can definitely tell a difference. I can tell a difference just the way the offense was going without Cespedes. That's a hard piece to replace. Sort of the same thing when I got out there."

The A's clinched a playoff berth on the final day of the regular season but lost to the Kansas City Royals in the American League wild-card game, leading to an overhaul of the A's roster. Samardzija and All-Star third baseman Josh Donaldson were dealt in trades and Lester left via free agency and signed with the Cubs.

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### **Chicago Sun-Times**

Soler, Lester lead Cubs past A's for fifth straight win

By Gordon Wittenmyer

OAKLAND, Calif. – Cubs starter Jon Lester spent thousands of dollars Thursday to treat seven teammates to a round of golf at bucket-list Pebble Beach Golf Links on the Cubs' day off.

"He loves taking care of his teammates and making sure everybody has a good time," Jake Arrieta said.

You should have seen what he did for them the next day.

The big left-hander took a one-hit shutout into the sixth Friday night in Oakland during a strong seven-inning performance to beat the Athletics 7-2 in the opener of a three-game series – giving the Cubs their first five-game winning streak since May.

"We did come ready to play today," manager Joe Maddon said, alluding to the Cubs four-run first. "And then, of course, Jonny permitted it to really take hold. He pitched extremely well."

Lester, who pitched the final two months of 2014 with the A's, including the start in their wild-card loss to Kansas City, struck out eight and walked none.

Four of the six hits he allowed came during the A's two-run sixth.

But by then Lester (12-4) was working with a 7-0 lead – thanks, in part, to Jorge Soler's tone-setting three-run homer in the first after being activated from the disabled list before the game.

"That kind of changes your game plan going in," Lester said of the big first inning. "You obviously have something you want to go with, and you get four in the first, now it's just about throwing strikes and putting them on the defensive and attacking."

Attacking?

The Cubs have won five straight for the first time since a six-game streak May 24-30, improving their best-in-baseball record to 26 games over .500 – and inspiring postgame media questions about seeing the finish line.

“We’ve got a long ways to go from the finish line. I hope nobody’s worried about the finish line right now,” Lester said. “We’ve got a good team. We feel good about ourselves.

“But we’ll worry about showing up tomorrow ready to go again, just because we know that we have the target on our backs and everybody wants to beat us. So we’ve got to make sure we show up to play every day.”

Soler showing up Friday helped the effort.

Despite little indication at Class AA Tennessee to suggest Soler was ready to produce in the big leagues, the Cubs ended his 11-game minor-league rehab assignment and put him in the starting lineup as the designated hitter Friday.

The result: Soler hammer-stroked the third big-league pitch he’d seen in two months off the concrete steps behind the left field wall so hard the ball bounced back into left field.

It was the first extra-base hit at any level in two months for Soler, who went just 6-for-37 (.162) with 16 strikeouts during his rehab assignment.

“I’m just really happy they called me up to be here today,” Soler said through the help of coach Henry Blanco translating from Spanish. “I was coming here ready, 100 percent.”

“Soler was a big part of that win,” said Maddon, who had said before the game Soler might be more focused and motivated than he was during a lengthy minor-league stretch.

“I’ve seen that with different guys,” Maddon said. “I’m not saying it’s right or wrong. I just think it happens. I think it’s a mind kind of game.”

Soler, who was an impact hitter for the Cubs during the postseason last fall, spent two months on the DL because of a hamstring injury.

“I was a little bit frustrated being out two months,” he said. “But I just wanted to keep a positive attitude and try to do my best.”

How does he explain the fact he hit nothing but singles since getting back on the field, until Friday?

“I was looking for a fastball,” he said. “And he threw me a fastball.”

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### **Chicago Sun-Times**

Soler makes sudden impact upon return to Cubs lineup

By Gordon Wittenmyer

OAKLAND, Calif. – Despite little indication at Class AA Tennessee to suggest Jorge Soler was ready to produce in the big-league lineup, the Cubs activated the outfielder from the disabled list Friday and put him in the starting lineup as the designated hitter against the Athletics.

The result: Soler hammer-stroked the third big-league pitch he’s seen in two months off the concrete steps behind the left field wall so hard the ball bounced back into left field.

The three-run shot capped a four-run first for the Cubs and set the tone in a 7-2 victory in the opener of a three-game series in Oakland.

Manager Joe Maddon said before the game he believed Soler might be more focused and motivated than he was during his minor-league rehab assignment.

“I’ve seen that with different guys,” Maddon said. “I’m not saying it’s right or wrong. I just think it happens. I think it’s a mind kind of game.”

Soler, who was an impact hitter for the Cubs during the postseason last fall, was just 6-for-37 (.162) without an extra-base hit in 11 rehab games, striking out 16 times.

“Obviously, if we get him going right now, the middle of that batting order gets thicker,” Maddon said.

Soler was on the DL for two months because of a hamstring injury. Making the move now for the interleague road series allows him to transition into the lineup without needing to play in the field until at least Tuesday.

### **Say it ain’t Joe**

The Cubs parted ways with six-time All-Star closer Joe Nathan after just three scoreless appearances, designating him for assignment to make room for Soler.

“He just needed more time,” said Maddon of the right-hander who had returned from a second Tommy John surgery. “I do believe he’s on the right path. I hope he gets another opportunity.

“But we just have so many folks here to get involved, it was the only way we could possibly do it.”

### **Tommy La Stillness**

Infielder Tommy La Stella still hasn’t played a game for AAA Iowa since he was optioned to the minors July 29 to make room for Chris Coghlan’s return from the DL. And it’s not clear when, or even if, he will.

La Stella, who was said to not take the demotion well, has been granted extra personal time by the club to report. Maddon said he’s been working out and taking batting practice.

“He’s not ready to play [at AAA] yet,” said Maddon, who acknowledged the roster-numbers element to demoting La Stella, who was batting .295 with an .846 OPS. “We’re trying to figure out how to get him back up here. It’s not clear-cut yet.”

What seems certain is that by sitting out games he runs the risk of putting young players such as Jeimer Candelario or Albert Almora Jr. in line for a promotion ahead of him if the club has a sudden need.

### **Cahill on tap**

Barring a setback or change in plans, right-hander Trevor Cahill is expected to start one of the games of the Cubs’ Aug. 16 doubleheader against the Brewers at Wrigley Field.

Cahill, who’s been on the DL with a knee injury most of the last month, has made four starts during a rehab assignment with Class AAA Iowa.

The former All-Star starter had pitched exclusively out of the bullpen (33 games) until the injury.

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## Chicago Sun-Times

Aroldis Chapman will be forgiven if he succeeds

By Dan McGrath

More than the political polls, ESPN is your worldwide leader in instigating summertime debate with its annual ranking of baseball's top 100 players. PED use is not a consideration, and utility isn't supposed to be; i.e., is an every-day center fielder more valuable than an every-five-days starting pitcher? All that matters is performance.

Hard to argue against Babe Ruth as No. 1, though some do, maintaining the era in which he dominated wasn't all it could have been because of the complete absence of black players and the limiting of Latin American players. The Babe's advocates counter that he was one of that era's top pitchers before leaving the mound for right field and more opportunities to slug the home runs that transformed baseball and may well have saved it from a gambling-and-corruption morass that the Black Sox scandal exposed.

We have been fascinated by power ever since, ascribing similarly restorative properties to the "Great Home Run Race" of 1998, wherein Mark McGwire and Sammy Sosa brought fun and excitement back to a game battered by years of rancorous labor disputes. The Barry Bonds freak show that followed lent further credence to the belief that better hitting was attainable through chemistry.

Sosa played on mostly bad teams during his time with the Cubs, but the seats were always filled, and no one ever left until Sammy had taken his last shot at planting one on Waveland Avenue. Would Ernie Banks be "Mr. Cub" if he didn't have 512 home runs to augment his genial nature and let's-play-two enthusiasm? Would malevolent Dave Kingman have been offered a newspaper column — fine idea there — if he hadn't been delivering moon shots during his stormy tenure as a Cub?

Nike was on to something with its "Chicks Dig the Longball" ad campaign of 1998. ESPN, your worldwide leader in overkill, taps into the fascination with its ceaseless promotion and breathless coverage of the Home Run Derby that's a prelim to the All-Star Game.

And for a knucklehead, Jose Canseco could be a perceptive guy. "Nobody," he told me once, "goes to the beer stand when I'm due to hit."

Power. We can't get enough of it.

The style that's currently in vogue at Wrigley comes via the sinewy left arm of pitcher Aroldis Chapman. His vapor-trail fastball produces a distinctive thwack that's audible throughout the ballpark as it pounds the catcher's glove and prompts awed patrons to gasp as they gaze at the speed readings in wonderment.

We thought Kerry Wood was amazing when he'd nudge 98 mph on occasion.

The handwringing over the ethics of acquiring a suspected domestic-violence perp seemed to vanish the first time Chapman hit 100 on the gun in his Wrigley debut July 27 against the White Sox. Now the crowd starts buzzing when he gets to his feet to loosen up in the bullpen. Entering Friday, he is 2-for-3 in save chances, he has struck out seven of the 15 batters he has faced and he may well be the last piece the Cubs need to put an end to that . . . you know.

The domestic-violence thing? Probably a misunderstanding. Leave the guy be.

The Cubs can emphasize the warm-and-fuzzy aspects of "The Plan" all they like, but the Chapman acquisition shows they'll be as ruthless as they need to be in pursuit of their goals. In pro sports, winning championships trumps all other goals, and it's naive to believe the hired help can consist exclusively of choirboys.

Not here. Dennis Rodman, Albert Belle, Tank Johnson and Theo Fleury all called Chicago home in the not-too-distant past. Four years ago, the White Sox traded for a pitcher with a domestic-violence beef more incredible than Chapman's: Brett Myers socked his wife on a downtown Boston street corner — twice.

I grew up with five sisters and a father who adored my mother, so I can't imagine raising my voice to a woman, much less a hand. Only recently, though, have we come to view domestic violence as the truly heinous crime it is. Before O.J. Simpson, before Ray Rice, before Greg Hardy, before Chapman, the Philadelphia Daily News did an exhaustive series on the frequency of sexual assaults and domestic batteries involving athletes on college campuses. Other than our awareness, not much has changed in the 32 years since those stories ran.

If an athlete brings the power to win games and earn championships, all is forgiven.

Leave it to historians to decide whether power corrupts. What's clear is that it seduces.

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### **Chicago Sun-Times**

If Rondon didn't quit in 2011, new role won't faze him now

By Gordon Wittenmyer

OAKLAND, Calif. – Just when it looked like he was on his way to full recovery from Tommy John surgery, Hector Rondon's right elbow literally broke apart early in the 2011 season.

And his baseball career was over.

"I wanted to quit," the Cubs reliever said. "I told the guys with the Indians, 'I'm ready to go home. I don't want to play baseball anymore.' "

A starting pitcher ranked as the No. 7 prospect in Cleveland's system by Baseball America before he got hurt, Rondon was told he had a 20-percent chance of ever pitching professionally again.

And only if he endured the pain and inevitable dark moments of another yearlong rehab. If he did everything the doctors and therapists told him to do. If he was lucky.

Twenty percent. "It's nothing," he said.

Those close to him in the Cleveland organization, including current Blue Jays general manager Ross Atkins, told Rondon they still believed in him and wanted him to try one more time.

Obviously, Rondon didn't quit. He has a 97-mph fastball and 77 career saves to prove it.

As much as anything, that part of his life and career informs this part of it.

For the last 25 months, Rondon has been one of the best closers in baseball – his 1.46 ERA and 6.5 strikeout-to-walk rate since the 2014 All-Star break even better than those of the hard-throwing All-Star the Cubs acquired early last week to take his job.

Aroldis Chapman in that span: 1.78 ERA, 3.9 strikeouts for every walk.

They have the same number of save chances, 75, in that span. Rondon converted 66; Chapman, 70.

But if Rondon, 29, wasn't going to quit five years ago when his broken elbow told him to, he wasn't about to flinch at this point.

"I'm not a selfish person," he said. "I think it's more important for our team to win games."

While Rondon might not be in line for the same kind of glory as Chapman, he's in position to have as much – possibly more – influence on whether the Cubs finish October the way they plan to.

As the kind of high-velocity, command-pitching weapon manager Joe Maddon didn't have in his bullpen before the Chapman trade, Rondon could wind up in more key, hot spots down the stretch than even the new closer – especially now that Maddon has backed off the four-out save situation that Chapman doesn't like.

Rondon, who has five scoreless setup appearances since the trade (with four holds and a win), appears ready.

“My confidence is really good,” said Rondon, whose strong performance during his first playoff run last year seemed to carry over into this season. “I learned from that moment. To breathe. And put my mind on pitch by pitch.”

Bullpen coach Lester Strobe said Rondon's rise into the kind of dominant reliever he has been the last two years was also about learning on the big-league job from the time the Cubs drafted him out of the Indians system in the Rule 5 draft before the 2013 season.

“He had to go through the ups and downs his very first year,” Strobe said of that 4.77-ERA season for a last-place team. “We're talking about a young man that got it on this level. The end of that first year, in September, you started to see the flower blossom. And from that point he's been moving forward.”

Rondon said he's “blessed” to have been drafted by the Cubs just after he'd begun to pitch competitively again in winter ball in 2012, after that second surgery to repair the bone that broke at the spot where the hole had been drilled from the Tommy John surgery.

He still has the large scar from the twice-opened spot on his elbow, and a screw in the bone.

All the pain from that second rehab, the months of throwing when he didn't want to see a radar number – all the uncertainty was worth landing in this spot, he said, with the potential to help finish some of the most important games this franchise might ever play. Whether it's in the eighth or ninth innings.

Rondon finds it hard to imagine where he might be if he'd quit in 2011.

“Working in Venezuela,” he said. “I don't know.”

“Sometimes life tricks you a little bit in those moments.”

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