



CHICAGO CUBS DAILY CLIPS

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

August 7, 2016

ESPNChicago.com

Slump? What slump? It's as if it never happened for the Cubs

By Jesse Rogers

OAKLAND -- Everything the Chicago Cubs gave back during their pre-All-Star break slump has been returned to them, after they once again reached a season-high 27 games over .500 in defeating the Oakland Athletics 4-0 on Saturday.

A 6-15 stretch before the break has been replaced by a 15-6 stretch after it, and the Cubs haven't lost since July 30, the day before their win in extra innings against the Seattle Mariners. The National League is once again on notice: The Cubs are the team to beat, despite Saturday's reminder of their putrid past.

The Cubs wore powder blue throwback jerseys from 1981 against the A's, but their play was anything but similar to that of the 48-65 team of that strike-shortened season.

"It's crazy how we've completely flipped the script since the All-Star break," Kris Bryant said after the latest win.

What's crazy is Bryant's teammate Addison Russell has 66 RBIs after he drove one in with a slow roller Saturday. Also surprising is Jorge Soler's returning from the disabled list looking better than ever. He had an RBI double one day after he hit a home run.

There's more. Ben Zobrist is hot again -- he singled twice and drove in two -- while Jake Arrieta's season has been really nuts and has felt so much worse than it has actually been. According to ESPN Stats & Information, Arrieta now leads all pitchers in scoreless starts of six innings or more; he threw his seventh of the season on Saturday. He lasted eight innings and limited the Athletics to just three hits and a walk while lowering his ERA to 2.59.

Maybe we should slow talk of Kyle Hendricks pitching Game 2 of a playoffs series, behind Jon Lester, as Arrieta is limiting opponents to a .189 batting average, best in the National League this side of Clayton Kershaw, who is injured.

"Really close," Arrieta said when asked about where his game is. "Emphasis on sinking the ball, middle down and forcing action early on. Not worrying about strikeouts. Those will come in big situations. Punchouts are less important."

Arrieta whiffed only four batters Saturday, and there was no chance that he was going to complete the game after he threw 108 pitches through eight. The Cubs continue to keep October in mind as they wade through the dog days of August. No longer is there an urgent need to look over their shoulders, as once again they've taken command of the NL Central, like they did to begin the season. It's like that pre-break slump never happened.

"It seems like we needed the rest of the All-Star break to get back to the type of team that we are," Zobrist said. "We knew we weren't the team we were in June. That's not the type of team we are. We just have to keep that going as long as we can."

The feel in the cramped locker room at the O.co Coliseum is what you would expect: confident and loose. The Cubs are healthy and getting contributions up and down the lineup, to go with a pitching staff that is clicking. The manager can't find much fault with anything he's seeing.

"We've played well," Joe Maddon said. "I can't deny that. We've played really well. They really are engaged. You can't get hot without good pitching, and our starters have been fantastic."

Yes, those starters, the backbone of the Cubs. Even if you have worries about the offense in the postseason, there's a chance the Cubs can outpitch their opponents. They're more equipped to do so this year than they were last year, as five pitchers continue to impress with just eight weeks remaining in the regular season. Arrieta's outing Saturday was stress-free, as the Cubs scored early runs for him, just as they did Friday for Lester. The Cubs have the best WHIP, batting average against and ERA among all starting staffs in baseball. That's how you get to 27 over .500. -- again.

"We're firing on all cylinders right now," Arrieta said. "It's nice to have six in a row. ... We're in really good shape."

Maddon said "we'll see" when asked Monday if the come-from-behind, dramatic win over the Mariners would "propel" his team in the coming days. Maybe it has, but the Cubs were on the verge of a run anyway. They were winning series but not quite rolling over teams -- until this week. They've won games early and late, low-scoring and high-scoring, with defense and pitching. One more win, and they'll have their second straight sweep, plus a new season high in games over .500.

"We're playing well again," Bryant said. "We knew we would, but sometimes, it feels like it's just not going your way. Right now, it's going our way."

--

ESPNChicago.com

How the Cubs won: Jake Arrieta returns to form

By Ken Woolums, ESPN Stats & Information

One start probably isn't enough to declare Jake Arrieta back, but he had his best outing in a long time Saturday. As a result, the Chicago Cubs ended a five-game losing streak in games he has started while extending their overall win streak to six games.

Arrieta threw eight scoreless innings, his longest scoreless start since throwing a no-hitter on April 21 against the Reds. He has seven scoreless starts of at least six innings this season, which leads the major leagues.

His fastball was strong

From June 5 to July 25, Arrieta had a nine-start stretch in which he allowed multiple hits against his fastball. In each of his past two starts, he has allowed one hit against his fastball.

In total, opponents are 2-of-36 in at-bats ending in a fastball from Arrieta over his past two starts.

Arrieta hasn't been missing bats with the pitch. The 12.5 percent miss rate against his fastball Saturday was the lowest in his past six starts.

However, players aren't able to square up the pitch. Saturday, opposing hitters had one hard-hit ball on 18 balls in play against his fastball after having zero in his previous start.

Cubs are going streaking

The Cubs have won six games in a row and nine of their past 10 overall. The win streak began with their six-run comeback against the Mariners on Sunday Night Baseball.

With the win Saturday, they are now on pace to win 101 games this season. They haven't won 100 games in a season since 1935.

--

ESPNChicago.com

A different Jake Arrieta takes on the A's on Saturday

By Sarah Langs, ESPN Stats & Information

On Saturday afternoon in Oakland, Jake Arrieta will take the mound opposite Sonny Gray and the A's. Arrieta will be starting against the A's for the third time in his career and first time since 2012 as a member of the Baltimore Orioles. Arrieta's evolution into a Cy Young-winning pitcher since that time is evident.

Then and now

Arrieta's repertoire has changed. In those two starts, he used his fastball 64 percent of the time, curveball 14 percent, slider 13 percent and changeup 9 percent.

Since the start of last season, Arrieta has used his fastball 56 percent of the time, slider 26 percent, curveball 14 percent and changeup just 4 percent.

Opponents missed on 4 percent of their swings against Arrieta's fastball in those two starts. Over the past two seasons, Arrieta has gotten misses on 19 percent of fastballs.

Arrieta got first-pitch strikes in 38 percent of plate appearances in those two starts. Over the past two years, he has thrown first-pitch strikes 60 percent of the time.

Arrieta wasn't exactly a strikeout pitcher back then. He struck out five batters in the two starts combined -- a 10 percent strikeout rate. He hasn't had a game in the past two seasons with a strikeout rate that low.

In the 2010 start, he struck out two batters in six innings. He hasn't struck out that few batters in that many innings since July 2013 against the Brewers -- when he also had two in six innings.

Arrieta has gotten tougher on lefties, too. They were 10-for-29 (.345) against him on those starts with a 1.061 OPS. Overall, from 2010-12, lefties hit .286 off Arrieta, ranked 169th of 210 qualified pitchers. His .866 opponent OPS ranked 196th.

Over the past two seasons, lefties are hitting just .171 against Arrieta with a .495 OPS. Both of those marks are the best among right-handed pitchers.

Streaking in the wrong direction

After not losing a game he started from July 30, 2015, until May 25 of this season, the Chicago Cubs have lost eight Arrieta starts this year.

His team has lost five straight games he has started, the longest streak of his career. Arrieta's most recent start was a quality one, as was one other in the streak, but overall he has not looked like the same pitcher.

Arrieta's 4.88 ERA since the first game of the streak on July 2 ranks 83rd of 104 qualified pitchers.

Why this could be the day

The Cubs haven't scored more than four runs in an Arrieta start since June 27 -- which was also the most recent one they won.

If they're looking for a pitcher to break out against, there might not be a better option than Sonny Gray. Gray's 5.84 ERA this season is last among 94 qualified pitchers. His home park has been no haven -- he has a 5.98 ERA at the Coliseum, second-to-last ahead of Patrick Corbin (6.91 at Chase Field).

Gray is getting crushed on his fastball, for a .964 opponent OPS and 24 percent hard-hit rate. The Cubs have an .857 OPS on fastballs, fifth in the majors.

--

Chicago Tribune

Cubs aim to balance lineup with sweep of A's

By Mark Gonzales

After watching his Cubs extend their winning streak to six games, manager Joe Maddon hinted he may tweak the lineup in Sunday's series finale against the Oakland Athletics and left-hander Sean Manaea.

"Everyone is playing, and I really like when people take part in ownership, it matters," Maddon said. "When everyone feels like they're contributing, it makes for a better room."

It also helps that the Cubs have a 25-12 record in games against left-handed starters. The return of Jorge Soler, who has continued in each of his two games since returning from the disabled list Friday, expands Maddon's options.

"It's a balancing act," Maddon said. "There are a lot of good guys that need to play and other guys who could have played (Saturday). Our bench has gotten deep, and there are guys that aren't even here yet. We're just trying to balance it and keep everyone active."

Javier Baez, who is batting .345 against left-handers, is expected to start. Another option is outfielder Matt Szczur in place of Jason Heyward.

--

Chicago Tribune

Cubs' second wind evident as they extend winning streak to six

By Mark Gonzales

The last time the Cubs were 27 games above .500, they promptly embarked on a 6-15 skid to end the first half that engendered some panic among their followers.

But their rebound has been timely with slightly less than one-third of the regular season left.

Jake Arrieta's return to dominance against a feeble lineup Saturday, and a similar resurgence from Ben Zobrist, has boosted confidence. Their 4-0 victory over the Athletics extended the Cubs' winning streak to six games and improved their major league-best record to 68-41.

"We're firing on all cylinders right now," Arrieta said after pitching eight innings of three-hit ball to lower his ERA to 2.59. "Does that mean we won't lose three in a row, who knows? It doesn't matter to us."

What matters to the Cubs is their starters are dominating again and their lineup is providing some timely hitting that had been lacking. Thus some of the swagger they displayed en route to a 47-20 mark on June 19 is back.

"They're engaged," manager Joe Maddon said. "They're present tense, ready to go. They're confident right now, and the pitching permits this all. You can't get hot without good pitching and our starters have been fantastic."

Since the All-Star break, Cubs starters have posted a 2.35 ERA. Moreover, Arrieta has distanced himself from a rough first-half finish, allowing two runs in his last 15 innings.

"Really close," Arrieta replied when asked whether he was matching his form from earlier in the season.

Arrieta (13-5) pitched efficiently as he didn't throw more than 14 pitches in any of his final four innings. That allowed Maddon to preserve late-inning specialists Pedro Strop, Hector Rondon and Aroldis Chapman.

It also helped that Khris Davis flied to right on a 3-0 pitch after Arrieta walked Stephen Vogt with one out in the fourth as Arrieta retired 15 of his final 18 batters.

"We're doing a lot of things well and continue to shore up some things we're not doing so well," Arrieta said. "But that's part of the game. You can't be perfect all the time all the way around. But we're doing a great job."

After an 0-for-18 rut to start the second half, Zobrist has picked up his production with an 11-point increase in his batting average to .278. Zobrist's two-out single in the third provided Arrieta with ample run support.

"We knew we weren't the team we had been (at the end of June)," Zobrist said. "We knew we could get back to playing good baseball on a nightly basis, and that's what we've been doing."

"We need to keep that going as long as we can. We know we would hit those (rough) spots you're going to have. You just weather the storm during those times. Our team did a good job of keeping our heads during that (bad spell) and getting back to the basics."

One of the more remarkable developments of the second half has been the production of Addison Russell, who has 15 RBIs in his last 20 games and is just two behind slugger Kris Bryant (68) despite hitting much lower in the lineup for most of the first half.

"(Russell) is always focused, but he bears down in those (clutch) moments," Maddon said.

--

Chicago Tribune

Saturday's recap: Cubs 4, Athletics 0

By Author

Behind Ben Zobrist's two-run single in the third inning and eight shutout innings from Jake Arrieta, the Cubs cruised to a 4-0 victory Saturday over the Athletics at O.co Coliseum and extended their winning streak to six games while improving to 27 games above .500 for the second time this season.

At the plate

Anthony Rizzo smacked a curveball for a double to start the sixth and scored on Addison Russell's 70-foot single. Jorge Soler, handling the designated-hitter duties for the second consecutive game, doubled down the third-base line to score Russell.

On the mound

Arrieta looked sharp against an inexperienced Athletics lineup. Arrieta struck out Coco Crisp on an 89 mph sinker in the first and fooled Max Muncy on a curve for a strikeout to start the fourth. Arrieta allowed only five baserunners through eight innings in lowering his ERA to 2.59.

In the field

Arrieta induced Crisp to hit a grounder back to him to start an inning-ending double play in the third, and Russell made a backhanded stop at shortstop to retire Yonder Alonso to end the seventh.

Key number

56: Zobrist's RBIs after knocking in two runs.

The quote

"You can play only so many guys." — Joe Maddon on his roster's depth.

Up next

Vs. Athletics at O.co Coliseum, 3:05 p.m. Sunday; WGN-9.

--

Chicago Tribune

Recent home run drought of little concern to Cubs' Kris Bryant

By Mark Gonzales

Kris Bryant has hit only one home run since July 5, but there's no panic in his voice.

The reason is that his batting average actually has risen four points higher to .282 during that span.

"I have 26 this year," Bryant said. "I had 26 all of last year. I'm in a pretty good spot right now. I'm not worried about it. They come in bunches when you start hitting them.

"That's something that people don't understand at times. It's really hard to hit a ball over the fence. You're hitting the ball pretty perfect or near perfect when you're doing that. And the hits we get, our swings aren't perfect all the time."

Bryant remains encouraged that refining his swing so that he's on a flatter plane through the strike zone and not prone to popups is working.

"It's a game of inches," Bryant said. "There's times where you line out, if you were a centimeter under the ball, it would be a home run. There are certain ways to look at certain things. It's all part of the whole process of this game. Sometimes it frustrates us."

In the flow: Newcomer Joe Smith appreciated that manager Joe Maddon used him in consecutive games after Smith allowed a home run Wednesday in his Cubs debut.

"The more times I can get out there, the better for me," said Smith, who pitched a scoreless eighth on Friday.

Smith admitted he's getting accustomed to new teammates that include three catchers, two of which he has thrown to in games.

"Crazy stuff happens in life," said Smith, who came to the Cubs on Aug. 1 in a trade with the Angels. "It's fun to come over here, but at the same time, you get derailed a bit mentally. It's kind of emotional with the stress involved. But it's no excuse. I still have to pitch. I'm not worried."

Extra innings: John Lackey will start Tuesday night against the Angels, with Jason Hammel moved back to Wednesday. ... According to a tentative 2017 schedule, the Cubs will play host to the Yankees May 5-7 and travel to Baltimore to play the Orioles on July 14-16, a source said. The official 2017 schedule is expected to be finalized this fall.

--

Chicago Tribune

Anthony Rizzo gives Little League team passes for Cubs-Athletics game

By Mark Gonzales

previous commitments will prevent Cubs first baseman Anthony Rizzo from attending the Little League Intermediate World Series in nearby Livermore.

But Rizzo took care of the Parkland (Fla.) team by providing passes for them to Friday's game between the Cubs and Oakland Athletics.

Rizzo participated in the Parkland league as a youth and has maintained strong ties.

"It's cool what they're doing," Rizzo said of Parkland, which is competing in the 13-year-old division. "When I played, the league just started. It's great to see how far they've come."

The Series is played at the same field that produced Hall of Fame left-hander Randy Johnson. Parkland will play in the semifinals Saturday night.

--

Chicago Tribune

Cubs expecting more catching opportunities for rookie Willson Contreras

By Mark Gonzales

After not starting behind the plate for three consecutive games, Willson Contreras is expected to return to the catching position with more regularity.

"I'm going to get him back there more consistently," said manager Joe Maddon, alluding to the fact the Cubs were off Thursday and will have another day off on Monday as he tries to find playing time for everyone.

"Through that entire month (of August), I think we'll be OK. Hopefully the weather cools like this. I want to get him more involved as we continue along. The other part is not get him too involved yet. The guy hasn't played that long into a season and definitely don't want to burn him out. You've seen some resurgence in his offense after we rested him a little bit. We want to be mindful of all that stuff."

Maddon believes that Contreras, 24, could be a very good left fielder or right fielder. But the return of Jorge Soler gives the Cubs a more bonafide outfielder and gives Maddon another reason to start Contreras behind the plate more frequently.

At the same time, Maddon hasn't given up on veteran left-handed hitter Miguel Montero despite his .194 batting average entering Saturday's game.

"The last week or so the bat has started to come on," Maddon said of Montero, who starts when Jake Arrieta is on the mound. "The pop is in there. You don't want to give up on anybody. People get hurt. Things don't work out as planned sometimes. You want to keep people engaged. And we've been able to do that to this point."

--

Chicago Sun-Times

Arrieta 'almost' back to Cy Young form in Cubs' 4-0 win over A's

By Gordon Wittenmyer

OAKLAND, Calif. – Eight scoreless innings. Three hits allowed.

Is Cy Young Jake Arrieta back?

“Not quite yet,” Cubs manager Joe Maddon said after his ace beat the Oakland Athletics 4-0 for the Cubs first win in an Arrieta start since June. “He’s almost there.”

“Almost” where he was during that historic run through the end of last year and 10 starts into this year — the Cubs will take that from the right-hander anytime he starts.

On Saturday it was good enough, with a few runs, for the Cubs’ sixth straight victory – and ninth in 10 games as they matched their high-water mark of 27 games over .500.

“We continue to do the things we’re good at and minimize the things we’re not, then we’re going to be in pretty good shape,” Arrieta (13-5) said, referring to the 15-6 surge out of the break for a team that limped into the break on a 6-15 slide.

“We’re in really good shape,” he added. “We’re doing a lot of things well and continuing to shore up some things we’re not doing so well. That’s part of the game.”

Arrieta – who says he’s “really close” to his Cy Young form – won for the first time in six starts by pitching his seventh scoreless start of at least six innings this season.

Despite a command hiccup for a batter or two in the fifth, it was the most dominant start for Arrieta since his April 21 no-hitter and dropped his ERA for the season to 2.59.

After three consecutive starts of 5 1/3 innings or less – and seven of 13 such starts going back to April – Arrieta has gone at least six innings in five consecutive starts, pitching into the seventh in all but one of those.

He has a 2.25 ERA in his last four starts – with just five hits allowed in his last two (15 innings). And he has held opponents scoreless in 15 of his last 16 innings.

“He looked good,” said veteran Ben Zobrist, who delivered a two-out, two-run single in the third for the big hit of the game. “It’s good to see him get really comfortable out there.”

Maddon said the rest at the All-Star break and since has been the key for the team’s resurgence, in particular the starting pitching that has led the way.

“You can’t get hot without good pitching, and our starters have been fantastic,” he said.

Said Zobrist: “It just seems we needed the rest of the All-Star break to get back to the type of team we are. We knew that we weren’t the team that we had been in June. We knew we could get back to playing good baseball on a nightly basis, and that’s what we’ve been doing. We just need to be able to keep that going as long as we can.”

--

Chicago Sun-Times

Rookie Contreras could play bigger role in big games down stretch

By Gordon Wittenmyer

OAKLAND, Calif. – The Cubs’ catching future could be on display against the backdrop of their pennant drive the next eight weeks.

Rookie Willson Contreras, who has been on the bench, in left field or at first base for 13 of the Cubs’ last 18 games, could start getting regular starts behind the plate down the stretch – starting as soon as Sunday’s series finale against the Athletics.

“I want to start getting him back there more consistently,” said Maddon, who acknowledged that might mean starting him behind the plate three of every five days.

With David Ross locked in as Jon Lester's personal catcher, that additional playing time would come at the expense of veteran Miguel Montero, who has struggled offensively all season – though Maddon said he likes Montero's at-bats more recently.

"And the pop's in there," Maddon said. "You don't want to give up on anybody, man. People get hurt; things just don't work out as planned sometimes. You want to keep people engaged, and we've been able to do that to this point. It's a balancing act. There's a lot of good guys that need to play."

Contreras has proven to be high on the list of those players since making his debut June 17, hitting .271 with an .806 OPS and as many home runs (five) as Montero.

He also has by far the highest percentage of throwing out would-be base stealers among the catchers (42 percent) – with more CS's (5-for-12) than Montero (2-for-50) in a fraction of as many chances. And while his catcher ERA (4.09 in 165 innings caught) is higher than the other catchers, it has dropped considerably in recent starts (one earned run last 24 innings).

"We need to figure out how to get him involved more often," said Maddon, who plans to balance increased catching duties against the workload for a guy who's navigating his first six-month baseball season.

Rotation shuffle

The Cubs plan to swap Jason Hammel and John Lackey's order in the rotation for the two-game series against the Angels Tuesday and Wednesday, with Lackey going first and Hammel getting the extra day as he returns from bereavement leave.

The move puts Lackey pitching on his sixth day instead of extending him to a seventh, while assuring the big-game veteran pitches in the four-game series against the second-place Cardinals over the weekend.

Notes: The Cubs and A's wore throwback 1981 uniforms Saturday as the A's honored their '81 playoff team – on a date no major league games were played in 1981 because of the June 11-Aug. 9 players' strike. ... The Cubs won 45 of their final 63 games (.714) last season to roll into the playoffs – including 15 of 16 to start that surge. From the same starting point (game No. 100) this year, the Cubs are 9-1. ... Maddon, when asked on Saturday to explain Hendricks: "Jimi or Kyle?"

--

Chicago Sun-Times

Cubs' Russell shows A's cost of going 'all in' at the deadline

By Gordon Wittenmyer

OAKLAND, Calif. – When Addison Russell got to Oakland this weekend and started reaching base more than 60 percent of the time and turning drives to the shortstop hole into outs, he not only helped the Cubs win a series but along the way helped tell a cautionary tale of going all-in at the trade deadline.

An All-Star starter in his first full season in the majors, the Cubs' young shortstop has reveled in his first two games against the organization that drafted him 11th overall in 2012 and traded him two years later to the Cubs in a deadline deal for pitchers Jeff Samardzija and Jason Hammel.

By the time the Cubs were done beating the A's 4-0 Saturday behind Jake Arrieta, Russell was 4-for-7 the first two games of the series, with his 66th RBI of the season and also had reached when hit by a pitch.

"And his defense has been outstanding," manager Joe Maddon said. "I don't think he has any type of chip or vengeance or any kind of ill intent in his heart. But I would imagine that he wants to show them how good [he is], a 'look at me now' kind of thing."

More than that, he's demonstrating the risks of selling out for a single shot at a championship – coincidentally, just a week after the Cubs finished walking a similar risk-reward tightrope at the deadline.

Like the A's in 2014, the Cubs were a postseason favorite as they approached the deadline looking for pitching. Unlike the A's that year, the Cubs resisted the urge to ship Kyle Schwarber to New York for their top target, Andrew Miller. But they nonetheless traded their top-ranked prospect, shortstop Gleyber Torres, for rent-a-closer Aroldis Chapman.

"Part of it depends on what you already have to cover," Maddon said. "Like if you give up an Addison, do you have another Addison?"

The Cubs not only had their big-league version Torres in the 22-year-old Russell when they made the Chapman trade, but they also had 23-year-old Javy Baez – a power-hitting infielder many consider a potential Gold Glove candidate at multiple positions, including short.

"You get rid of Schwarber, what do you get in return?" said Arrieta (13-5), who was back to Cy Young form Saturday with eight scoreless innings for his first win since June. "He's not really a guy you want to get rid of."

The Cubs already are looking at Schwarber as their big offseason acquisition for the upcoming winter, anticipating the return of his left-handed power to the lineup for next year's opener after a season-ending knee injury the first week of this season.

Meanwhile, their ability to leverage Oakland's urgency two years ago provided a core player at a critical position who has been one of the reasons the Cubs have the best record in the majors.

"I don't like to tell people they made mistakes; I have no idea about the GM thing and how difficult that is to do," said veteran teammate Ben Zobrist, whose two-out, two-run single in the third was the big hit of Saturday's game. "In retrospect, Addie's turned into a great player.

"That's Addie's job, to make that look like a bad trade, and he's doing a good job of that so far."

A's general manager David Forst said last year his front office had no regrets over the trade, even though they faded down the stretch in '14 and were bounced quickly in the American League wild-card game.

They still don't have anything close to "another Addison" near the majors as they muddle through a last-place season – making do with Marcus Semien after flipping Samardzija to the White Sox for him a few months after acquiring the pitcher.

"You come from an organization, and you want them to see how much you've grown since the last time that they had you," said Russell, who returned this weekend to the A's stadium for the first time since his draft day.

"But I just went out there and tried to play the game that I play."

Russell's 66 RBIs – which Maddon said he didn't see coming – are just two behind MVP-candidate teammate Kris Bryant and just six off the lead among National League shortstops.

"What he gives us at the plate is almost a bonus," Arrieta said, "just because of how good he is defensively. He's pretty much one of the lockdown shortstops in baseball. And he's only going to continue to get better."

Of all the players on both teams' rosters that were originally drafted and signed by the A's, the second- and third-ranked RBI producers this year were Ryon Healy (10) and Max Muncy (three).

"If they didn't trade me, I think that I would be a pretty good asset to have in the A's organization," Russell said. "But I love where I'm at right now."

--

Cubs.com

Arrieta back in win column with Cubs' shutout

By Mark Chiarelli and Rick Eymer

OAKLAND -- Jake Arrieta threw eight scoreless innings and Ben Zobrist chipped in a two-run single as the Cubs beat the A's, 4-0, on Saturday, while Oakland starter Sonny Gray left the game due to injury after five innings.

Chicago has won six straight games and 16 of its past 22. Arrieta was superb, holding Oakland to three hits in his 13th win and departing to strong applause from a hearty Cubs contingent at the Coliseum. Only two A's baserunners reached second base against the righty, who has the league's fifth-best ERA (2.59) among qualified starters.

"We're having a nice stretch here," Arrieta said. "It's nice to have six in a row, but tomorrow it doesn't matter."

Arrieta retired 10 of the last 11 batters he faced. Saturday marked the second straight start Arrieta pitched into at least the eighth inning and the third time in four starts he allowed two runs or fewer. It was a welcome sight for the righty after he went 0-3 with a 4.88 ERA in July.

Gray entered amid his own July struggles, but he was better Saturday until a sore right extensor muscle in his forearm forced his sudden departure. He held Chicago to two runs on five hits over five innings, including Zobrist's two-out, two-run single in the third. Gray was replaced by Liam Hendriks, who gave up two runs on RBIs by Addison Russell and Jorge Soler to make it 4-0.

Gray said he wanted to return for the sixth, but he realized it wasn't the best decision.

"We decided to shut it down there instead of risking anything else," Gray said. "I lobbied to go back out there, but it just seemed like it obviously wasn't going to happen."

The A's have now been shut out seven times, and Gray has been the loser in three of them. He still owns the league's highest ERA (5.74) among qualified pitchers and lost his career-high 11th game.

Both teams donned throwback-style uniforms on a day in which Oakland honored its 1981 team. The Cubs now have a league-best record of 68-41, while the A's lost for the seventh time in their past eight games, falling a season-high 14 games below .500.

MOMENTS THAT MATTERED

Key two-out hit: Zobrist stroked a solid single into center field to drive in Willson Contreras and Dexter Fowler, who led off the third inning with singles. A strikeout and groundout later, Gray had a chance to get out of the frame without damage. Zobrist, a former A's teammate, dashed that hope.

"It's been an up-and-down season," Zobrist said. "You don't want that. I'm back to feeling healthier, feeling strong and getting back into the rhythm of the game."

Gray's day ends abruptly: Gray wasn't perfect, allowing five hits through the first three innings, but he didn't surrender a hit over his last two frames and retired the final seven batters he faced. So it came as a surprise when Hendriks trotted in from the bullpen to begin the sixth inning, ending Gray's day after just 72 pitches and cutting short what appeared to be a bounce-back start for the righty. The team later announced Gray's injury.

"He was throwing the ball pretty good today," A's manager Bob Melvin said. "The one inning where he gives up two runs is two bloop hits ... I thought he got out of a jam before that. It looked like he was throwing the ball really well."

Back on the road again: Following three winless outings on the road, Arrieta got back on track with his masterful effort. He's now 20-2 over his past 23 road starts.

"That was nice," Cubs manager Joe Maddon said. "He kept his command. He had two or three key pitches -- the 3-0, 3-1 grounder where we didn't get the double play and the 3-0 fly ball [to Khris Davis in the fourth]. Those were big pitches for him."

A's flash the leather: Gray found himself in trouble in the second, allowing back-to-back singles to begin the inning, but two strong defensive plays from young infielders kept Chicago off the scoreboard. Max Muncy made a diving stop at second base on a Jason Heyward grounder for the first out, and third baseman Ryon Healy snared a Jorge Soler chopper and fired home to throw out Zobrist on the next at-bat, keeping the game scoreless.

QUOTABLE

"I like color. Swing back to the '80s. They actually look good and they're very comfortable." -- Maddon, on the 1981 throwback road jersey

AFTER FURTHER REVIEW

The Cubs challenged a call at first base in the seventh inning after the A's Danny Valencia initially beat out a ground ball to third baseman Kris Bryant. After review, it was determined that first baseman Anthony Rizzo kept his foot on the bag, and the call was overturned.

WHAT'S NEXT

Cubs: Right-hander Kyle Hendricks makes the start in Sunday's 3:05 p.m. CT series finale. He's coming off his second career shutout, which he accomplished with a season-high 123 pitches. He's never faced the A's, and he is 2-6 with a 3.75 ERA on the road.

Athletics: Sean Manaea (3-6, 4.68 ERA) starts at 1:05 p.m. PT Sunday at the Coliseum. The rookie is 1-2 with a 3.14 ERA in seven starts since coming off the disabled list on June 29, but he took the loss Tuesday in his last start against the Angels, giving up four runs in 5 2/3 innings.

--

Cubs.com

Zobrist raking as rested Cubs continue to roll
By Rick Eymer

OAKLAND -- Ben Zobrist, who got the Cubs on the scoreboard with a two-run single in the third inning on Saturday at the Coliseum, figures all the team needed was a little break.

"It's a good stretch we've been on and we're getting better quality at-bats," Zobrist said following the Cubs' sixth straight win, a 4-0 victory over the Athletics. "I think we needed the rest at the All-Star break to help us get back to playing our game."

The Cubs have won 15 of 21 games since regrouping after the break, a turnaround from losing nine of the final 11 games leading into it.

"We're back to playing good baseball, and we want to keep that going as long as we can," Zobrist said. "We'll get back to the grind of the details."

Zobrist, who started at second base for the National League All-Star team, has had his own roller coaster of a season. He stumbled along at an .094 clip from July 1-22, with five hits in 53 at-bats. Since then, Zobrist has rebounded with a stretch of 15 games in which he's hitting .354 (17-for-48).

"It's been an up-and-down season," Zobrist said. "You don't want that. Sometimes you have to work through injuries and being tired. I'm back to feeling healthier, feeling strong and getting into the rhythm of the game."

It's a trend Cubs manager Joe Maddon has noticed.

"I'm watching them out there from the very first pitch and they're all right there, they're engaged, they're present-tense, ready to go," Maddon said. "The guys are very confident right now, and the pitching permits this all to happen. You can't get hot without good pitching, and our starters have been fantastic."

Jake Arrieta threw eight scoreless innings to earn his first victory in six starts, and he thinks he's pretty close to where he was at the beginning of the year.

"Emphasis on sinking the ball down, middle down in the strike zone and forcing action early on," Arrieta said. "Not worrying about strikeouts. Those will come in big situations. I'm trying to get through the middle innings with eight to 12 pitches.

"We've been throwing the ball well, been swinging it. We're playing good baseball. There's always things to improve on. There's things to be happy about."

--

Cubs.com

Contreras helps Cubs with ability to play outfield

By Rick Eymer

OAKLAND -- Thanks to the versatility of catcher Willson Contreras, Cubs manager Joe Maddon is able to involve his full roster.

"He's done well wherever we put him," Maddon said. "He needs to play more consistently and we need to get him into the catcher's spot. This way we can utilize all our players."

Contreras has played as many games in left field (17) as he has behind the plate, and he has appeared at first base twice. Maddon said he also wouldn't hesitate to use Contreras in right field.

"He's a good athlete," Maddon said. "He runs well. If he played left field, even right field, all the time, he would be a very good outfielder."

Contreras was batting .271 entering Saturday's game in Oakland, and he increased his hitting streak to five games with a third-inning single.

Worth noting

- Jason Hammel, who is on the bereavement list, will get an extra day and start Wednesday's game against the Angels. John Lackey, who last pitched Wednesday against the Marlins, will make the start Tuesday.

--

Cubs.com

Following shutout, Hendricks faces A's in finale

By Rick Eymer

Cubs right-hander Kyle Hendricks is enjoying a career year. A's lefty Sean Manaea is enjoying his rookie season. They're matched up for Sunday's series finale in Oakland.

Hendricks, in his third season, has established a career high for wins (10), owns the lowest home ERA (1.19) in the Majors and is coming off his second career shutout.

"It's been primarily his fastball command," Cubs manager Joe Maddon said. "He's always had good command, just not to the extent he's shown this year. He has a four-seam fastball he elevates, which I love. He gets a lot of takes." Manaea seems to have gotten the hang of things after a rough start. He gave up 16 earned runs over his first 12 2/3 innings, but only 32 in 79 2/3 innings since (3.62 ERA).

"I grew up watching the Cubs. They're really good right now, really hot," Manaea said. "You just try to take it like any other game and not put [on] too much pressure. It will be a fun matchup."

Things to know about this game

- Manaea has never faced anyone on the Cubs' roster. Raised in Indiana, Manaea saw his first Major League game at Wrigley Field.
- A's outfielder Khris Davis has a .357 average (5-for-14) against Hendricks. Yonder Alonso and Danny Valencia are each 1-for-3 against the Chicago righty.
- Matt Szczur has 12 pinch-hits, the most by a Cubs player since Reed Johnson had 13 in 2012.

--