October 23, 2016

ESPNChicago.com
Holy cow! Cubs are going to the World Series
By Bradford Doolittle

CHICAGO -- Somewhere in a cramped booth at Wrigley Field, high above a playing surface erupting with unrestrained jubilation, veteran broadcaster Pat Hughes gave his listeners the news that few of them thought they'd ever hear: The Chicago Cubs are going to the World Series.

The most dramatic result of the past seven decades of Cubs baseball unfolded in almost shockingly undramatic fashion. Dexter Fowler, Kris Bryant and Ben Zobrist drove in runs early. Willson Contreras homered in the fourth, Anthony Rizzo in the fifth. Starter Kyle Hendricks was brilliant into the eighth inning. Aroldis Chapman lit up the scoreboard with triple-digit velocity to finish it off. The Cubs beat the Dodgers 5-0 to win the National League Championship Series in six games.

Just like that, the Cubs -- the Chicago Cubs -- are National League champions.

The win was the latest and largest in a historic season for a Cubs franchise that has been operating since 1876. Seventy-one years removed from their last pennant, and 108 years since their last World Series crown, the Cubs won 103 games during the regular season, then survived the elite pitching of the Giants and Dodgers to emerge from the National League playoffs.

Six times the Cubs had played a game to clinch an NLCS -- three times in 1984, three more in 2003. They held leads in five of those games, yet the pennant drought persisted year after year, disappointment after disappointment. The organization became better known for its venerable ballpark and its partylike atmosphere than actual baseball, all while bearing the unfortunate moniker “Lovable Losers.” They’re still lovable, but they are losers no more.

Much was written about the daunting task of beating the Dodgers’ Clayton Kershaw, arguably the game’s best pitcher, who has a composite ERA over the past four seasons of 1.88 and who shut out the Cubs over seven innings in Game 2. The Cubs showed from the outset that Game 6 would be different.

It all started when Chicago folk favorite Javier Baez got the crowd roaring in the top of the first with an acrobatic tag on Andrew Toles and throw to first for a double play. In the bottom of the inning, Fowler greeted Kershaw with a ground-rule double along the brick wall in right. Bryant singled him in, then went to third when Andrew Toles dropped a Rizzo drive in the outfield. Zobrist, who turned the tide of the series with a bunt single in Game 4, drove in the second run with a sacrifice fly.

That was enough for Hendricks, the Cubs’ Greg Maddux clone who is a leading contender for the NL Cy Young Award. After a season in which he went 9-2 at Wrigley with an MLB-best 1.32 home ERA, Hendricks benefited from the early twin killing, picked a runner off base in the second and kept the Dodgers off balance for the rest of his outing.

He gave way to fireballing lefty Chapman, who shut down the Dodgers in the eighth and ninth innings, inducing double plays in each inning.

With Chapman’s last clap of thunder, the Cubs were National League champions. They had made something that had taken so long look so easy.
Anticipation for the game was rampant throughout Chicago all during the day. On the “L” train, normally aloof tourists and locals alike mused about what might happen come game time. The streets around the ballpark filled early, with Clark Street becoming so crowded by midafternoon that manager Joe Maddon suggested the city could make a mint by ticketing jaywalkers.

Inside the jam-packed park, the tension built with each out and a nervous energy settled over the proceedings by the middle innings. In the second inning, someone set off fireworks in the neighborhood beyond the center-field scoreboard, earning oohs and aahs from the crowd, and repeated the performance in the seventh. The fireworks were better inside the park.

Before long, it became evident that the ghosts of 1969, 1977, 1984, 1989, 1998, 2003, 2007, 2008 and 2015 would remain at rest. This version of the Cubs might be the best in the franchise’s 141-year history. They are simply too good to let whispers of ghosts, curses and goats hold them back.

There were no routine grounders between the legs, no meandering cloven-hoofed creatures waiting at the gates and no headphone-wearing fans scapegoated after reaching for a foul ball. There were no blown leads, nor ace starters left in past their expiration to twist in the cold Lake Michigan breeze. There was only the cool, mistake-free brilliance that has defined the Cubs since spring training. Now the Cleveland Indians and four more wins are all that stands in the way of the Cubs quenching the oldest thirst in sports.

Ron Santo never experienced it as a Cub, nor did Hall of Famers Ryne Sandberg, Billy Williams, Ernie Banks, Ferguson Jenkins, Andre Dawson, Bruce Sutter or Greg Maddux. Harry Caray never called it. Mike Royko never wrote it. None of those greats, each titans in their respective fields, got to write, say or experience the words that all of Chicago was screaming on Saturday night.

Let the record show that on a clear, chilly night on Oct. 22, 2016, the Cubs reached the destination so many thought could not be reached.

Now the words can be written, shouted, sung or set off in fireworks:

The Chicago Cubs are going to the World Series.

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ESPNChicago.com
Finally! The Cubs’ six darkest days lead to their brightest
By Bradford Doolittle

Let’s begin with what seems obvious, but what is obvious to one eludes another. Nothing in the long, sad history of the Chicago Cubs has had any tangible effect on the team that just beat the Los Angeles Dodgers. You know, the actual guys who just landed the franchise’s first National League pennant since 1945. Chicago Cubs. World Series. Because Anthony Rizzo, Kris Bryant, Jon Lester & Co. have been running roughshod over the rest of the major leagues since spring training, we shouldn’t be shocked by this. But let’s face it: We are.

That’s because of the historical context, a long-chronicled series of disasters and near misses that colors our experience of this thrilling ride. No, the current Cubs players are not responsible for those past disappointments. Many of them probably aren’t even aware of more than one or two of them, if any -- ballplayers often have little sense of the history of their own game. For us, though, the disappointments are part of the lore of baseball and that building saga has in time created a cultural phenomenon that now fuels our emotions over the events we just witnessed, and our imaginations about what is yet to come. You may root for the Cubs or not, but if you love baseball, you’re paying attention.

The Cubs are headed to the World Series to face the Indians! Check out our complete postseason coverage »

The 2016 Cubs are now very much a part of this story, as were Ron Santo, Ernie Banks, Billy Williams, Ryne Sandberg, Kerry Wood and all those others who fell short in the pursuit of what was just achieved. They just happen to be authors of the happiest chapter yet, and hope to write the grand finale in the coming days.
On my flight to San Francisco during the National League Division Series between the Cubs and Giants, a gentleman sitting behind me said, “I told my wife that if the Cubs win the World Series, I can die the next day.” He said this not once, but three times. Enough to make me a little nervous.

That’s how much it means to longtime fans in Chicagoland.

During the early history of the franchise, the Cubs won pennants and even a couple of World Series, but that all occurred during the time or before Harry Truman was president. When the Cubs and Dodgers took the field Saturday, it was the seventh time Chicago played a National League Championship Series game with a chance to win a pennant. In a sense, the Cubs’ NLCS victory was their first real accomplishment of the season. 103 wins? That’s nice. NLDS victory? Fine. Three victories in the National League Championship Series? Those were fun, but wake me up when they win the next one. Because the Cubs had been here before.

Six times.

Seven games. Three different Octobers. Consider this a sort of catharsis.

1984

Baseball subdivided in 1969, creating what we now know as the league championship series. It took 16 years after that before the Cubs played in an NLCS. That was in 1984, a year that suggests ominous portents in Wrigleyville for reasons that have nothing to do with George Orwell or Van Halen.

Oct. 4: Cubs at Padres, NLCS Game 3

The situation: The Cubs won the first two games of the series amid controversies about things such as the lack of lights at Wrigley Field and the lack of actual big league umpires -- the men in blue were on strike, and replacement umps worked the first four games of the NLCS. After winning the first two games of the best-of-five series, Chicago was one win away from its first World Series in 39 years. It seemed like a big number then because we didn’t know. We just didn’t know. Game 3 was the first of three straight games to be played at Jack Murphy Stadium, if necessary.

How it went horribly wrong: The Padres won 7-1, so there was no gotcha moment in this game. Dennis Eckersley was a pretty good starting pitcher before 1987, when Tony La Russa turned him into the prototype of what we now know as the three-out closer. Eck shut out the Padres through four innings and the Cubs took an early lead. He got into trouble in the fifth, giving up three runs on hits by Garry Templeton and Alan Wiggins. He also stayed in the game, something that would never happen in the 2016 model of postseason pitching staff deployment. In the sixth, Eckersley was finally pulled by manager Jim Frey with a couple of men on base. Kevin McReynolds hammered a three-run homer off reliever George Frazier and the Padres cruised to a 7-1 win.

What they said at the time: A woman named Phyllis Liss had flown from Illinois to California for the game. After the loss, she told The Chicago Tribune, "It's a sad day. I didn't want it to be like this. But we'll get them Saturday. I've been a Cub fan a long, long time. I came here to scratch my 39-year itch." That was 32 years ago.

Oct. 6: Cubs at Padres, NLCS Game 4

The situation: No worries. The Cubs lost Game 3, but they still needed only one, and Harry Caray was still a Cubs fan and a Bud man.

How it went horribly wrong: Garvey. This is the Garvey Game, when the one-time Dodgers MVP first baseman hit a walk-off, two-run homer off Lee Smith to beat the Cubs 7-5. Garvey was wandering around the field before Thursday’s Game 5 in Los Angeles, smiling as if he’d never dealt such a miserable blow to Cubs fans. In fact, there have been a lot of characters from the 1984 NLCS hanging around the two ballparks: Garvey, Smith, Ryne Sandberg, Bob Dernier, Ron Cey. What does it mean? Anyway, Frey had drawn criticism for not starting NL Cy
Young winner Rick Sutcliffe in Game 4. Still, the Cubs led 3-2 at one point in the middle innings and were in position to finish it off.

What they said at the time: “There will be tomorrow!” shouted Hall of Fame Dodgers pitcher Don Drysdale, who called the game for ABC, when Garvey’s drive disappeared into the stands in right-center.

It’s best not to consider his words too literally.

Oct. 7: Cubs at Padres, NLCS Game 5

The situation: OK, Garvey got them in Game 4. Maybe Frey should have started Sutcliffe instead of (allegedly) peeking ahead to Game 1 of the World Series against a Detroit Tigers team that had just finished off Kansas City in the American League Championship Series. But now Sutcliffe was set for Game 5, he was rested and he had won 17 of 18 since being acquired by the Cubs during the season. It was all good.

How it went horribly wrong: Leon Durham. Poor guy. The Cubs led 3-0 after five innings and Sutcliffe seemed to be following the script: Ace saves Cubs. Durham hit a two-run homer in the first inning -- people forget that -- and Gary “Sarge” Matthews hit a solo shot in the third. Sutcliffe began to waver in the sixth, allowing two hits, a walk and back-to-back sacrifice flies. In 2016, he would have been done. In 1984, Frey sent him out for the seventh. He walked Carmelo Martinez to start the seventh and stayed in the game. After a sacrifice bunt, pinch hitter Tim Flannery hit a roller to Durham at first. Right through the wickets it went, and Martinez scored from second. It got worse. Wiggins singled. Tony Gwynn doubled in Flannery and Wiggins. Garvey singled in Gwynn. Finally, after the Padres had put up their sixth run of the game and fourth of the inning, Frey summoned Steve Trout from the Cubs’ bullpen to replace Sutcliffe.

What they said at the time: "I take the responsibility for this," Sutcliffe told the Tribune. "It's my fault." It wasn’t, but that kind of accountability is why Sutcliffe remains high in the esteem of Cubs fans to this day.

2003

The Gregorian calendar’s 1,984th year loomed as the worst for 19 years. Then the North Side faithful handed off their misery to a new generation. Those Cubs fans have since coped with 2003, their moment when the dream seemed so close. It was a year that made a lot of money for therapists all over Chicagoland.

Oct. 12: Cubs at Marlins, NLCS Game 5

The situation: This was a true wild-card era matchup. There were two 100-win clubs in the National League in 2003, the Braves and the Giants. They were knocked off by the Marlins (91 wins) and the Cubs (88 wins). That wouldn't have made a pennant any less sweet in Wrigleyville, where people packed the bars to watch the Cubs finish off Florida. They'd won three of the first four games of the series. Game 5 was big because with a win, the Cubs would get to start Mark Prior and Kerry Wood in the first two games of the World Series.

How it went horribly wrong: Josh Beckett dominated the Cubs, throwing a two-hit shutout with 11 strikeouts. It happens. Beckett had that kind of stuff, though the Cubs had scored six runs off him in Game 1. No problem, though. The series was going back to Wrigley Field, and Cubs manager Dusty Baker had Prior and Wood all ready to go.

What they said at the time: "We feel confident with those guys on the mound, especially after a loss," Baker said.

Oct. 14: Marlins at Cubs, NLCS Game 6

The situation: With the Cubs still needing just one victory for their first pennant in 58 years, they sent Prior to the hill. In his first full big league season, Prior went 18-6 with a 2.43 ERA, 245 strikeouts and a third-place finish in the Cy Young balloting. He had already thrown 16 innings in two starts that postseason with a 1.69 ERA. During his last 11 starts of the regular season, Prior was 10-1 with a 1.52 ERA. Yep, this was in the bank.
How it went horribly wrong: Come on, you know what went wrong. It’s a sequence so famous that we made a
documentary about it. It was the game that turned a surname (Bartman) into a synonym for scapegoat. Without
reliving the complete set of gory details, let’s focus on the eerie similarity between this contest and Game 5 in
1984. As the Cubs’ season unraveled, their ace was left on the mound to twist in the wind. After throwing 7⅓
shutout innings, Prior allowed two doubles, two singles, a walk and the grounder to short that Alex Gonzalez
booted.

What they said at the time: “It has nothing to do with the curse," Baker said. "It has to do with fan interference and
a very uncharacteristic error by Gonzalez. History has nothing to do with this game, nothing."

Oct. 15: Marlins at Cubs, NLCS Game 7

The situation: No worries. The Cubs still had Wood going and the Marlins were handing the ball to the mediocre
Mark Redman. The Beckett card had been played in Game 5, Chicago was sitting pretty. Bring on the Yankees!

How it went horribly wrong: Wood gave up a three-run homer to 20-year-old rookie Miguel Cabrera in the first,
but the Cubs rallied to take a 5-3 lead. Part of that rally was Wood’s two-run homer off Redman in the second.
Wood walked two of the first three batters of the fifth, creating a high-leverage situation in which you can imagine
Joe Maddon might have pulled Wood. But Wood faced Ivan Rodriguez, Cabrera and Derrek Lee in succession and
each drove in a run to give Florida the lead.

Meanwhile, Trader Jack McKeon had summoned Beckett from the bullpen to calm things down, and like Madison
Bumgarner in the 2014 World Series and Clayton Kershaw in this year’s NLDS, the ace turned into a clutch stopper.
Beck threw four innings of one-run, one-hit ball. The Marlins kept tacking on runs and won 9-6. Dream over.
Nightmare continues.

What they said at the time: "The Cubs will win next year," said Darren Baker, Dusty’s 4-year-old son.

2016

Oct. 22: Dodgers at Cubs, NLCS Game 6

The situation: The Cubs bounced back from consecutive shutouts to throttle the Dodgers by a combined score of
18-6 to grab a 3-2 lead in the NLCS. Looming in Game 6 for the Dodgers was ace lefty Clayton Kershaw. After
another Kershaw masterpiece, the Dodgers would then turn to lefty curveball wizard Rich Hill for Game 7. Behind
them both was rested closer Kenley Jansen.

How it went horribly wrong: It didn’t. They won. Chicago Cubs. World Series. Believe it, folks, it happened. It finally
happened.

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ESPNChicago.com
The Professor pitches the Cubs into the World Series
By Bradford Doolittle

CHICAGO -- With a performance worthy of his scientific method, the Professor pitched the Chicago Cubs into the
World Series.

During his breakout 2016 season, Kyle Hendricks has been compared at various times to Clark Kent, Greg Maddux
and the Norse god Odin. (Some of those were just me.) The “Professor” is the moniker his teammates have chosen,
and given the way he dissected the Los Angeles Dodgers on Saturday, few would question the choice.

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Hendricks’ picture-perfect 7⅓ innings were backed by the five runs his teammates put up against the Dodgers’ ace
of aces, Clayton Kershaw; and that was more than enough, as the Cubs whitewashed Los Angeles 5-0 to clinch the
National League Championship Series four games to two. Voila! The Cubs are headed to their first World Series since 1945.

“We’ve still got a little ways to go, though,” said Hendricks, quick to remind anyone with a question slanted toward historical context. “This has been our goal since Day 1. We’re going to enjoy this, but we know where we’re going to go. We know what it means to the fans in this city.”

The bare facts: Hendricks allowed a single to Andrew Toles to lead off the game. The next batter, Kyle Seager, rolled into a nifty 4-3 double play turned by Javier Baez. During the next inning, Josh Reddick reached on an error, but Hendricks picked him off.

That was it. Hendricks did not allow another baserunner until Reddick singled with one out in the eighth. Manager Joe Maddon pulled the plug at that point, thrusting his left arm toward the Cubs’ bullpen to summon Aroldis Chapman to finish things off, which Chapman did with little undue drama.

“I just tried to make my best pitch,” Hendricks said. “Every time. On to the next one.”

For the Dodgers, going from Hendricks to Chapman must have felt like going from a gondola to a speedboat. There’s Hendricks, with one of the lowest fastball velocities in the game, yet elegant in every respect, handing off the Chapman, who lights up the radar gun to extent few pitchers ever have. As thrilling as that is to witness, Hendricks’ changeup might be one of the five best pitches in the game right now. According to ESPN Stats & Information data, Hendricks threw his changeup 26 times in Game 6, holding the Dodgers hitless in seven at-bats that ended with the pitch.

“At the end of the day,” Hendricks said, “if you make good pitches, you get hitters out. Obviously, there was a lot on the line. Just tried to simplify it the best I could.”

Everything is simple for a genius.

Lots of ink was spilled on the six times the Cubs played games with a chance at clinching an NLCS, the six times they failed, the five times they blew a lead and the three times they lost despite have an ace pitcher on the mound. But with Hendricks looking every bit the ace on Saturday, he became the first of his peers to break through the Cubbie Blue ceiling.

“That’s the best pitching performance I’ve seen,” Cubs MVP candidate Kris Bryant said. “Just throwing exactly where he wants to. Soft contact. He’s certainly the unsung hero of this team.”

The common thread between Rick Sutcliffe in 1984 and both Mark Prior and Kerry Wood in 2003 was that they were left on the mound after they had lost their stuff, and all three times, the games got away from the Cubs. That, of course, is the way things used to be: You ride with your best and hope it works out.

Nowadays, it doesn’t work like that. Even a No. 1 starter in the playoffs isn’t allowed to work out of trouble more than once or twice in an outing. The bullpens these days are too deep and too good. But once in a while, a guy like Hendricks comes along and explodes the modern paradigm: He was simply too good to remove. When the 26-year-old finally did falter, allowing that eighth-inning hit to Reddick, Maddon sprang out of the dugout as if to say, “Finally!” And the crowd, riding a wave of euphoria that might not crest until Thanksgiving, paused in its jubilation to boo a manager it collectively adores. Hendricks noticed.

“That was pretty cool,” Hendricks said. “But I know what I’ve got behind me in the bullpen. Not only Chappie, but we’ve got some electric arms down there. Whoever he was going to go to, the game was over.”

But this was not 1984 or 2003 or any other of the years of discontent in Wrigleyville. Maddon is a 21st-century manager who would sound like an alien to someone like Jim Frey or Dusty Baker. (Yeah, Dusty still manages. He probably still thinks Maddon sounds like an alien.) Hendricks did his job, and Chapman did his. The Sutcliffe-Prior-Wood scenarios never got a chance to get off the ground.
“If the opposing pitcher doesn’t make mistakes, then it’s tough to execute,” Dodgers manager Dave Roberts said. “I thought, again, Kyle pitched a perfect game.”

Slow fastball? Yes, but he can throw harder if he needs to. A little, anyway. Mild-mannered disposition? Yes. A Dartmouth man? Of course. That’s in the media guide. They call him the Professor, and he’s smart enough to not pay any attention to history.

“What else can you say about that guy?” last season’s NL Cy Young winner, Jake Arrieta, said about the maybe-this-season’s winner Hendricks. “He’s as well prepared and well poised as anybody in the game. You put those two things together, you get a guy like that. This guy can dominate and dissect a lineup.”


“It’s been an unbelievable year,” Hendricks said. “But we’re not done.”

ESPNChicago.com
Let it soak in: There was no stopping these Cubs
By Jesse Rogers

CHICAGO -- They saved their best for last, and in playing their most complete game of the postseason, the Chicago Cubs exorcised their demons by making the World Series for the first time in 71 years. The 5-0 win in Game 6 of the National League Championship Series against the Los Angeles Dodgers -- and the subsequent celebration -- was one for the ages.

"Clayton Kershaw is good, but we knew we could beat him," reliever Pedro Strop said on the infield after the game while hugging his teammates. "We hit him good."

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Beat him they did. After consecutive shutout losses in Games 2 and 3, the Cubs' offense came alive, culminating Saturday when they chased the best pitcher on the planet out of the game after just five innings. The Cubs came out swinging but only because they never wavered during their darkest hours of the series.

"Nobody doubted anything," hitting coach John Mallee said standing near the batter's box while celebrating. "When Addy (Addison Russell) homered in Game 4, you think to yourself, 'Here it is. This is the turning point.' Now we roll."

From the fourth inning of Game 4 until the final out of the NLCS, the Cubs scored 23 runs. It was with an undying belief they would turn things around and serve a starving fan base a World Series appearance. They delivered what they promised themselves -- and their fans -- in March.

Jon Lester and the Cubs had 71 years of celebrating to do on Saturday night. Jonathan Daniel/Getty Images

"The fans deserve this as much as we do," Strop said. "Coming over (from Baltimore) all I knew is the fans sell out even when we lose. Now we won for them."

A double play ended the Dodgers season and set off a wild party inside and outside the Cubs clubhouse -- which might last until the next round begins. It was that wild, but it never happens without the vision. Saturday night was the result of a plan the Cubs hatched five years ago, and it followed a script Hollywood may have rejected as too cliche: A team -- and ballpark -- remade from the ground up.

On the field and in the clubhouse after the memorable win, the front office basked in the accomplishment. They did it together, on their terms, with no concern for the criticism they received for losing during those rebuilding days. They stuck to their convictions that this was the right way to stay competitive for a long time. And they are reaping the results. The Cubs are in the World Series.
"We got some breaks along the way that helped us out," general manager Jed Hoyer said as champagne was poured on his head. "It gives you chills. Seventy-one years is a long time."

The breaks Hoyer refers to mostly revolve around his young players. No matter how talented they were, if they weren't able to process the big moments, the Cubs wouldn't be here this quickly.

"The young kids have come up on the big stage, and they're not scared," Hoyer stated. "That's something you can't predict when you rebuild."

Perhaps the person who can put it in perspective the best -- other than a long suffering fan -- is the longest-tenured Cub, lefty reliever Travis Wood. He was here during some of the darkest days from 2012 to 2014 when the team lost a total of 286 games.

"To be here now after where we started is unbelievable," Wood said shaking his head. "I can't believe I'm in the World Series, but I'm glad I am. Our young guys came through."

Perhaps the clinching night can be summed up most by the work of two people: a young, brash infielder who won co-MVP honors and a mild-mannered pitcher who proved yet again he was every bit as good as any pitcher in 2016. Kyle Hendricks and Javier Baez represent everything exciting about the Cubs. Baez proved the adage you can't judge a book by its cover, because if that was the case, all anyone would have seen is a swing-and-miss guy. He's far from that player now.

"He's the most natural baseball player I've ever seen play the game," Hendricks said of his teammate. "His instincts in-game are just top notch."

Hendricks' instincts aren't bad either as his ability to break down the Dodger hitters was masterful. He performed surgery on them, dissecting every weakness and turning them into weak ground balls or strikeouts. Was there any doubt Hendricks would come up big? He's done it all season with the demeanor of the guy next door who's cutting his lawn. There's no flair to Hendricks' game, like there is with Baez, but that's not what he thrives on. He relies on keeping even-keeled. The two players couldn't be more different but are equally fun to watch.

"He deserved the Cy Young award," teammate Jon Lester said of Hendricks.

As the champagne flowed in the locker room, the leader of the group was right in the middle of it all. Joe Maddon's methods were once again proven to work, as his laid-back style could not have fit better on a young team. If you want to know why players like Baez and Willson Contreras can succeed so quickly, it's because Maddon allows them to be themselves. Don't underestimate the comfort that brings a player. As for making it to the World Series in his second year with the team, even the manager was surprised.

"It's unusual when theory and reality come together," he said of the Cubs' plan. "It takes you a while to absorb it all."

Absorb it they did -- along with a lot of liquor. The celebration rivaled that of the wild-card victory last year in Pittsburgh. A lot of emotion has been put into the franchise, and it all came out at once, both in the stands and inside the Cubs' clubhouse.

"It's special because of all the ingredients involved," team president Theo Epstein said. "From the scouts, to our developmental people, to the players and coaches. This accomplishment is for everyone."

It truly is for everyone, because over 71 years there have been so many players who have come and gone wanting what the Cubs now have. So many fans who dedicated their lives to this franchise, waiting, hoping for this moment to arrive. As players continued to hug teammates and their families long after the final out was made, some finally understood the enormity of it all.
"I know these people have been waiting a long time," Russell said looking around the stands. "I know we’re young, but we never give up. There’s always someone there to pick you up if you need it. That’s the Cubs way, and now I can’t wait for the World Series. It’s going to be great."

ESPNChicago.com
Clutch Cubbies: The moments that put the Cubs in the World Series
By Bradford Doolittle

CHICAGO -- The final out of Game 6 in the National League Championship Series will be replayed in Chicago forever. No matter how many pennants or World Series the Cubs win in the future, this is the one that broke the 71-year NL pennant drought and put the team in position to finally confront the ghost of William Sianis’ goat.

The four wins against the Los Angeles Dodgers weren’t all dramatic, but they all featured key turning points in a series that put the Cubs in their most adverse position of the entire season. Down 2-1 after being shut out in back-to-back games, the Cubs responded with three straight wins, emphatically dismissing the prospect of any recurrent October horrors.

Let’s run through the Cubs’ biggest moments of the NLCS -- as we did after the Cubs’ victory in the NL Division Series. We’ll use win probability added (WPA) data from fangraphs.com for a numerical element, though the actual moments were chosen subjectively.

As for that final out: In terms of WPA adjusted for 71-year scarcity, let’s just assume that Aroldis Chapman getting the Dodgers’ Yasiel Puig to ground into a double play takes the top prize.

1. Miguel Montero’s grand slam in Game 1
(Win probability added: 35.5 percent)

Jon Lester held Los Angeles to one run over six innings but was pulled for a switch-hitter with the Cubs leading 3-0 in the sixth. In the eighth, the Dodgers loaded the bases with no one out, so Cubs manager Joe Maddon summoned Aroldis Chapman in for one of those six-out saves that the closer isn’t quite in love with. Chapman struck out Corey Seager and Yasiel Puig, but then Adrian Gonzalez knotted the score with a two-run single (31.7 WPA). That deflated the mood at Wrigley Field considerably, but not for long. Chicago loaded the bases against Joe Blanton, then Montero unloaded on a slider to break open the game. The Cubs won 8-4.

“It’s easy to hit a grand slam in the first inning when nobody is actually screaming at it,” Montero said. “This one is a lot more special, because it’s in front of this special crowd that we have, and you’re always looking for that.”

2. Ben Zobrist bunts for a single in Game 4
(WPA: 4.5 percent)

There is no way to quantify what Zobrist’s bunt did for the Cubs in this game. Everything changed after it happened. The Cubs had not scored in 21 innings and had gone hitless through their first three frames against Julio Urias. While John Lackey had likewise kept the Dodgers off the scoreboard, the longer the Cubs’ offensive slump continued, the more the terrifying specter of a 3-1 deficit loomed over the mountaintops of Chavez Ravine. Then, leading off the fourth, Zobrist -- the Cubs’ cleanup hitter -- laid down a perfect bunt for Chicago’s first hit.

“It’s always best when Benny does something extemporaneously,” Maddon said. “Whenever I give him a sign, it never works. So I’m glad he thought of it on his own.”

The bunt seemed to throw Urias off his rhythm. Javier Baez and Willson Contreras followed with singles. Jason Heyward drove in a run with a groundout. That set up ...
3. Addison Russell homers in Game 4

(WPA: 9.7)

Russell’s two-run homer to center did a lot more than put the Cubs up 4-0. It broke his playoff-long funk, and the emotion of the moment was evident when he pumped his fist while rounding the bases. This could be assigning meaning to an event after the fact, but it sure felt like Russell’s arrival to the postseason signified that this Cubs team was not going to collapse like so many of their forerunners had done. The Cubs went on to win 10-2.

“That’s our team,” Maddon said. “You saw our team out there today.”

4. Russell homers in Game 5

(WPA: 25.6)

The Cubs had evened the series, but Game 5 was still fraught with apprehension. Lose that one and you go back to Wrigley Field needing to beat both Clayton Kershaw and Rich Hill. Lester was back on the mound and, as usual, he was on top of his game in the postseason. The Dodgers scratched out a run against him in the fourth, and that was enough to keep them even against a Cubs offense that had managed just Anthony Rizzo’s first-inning RBI double.

In the sixth, Blanton was back, and Baez greeted him with a single, then stole second. And for the second straight night, Russell deposited a high slider into the bleachers.

The Cubs eventually rolled to an 8-1 lead before winning 8-4. One more win was all they needed.

“Rounding the bases, it was pretty exciting,” Russell said. “[I was] pumped up. Not only for myself but for the team -- and that little cushion that Jonny had to go forward from that. I felt really good.”

5. Dexter Fowler doubles to lead off Game 6

(WPA: 6.1)

Forget the leverage of the situation. After all the talk of Kershaws and Hills and snarks and grumkins, Fowler and the Cubs wasted no time in declaring that history would be given no quarter on this night.

Fowler scored on Kris Bryant’s single, and the Cubs never looked back, shutting out the Dodgers 5-0.

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ESPNChicago.com

The world changed Saturday night at Wrigley
By Jayson Stark

CHICAGO -- Ron Santo never saw this. Fergie Jenkins never did this. Ernie Banks never lived to see this moment -- to watch the universe change before his eyes.

But finally, on Saturday at 9:45 p.m. Wrigley Daylight Time, when the world turned upside-down, it finally happened. That moment.

There were two outs left until Cubs Armageddon. Yasiel Puig tapped a one-out ground ball toward shortstop, where Addison Russell realized immediately what had a chance to happen here.

The baseball -- THAT baseball -- was hopping directly at him. And his first thought was: “I could not believe it. ... He hit it to me. He hit it to ME.”

But this ball was traveling so slowly, he wasn’t sure it was a double-play ball. So all he told himself was to make sure he got one out -- "and if we get two, that’s even sweeter."
Except Russell was feeding that baseball to a second baseman who believes everything and anything is possible. Of course Javier Baez was going to get this baseball to first base on time. What else would he do?

"So I decided to turn it," Baez said. "And we made it happen."

Baez’s relay throw whooshed toward Anthony Rizzo at approximately 178 mph. It popped into Rizzo’s glove a millisecond before Puig’s foot hit the first-base bag. And it is barely possible to describe what happened next with mere words.

With hugs, maybe. With tears, maybe. With a lifetime’s worth of emotions spilling through the night, definitely.

The Cubs -- the Chicago Cubs -- were going to the World Series. Did you think you’d possibly live long enough to read that sentence? Did you think the baseball gods would ever permit something that crazy to happen?

Well, it’s happening, ladies and gentlemen. It’s happening. In real life. In your life. For the first time in 71 years. In this actual world that you live in.

"I can’t believe it," said Cubs legend Billy Williams after the team’s 5-0 triumph over Clayton Kershaw and the Los Angeles Dodgers in Game 6 of the National League Championship Series that finally made that dream come true. "I’m standing on the field, and the Cubs are going to the World Series. I can’t believe that."

Williams played for the Cubs for 16 years. In the 1950s. In the 1960s. In the 1970s. He has been retired for 40 years. No wonder his brain and his heart were having trouble processing a moment this powerful, this historic. How can any of us truly comprehend something this mysterious, something that very few people you know had ever witnessed?

So maybe we can help you make it all sink in. Maybe we can make you appreciate how lonnnnggg ago 1945 really was. Ready? Since the last time the Cubs played in a World Series:

-- 1,275 different men played for the Cubs -- in seasons that didn’t end this way, of course.

-- 606 different men threw at least one pitch for the Cubs -- none of them in a World Series game.

-- the Cubs played 11,309 baseball games -- not one of which could be described as "a World Series game."

-- World Series games were played in 45 different ballparks -- none of which were known as "Wrigley Field." At Coors Field, yes. At Chase Field, yes. At Ebbets Field and Citi Field, yes. Even at Tropicana Field. But at Wrigley? Iconic Wrigley Field? Never.

-- the Yankees played in 26 World Series in that endless time span. The Dodgers played in 15. The Cardinals played in 11. The Cubs watched or listened to all of them from their living rooms, from their man caves or from some fishing boat in the middle of a distant sea.

-- Banks played more than 2,500 games for the Cubs. Williams played more than 2,200. Ryne Sandberg and Santo played more than 2,100 apiece. That’s a whole lot of box scores. Just not World Series box scores.

So what happened at Wrigley Field on Saturday night was more than just a baseball game. More than just a sporting event. The world changed on this night. Lives changed on this night. Millions of lives. Millions.

"This transcends baseball," said Ryan Dempster, a man who pitched 376 games for the Cubs over nine different seasons -- and never had any of them end like this. "You know how many people I saw cry tonight? People crying. People hugging each other. This is far more than a baseball game. I don’t know how to put it into words, except it’s an event in these people's lives that they will forever remember. And to be here, to watch it all happen, was just incredible."
So how do we define what changed on this night? After all, it wasn’t as if the Cubs won a World Series. They merely won a game that will allow them to play in the World Series -- against a team from Cleveland with its own history to rewrite.

But even the Indians have at least played in four World Series since the last time the Cubs played in one. Meanwhile in Chicago, the Cubs hadn't reached this perch on the mountain since the Harry Truman administration, hadn't clinched a World Series berth at Wrigley since 1932, hadn't won a single best-of-seven series since 1908.

So even though there is more to do and more baseball to play, what happened at Wrigley Field was as epic as a league championship series clincher can possibly get. The Cubs didn't just end a drought here. They busted more ghosts than Bill Murray ever did.

"Getting to the World Series is a big accomplishment," said the manager of this ghostbuster crew, Joe Maddon. "Of course, winning it would be even greater than that. But I still believe that, in seasons to come, people are going to believe more easily now. They're not going to look for the next shoe to drop. They'll believe that something good is going to occur, as opposed to something bad."

But wait. Maybe those people actually crossed that threshold before the final out on this night. Maybe there was a sign from the heavens, in the ninth inning of this game, that it was OK to believe. Really.

It happened with one out in the ninth. On a 3-and-1 pitch from Aroldis Chapman to Carlos Ruiz. Ruiz swung at a 101 mph Chapman infernoball and got just enough of it to lift a high foul ball that drifted down the left-field line and floated just out of play -- into a section that looked waaaayyyy too familiar to anyone who saw Game 6 of another NLCS, back in 2003.

"Somebody said to me that that one-out foul ball was right where [Steve] Bartman was," said Cubs catcher David Ross. "Somebody said that in the dugout. And I just said, 'Who cares, you know? We've got one out and the guy on the mound throws 100. I like our chances.' ... So when he said, 'Ooh, that was right where Bartman was,' I just went, 'Perfect. It went all the way in the stands. Foul ball. So now we can win.'"

And three pitches later, what do you know? That's exactly what they did.

Mark Grace never had a night like this. Don Kessinger never felt a feeling like this. Sammy Sosa never hopped around Wrigley when the planets lined up like this.

But Baez? He was there. He was part of it. He was a cowinner of the NLCS MVP award -- along with Jon Lester -- on the night the Cubs booked their trip to the World Series.

"Crazy," he said. "It's crazy living this life right now."

And Russell? He was there, too. He pounded a second-inning double off Kershaw. He started the artful double play that turned Wrigley into a sea of noise, high-fives and selfies. And he spent the next hour and a half wandering around this magical ballpark with a smile on his face as wide as that street beyond the bleachers that was obviously named with him in mind.

"We're going to the dance, man," he said. "And we're gonna dance."

And Ross? Yep, he was there, too. He didn't play on this night, though he did become part of a very cool feat when Willson Contreras homered in the fourth inning -- and made the Cubs the first team in history to have three different catchers (Contreras, Miguel Montero and Ross) hit home runs in the same postseason. But nevertheless, Ross was summoned to the victory podium behind second base -- along with the brass and the manager and the co-MVPs -- and the cheers were so loud, they filled up his eyes with emotion.

"There's been a feeling about this city since we landed [Friday morning]," Ross said, as he nears the end of his final season. "There's just a buzz here. Everybody's excited. This is the Holy Grail of sports championships. And this
moment here just shows you how great this city is and these fans. It hasn't always been this way. But I think they appreciate it more, because they've had so many low times."

But five years ago, the Cubs hired a master of curse zapping named Theo Epstein to perform another baseball magic act. Then, in the fall of 2014, they hired a silver-haired renaissance man named Joseph J. Maddon to lead people, embrace the moments and change this culture. Well, you could feel that culture shifting again on Saturday, right before your eyeballs.

Asked whether he had allowed himself two years ago, back when the Cubs hired him, to picture the sights and sounds of what he called this "crazy cool" evening, Maddon shook his head, his eyes twinkling in the electric night. "I just didn't want to do that," he said. "I wanted to be surprised. And it's just as you'd expect. But I don't even know what it looks like outside. Oh my God."

No kidding. Beyond those ivy-covered walls, the streets were thumping with life. But not just streets named Waveland and Clark and Addison. We're talking about many, many streets, stretched out across many, many miles, where life as these people had always known it had just shot all these folks into a cosmos they had never known.

These Cubs might have four more humongous baseball games to win. But they've already erased 71 years of history and heartbreak. So even now, nothing is quite the same anymore. And that's going to take some getting used to -- even for the Cubbies themselves.

Asked what he thought had changed on this night, Maddon answered with one powerful word: "Perception."

"You know that thing I'd always heard, about the Cubs being lovable losers, I never quite understood that," the manager said, "because that's not how I was raised. So getting here and really not paying attention to all the nonsense, the superstition that really has dragged a lot of people's minds down -- to escape that is great. Now we can just continue to move it forward."

That job -- the moving-it-forward part of the gig -- begins Tuesday in Cleveland. But first, the 2016 Chicago Cubs had another big job they had to get to.

As the sign in the stands said, they had to "party like it's 1945." And from the looks of things, they were up to that job, too -- almost as up to that job as the people whose lives they had just transformed.

"They're ready for this moment," Baez said of those people. "And we're ready for this moment."

So how long, he was asked, could they all celebrate what just happened here?

"Ooh," gushed the NLCS co-MVP. "Forever."

ESPNChicago.com
With no curveball, Kershaw had little chance
By ESPN Stats & Information

Clayton Kershaw couldn't throw his curveball for a strike. Largely as a result, the Los Angeles Dodgers couldn't force a Game 7 in the National League Championship Series.

The Dodgers left-hander threw 15 curveballs against the Chicago Cubs on Saturday night, and those 15 pitches resulted in one strike.

Kershaw lacked command of the curve in Game 2, also. He threw nine and got three strikes.
Without the curveball working, Kershaw was reduced to a two-pitch pitcher and the Cubs were allowed to sit on fastballs and sliders. The Cubs were 7-for-21 with two home runs against those two pitches in Game 6. They were 1-for-21 in at-bats ending in those pitches in Game 2 of the NLCS.

Location

Kershaw threw 40 percent of his pitches in the horizontal middle of the plate, his second most in a start this season. Three of the hits Kershaw allowed were on pitches in that zone, including two doubles.

The Cubs swung and missed on 10 percent of Kershaw’s pitches, his second-lowest rate in a start this season. Interestingly, the lowest was 8 percent in Game 2 of the NLCS.

Usually, keeping the ball down is a good strategy. But the Cubs demolished Kershaw on pitches low in the zone or lower, going 6-for-13 with two home runs in at-bats ending on pitches in that location. The Cubs were 1-for-10 in such at-bats in Game 2 of the NLCS.

Untimely poor outings for Kershaw

After posting a 4.98 ERA in his first eight career postseason starts, Kershaw had been much more effective since last October. He had a 4.98 ERA in the postseason through 2014, but was at 3.34 entering Saturday’s start.

Saturday was Kershaw’s fifth start with his team facing elimination. He has allowed at least five runs in three of those starts.

ESPNChicago.com

What we learned: Go, Cubs, Go ... all the way to the World Series
By David Schoenfield

The Chicago Cubs are going to the World Series. They stared down Clayton Kershaw in Game 6 of the National League Championship Series and sent him to the showers after five innings. They stared down the ghosts of Wrigley Field. They stared down curses and goats and history and every other excuse every Cubs fan has made through the years. Most of all, Kyle Hendricks stared down a good Dodgers lineup and crushed it, allowing just two hits over 7 1/3 innings of beautiful pitching during the 5-0 victory.

1. Party like it’s 1945! The Cubs were the best team in baseball coming out of spring training. They were the best team when they soared to a 25-6 start. They were still the best team even when the Giants briefly passed them for baseball’s best record. They were baseball’s best team when they got their mojo back with a 22-6 August, and they were the best team as the regular season ended.

Of course, you still have to go out and put those first 162 games behind you and win when it matters most, and as we’ve documented in various places, owning the best record -- even by a large margin -- doesn’t mean a whole lot heading into the playoffs. There was the dramatic Game 4 rally to clinch the National League Division Series against the Giants. There was intense panic after the Dodgers shut out the Cubs in Games 2 and 3 of the NLCS. The series turned in Game 4 when the game was tied 0-0 through three innings. A huge hit came from Javier Baez -- swing-at-anything Javier Baez -- dropping an 0-2 changeup from Julio Urias into left field. Three batters later Addison Russell hit a two-run home run and it was 4-0.

Over the final three games, the Cubs outscored the Dodgers 23-6. They pounded out 33 hits and hit five home runs. They beat the best pitcher in baseball.

A big Cubs fan texted me in the seventh inning. "I'm numb to this. I can't believe what I'm seeing," she wrote. Believe, Cubs fans, believe.
2. The Kyle Hendricks Game. The last Cubs Game 6 of the NLCS went down in history as the Bartman Game. This one will be remembered for the majesty of Hendricks, who grew up in California and went to college at Dartmouth because it was the only school to promise him a baseball starting job as a freshman. He was an eighth-round draft pick, acquired from the Rangers at the trade deadline in 2012 for Ryan Dempster. The Cubs were 43-59 that day. They’d lose 101 games that year in the first year of the Theo Epstein/Jed Hoyer regime.

That trade came together at the last minute. "Was it five [minutes]? It might have been less than that," Hoyer said at the time. "It came down to the end."

Hendricks allowed a hit to the first batter of the game but had retired 17 in a row entering the eighth inning. He threw 88 pitches -- 33 fastballs that danced, 26 changeups that sang, 20 cutters that confused and 9 curveballs that confounded. He was in complete control, calm and efficient. He didn’t walk a batter, flew first-pitch strikes to 17 of the 23 batters he faced, went to just five three-ball counts. And get this: Hendricks and Aroldis Chapman, who got the final five outs, faced the minimum 27 batters, as all three Dodgers baserunners were erased on double plays.

Fly the W.

3. Dexter Fowler delivers. Fowler started the game with a soft double to right field. According to the Statcast guys, a ball hit at that velocity and launch angle goes for a hit only 7 percent of the time. Maybe it is the Cubs’ season after all. In the second inning, Kershaw’s 0-2 fastball got too much of the plate and Fowler grounded a hard single into left field to make it 3-0.

When the Cubs got off to that great start in April, it was Fowler who carried the offense, hitting .347/.474/.613 that month with 19 runs scored. He slumped in June and missed much of July with an injury -- one of the few injuries the Cubs sustained this season -- but has played well again down the stretch. He’s the spark at the top of the lineup before big boys Kris Bryant and Anthony Rizzo come up.

4. We have to talk about Clayton Kershaw. We say all this with the caveat that Kershaw missed more than two months with a herniated disk in his back, so while he seemed healthy during the postseason and his velocity was fine, it’s impossible to know what ramifications there may have been as a result of the injury. He did pitch a gem in Game 2, when he tossed seven shutout innings. But he struggled all of Game 6, unable to put batters away. Here’s what I mean: Through the first three innings, he got to two strikes on 10 batters, but put only two of them away -- Hendricks after a seven-pitch battle, and the free-swinging Baez. During the regular season, when Kershaw got to two strikes, he recorded a strikeout 53 percent of the time.

Look at those at-bats during the first two innings as the Cubs took a 3-0 lead.

First inning

Fowler: 1-1, double
Bryant: 1-2, single
Rizzo: 1-2, ball, foul, error on Toles
Ben Zobrist, 0-2, sac fly
Baez: 0-2, foul, ball, foul, foul, ball, popped up to first
Willson Contreras: 0-2, ball, foul, ball, grounded out to shortstop

That was a 30-pitch first inning. Andrew Toles’ dropped fly ball led to an unearned run, but Kershaw’s inability to put batters away -- like he does so easily in the regular season -- led to balls in play and sometimes bad things happen when balls are put in play. Credit the Cubs, of course, for some good at-bats, fouling off pitching, and running up Kershaw’s pitch count.
Second inning

Russell: 1-2, ball, double

Albert Almora: grounded out

Hendricks: 0-2, ball, ball, ball, foul, strikeout looking

Fowler: 0-2, RBI single to left (out trying to advance)

Once again, Russell doubled with two strikes, and Fowler hit a hard grounder into left on an 0-2 count. After that, Contreras lined a home run in the fourth, and then Anthony Rizzo hit a fastball out in the fifth when Kershaw dropped his arm angle down on him.

Bottom line: Kershaw did not pitch well. He has also been cursed -- that word! -- by a lack of run support. In his four NLCS starts since 2013, the Dodgers have scored the grand total of one run for him. He has had zero margin for error, and he has made some errors.

5. Next up: the Cleveland Indians. You can make a case that this will be the most anticipated World Series ever, with a combined 176 years without a World Series title between the two franchises.

It’s going to be something.

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ESPNChicago.com
From an ex-Cub: How Chicago's 2016 success eases past heartache
By Doug Glanville

The Cubs have carried a curse that would have made King Tut proud, the byproduct of which is a century-old, dust-filled trophy case that now may be filled with the work of this 2016 team.

From spring training on, this team has been the favorite, a strange juxtaposition for an organization that for decades carried a suitcase full of preseason predictions that had it set for dead last. This year, grounded by the calm of manager Joe Maddon, the Cubs embraced history and expectations, fueling a chance to redefine the significance of the organization’s dance with futility.

I was on one team that flirted with legendary emptiness, when in 1997, we started the season 0-14. After loss No. 5, local Cubs media man Dave Kaplan declared he would eat, sleep and “shower” in McDonald’s until the Cubs won. Nine days of his life were spent in fast food hell. The season was not a complete loss; few noticed that we actually played over-.500 ball the rest of the season. But because the season was over before it barely began, I didn’t blame anyone for looking ahead to 1998.

I was drafted by the Cubs in 1991, so by the time I arrived to Wrigley Field in 1996, I had ingested some of this ancient toxicity. I was not a lifelong Cubs fan, but my minor league tenure made me more than just a hired gun like I was when I returned in 2003. My first introduction to professional baseball life was through the lens of Cubs culture. The tone is often set by the organization that drafts and signs you. Yet in any organization, no matter what has happened or how bad the current team may be playing, the future is just that: the future, a true opportunity to change the narrative with fresh blood and the optimism of youth.

Then it got real. Minor league life, at the lower levels, was light-years away from the big leagues. For a while, I didn’t understand the enduring pain, the sciatica of devastating defeat that shot down the legs of Cubs fans. But I did understand well that I could be part of the antidote, by looking toward a future of success, albeit hypothetical, since I was not in a major league uniform at the time. I was developing, not producing, which gave me enough Teflon-coated naïveté to dismiss curses. Especially since I was always nice to goats.
Then, when I was put on the major league roster, it became real, palpable. Expectations, history, future, it slaps you in the face when you walk in the major league locker room in spring training for the first time (or as a September call-up). As longtime Cubs front-office man Larry Himes would say, "You can see and feel the swagger in these locker rooms, it drips off of players." I walked into spring training and saw my jersey hanging next to Ryne Sandberg’s, and no matter what the history, no matter how many Strat-O-Matic baseball games I played with Ryno hitting triples for my team, I was here now, imperatively unaware enough to believe I would write my own future as the decade-long center fielder for my Chicago Cubs. After all, as a minor leaguer with a great passion for baseball history, I looked around the room and saw great players, not a cemetery of the damned. Mark Grace (.300 hitter), Shawon Dunston (rocket arm), Randy Myers (lockdown closer), Sandberg (future Hall of Famer). Everyone was awesome, so why not us? Like any other major league team, we had All-Stars, we had first-rounders, we had guys like the late Jessie Hollins who could light up the radar gun. Who could beat these guys? They were the best I had ever seen in one room.

So it was a good thing that I, or any young player, didn't have the burden of the past to cloud what my optimism told me about my future and this organization's future. This is the gift of youth, something the 2016 team has despite its ability to play like veterans. As Theo Epstein shared with me before a game last season, "If you can find that balance of superior talent and maturity beyond his years, you have a star and winning player, for a long time." He found it in Kris Bryant, Anthony Rizzo, Addison Russell, Javier Baez ...

In 1996, I was called up, a center fielder set to play left field in my debut at Wrigley Field. I was playing a position that was foreign to me to fill a void. A team lesson: Play where you can help this team the most. Bryant went into 2016 being a super-utility player, not just a third baseman, and he may win MVP because of it. My being out of position did not secure me a long-term future as a Cub because I was a speedy defender who was not going to hit 30 home runs as a corner outfielder. But at least, I was in the lineup.

By 1997, I was correct about running into career-development issues, as Cubs GM Ed Lynch would eventually say to me at the end of my .300-hitting first full season. "We tried to give the starting job to everyone else but you, and to your credit, you rose above."

I would get traded that offseason, interrupting my tenure as a Cub. I learned other team cultures -- the Phillies, the Rangers, even the Yankees in 2004 spring training. All had their own issues and challenges, with various levels of success.

By the time I came back in 2003, I had seen a lot; I had experienced different baseball languages and societies. The attention to detail under Buck Showalter in Texas; the lax, full-loving, chill-fest of Terry Francona in Philadelphia; the high-octane, frenetic emotion off the rails under Larry Bowa, also in Philadelphia; the slithering life of the party and confidence-evoking wisdom of Dusty Baker in Chicago; all after Jim Riggleman in Chicago.

I was back, but I was a different player, a different person. I had lost my father at the end of 2002; I was down a hamstring tendon from surgery earlier in the year; the evidence was in of what kind of player I was. The future was visible, no longer a dream. Even though it was the same Cubs uniform, 12 years after my first-round draft-pick status from 1991.

Yet I had a lot left to play for. Things I didn't understand as a young prospect during my rookie campaign in 1996. Family, my father's memory, debunking mythology, a second chance at what could have been if I played my entire career as a Cub. Bartman? Curse? No, what we all experience, life and loss, yet still with a chance at rebirth, redemption, honor.

My graying in the game forced me to intake more than just the final score of a game. There was too much at stake at that point, and when we lost, I lay motionless in my apartment for 24 hours, trying to reconcile the level of exhaustion with taking the next step into tomorrow. Tired for the city, tired for the organization, tired from sitting on every pitch since I was traded over at the trade deadline in July.

Maybe the 2016 Cubs don't know those stories. Player to player. Man to man. And maybe they shouldn't. They have overcome the invisible hurdle that eluded my 2003 team. Closing out a 3-2 lead, playing at home with the
rotation set as well as it could be set. Something we could not accomplish behind the elite arms of Mark Prior and Kerry Wood.

They delivered, and what we instantly come to understand is the necessity of the prior journey. It tastes sweeter after all this time; we now see fine wine in the bottle instead of rat poison adorned with skull and crossbones. It has aged appropriately and better yet, they will celebrate with their teammates and with generations of fans, players and staff who were part of the process that Joe Maddon so often talks about. As Maddon told me when asked if his team were a wine, what kind it would be:

"A blend. Robust and full-bodied. Complex flavors, well-rounded, with a strong finish."

I could never take credit for the success of the 2016 Cubs in any direct sense, but our pain from 2003 has ripened, helping us all reinterpret the events that led to this point. History has been rewritten, or maybe we've just been patient enough to let history become our present.

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ESPNChicago.com
Scouting Kyle Schwarber in the AFL: Can he help the Cubs?
By Christopher Crawford

The Chicago Cubs have one of the best young lineups in baseball, and as everyone on the planet knows by now, they're headed to the World Series for the first time in 71 years.

And they just might be getting another key piece to their lineup.

Outfielder Kyle Schwarber has been out since April 7 after tearing his ACL, and he was presumed to be lost for the remainder of the 2016 season. That could all be changing, however, as Schwarber has been added to the Mesa Solar Sox roster in the Arizona Fall League, and there's a real chance he could be added to the Cubs' World Series roster before Tuesday's game against Cleveland.

In his first action in six-plus months, Schwarber went 0-for-3 with a walk, but that's only part of the story. I had a chance to speak with an AL scout who attended the game, and he had positive -- but cautious -- things to say about the left-handed hitter.

"The timing is just a little bit off," the scout said. "But that's to be expected; this guy hasn't played in a game since April. He still showed quality bat speed, he appeared to recognize pitches well, and he's always a threat with the long ball. As talented as this young man is, it wouldn't surprise me at all if he's ready to contribute with the bat in a couple of days."

How Schwarber would fit is intriguing, and potentially less problematic than you might think. The Cubs will have the DH available for the first two games of the series and (potentially) the last two, so you don't have to worry about him defensively. He wasn't exactly a defensive star before the injury, and he certainly won't play defense in the games at Wrigley Field, but he's a potential weapon off the bench late in games. At the very least, Cleveland would have to be careful about using right-handed relievers, knowing that Schwarber is just a substitution away. Also keep in mind that the Cubs are currently carrying three catchers and have a ton of roster versatility, so they don't have to worry as much about late-game decisions knowing they have a non-option on defense.

It's a risk -- and no decision will be made on Schwarber until after Sunday's simulated game -- but Schwarber could be a major addition to the Cubs' lineup in the first two games, one they weren't expecting to see on the field until 2017.

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Chicago Cubs fans hoping to see the first World Series title of their lifetime are driving up ticket prices. And it doesn’t help that most Cleveland Indians fans haven’t seen their team hoist a trophy, either.

The Cubs are hoping to win their first title since 1908, while the Indians have been waiting since 1948.

As of Sunday morning, the average ticket sold on StubHub for Games 3, 4 and 5 at Wrigley Field in Chicago was more than $3,000.

One fan bought four seats in a bullpen box along the first-base line for Game 5 for $17,950 each. A pair of seats was also purchased on StubHub for $16,000 a ticket for Games 3 and 4 -- one by the Cubs' dugout, the other one by the Indians' dugout.

The highest total transaction on World Series seats on StubHub was for a Game 7 at Cleveland's Progressive Field. A fan bought four tickets in the first row behind the Cubs' dugout for $24,500 each, including fees. If a Game 7 isn't necessary, the sale will be negated, and the buyer will receive a refund for the cost of the seats and fees.

What remains to be seen is whether the hottest ticket market in baseball history will sustain. When the Cubs clinched Saturday night, the cheapest ticket to get into Game 1 in Cleveland on StubHub was $1,090. By Sunday morning, one could be found for $850. Listed ticket prices to Game 3 in Chicago didn't move up after the Cubs recorded their final out, with the cheapest standing-room ticket hovering around $2,275.

Cubs hoping Kyle Schwarber could DH in World Series

CHICAGO -- The Cubs haven't ruled out a possible return from injured slugger Kyle Schwarber for the World Series.

Schwarber, who tore two ligaments in his left knee in just the third game of the regular season, has been cleared by doctors to hit. He joined the Mesa Solar Sox in the Arizona Fall League on Saturday.

"It was a pleasant surprise," Cubs president Theo Epstein said before Game 6 of the National League Championship Series, in which the Cubs beat the Dodgers 5-0 to advance to the World Series. "We got news that was better than expected."

After Schwarber received clearance from his doctor in Dallas on Monday, the outfielder immediately called Epstein to plead his case.

"He asked for a chance to do this," Epstein said. "With as hard as Kyle has worked and as much as this means to him -- and potentially us -- we wanted to give him that opportunity."

The team hopes Schwarber will be available to be its designated hitter for World Series games in Cleveland. The Indians will host Game 1 of the World Series on Tuesday.

"We're going to evaluate him day to day from a medical standpoint and a baseball standpoint," Epstein said.

Schwarber flew from Dallas to Los Angeles on Monday afternoon and hit in the batting cage. He then took batting practice with the Cubs at Dodger Stadium on Tuesday. By Thursday, he was taking batting practice at the team's spring facility in Mesa, Arizona.
He hit second in the order for Mesa in Saturday night's Arizona Fall League game, going 0 for 3 with a walk as the designated hitter. He watched the Cubs face the Dodgers on a tablet in the dugout between at-bats.

Epstein said Schwarber's only medical concern at the moment is "blisters" after taking so much batting practice. He'll wear a knee brace during games.

"He's made it to a best-case scenario after six months," Epstein said. "We're not ruling anything in; we're not ruling anything out. We're not getting ahead of ourselves. We have a lot of work here before this becomes pertinent."

Schwarber burst onto the scene last year, hitting 16 home runs after being called up from Triple-A Iowa. He then hit another five in the playoffs to become the Cubs' all-time postseason home run leader.

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ESPNChicago.com
Cubs' Albert Almora Jr. to replace Jason Heyward in RF in Game 6
By Bradford Doolittle

CHICAGO -- The Chicago Cubs will throw one of their youngest players into the fray against the Los Angeles Dodgers' Clayton Kershaw on Saturday in Game 6 of the National League Division Series. The Cubs need only one more win to advance to their first World Series in 71 years.

Cubs manager Joe Maddon has inserted rookie Albert Almora Jr., 22, into the lineup in right field in place of veteran Jason Heyward. Almora, who bats right handed, is 0-for-6 in the postseason in limited action, primarily as a defensive replacement.

"Kershaw is pretty good," Maddon said coyly. "You look at his numbers, they're absurd against lefties. Get another right-handed bat out there, [and] the way Albert can play defense really makes it a little bit easier. Chose him over [Jorge] Soler. I think Albert is swinging the bat well. I like his defense a lot."

Almora hit .277 with three homers in 47 games during the regular season. He also wowed with highlight-reel defense.

Heyward, who signed an eight-year, $184 million free-agent deal with the Cubs last winter, has struggled at the plate all season, though his defense and base running have helped keep him in the lineup. He is just 2-for-28 in the postseason, including a 1-for-16 showing against the Dodgers. His career numbers against Kershaw are even less encouraging: 0-for-12 with seven strikeouts.

"He's struggling, obviously," Maddon said. "He keeps working. We have a lot of faith in him. If we didn't have the opportunity to do something differently tonight, I wouldn't have. But we do. Albert just presents well at the plate and well on defense to the point where I thought we need to give it a go."

Maddon suggested that Heyward might need to use the offseason to recapture his once dangerous swing. He hit .281 over the previous two seasons before sinking to .230 in 2016.

"There's going to be a lot of internal work done with him in the offseason, no question," Maddon said. "You know he's not satisfied with the year. But he keeps going out there and, again, he's a big part of our 100-plus wins this year."

The Dodgers, in search of a spark on offense, also switched up their lineup Saturday, putting rookie Andrew Toles in the leadoff spot and dropping veteran Chase Utley to the No. 8 spot.

Toles did not start a game as the Dodgers' leadoff hitter this season and had just one at-bat from that spot. Utley was the Dodgers' leadoff hitter 112 times this season, holding the job primarily with a right-handed pitcher on the mound.
Toles was a third-round draft pick in 2012, and he made his major league debut on July 8, 2016. But the outfielder was sent back down at the end of July and returned Aug. 21, batting .313 with a .567 slugging percentage over his past 32 games with the Dodgers.

Aside from the Toles/Utley switch, the Dodgers mostly stuck to their lineup against right-handed pitching. Corey Seager will follow Toles, with Justin Turner batting third. Adrian Gonzalez is the Dodgers’ cleanup hitter, with Josh Reddick, Joc Pederson and Yasmani Grandal to follow. Kershaw will bat after Utley in the No. 9 spot.

ESPN’s Doug Padilla contributed to this report.

CSNChicago.com
Holy Cow: Cubs Advance To World Series For First Time Since 1945
By Tony Andracki

The Cubs are going to the World Series.

Yes, you read that right.

The Cubs are going to the World Series.

The Curse of the Billy Goat is broken.

The 71-year drought is over.

The truly once-in-a-lifetime moment has finally come to Chicago.

Holy cow.

The Cubs punched their ticket to the promised land with a 5-0 victory over the Los Angeles Dodgers and the Best Pitcher on the Planet in front of 42,386 fans in the most euphoric moment in Wrigley Field's history.

"Being from Illinois, there's so many people - my family members included, friends that I grew up with - that right now are just glued to this, getting a chance to experience something that hasn't happened in their lifetime," said Ben Zobrist, a native of Eureka, Ill. "I couldn't be happier to be a part of it."

Theo Epstein's vision is one step closer to coming to fruition.

"History doesn't really weigh on this club," Epstein said before Saturday's Game 6. "Just trying to win tonight's game.

"These guys - a lot of them are in their early 20s and they're not burdened by that stuff. The organization isn't. It's just about trying to win and keeping it simple."

The Cubs drew first blood off Clayton Kershaw, keeping with the tradition of the team that scores first winning the game in this National League Championship Series.

After waiting until two outs in the fifth of Kershaw's Game 2 start to get their first baserunner, the Cubs jumped on him early as Dexter Fowler laced the third pitch down the right field line for a leadoff double.

Kris Bryant followed with an RBI single and then Andrew Toles dropped Anthony Rizzo's fly ball in left field and just like that, the Cubs were up 1-0 and had runners on second and third with nobody out.

Ben Zobrist drilled a sac fly to center field and the Cubs moved to the second with a critical two-run lead.
From there, they added on with a Fowler RBI single in the second, a Willson Contreras homer in the fourth and then a Rizzo solo blast in the fifth.

Kershaw allowed only two singles to the Cubs in seven shutout innings in Game 2, but lasted just five innings in the NLCS clincher, surrendering five runs (four earned) on seven hits.

The Cubs felt they let too many good pitches go by in the early count in the previous Kershaw start, so they vowed to be more aggressive this time around and it paid off.

Kyle Hendricks was brilliant on the mound, allowing only two hits in 7.1 shutout innings. He struck out six, didn't walk a batter and was so dominant, the Wrigley crowd actually booed Joe Maddon when the manager came out to make a pitching change and call for closer Aroldis Chapman.

After getting shut out in back-to-back games and going down 2-1 in the series, the Cubs battled back and scored 23 runs over the final three games to punch a ticket to the World Series.

The Cubs will head to Cleveland to take on the Indians in Game 1 of the World Series Tuesday night.

Games 3, 4 and 5 (if needed) will be back at Wrigley next Friday, Saturday and Sunday for what would figure to be the craziest Halloween weekend Chicago has ever seen.

"Listen, there's another trophy we want," Cubs GM Jed Hoyer said. "There's another step along the road, but to take a little time and appreciate something that hasn't been done in 71 years. You look at the way these people are celebrating, it's awesome.

"A couple times, they showed pictures outside [Wrigley]. I remember when I got here, they showed clips of '03 and what it was like outside and you think to yourself, 'Now they can actually celebrate.'"

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CSNChicago.com 
The New Cubs Are Out To Write Their Own History
By Patrick Mooney

The Cubs felt so nervous just before a 7:09 first pitch on Saturday night that Javier Baez found the camera looking into the home dugout, waved with a big smile and started pumping his fist, hammering it up for the video board as Aerosmith's “Sweet Emotion” blasted through the Wrigley Field sound system.

The Cubs then ran out onto the field and systematically destroyed the Los Angeles Dodgers, ending this National League Championship Series in six games with a 5-0 win that featured almost no tension or suspense, obliterating for now the narrative around this franchise.

The old stadium still kept shaking, from Kris Bryant’s RBI single in the first inning to the clapping to Anthony Rizzo’s “Intoxicated” walk-up music to a standing ovation for Kyle Hendricks, who outpitched the supposed best pitcher on the planet in Clayton Kershaw.

“We don’t care about history,” Bryant said. “This is a completely different team, different people all around. It doesn’t matter. This is a new Chicago Cubs team. And we are certainly a very confident group.”

Sure, 1908 will hover over the entire World Series, which begins Tuesday night against the Cleveland Indians at Progressive Field. But this is the new normal for Bryant, who within two years has won 200 games, four playoff rounds, a Rookie of the Year award and probably MVP hardware.

This team isn’t going away, either. With a chance to win the pennant for the first time since the Truman administration, the Cubs started two rookies who began this season at Triple-A Iowa – catcher Willson Contreras
and outfielder Albert Almora Jr. — in a lineup that featured Bryant (24), Rizzo (27), Baez (23), Addison Russell (22) and Hendricks (26).

Contreras caught a shutout and posed for a moment at home plate watching his line-drive homer off Kershaw fly into the left-field bleachers in the fourth inning. Rizzo — who had looked overmatched earlier in the playoffs — became the first left-handed hitter to homer off Kershaw during this calendar year.

And when Rizzo tried to wave off Baez for the ball Josh Reddick popped up to the right side of the infield in the fifth inning, Baez cut right in front of Rizzo to catch it, continuing a long-running gag among the Cubs infielders.

“I don’t think they’re oblivious, because that’s sort of insulting in some ways,” general manager Jed Hoyer said. “They know the history. I just don’t think they care. They think they’re a good team and they love to play. And we have some guys that definitely shine on the big stage.”

Baez — a September call-up last year who couldn’t get an everyday spot during the regular season — showed off his bat speed and unbelievable defensive instincts and emerged as the NLCS co-MVP along with big-game pitcher Jon Lester. Sold on the idea of all this young talent someday coming together, Lester joined a last-place team after the 2014 season, taking a leap of faith, even at $155 million.

“I don’t feel like there’s pressure at all in our clubhouse,” said Almora, the first player Theo Epstein’s front office drafted here in 2012. “There’s just hunger and excitement and desire to win.

“None of us were around in 1945...so we just got to write our own history.”

This is what the Cubs have been talking about since the New York Mets swept them out of last year’s NLCS, since the Ricketts family invested almost $290 million more in free agents, since unconventional manager Joe Maddon made “Embrace The Target” the theme of spring training.

Whatever your preconceived notions of the old Cubs are, know that this group has an amazing sense of balance. They are youthful and experienced. They play as a team and with individual flair. They have style and get dirty. They are analytical and sort of oblivious. They are loose and intense. And the ending hasn’t been written yet.

“We still got a long ways to go,” Lester said. “We’ll enjoy tonight — don’t get me wrong — we’ll have a celebration. We’ll have a good time. We’ll smile, we’ll hug each other, probably get drunk a little bit...but we got some work to do.”

CSNChicago.com
Kyle Hendricks Outduels Clayton Kershaw And Delivers Legendary Performance That Puts Cubs In World Series
By Patrick Mooney

John Hendricks sent a text message to his son at 11:24 a.m. on Saturday: “Good luck tonight!! Remember, great mechanics and preparation will prevail. Just let it go!!” It ended with three emoji: a smiley face with sunglasses, the thumbs-up sign and a flexed biceps.

The Cubs have bonded fathers and sons for generations, and Hendricks immediately understood what it meant for his boy when the Cubs traded Ryan Dempster to the Texas Rangers minutes before the deadline on July 31, 2012, telling Kyle: “You win in this city, you will be a legend. There is no doubt about it. This is the greatest sports town in the United States.”

This is the intoxicating lure of the Cubs. It didn’t matter that Kyle had been an eighth-round pick out of Dartmouth College, and hadn’t yet finished his first full season in professional baseball, and would be joining an organization enduring a 101-loss season, the third of five straight fifth-place finishes.
Kyle’s low-key personality will never get him confused with an ’85 Bear, but he delivered a legendary performance in Game 6, outpitching Clayton Kershaw at the end of this National League Championship Series and leading the Cubs to the World Series for the first time in 71 years.

Five outs away from the pennant, a raucous crowd of 42,386 at Wrigley Field actually booed star manager Joe Maddon when he walked out to the mound to take the ball from Kyle and bring in closer Aroldis Chapman. Kyle, the silent assassin, did briefly raise his hand to acknowledge the standing ovation before descending the dugout steps.

After a 5-0 win, Kyle stood in roughly the same spot with Nike goggles on his head and finally looked a little rattled, his body shivering and teeth chattering in the cold, his Cubs gear soaked from the champagne-and-beer celebration.

“It’s always been an uphill climb for me, honestly,” Kyle said. “But that really has nothing to do with getting guys out. My focus from Day 1 — even when I was young, high school, college, all the way up until now — all it’s been is trying to make good pitches.

“And as we moved up, you just saw that good pitches get good hitters out.”

At a time when the game is obsessed with velocity and showing off for the radar gun, Kyle knows how to pitch, putting the ball where he wants when he wants, avoiding the hot zones that lead to trouble, mixing his changeups, fastballs and curveball in an unpredictable way that takes advantage of the team’s intricate scouting system and keeps hitters completely off-balance.

“Kyle didn’t even give them any air or any hope,” general manager Jed Hoyer said.

Amid the celebration, scouting/player-development chief Jason McLeod spotted Kyle’s dad and yelled at John: “You f------ called it!” John — who once worked in the Angels ticket office and as a golf pro in Southern California — had moved to Chicago two years ago to work for his good friend’s limo company and watch his son pitch at Wrigley Field. John had told McLeod that Kyle would one day help the Cubs win a championship.

“That was one of the best pitching performances I’ve ever seen,” McLeod said. “Ever.”

The media framed Kyle as The Other Pitcher, even though he won the ERA title this season, with all the pregame buzz surrounding Kershaw, the three-time Cy Young Award winner and 2014 NL MVP. Except Kershaw gave up five runs and got knocked out after five innings, while Kyle only gave up two singles to the 23 batters he faced, finishing with six strikeouts against zero walks and looking like he had even more left in the tank at 88 pitches.

“It was incredible,” Ben Zobrist said. “That was the easiest postseason game we’ve had yet and it was the clincher to go to the World Series.

“He’s just so good, so mature for his age. He just has a knack to put the ball where he needs to. He’s smart and he’s clutch. He deserves to win the Cy Young this year.”

Where Kershaw’s presence loomed over the entire playoffs, Kyle has always been underestimated, coming into this season as a fourth or fifth starter with something to prove, and even he didn’t see all this coming. But big-game pitchers can come in all shapes and sizes and don’t have to throw 97 mph.

“He wants the ball,” John said. “Every big game — I don’t care if it was Little League or wherever — he wants the ball. Plain and simple, (he’ll) get the job done.”
Two quick runs off the best pitcher on the planet on Saturday night afforded the Cubs exactly what they needed to snap a 71-year-old drought.

Already confident after consecutive offensive outbursts in the previous two games, a two-run first inning against Clayton Kershaw had Cubs hitters in a positive frame of mind.

They rode the surprising rally and a dominant performance by Kyle Hendricks to a 5-0 victory over the Los Angeles Dodgers at Wrigley Field in Game 6 of the National League Championship Series. The win earned the Cubs their first NL pennant since 1945 and on Tuesday night they’ll seek their first World Series title since 1908 when they face the Cleveland Indians in Game 1.

“It’s huge for the confidence, the positive momentum from LA, to carry over back home,” left fielder Ben Zobrist said. “Those were the biggest moments in the game early on to help everybody keep pushing and that we got this thing --- that we’re in charge of the game early. That’s a huge momentum builder.”

The Cubs did a little bit of everything in the first inning against Kershaw, who dominated them for seven scoreless frames in a 1-0 Dodgers victory in Game 2 on Sunday night. Some hitters took a more aggressive approach against the three-time NL Cy Young winner while others remained patient. The one constant throughout the 30-pitch frame was that Cubs hitters took advantage whenever Kershaw made a mistake.

Dexter Fowler started with an opposite-field double on a 1-1 slider and Wrigley was rocking when Kris Bryant singled him in to make it 1-0. Andrew Tolles’ error on Anthony Rizzo’s gapper to left center put runners on second and third. Zobrist took advantage and put the Cubs ahead by two with a sac fly to center.

“I think the boys were just ready to go,” Fowler said.

The confidence gained from 18 runs scored in the fourth and fifth games of the series was evident before the Cubs ever took the field. Players looked loose during pregame warmups, whether it was Albert Almora Jr. and several teammates banging air drums to Phil Collins’ ‘In The Air Tonight’ or Javy Baez pumping his fist to a loud beat mere seconds before the Cubs took the field.

The confidence carried over as the two runs represented the first time all season that Kershaw had allowed a pair to score in the first inning.

“They jumped on it,” catcher Miguel Montero said. “They were all over his fastball and they spit on his breaking ball.

“We felt good coming into the game knowing that we were facing the best pitcher on the planet. But we felt good about ourselves because we got the lead.”

Dodgers manager Dave Roberts thought the key was that the Cubs took advantage of Kershaw’s mistakes as opposed to his previous start when he allowed two hits. Addison Russell kept the pressure on Kershaw when he ripped a hanging slider for a leadoff double in the second inning and he later scored on Fowler’s two-out single to left.

Rookie catcher Willson Contreras crushed a hanging slider for a solo homer in the fourth inning to make it a 4-0 lead.

“They had a great game plan tonight,” Roberts said. “And there was a couple mistake sliders that they took advantage of. But they were running counts, they used the whole field, and there was traffic all night for Clayton. And he gave it everything he had, but when they did -- when he did make a mistake, they made him pay.”
Rizzo gave the Cubs an even bigger lead when he hammered a 1-1 fastball from Kershaw in the fifth inning for a solo homer and a 5-0 lead. Combined with the dominance of Hendricks, the cushion made any talk about curses or billy goats or five outs seem downright silly.

“It felt really good, amazing,” Rizzo said. “We were on the board and I tell our pitchers all the time, ‘If you don’t let ‘em score, it’s impossible (for them) to win.’”

CSNChicago.com
Javier Baez’s Surge Of Playoff Highlights, And Co-Nlcs Mvp Honors, No Surprise To Cubs Teammates
By JJ Stankevitz

In a way, it was fitting the Cubs secured the final out they needed to end a 71-year World Series drought on another spectacular play by Javier Baez.

With one out in the top of the ninth, Los Angeles Dodgers pinch hitter Yasiel Puig chopped a grounder to shortstop Addison Russell, who fielded it and threw to Baez at second base with Carlos Ruiz bearing down on the bag.

Baez played the pivot perfectly and fired a missile to first baseman Anthony Rizzo to earn the Cubs their first National League pennant since 1945.

“To be honest, we only want to get one man,” Russell said. “If we get two, that’s sweetening the pot. And we got two.”

Baez, along with starter Jon Lester, was named as a National League Championship Series co-MVP as Wrigley Field shook in a raucous celebration. His barrage of highlight-reel plays grew from stunning to expected with each one, like when he fielded a ground ball, hustled to tag out Andrew Toles and fired to first for a mesmerizing double play in the first inning.

The Cubs have always known Baez has the instincts and baseball I.Q. to be a defensive whiz no matter where he plays, but to do it on this stage as a 23-year-old who a year ago was a utility guy who struck out too much and only appeared in 28 regular season games makes it that much more impressive.

“This guy never faltered, he accepted his role as being a bench player and kind of a platoon guy, that’s hard to do at 20 or whatever he is,” Lester said. “You can ask (catcher David Ross) about that, he did that at an older age where he kind of had to accept the backup role. It’s a hard thing to do, it’s a hard thing to swallow your pride. This guy did it, he put the team first, and to be anywhere we’re at right now, to be a part with him and to be named that is very humbling for me, because I know where he was at, what he’s been through, and the struggle he’s gone through the last two years.”

Added Lester: “I know this is kind of the tip of the iceberg for him.”

Starter Kyle Hendricks, who dazzled over 7 1/3 innings of shutout, facing-the-minimum ball, said Baez’s first-inning double play helped calm things down and give the Cubs some momentum for what could’ve been a nervy evening at Wrigley Field.

“He’s the most natural baseball player I’ve ever seen play the game,” Hendricks said. “His instincts in game are just top notch. And that was another play today that was huge. The first guy getting on, to make that play and turn that double play set such a tone for the game.”

Baez did make an uncharacteristic error in the second inning, bobbling a rolling ground ball off the bat of Josh Roddick to allow the Dodgers right fielder to reach (he was picked off shortly thereafter). But that turned out to only be a blip on Baez’s evening, which started and ended with those impressive double plays.
“When he goes out there he’s not afraid of making a mistake, and that’s big thing when you get players that are en masse not concerned about making mistakes, really good stuff can happen,” manager Joe Maddon said. “That’s, he leads the pack with that.”

While the Cubs marveled at Baez’s transcendent play in the National League Division Series and the NLCS, everyone on the team, and in Wrigley Field on Saturday and watching on TV, is waiting to see what he can do for a World Series encore.

“Everybody loves Javy. I love Javy,” catcher Willson Contreras said. “He’s an unbelievable player, and unbelievable athlete, and I know that it isn’t over yet. He will do it one more time.”

CSNChicago.com
Why Joe Maddon Chose Albert Almora Jr. Over Jason Heyward In Huge Game 6 For Cubs
By Patrick Mooney

With the chance to book their first trip to the World Series since 1945, the Cubs benched the player with the biggest contract in franchise history and started a 22-year-old rookie who began this season at Triple-A Iowa.

Now that says something about Clayton Kershaw’s overall brilliance and Albert Almora Jr.’s precocious nature, but it also again spotlights Jason Heyward’s offensive spiral during the first year of that $184 million megadeal.

Heyward’s Gold Glove defense in right field, well-rounded skills and clubhouse intangibles certainly helped the Cubs get to this point – up 3-2 on the Los Angeles Dodgers in the National League Championship Series – but manager Joe Maddon wanted to go in a different direction for Saturday’s Game 6 at Wrigley Field.

“Kershaw’s pretty good,” Maddon said. “You look at his numbers, he’s been absurd versus lefties, (so you) get another right-handed bat out there and the way Albert can play defense really makes it a little bit easier.

“If we didn’t have the opportunity to do something differently tonight I wouldn’t have. But we do. Albert just presents well at the plate – and well on defense – to the point where I thought we needed to give it a go.”

Almora – the first player the Theo Epstein regime drafted here with the sixth overall pick in 2012 – could be the 2017 Opening Day starter in center field if Dexter Fowler cashes in elsewhere as a free agent.

After posting career lows in homers (seven) and OPS (.631) during the regular season, Heyward has gone 2-for-28 (.071 average) in the playoffs and will probably need to reboot during the winter.

“I’m sure there’s going to be a lot of internal work done in the offseason with him, no question,” Maddon said. “You know he’s not satisfied with the year. (But) he was a big part of our 100-plus wins this year.

“It is something that he has to work on – and he will work on it – but by no means is anybody giving up on him. He just needs to probably clear his mind a little bit when this is all said and done and get back to the drawing board.”

CSNChicago.com
Cubs Hoping Kyle Schwarber Can Make World Series Comeback
By Patrick Mooney

As if the possibility of clinching their first National League pennant in 71 years didn’t create enough drama and excitement in Wrigleyville, the Cubs have sent Kyle Schwarber to the Arizona Fall League, hoping he can add another chapter to his October legend.
Schwarber earned this chance after beating every expectation in his recovery from major surgery on his left knee in April. The Cubs haven’t ruled anything in or out – and still need to take care of business against the Los Angeles Dodgers this weekend – but they want to see how he responds on Saturday with the Mesa Solar Sox and ultimately decide if he would be a viable designated-hitter option for the World Series.

Schwarber gained clearance on Monday from Dr. Daniel Cooper, the head team physician for the Dallas Cowboys who reconstructed his ACL and repaired his LCL after a brutal outfield collision during the first week of the regular season. Schwarber immediately phoned Theo Epstein after the six-month checkup. The Cubs president anticipated getting a better idea of when the left-handed slugger might start hitting and eventually play winter ball.

“I wasn’t expecting the call,” Epstein said. “We got news that was beyond better than we could have expected by any reasonable standard.

“He asked for a chance to do this. With as hard as Kyle has worked and as much as this means to him – and potentially to us – we wanted to give him that opportunity.”

Schwarber flew from Dallas on Monday to Los Angeles, where he hit in the cage at Dodger Stadium that night. As the NL Championship Series unfolded, Schwarber hit again on Tuesday and then left for Arizona on Wednesday to ramp up his baseball activities and prove whether or not he could again be a difference-maker in October.

Schwarber, the No. 4 overall pick in the 2014 draft out of Indiana University, generated 16 home runs in 69 games last season and then set a franchise record with five homers in the playoffs. The Cleveland Indians would have to account for that kind of lineup presence in potential World Series Games 1, 2, 6 and 7 at Progressive Field, plus the pinch-hit opportunities to drive another ball onto a Wrigley Field video board.

“We’ll see where this goes,” Epstein said. “We’re not getting ahead of ourselves. We have a lot of work to do here before this becomes pertinent on a short-term basis. But it’s a testament to how hard Kyle has worked to even be in this position where it’s a possibility.”

The Cubs still have to deal with Clayton Kershaw on Saturday night in Game 6, and then judge whether or not this layoff is too long, even for one of their best young hitters, especially against Cleveland’s dynamic bullpen.

Schwarber has been working out with a brace on his left knee, taking live batting practice on Friday in Mesa against James Farris, a Cubs prospect in the Arizona Fall League. The Cubs will have scouts watching Schwarber, who’s supposed to call Epstein and the team’s medical staff again on Saturday night with an update. The Cubs have already received good reports on Schwarber’s agility tests, watching him running, cutting and changing directions.

“He’s so passionate about baseball,” Epstein said. “He’s just been behind the scenes working his tail off and managing to stay part of the team. Physically, he’s on an accelerated timetable. And from a baseball standpoint, certainly, he’s only got about a week or so to get ready. But mentally, he’s been preparing for this for six months.

“He’s been doing advance scouting. He’s been watching how pitchers attack hitters. He’s been studying his own video. He’s been studying opposing video, so mentally he’s been preparing for this for a long time and has been itching to contribute.

“Just the fact that he’s gotten to this point is a testament to his character. He’s got everyone in the organization pulling for him.”

This is all goes back to how the Cubs drafted Schwarber when some in the industry viewed him as a DH and a reach that high in the first round, or why he became untouchable when the New York Yankees kept asking about him before trading lights-out reliever Andrew Miller to the Indians.

The Cubs will never bet against Schwarber.

“Typically guys need much longer to get their timing and get ready,” Epstein said. “But I wouldn’t put anything past Kyle.”
Chicago Tribune
Won for the ages: After years of waiting and suffering, Cubs are in World Series
By Paul Sullivan

One drought down, one to go.

Wrigleyville erupted in a joyous celebration Saturday night when the Cubs' 71-year World Series wait at long last came to an end. When Yasiel Puig hit into a double play for the final outs of Saturday night's 5-0 victory over the Dodgers in Game 6 of the National League Championship Series, the Cubs sealed a date with the Indians in the 2016 Fall Classic, beginning Tuesday night in Cleveland.

It's OK to say it out loud now, Chicago. The Cubs are National League champions. The Cubs are in the World Series for the first time since 1945.

Let those words sink in for a few days before the games — and all the trepidation and anxiety they will bring — begin Tuesday. For now, it's time for Cubs fans to raise a glass to the millions who never got to say that simple sentence:

The Cubs are in the World Series.

While you're at it, offer up a toast to Cubs President Theo Epstein, whose master plan is almost complete. Cubs Nation now holds its breath and hopes this truly is the year it can cross the No. 1 item off its collective bucket list — ending the 107-year championship drought, the longest in sports history.

It has been a long hard journey, but Epstein credited Cubs fans for having the patience to let the plan succeed.

"We were transparent with them and they trusted us in return," Epstein said. "Those are unique ingredients that make this one special. You just smile, soak it all in, let it take your breath away and then get back to work and try and win four more games."

With Wrigley Field up for grabs and the fans spilling into the streets, manager Joe Maddon was asked if he ever has seen anything like it.

"I haven't," Maddon said with a laugh. "Maybe when Hazleton beat West Hazleton in football, but otherwise? No difference."

The Cubs celebrated out on the field with elan. Justin Grimm pickpocketed a beer out of Jake Arrieta's back pocket, and Willson Contreras jumped into David Ross' arms like a 6-year-old jumping on his bed.

The bubble of fun was just starting.

"It's hard to put this into words, there has been so much emotion over the years from this fan base," Ben Zobrist said. "It's not just Chicago, it's not just Illinois. It's all over the country. I know they're watching all over the country and all over the world.

"What a special moment. We've been wanting to do this for the fans all year long, and now that we've accomplished the National League championship, it's time to move on to bigger things. The ultimate goal is still out in front of us."

Former Cubs great Billy Williams said he thought about former teammates Ernie Banks and Ron Santo as the Cubs celebrated the final out.
"They wanted to see this kind of thing happen, going to the World Series" Williams said. "It has been 108 years (since they won it). The fans waited a long time, they had a long time to celebrate, and they're going to pitch a big party tonight."

How long?

"All night and all day," he said.

If one picture alone could describe the last seven decades of frustration, it would be Norman Rockwell's 1948 classic "The Dugout," with long-faced Cubs slouching while fans in the box seats heckled them. The Cubs were only three years removed from the World Series, but the painting became prophetic.

Some cities debate which of their teams was the greatest in franchise history. Cubs fans compare epic collapses from 1969, '84 and '03.

The only antidotes to years of waiting for "next year" were another Old Style, a frosty malt and a kosher dog. The cheapest seats became the trendiest when the Bleacher Bums arrived in the 1960s, but being a Cubs fan was always an interactive experience, whether it was throwing packets of tobacco onto the field after Hank Sauer home runs or tossing Oh Henry! bars in the air whenever Henry Rodriguez smoked one.

They continue to throw baseballs back whenever an opposing player hits a home run, a tradition that spread to other parks.

Despite the years of losing, there was always some comic relief to help mask the pain. A chirping cricket kept outfielder Jose Cardenal up all night and kept him out of a game with stuck eyelids. A six-fingered pitcher named Antonio Alfonseca belly-bumped an ump. Pitcher Ted Lilly slammed his glove to the mound after serving up a playoff home run. You had to laugh to keep from crying.

Before this breakthrough season, the Cubs tried not to suck, but failed more often than not. Sometimes it was in the regular season, and on rare occasions, it happened in October, during the miserable postseasons of 1989 and '98, 2007 and 2008.

A lifetime of serving as eyewitnesses to what manager Lou Piniella called "Cubbie Occurrences" thickened the skin of Cubs fans while occasionally breaking their hearts.

The Cubs tried just about everything to win, to no avail.

A pitcher named Bill Faul who hypnotized himself before starts. A self-help guru/strength coach named Mack Newton who combined cardio exercises with philosophical meanderings on life. A rotating "College of Coaches" brought in to manage — or mismanage as it turned out.

The Cubs just couldn't do it. Not with Hall of Famers such as Banks, Williams, Santo, Fergie Jenkins, Bruce Sutter, Ryne Sandberg or Andre Dawson. And not with cult heroes such as Sauer, Cardenal, Gary Matthews or Rod Beck.

There was always something to blame, be it a billy goat, a black cat or a fan trying to catch a foul ball down the left-field line. When the team crashed and burned before it reached the promised land, it was rarely pinned on underperforming players, overmatched managers and coaches or inept general managers.

Over the years, the Cubs tried to convince fans things were changing, with catchy slogans such as "Building a New Tradition" and "We're Working On it," only to hit pay dirt with Maddon's ubiquitous "Try Not To Suck." And every new manager was hailed as a game-changer, from Frankie Frisch's hiring in 1949 to Maddon's "shot-and-a-beer" introduction at the Cubby Bear in 2014.

Many good men came to Chicago with high hopes, only to leave with their heads between their legs.
"It was an experience," Piniella said. "Unless you're there and you do it … it's different than what you would think going in. You know, you win three or four games in a row and you're going to win the pennant. You lose three or four games in a row and the season is over. It isn't an easy place to manage."

The roll call of Cubs managers since Charlie Grimm's departure has been a smorgasbord of legends and losers,

Beloved Cubs star Phil Cavarretta was given the job in July 1951. But in spring training of '54 he told owner P.K. Wrigley the team had few quality players and were destined for a sub-.500 season. Wrigley viewed the honesty as "defeatism," and Cavarretta became the first manager to be fired in spring training.

Leo Durocher arrived in 1966 and famously said, "This ain't no eighth-place ballclub." He was right. The Cubs finished 10th. Durocher was the toast of Chicago for most of 1969 but eventually was toast after the mother of all collapses.

Herman Franks came out of retirement in 1977 at the age of 63, hoping to end the 68-year title drought. The team staged another collapse from first place in '77, one that was lost in time thanks to its proximity to the '69 disaster. Franks quit in a huff in '79, trashig his players on the way out, including the classic rip of Mike Vail: "There isn't enough money in the world to pay me to manage if I have to look at that face every day."

Lee Elia's profane tirade against Cubs fans after a 1983 loss to the Dodgers will be the first line in his bleeping obituary. Jim Frey ended a 39-year playoff drought in 1984, then started Scott Sanderson instead of Rick Sutcliffe in a potential clinching Game 4 of the NLCS, greasing the skids for another blown season.

Gene Michael "stuck out like a sore thumb," according to general manager Dallas Green. Michael quit before the end of the '87 season, telling a reporter instead of Green. The Boys of Zimmer got close in '89, rolling the dice until it came up snake-eyes in the postseason.

It was all downhill for Don Zimmer afterward, leading to an ill-advised ultimatum to Tribune Co. bosses that cost him his job. Zimmer's last act as a Cubs employee was to let the beat writers run up the tab in his Manhattan hotel room by emptying the mini-bar.

The hiring of Don Baylor as manager was posted in a secret place on the team's website until a Chicago Tribune techie discovered it. Baylor bunted his way out of town. "In Dusty We Trusty" was the rallying cry for Dusty Baker, and it seemed like a match made in heaven until the trust went bust in the post-'03 world.

Piniella guided the Cubs to back-to-back NL Central titles — and back-to-back winless postseasons — but Tribune Co. stopped spending, and Piniella walked away.

Mike Quade, Dale Sveum and Rick Renteria followed — but none of them really had a shot.

And then Maddon, a freestyle orator, convinced his players to ignore the team's past and advised them to party after every win. Epstein pounced when the Rays manager became available after the 2014 season, and the Cubs won 97 games and made it to the NLCS in Maddon's first year.

"Really it comes back to the fans," Cubs Chairman Tom Ricketts said. "If it wasn't for the fans hanging with us through those (rebuilding) years, we wouldn't be here tonight."

When Maddon was introduced as Cubs manager, he told fans his motto was, "Don't ever permit the pressure to exceed the pleasure."

Two years later, the Cubs at long last had made it to a World Series.

And the pleasure was ours.

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A little bit of faith was all the Cubs asked for, and all they really needed.

Forget about all the things that happened to their predecessors and think about all the hard work and preparation that got them to this moment.

When it mattered most, the Cubs were ready, and so was Wrigley Field.

On an electric night at the 102-year-old ballpark, the Cubs beat the Dodgers 5-0 in Game 6 of the National League Championship Series to clinch their first pennant since 1945.

Kyle Hendricks turned in another made-for-Maddux outing in the biggest game of his life, shutting out the Dodgers on two hits in 7 1/3 innings and beating Dodgers ace Clayton Kershaw.

"I thought we played one of our best games we played all year tonight, under these circumstances," manager Joe Maddon said. "The defense, the pitching, the hitting. That was a complete game of baseball."

The Cubs have had history thrown in their faces all year long, and they know the numbers by heart — 1908 and 1945, 1969 and 2003.

"The history means a lot," Hendricks said. "It puts it in perspective for us. We enjoy it more, because we know it means to the fans of this city. At the end of the day, it's about baseball, it's about winning games, and it comes down to making pitches."

A crowd of 42,386 made every pitch a life-and-death experience, while thousands of fans congregated outside to share in the glory. It was a day they'd waited their entire lives for, and no one was ready to go home.

A 71-year wait for a pennant seemed like a lifetime, and for most of them, it was. There were a few near-misses along the way, most notably in 1984 and 2003, but for the most part, the franchise seldom came close to getting this far, earning its reputation as lovable losers.

Hendricks may not be the best pitcher on the planet, but he just might be the smartest. He was lost in Kershaw's shadow in all the pregame hype, despite leading the majors in earned-run average.

"Honestly, it's nothing new for me," Hendricks said. "That's kind of how it's been my whole life, my whole career. But you don't think about it. That's all outside forces. When you make good pitches, you're going to get hitters out."

All the pregame anxiety subsided when Dexter Fowler sliced a ball into right field that bounced into the seats for a ground-rule double leading off the game. Everyone was well aware of the Cubs' mantra surrounding Fowler.

"He goes, we go."

Another double to right by Kris Bryant brought a giant sigh of relief, and when left fielder Andrew Toles botched an Anthony Rizzo fly ball, the Cubs were on their way. Fowler's RBI single in the second made it 3-0, and Willson Contreras and Anthony Rizzo cranked solo home runs in the fourth and fifth innings to pile on.

"It's hard to put into words, when you see a guy like David Ross on the podium," Jake Arrieta said. "It's been a storybook year, not only for him, but for the team."

On a gorgeous fall afternoon in Chicago, the "W" flags were flying all over Wrigleyville, and the whole town seemed to be in a self-induced, Cubbie coma.
"I love to be in a city that’s playing October baseball where you can just feel everyone captivated by the ballclub, everyone walking around tired from staying up late, prioritizing baseball above all else," President Theo Epstein said. "It’s a great phenomenon."

The Cubs pulled out all the stops Saturday, almost as if the day was scripted.

Kyle Schwarber’s unexpected return from knee surgery was announced in the afternoon, precluding a possible return as DH in the World Series. Kerry Wood threw out the first pitch wearing a Ron Santo jersey, and the Cubs jumped out to a quick 2-0 lead, forcing Kershaw to throw 30 pitches. A video of Santo played on the video board after the bottom of the first, and a premature fireworks display went off outside the center-field scoreboard during the second.

The players were ready for anything, and nothing seemed to faze them. Series MVP Javier Baez got the crowd into it by pumping his chest a few times after starting a double play in the first and stealing a popup from Rizzo in the fifth despite Rizzo waving his arms calling for it.

Like a couple of kids in Little League, Rizzo pretended to go after Baez.

Maybe that's why this team is as good as it is. They've never lost the kid in them, even when the stakes were the highest.

The Cubs have been so ready to party they had their own DJ on call for the pennant-clinching bash in the clubhouse. So will the Cubs have a DJ ready for a World Series bash?

"There'll be a lot more than just one DJ," Rizzo said. "There will be a zoo."

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Chicago Tribune
No more waiting till next year: Cubs in World Series — and get used to it
By David Haugh

Anthony Rizzo threw his glove, pumped his fist and leaped into the arms of Travis Wood.

Aroldis Chapman waved a "W" flag. David Ross cried. Cubs players formed a blue mound of joy on the pitcher's mound Saturday night at Wrigley Field after their 5-0 victory over the Dodgers clinched the National League pennant for the first time since 1945.

Next year really is here, North Siders. It's really gonna happen. The Cubs have won the pennant. Yes, the Cubs have won the pennant.

"Four more and we can really have a party," manager Joe Maddon said during the postgame ceremony.

All over Wrigleyville, giddy fans fled to the streets to hug friends and strangers. Inside the old ballpark, the reaction was visceral, the elation indescribable and the relief undeniable as a crowd of 42,386 euphoric fans unleashed 71 years' worth of frustration and disappointment.

"This is an unbelievable win for the city, the team," Kris Bryant said as chants of "M-V-P" grew louder.

Exuberance began replacing the anxiety the minute the Cubs jumped to a 2-0 first-inning lead, a belief that buried any lingering fears locally. This wasn't a dream but reality the rest of baseball better get used to, and fast. The last time the Cubs went to the World Series, the Dodgers played in Brooklyn, but now the National League runners-up return home to Los Angeles, the answer to a trivia question.
All eyes were on Wrigley to see an elite pitcher at his best with the stakes high, and Kyle Hendricks delivered. With history calling, Hendricks answered, giving up two hits in 7 1/3 innings and retiring 17 straight, while Cubs hitters KO'd Dodgers ace Clayton Kershaw.

Hendricks was so good that manager Joe Maddon heard boos when he went to the mound to replace him in the eighth — just five outs from the World Series. Yes, five outs. But this time Chapman did the job.

So did the Cubs offense.

Against the best pitcher on the planet, the Cubs were out of this world, jumping on Kershaw for three runs in the first two innings. Almost eerily, the Cubs scored two runs in the first and one in the second just as they did in the decisive Game 5 against the Padres in 1984. They also led the Marlins 3-0 in Game 6 of the 2003 NLCS at the start of the eighth inning.

But these Cubs would not blow this three-run lead. A Willson Contreras solo home run in the fourth padded the cushion, and Anthony Rizzo's 393-foot blast in the fifth made it downright comfortable.

The "Kersh" was busted after five innings and 93 pitches. The curse-proof Cubs were on their way to the World Series. This is Chicago, a sports city whose memory makes elephants envious. No matter what Kershaw accomplishes in a Hall of Fame career, he always will be remembered here as the guy the Cubs beat in a pennant-clinching Game 6. The standing ovation for Andre Ethier, announced as the pinch hitter for Kershaw in the fifth, confirmed how special this offensive performance was. How special this night always will be in Cubs lore.

This was for the 1969 Cubs, Leon Durham in 1984, Steve Bartman in 2003 and any other goat blamed for past choke jobs, even for that cursed creature that belonged to Billy Sianis. This was for Ernie and Ronnie, Ryno and Hawk and Billy, and all the great Cubs who never got the chance to play in the Fall Classic.

This was for the die-hard fans who felt tears welling in their eyes during the final out, the ones who showed so much persistence and passion, faith and fanaticism. This was for those who never thought they would live long enough to see the Cubs play in the World Series again, and for those who lost years of their lives watching them try.

With five players in Saturday’s starting lineup 24 or younger, these Cubs probably are too young to appreciate the significance of taking this team to the World Series and too good to think it will be the last time with this core. The Theo Epstein Plan came together. The patience paid off. Next year is here, finally, thanks to guys Chicago has gotten to know by their first names or nicknames: Theo and Jed and an extraordinary Joe leading the way for KB and Rizz, Zo and Addy, Javy and Dex, Jake, Jon and Grandpa Rossy.

In and around Wrigley, the charged pregame atmosphere, at the very least, matched the feeling around the United Center on June 15, 2015, before the Blackhawks clinched the Stanley Cup championship on home ice for the first time in 77 years. Some would say Wrigley's buzz exceeded it.

Parking spots on Grace Street were going for $80. One ticket broker claimed to have sold an upper-deck seat for $2,000. The bars were crowded and creative homemade signs carried messages such as "CLAYTON: PLEASE TRY TO SUCK" and "WE AIN'T AFRAID OF NO GOATS." A bridal party stopped on Addison Street, emerged from a limousine and took pictures in front of the Harry Caray statue.

A man wearing a one-piece Cubs pajama outfit rode by on a bicycle. "Oh, my god, I love your onesie!" the bride yelled.

As the Dodgers team bus slowly pulled into the narrow team entrance, Cubs fans closed in to offer the coldest of welcomes.

"Not today, y'all," a guy in a Bryant jersey yelled as the door opened.

Not today, indeed.
Chairman Tom Ricketts bought the Cubs in 2009 with the promise of doing something he had never seen since the day he started cheering from the bleachers where he met his wife: leading an organization that marketed failure into a World Series. Ricketts fought the rooftop owners for a view of a Cubs team so historically bad, we could barely stand to watch. Yet here they are seven years later, and nobody can look away, a baseball beauty to behold.

"I can’t even describe it right now," an emotional Ricketts said, hoisting the Warren C. Giles Trophy. "All I know is we have to win four more games."

Before moving on to the Indians, remember the Cubs won 12 more regular-season games than the Dodgers. The last time the Cubs trailed was the end of Game 3. They fell victim to two outstanding pitching performances in the NLCS but clearly were the better team. This was their night. This just could be their year.

The weight is lifted. The wait is over, at last.

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Chicago Tribune
Cubs near-perfect in beating Dodgers 5-0 to win first NL pennant since 1945
By Mark Gonzales

Dexter Fowler sensed a different, yet special feeling Saturday as soon as he walked into the Cubs’ clubhouse.

“I could tell the guys wanted it now," Fowler said.

Never was that mission so apparent Saturday night as Kyle Hendricks pitched 7 1/3 innings of two-hit ball and a resurgent offense knocked out Clayton Kershaw after five innings to put an exclamation point on a 5-0 victory to capture the National League Championship Series before a delirious Wrigley Field crowd of 42,386.

The Cubs outscored the Dodgers 23-6 in the final three games to win this best-of-seven series 4-2 and claim their first NL pennant since 1945. Cubs second baseman Javier Baez and two-game winner Jon Lester were named co-MVPs of the NLCS.

The ultimate mission of the 2016 season — winning the World Series — starts Tuesday night against the American League champion Indians at Progressive Field in Cleveland.

“I don’t have to be anywhere until Tuesday," quipped Chairman Tom Ricketts, who hired President Theo Epstein five years ago to build sustainable success for the franchise.

The Cubs’ fundamental blueprint was executed to near perfection from the start, as they outplayed a fundamentally challenged Dodgers outfit.

“We carried out (manager) Joe Maddon’s mission to win every inning,” said hitting coach John Mallee, whose pupils were relentless in attacking Kershaw until the three-time Cy Young Award winner was lifted for a pinch-hitter in the sixth.

In the first inning, Baez chased Andrew Toles out of the baseline to start a double play in the first inning.

Then, in the bottom half of the inning, Kris Bryant poked a low, outside pitch into right field to score Fowler for the first run. The Cubs capitalized on Toles’ error in left field to score their second run on Ben Zobrist’s a sacrifice fly, marking the first time Kershaw allowed two runs in the first inning this season.

Unlike Game 2, when the three-time Cy Young Award winner needed only 32 pitches to get through the first three innings, the Cubs tested him early as Baez fouled off three two-strike pitches before popping out. Kershaw needed 30 pitches to get out of the first.
The resurgent Addison Russell led off the second with a double and scored on Fowler’s two-out single, and the Cubs added home runs from rookie Willson Contreras and Anthony Rizzo in the fourth and fifth.

“To perform this well on this stage with all the pressure says a lot about this group,” Mallee said.

The renaissance became more convincing when Contreras led off the fourth with his homer and raised his right hand while running to first.

The Cubs’ looseness was evident from the start, as Russell imitated riding a motorcycle after hitting a leadoff double in the second, and Baez stepped in front of the much taller Rizzo at first to catch Josh Reddick’s popup in the fourth.

For his part, the soft-throwing Hendricks, who emerged from his fifth-starter role as arguably the Cubs’ most dependable pitcher with 16 victories and a major league-low 2.13 ERA, limited the Dodgers to Toles’ single on the game’s first pitch until Josh Reddick singled with one out in the eighth. Hendricks then gave way to Aroldis Chapman despite throwing only 88 pitches and walking none while striking out six.

“It has been a storybook year for him and the entire team,” fellow pitcher Jake Arrieta said.

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Chicago Tribune
Cubs beat Dodgers' best — Clayton Kershaw, who calls them 'better team'
By Colleen Kane

The taunts started to bounce across Wrigley Field early Saturday night.

"Kerrrr-shaw. Kerrrr-shaw."

The Dodgers ace gave them no reason to stop until he walked off the field after the fifth inning of Game 6 of the National League Championship Series, his head bowed and the scoreboard showing a five-run Cubs lead.

Clayton Kershaw may be the best pitcher in the world, but on the biggest night on the North Side in 71 years, he didn't have it.

Kershaw gave up two hits and a run two batters into the game and put the Dodgers in a three-run hole after two innings. By the time he was pulled for a pinch hitter in the top of the sixth to cheers and waves of Cubs fans, he had allowed five runs — four earned — on seven hits.

For the Dodgers, who needed to win the final two games on the road to make it to their first World Series since 1988, there was no recovering in a 5-0 Cubs victory.

For the Cubs, it was a stunning and energizing turn of events against the three-time NL Cy Young Award winner as they clinched their first World Series berth since 1945.

"You look back and think about the season as a whole, and it's tough to swallow tonight," Kershaw said. "But I'd much rather be in this situation and fail than not get to be in this situation at all."

Kershaw’s ineffectiveness came just seven days after he threw seven shutout innings against the Cubs. There was so much faith that Kershaw could repeat it that a reporter asked Dodgers manager Dave Roberts in the pregame news conference about the ace being available in relief should the Dodgers force a Game 7.

Kershaw had allowed just three runs in the first inning in 21 starts during the regular season, and never more than one run in the first this season. But the Cubs pulled ahead 2-0 on Kris Bryant's RBI single and Ben Zobrist's sacrifice fly in the first.
Kershaw had given up just two home runs in a game once this season, on April 9. But he gave up a fourth-inning solo shot to Willson Contreras and a fifth-inning homer to Anthony Rizzo.

Meanwhile, the Dodgers had two hits, a major role reversal after shutting out the Cubs in Games 2 and 3.

"You ride the wave while you’re hot, and they got hot," Dodgers outfielder Joc Pederson said. Their guys — Rizzo, (Addison) Russell, (Javier) Baez, Contreras — they stepped up, and they were playing out of the world."

As Kershaw and Pederson spoke in a tunnel outside the visitors clubhouse at Wrigley Field, the sound of fans singing "Go Cubs Go" drifted down from the concourse.

"Fans are excited," Kershaw said. "They've been excited the whole series. I don't know if it was a whole lot different (atmosphere) because they haven't been in so long, but making it to the World Series is no small feat, no matter how long you haven't been there.

"Give credit to the Cubs. They played well the whole series, started swinging the bats the last three games. They're just a better team."

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Chicago Tribune
As Cubs clinch spot in World Series, Theo Epstein reflects on the journey
By Mark Gonzales

As Theo Epstein stood behind second base and surveyed the loud and zany celebration at Wrigley Field, the Cubs' president praised the collective contributions that brought the franchise from the depths of the National League to their first World Series berth since 1945.

"We never doubted, but there were times it seemed a long awful long way away," Epstein said after the Cubs beat the Dodgers in the National League Championship Series. "We’d stare at the board and wonder where the impact players were going to come from, how we were going to hire enough impact talent to make this happen.

"Slowly but surely it came together with great support from ownership and a good job by our scouting and player development guys. Next thing you know, you look up and we got four more wins and we’re World Champions. It’s pretty special."

Epstein admitted the Cubs faced a serious challenge after trailing the Dodgers 2-1 in this best-of-seven series. The Cubs responded by scoring 23 runs in their final three games to overtake the Dodgers and advance to the World Series, where they will play Cleveland on Tuesday night at Progressive Field.

"We needed to wake up and be ourselves," Epstein said. "Same thing in Game 4 against the Giants (in the NL Division Series). If we’re going to go down, let’s go down as us. Sure enough, when the switch went on in San Francisco, bang. It was a lightning strike. That series was over.

"Same thing here. (Ben) Zobrist lays down that bunt, all of a sudden our at-bats got so much better. Our approach was back. We put on a masterpiece performance. Kyle Hendricks was unbelievable."

Although Epstein overhauled the entire franchise and endured some rough times to reach the World Series in five seasons, he expressed his gratitude for being a part of this renaissance.

"It’s good to be a part of this organization," Epstein said. "It’s a special place. I’m honored to be here."

Epstein was just as surprised and impressed with the unselfishness of his players as well as their talent.
“The veterans took less to sign here to be part of this,” Epstein said. “Our young guys, from the moment they were drafted, wanted to contribute to a club that could get to the World Series, win a World Series and how they set their egos and they’re getting rewarded for it.

"It’s crazy living this life right now."

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Chicago Tribune
Wrigley Field not that loud? Cubs fans bring the noise Saturday night
By Tony Briscoe

Dodgers first baseman Adrian Gonzalez might not think Wrigley Field is that loud, but Cubs fans took his words to heart Saturday night, registering sound levels guaranteed to make some ears ring.

Before Game 6 of the National League Championship Series Gonzalez said: "They can’t cheer any louder. It's not like it's a loud stadium to begin with. They’re going to try their best, and we’re going to tune them out like we always do."

He may have regretted the timing of his challenge. The Cubs beat the Dodgers 5-0 Saturday night to advance to their first World Series in 71 years.

"I think he opened up a big can of worms," said Cubs season ticket holder Debbie Manfredi. "He’s not been making any friends this entire series."

In Gonzalez’s first at bat, the boos rained down from the stands at about 93 decibels. Gonzalez silenced the crowd with a hit, but they roared even louder, at about 97 decibels, when he was picked off by Cubs pitcher Kyle Hendricks. The 97 decibels is about the equivalent of a rumbling CTA train.

Using the Sound Meter application, the Tribune measured noise levels on an iPhone throughout the game. Although none matched the top decibel on the app — 107.3, the sound of an ambulance approaching Chicago and Michigan avenues during rush hour — several plays hovered around 100 decibels.

Cubs fan Frank Velasquez, 22, a pitcher at Louis University, said he knows how sound can get to player.

"I wouldn't want to be in that position," he said referring to the Dodgers' Clayton Kershaw as he pitched through loud jeers from the fans.

"I actually like Adrian, but he doesn't know what he's talking about. As a season ticket holder this is the loudest it's ever been. I went to Game 1 and 2, and it's even more electric."

Here are a few readings from around the ballpark Saturday night:

Two hours before the game, outside Wrigley Field’s Clark and Addison entrance: 76 decibels, similar to a car passing at 65 mph.

From the standing room only section on the third base side, Dexter Fowler’s lead-off hit: 97 decibels.

From the standing room only section behind home plate, jeers directed at Kershaw: 95 decibels, similar to the sound generated by a power mower.

From the standing room only section on the third base side, first score of the game: 98 decibels.

From the standing room only section behind home plate, Fowler’s single scoring Addison Russell in the second inning, 102 decibels.
From a long line outside the men’s bathroom after Javier Baez's fourth-inning home run: 100 decibels, the equivalent of helicopter flying 100 feet overhead.

From the upper deck, third base side, Scottie Pippen leading the crowd in "Take me out to the Ballgame" for the seventh-inning stretch: 87 decibels, louder than rush hour traffic in River North.

Behind the Cubs dugout, "Go Cubs Go" sung after the final out: 101 decibels, about the sound of a jet takeoff from 1,000 feet above.

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Chicago Tribune
For former Cubs, National League pennant 'a mind-blowing experience'
By Chris Kuc

Smack in the middle of the Cubs’ raucous celebration after clinching their first National League pennant since 1945 on Saturday night were some former players who didn’t get a chance to pop the champagne in the same situation.

“We got to play in this game but we just didn’t get to celebrate after,” said Kerry Wood, a member of the 2003 Cubs team that fell to the Marlins in the NLCS. “I’m extremely happy for the city. These guys set themselves in history and they’re going to be linked forever. But we have four more to go and it’s the right group to go with.

“It was a mind-blowing experience being out there with the crowd.”

Celebrating with Wood and celebrities such as Pearl Jam frontman Eddie Vedder and actor John Cusack at Wrigley Field was Hall of Fame outfielder Billy Williams, who played 14-plus seasons with the Cubs during the 1960s and ’70s and never reached the postseason with the team. Williams did play in the 1975 ALCS with the Athletics near the end of his career.

Williams said thoughts of late Cubs teammates and legends Ron Santo and Ernie Banks — who played a combined 4,771 games but never in the playoffs — popped into his head as the final out was recorded in the Cubs’ 5-0 victory over the Dodgers in Game 6.

“(Santo and Banks) immediately came to my mind,” Williams said. “I played with Ronnie a long time ago — we started out in Double A together. And Ernie was here and we came up to the big leagues to help Ernie try to win a pennant and we didn’t get a chance to do that. They’re somewhere celebrating. I know Ronnie is. He’s having a glass of red wine.

“It’s great feeling. I look at the fans in the stands and I said congratulations to them because they’ve supported this ballclub over the years. I’m happy for them because they’ve been here.”

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Chicago Tribune
For Joe Buck and Pat Hughes, simplicity golden as Cubs win pennant
By Phil Rosenthal

“The Cubs have won the pennant!” Joe Buck shouted above the din on Fox Sports’ Fox Sports 1 after the Dodgers’ Yasiel Puig hit into a game-ending double play, then let the din and Steve Goodman’s “Go Cubs Go” over Wrigley Field’s speakers say what needed to be said.

The simple fact of it was enough.

No poetry was needed and, for two minutes and 40 seconds, the best thing to be said of the Cubs’ first National League title in 71 years was nothing at all.
Players embraced, fans in the ballpark and out whooped it up and the W was run up the scoreboard flagpole. No need to add another word to the pictures.

“The Cubs are going to the World Series! The Cubs win the pennant!” was Cubs radio man Pat Hughes’ call on WSCR-AM (670).

Then Hughes said nothing for 23 seconds, letting the moment play out in listeners’ minds.

“The National League champion Chicago Cubs will play the Cleveland Indians in the World Series,” Hughes said, leaving another five seconds for listeners to soak up the magnitude of that. “All 25 guys, plus the coaches and manager Joe Maddon, celebrating on the mound.”

Some announcers write out what they will say in such events ahead of time, as if simple declarative sentences would fail them.

Too often it comes out strained, an awkward overwrought effort to put their own stamp on something for posterity either suggesting they doubt the moment itself will be sufficiently memorable or that their contribution will otherwise go unnoticed.

Buck and Hughes did it exactly right. It was clean, simple, straight-forward.

The Cubs haven’t been to the World Series since 1945, a season before the first televised game from Wrigley Field.

They haven’t won a World Series since 1908, predating even commercial radio, meaning the next person to announce the franchise has won one will be the first.

That is stamp enough.

On TV, all that’s needed is to show it.

On radio, all that’s wanted is to convey what is happening.

When Buck and the FS1 crew started to reference Cubs curses late in the 5-0 Game 6 victory over the Dodgers that would clinch the National League Championship Series, you knew it was part of the story. But it was like the scene in the movie that had been in all the ads. You wanted to fast-forward past it to get to the big scene at the end.

Hughes’ sidekick, Ron Coomer, marveled at the noise that erupted when the 27th Dodgers at-bat and final out were in the books.

“I don’t think I’ve ever felt anything like that in my professional career. Period. Nothing close, partner,” Coomer said.

Hughes, the voice of the Cubs since 1996, called it “one of the greatest things in Chicago Cubs history,” an obvious distinction but not at all wrong.

“Defense was such a strong part of this team all year, and it was a lovely 6-4-3 double play that ended it, (Addison) Russell to (Javier) Baez to (Anthony) Rizzo,” Hughes said. “Fans still making thunderous noise. I can barely hear myself talk and may not be making any sense at all now, Ron, but it doesn’t matter.”

But it made perfect sense to make nothing more – or less – of the moment than necessary. It was preserved for the time capsule without adornment, buzzwords, catchphrase, hashtag, promo tagline or T-shirt slogan.

The Cubs won the pennant.

That was plenty, and knowing it was enough mattered a lot.
Mystery solved: Now we know why Fox Sports pushed the whole “great Clayton Kershaw” thing so hard up front in Game 6, complete with music video. It had a sell-by date of Saturday’s first inning.

Hats off: The Cubs’ victory made it into “Weekend Update” on “Saturday Night Live.”

“Another outcome rigged by Hillary Clinton,” said Colin Jost, showing a picture of the candidate from Park Ridge in a Cubs hat.

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**Chicago Tribune**

Kyle Schwarber fine after first action in Arizona Fall League

By Jack Thompson

In his first action since undergoing left knee surgery early in the season, Cubs slugger Kyle Schwarber went 0-for-3 with a walk Saturday night in the Arizona Fall League.

Batting second and serving as the designated hitter for the Mesa Solar Sox, Schwarber grounded out twice, walked on a full count and then lined out to the gap in right-center field.

"It was overall a really great day for me," Schwarber said after the game at Sloan Park. "The first two (at-bats) I chased a little bit. Today was about the at-bats. Running was not a factor."

Schwarber added his knee felt fine.

Schwarber said he was able to follow Saturday’s night National League Championship Series finale at Wrigley Field on an iPad set up in the dugout.

When asked if it was bittersweet for him not to be there for the Cubs' 5-0 pennant clincher over the Dodgers, he said, "No. Those guys deserve it, I was just getting my work in. I might join them in Cleveland (for the World Series). It’s either cheering or whatever it is, I’m all in for it."

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**Chicago Tribune**

Another home run from rookie Willson Contreras helps seal Dodgers’ fate

By Paul Skrbina

A 100-year-old baseball stadium was shaken to its core Saturday as soon as the baseball collided with Willson Contreras’ bat.

The fourth-inning meeting was as violent as the result was exhilarating for anxious fans. The ball that originated in Clayton Kershaw’s hand found its final resting place 377 feet away in the left-field bleachers to start the fourth inning of the Cubs' 5-0 victory against the Dodgers in the sixth and final game of the National League Championship Series.

The home run that launched applause from the crowd of 42,386 gave the Cubs a four-run lead and some breathing room against Kershaw, a three-time Cy Young Award winner who only a few games ago had knocked some wind out of the team's World Series sails with a two-hit, seven-inning masterpiece.

Contreras has had a flair for theatrics since joining the Cubs, though. Two days after making his major-league debut June 17, the 24-year-old rookie catcher deposited the first pitch he saw for a home run.

After repeating that feat on a bigger stage Saturday night, Contreras said as tears filled his eyes, "It just reminded me of that day. It’s even more special because we’re going to the World Series."
The first time Cubs catching coach Mike Borzello saw Contreras bat, in the fall league last year, Contreras blew out his hamstring running to first base on a groundout to shortstop.

"He got to see all of one at-bat," Cubs President Theo Epstein said. "But it afforded them to spend a lot of time together the next three or four days."

The Cubs sent Borzello to see Contreras for just that reason, to get to know him.

The team, Epstein said, was "anticipating this moment would come," that Contreras would be a contributor.

Contreras hit 12 home runs during the regular season and was batting .412 with three RBIs in the postseason entering Saturday.

His arm also has been valuable. Contreras picked Justin Turner off second base to end the first inning of Game 4 on Wednesday night.

All big reasons why Cubs manager Joe Maddon and his staff opted to carry three catchers on the postseason roster.

David Ross and Miguel Montero also have hit home runs this postseason. Montero's grand slam lifted the Cubs to victory in Game 1 of the NLCS. Ross hit his in Game 4 of the division series.

Both have been mentors for Contreras, the team's catcher of the future.

"They have like 26 years in the big leagues. I want to take every advantage from them," he said earlier this season. "I ask them questions and know they'll answer."

Just like Contreras has since he has been with the team.

Just like he did again Saturday night.

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**Chicago Tribune**

Kyle Schwarber rejoining Cubs for World Series a real possibility

By Mark Gonzales

In the Cubs' season of historical significance, Kyle Schwarber is on the verge of reaching a significant medical milestone.

Schwarber, 23, was cleared to play Saturday night for the Mesa Solar Sox of the Arizona Fall League — six months after undergoing surgery to repair two ligament tears on his left knee. It's now possible he could join the Cubs if they reach the World Series for the first time since 1945.

"We're not ruling anything in," President Theo Epstein said. "We're not ruling anything out. We're not getting ahead of ourselves here. We have a lot of work to do before he becomes pertinent on a short-term basis. But it's a testament to how hard Kyle has worked to be in this position to how it's a possibility. It's a credit to him and all the members of our staff who have worked with him."

Schwarber, who hit 16 home runs in 69 games for the Cubs during the regular season and five during the 2015 playoffs, will handle the designated-hitter duties for Mesa — a job he could perform at Cleveland if he's cleared to play and the Cubs advance to the Series.

Schwarber will wear a brace on his knee and won't play in the field. He has been told to run the bases conservatively.
"It's awesome," manager Joe Maddon said. "I didn't see it coming."

Neither did anyone but Schwarber, who wasn’t expected to be cleared fully until the start of spring training after suffering the injury April 7. But Schwarber showed remarkable improvement in agility drills over the last 1 1/2 months after progressing from range of motion and strengthening work.

Schwarber received clearance Monday to hit and run after a six-month post-operation examination from Dr. Daniel Cooper, who performed the surgery. Epstein was informed of the updates before Schwarber flew to Los Angeles, where he hit Monday and Tuesday in the batting cage before flying to Mesa on Wednesday for a recovery day and tracked pitches off a machine.

Schwarber took batting practice on the field for the first time on Thursday and tracked about 400 to 500 fastball and breaking pitches off a machine.

Schwarber looked impressive Friday in eight at-bats off Double-A Tennessee pitcher James Farris, and then got clearance from Cooper to play in the AFL, Epstein said.

"Physically, he's on an accelerated time table," said Epstein, who said he didn't prod medical authorities to clear Schwarber. "To a baseball standpoint, he's only got about a week or so to be ready, but mentally he's been preparing for six months and has been advance scouting.

"He's been watching how pitchers attack hitters, studying his own video, studying opposing video. Mentally he's been preparing for a long time and been itching to contribute."

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**Chicago Tribune**

Tom Ricketts seeks the ultimate payback for Cubs fans: a World Series title

By Mark Gonzales

Tom Ricketts developed his love for the Cubs while sitting in the Wrigley Field bleachers when he was attending the University of Chicago in the 1980s.

That affection for his fellow fans surfaced Saturday night during the middle of the Cubs' National League title-clinching win over the Dodgers, when Ricketts was seen high-fiving and shaking hands with fans.

After watching his players win their first league title since 1945, Ricketts expressed his happiness for the fans who have remained loyal with dreams of the franchise's first World Series title since 1908.

"Most importantly, it’s about fans," Ricketts said. "You think about all the people, with all this love for this team for so long. And now we got a chance, with four more wins, to really pay them back."

Ricketts took note of the building blocks that became firm in the past 1 1/2 seasons.

"Everyone looks at the second half of last season when it jelled," said Ricketts, reflecting on the Cubs' strong finish that earned them an NL wild-card berth and a trip to the NL Championship Series before getting swept in four games by the Mets.

"Then going into the offseason, we made some key additions, brought some guys back, and everyone felt strong going into spring training. We had a couple rough weeks in June, but most of the year we’ve been the best team in baseball."

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Fan in ‘Bartman Seat’ for Game 6 just ‘happy, thrilled to be here’
By Chris Kuc

The seat — aisle 4, row 8, seat 113 — remained empty 15 minutes before the first pitch of Game 6 of the National League Championship Series between the Cubs and Dodgers on Saturday night at Wrigley Field.

Then a 38-year-old Cubs fan named Bryan made his way through the row and took in the view from the most infamous seat in venerable Wrigley Field.

Bryan, who chose not to disclose his last name, was the holder of the seat that Steve Bartman made notorious during the 2003 NLCS between the Cubs and Marlins. Bartman was the fan who got his hands on a foul ball off the bat of the Marlins' Luis Castillo that left fielder Moises Alou believed he could catch in a game during which the Cubs coughed up a 3-0 lead and eventually fell 8-3. Bartman was vilified for the Cubs' loss — and the one the next night — and justified or not, became a part of Cubs lore.

What was Bryan going to do if a foul ball came his and his wife's way in the first NLCS Game 6 at Wrigley since the Bartman incident?

"We're going to stay out of the way," said Bryan, a Detroit native who grew up a Tigers fan but switched allegiances to the Cubs "five or seven years ago."

"I'm just happy to be here, I'm excited, I'm thrilled," he added. "My wife and I have an 8-month-old baby so this is a pretty special time for all of us."

The "Bartman Seat" has become a tourist stop at Wrigley as fans visit it before games. On Saturday, fans posed for pictures next to it, including a group of four season ticket holders with seats in a different location for Game 6.

"I want to kill all of this talk," said Andy Ziehr of Rockford. "I don't want to hear it anymore. It has been 13 years with all these references. I can't wait for it to just be gone."

Would Ziehr have gone after the Castillo foul ball?

"I'd like to say I'd have pulled back and let (Alou) make the catch, but there's a pretty decent chance I would have done that same thing," Ziehr said. "I actually feel terrible for (Bartman)."

Happily, there were no incidents of fan interference down the left-field line — or anywhere for that matter — in Game 6, and with the Cubs winning 5-0 to advance to the World Series for the first time since 1945, perhaps Bartman's role finally can take a back seat in history.

For Bryan, who works for a family entertainment company in Chicago, he was just delighted to be there to witness it.

"Just honestly, I'm a big fan," he said. "I love the Cubs, love the city and I'm happy to be here."

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Game 6 turning point: Kris Bryant's RBI single in the first inning
By Chris Kuc

The situation: All that stood between the Cubs and their first World Series appearance since 1945 was arguably the best pitcher of his generation, Dodgers ace Clayton Kershaw. After Kyle Hendricks shut down the Dodgers in the top of the first, center fielder Dexter Fowler led off the bottom half and lined a 1-1 Kershaw pitch down the right-field line that bounced into the stands for a ground-rule double. That brought up Kris Bryant, who entered the game with a .343 postseason average.
What happened next: Bryant punched a 1-2 fastball into right field to plate Fowler and immediately put Kershaw on the ropes.

The aftermath: The Cubs kept coming at Kershaw. Left fielder Andrew Toles dropped an Anthony Rizzo liner to put runners at second and third, and Ben Zobrist followed with a sacrifice fly to center. The Cubs tacked on a run in the second when Fowler singled in Addison Russell, who had led off with a double. Solo home runs by Willson Contreras in the fourth and Rizzo in the fifth gave the Cubs a 5-0 lead. When Andre Ethier pinch hit for Kershaw in the sixth, the left-hander’s night was over. Kershaw’s line: 5 IP, 7 hits, 5 R, 4 ER, 0 BBs, 4 Ks.

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Chicago Tribune
Cubs and Indians, Chicago and Cleveland, two made for each other
By Bernie Lincicome

History can be chased but never caught. Tomorrow is a tease that becomes today. Yesterday is permanent and cannot be canceled.

And yet ...

Here the Cubs are, at last and at once, where they were expected to be, where their disciples imagined they must be, later always than sooner, validating the longest feat of faith since hope was raw.

The World Series. Chicago Cubs. In the same sentence fragment. Like one of those what is wrong with this picture puzzles.

And who awaits them but the comparably forlorn Cleveland Indians, the team of my youth, less easily lovable than eternally lost, a more local agony than the celebrated symbols of futility from the North Side of Chicago, if no less deserving of a kind word or two.

This Series matchup invites the question of who has suffered more, as if pain decides who is more deserving, as if agony is a critical benefit.

Cleveland easily wins the civic misery contest, but Chicago must accept the prize for dogged delusion.

This will be a World Series of mutual melancholy, simultaneous suffering. Picking one or the other is like choosing an abused pet from an animal shelter.

The Indians, after all, have had their moments since the Cubs last were where they are, a World Series triumph in '48, a loss in '54 and a couple more in the '90s. Not one of them echoed as loudly as any of the Cubs failures.

What was for Cleveland limited torment along one of the Lesser Lakes, geography has not held the despair for each Cub collapse. Myth and legend grew of curses and jinxes and cosmic interference, raising redundant incompetence to fragrant allegory.

"Myths are made for the imagination to breathe life into them," said Camus, and remember he is the one who brought us the ordeal of Sisyphus, the relentless rock roller who found happiness in the chore.

The World Series has been a table reserved for the Cubs and no matter how dusty the seat, how crowded the room or how many others have tried to take it, the Cubs fan was always there to say, "No. He'll be here any minute."

Minutes make hours, hours make days, days make years and the number becomes too large to grasp, too ludicrous to do harm. The addition becomes the endorsement.
It will not mean as much again as it does now. Not if the Cubs lose the Series, not if the Cubs do it again and again. The goal will not change, only the ache to reach it.

May the Cubs never be toughened by success, never lose their vulnerability, never trade humility for arrogance, never forget the devotion that always has been there without it being earned or appreciated.

For Cleveland as well, with the NBA Cavaliers already redeeming the unredeemable, pride easily can become conceit and in that way lies madness, or New York.

A common memory now connects Chicago and Cleveland, as busy Great Lakes commerce once did, when another century pledged more than it delivered, just as their baseball teams always have done.

A simple game of pitch and catch, of throw and hit, of run and walk should not mark the measure of a place, but it does and it will.

There has been too much disappointment, too many promises broken, too great an investment in affection too often unreturned, too many dreams unrealized for any of this to mean less than it must.

To crib from another American dreamer, the Cubs beat on, boats against the current, borne ceaselessly into the past.

They came a long way, their dream so close they hardly could fail to grasp it, a future that year by year receded.

It eluded them but no matter, tomorrow they would run faster, stretch their arms further and one fine morning …

... it is dawn in Chicago. Cleveland, too, I suppose.

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Chicago Tribune
Fly the W! The Cubs are going to the World Series.
By Editorial Board

Chicago is draped in big blue “W’s.” On flag standards and balconies, car doors and storefront windows. This time not just W for “win,” though. It’s for “World Series!”

The Cubs’ ascent to the Fall Classic isn’t a dream anymore. After Saturday night’s victory in the seasonal chill — no, in the heartfelt warmth — of Wrigley Field, it’s a gleeful reality with a firm date on the calendar: Game 1 begins at 7 p.m. Chicago time Tuesday in a lovely ballyard in Cleveland. The Indians, who last won a World Series in 1948, will show up hungry.

It’s been 71 years since the Cubs made it this far. This city piled all those years of hope and expectation on the shoulders of this year’s players — and they delivered. They closed the deal Saturday night with aggressive batting and surgical, minimalist pitching. So much for the Los Angeles Dodgers, who lost the last of these six games by a score of 5-0.

In 1945, the year this last happened, a World War ended and a Cold War began. The Cubs snatched the pennant and embarked on a World Series they’d lose in seven games to the Detroit Tigers.

Since then, we’ve grimaced through the infamous September Swoon of 1969, the post-Bartman collapse and countless back-of-the-pack seasons that asked us for patience, always more patience. "Wait till next year” became a national catchphrase for a city with a lovable team that just never could make it to the top rung.

This crew helped us forget all of that heartbreak. Now they’re four wins away from giving Cubs Nation its first World Series championship since 1908. That’s 108 years ago — one for each red double-stitch on a regulation baseball.
Sure, Joe Maddon has shepherded this team to a World Series, but it’s the way that he’s done it that’s so extraordinary: The Cubs and the city have had a blast getting there. The wacky dress-up road trips, the zenlike maxims like “Do simple better” and “Embrace the target,” the “Try Not To Suck” T-shirts — they’re all part of a Maddon mystique that reminds us baseball, no matter how commercial it has become, is still a pastime.

As for the players, their performance during the Dodgers series yielded a host of magic moments. Javier Baez’s fielding acrobatics could have been a Cirque du Soleil audition. Addison Russell broke out of his doldrums with clutch homers in Games 4 and 5. And there were unlikely heroes, starting with Miguel Montero and his pinch-hit grand slam in the eighth inning of Game 1.

Perhaps the unlikeliest contributor wasn’t on the team’s playoff roster. Matt Szczur lent his bat to Anthony Rizzo, who used it to break out of a slump and rocket a homer in Game 4 — and lent his underwear to Russell, who promptly snapped a four-game hitless streak. Coincidence atop coincidence? Just luck? If so, Chicago will take it.

Come Saturday night, the first Chicago batter, Dexter Fowler, doubled and scored, giving the Cubs the only run they would need. How elegant was that?

As giddy as we are about the Cubs and this halcyon season, there’s something else to savor — the future. This is not just a team turbo-charged with talent, it’s an astoundingly young team turbo-charged with talent. Russell’s just 22; Baez is 23. MVP candidate Kris Bryant is 24. Don’t forget slugger Kyle Schwarber, 23, slated to return next year, healed from a season-killing injury and amped up for 2017.

For now, savor the present and salute a cast that, dare we say, could soon have us readying the confetti.

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**Chicago Tribune**

Cub fans now strangers in a strange land
By John Kass

Cubs fans, the World Series calls and the Cleveland Indians are waiting.

Forget the history. Instead, think of yourselves as discoverers, as pilgrims in some strange new world created by Theo and the Ricketts family.

With your team in the World Series, Cubs history is irrelevant. History is like armor; it shields you from the moment. It’s heavy and it gets in the way. So drop it.

It’s been more than a century since the Cubs won a World Series, and if you’re a true fan and not some bandwagon jumper, you already know the past.

You know the October wind that has mocked you year after year, while others had the Series in their towns. You know the wet of all those cold Novembers. You’ve said, “Wait till next year” so many times that it began to curdle on you, like a shriek at a grave.

There have been generations of futility, and reason alone couldn’t explain it. So you had to rely on curses and goats to make sense of things.

That’s all gone. You’re here, with the Cubs, and your hearts are pounding.

Baseball history, that weak, church-of-baseball history, is fine for some nine-part PBS documentary. But ballplayers aren’t nerds. They think of now, not then. History just doesn’t belong on a baseball diamond in October.

You think Javy Baez thinks about Cubs history? You think he wants to redeem what happened when the ball bounced through Leon Durham’s legs in San Diego? Or 1969 and the Mets, and the black cat and Ron Santo’s rage?
No. He makes his own history. He let that soft liner fall with men on base the other night, so the Cubs could turn a
double play against the Dodgers. His mind wasn't calcified by memories.

Kyle Hendricks played for Dartmouth, so he must have read some history. Go ask him. I wouldn't, but you could.
And here is what I'd like him to say to you about Cubs history: "History? So bleeping what? Shut up, nerd, and give
me the ball."

Here's what historians do as kids if they have an autographed baseball: They keep it in a glass case and worship it.
They collect baseball cards. They know about the "Homer in the Gloamin'."

But here's what ballplayers do as kids if the only baseball they've got is one with autographs on it: They hit it. They
catch it. They play with it in the dirt.

The only history that counts is what the Cub scouts and players and manager Joe Maddon put before them in
reports, one of pitches and tendencies, who's on form and who's not, who can't hit, who can.

Ballplayers aren't tweedy professors, smoking pipes like some geezer in the Narnia stories. Don't be the geezer.
And they're not some Sox fan who writes a newspaper column and is now vaguely apologizing for baiting Cubs fans
with talk of goat soup.

But humans are foolish, superstitious mammals, and there is still a market for incantations and curses and the
Cubs. And I've been called "The He-Witch of Wrigley" since that Bartman business. So you want a spell? OK, Here's
a spell:

By the burnt nose hairs of Harry Caray, by the singed eyelashes of Jose Cardenal, by the eyebrows of Ferguson
Jenkins, and by the rising smoke from all this holy hair, wake up, dammit, and stop with the stupid spells and forget
Cubs history.

You belong here, in the present, with the Cubs as the best team in baseball.

Being a fan means you don't hold anything at a distance. You hold your heart in April, right in your hand. You're
holding it now, thinking about Cleveland. History is at a distance. Fans are by definition, fanatics, and fans can't
seek safety in emotional distance. It's love, actually, isn't it? Love for a club and what it has meant to you and your
family and friends.

There is no refuge. Forget all that let's-keep-things-at-a-distance crap. Don't cheat yourselves by thinking of the
long view. Emotional safety is a soiled bed for politicians and cowards. They look for wiggle room. You can't.

You've waited for the series for so long. And this is what you've always wanted. Now you've got it, right in front of
you.

Love it.

And please, don't worry about what this means to Chicago.

Politicians and business types and civic boosters will try to explain it, and so will journalists. I might even give it a
go in the coming days. And if I do, please tell me to put my column in a bong and smoke it.

Don't worry about Chicago.

Chicago keeps getting kicked in the mouth and spits and gets up again. Chicago will be all right. Don't let anything
distract you.

The World Series is about to begin and you're strangers in a strange land. Others, too, must have felt this way.
The Spaniards with Columbus must have felt it, as they rowed toward that first sandy beach. And the Vikings, and Odysseus felt it, too. And now Cubs fans join them in this moment of discovery, of wonder and fear.

For all the true fans, for my brothers Pete and Nick, for Pat the paramedic, for Mary Ellen and all the rest of you, for all those hearts that bleed blue, by the burnt nose hairs of Harry Caray, I wish you good luck.

You're in the undiscovered country now. There's no going back.

Go Cubs.

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Chicago Tribune
Struggling Jason Heyward faces winter of adjustments to swing
By Mark Gonzales

Jason Heyward faces an offseason full of changes in an attempt to rediscover the swing that convinced the Cubs to sign him to an eight-year, $184 million contract last December.

"I'm sure there's going to be a lot of internal work done in the offseason with him, no question," manager Joe Maddon said Saturday "You know he's not satisfied with the year. But he keeps going out there. He's a big part of our 100-plus wins this year. So it is something he has to work on. He will work on it."

Maddon bypassed the Gold Glove right fielder Saturday night to give Albert Almora Jr. a start against the Dodgers in Game 6 of the National League Championship Series.

But he remains positive about Heyward.

"By no means has anyone given up on him," he said. "He just needs to clear his mind a little. When this is all (over), he'll go back to the drawing board."

The most glaring observation from scouts and others is Heyward's lack of solid contact. Heyward, 27, collected only 35 extra-base hits to go with a .230 batting average in 142 games during the regular season. Heyward is batting .071 (2-for-28) during the playoffs, including a 1-for-16 mark through the first five games of the NLCS. Heyward hasn't hit a ball out of the infield since Game 2.

"He's struggling, obviously," Maddon said. "... We've been through that before. He keeps working, and we have a lot of faith in him.

"If we didn't have the opportunity to do something different, then I wouldn't have. But we do. Albert presents well at the plate and well on defense to the point where we thought we need to give it a go."

Controlling Contreras: In the wake of Willson Contreras' emotions appearing to get the better of him during and after Game 5, Maddon hopes his rookie catcher will keep his poise — particularly with home plate umpire Ted Barrett on Saturday night.

"Just catch," Maddon said. "Do your normal catching thing because he's a passionate young man. I absolutely love it. You don't want to subtract a whole lot. Just focus on your pitcher. And control what you can."

Maddon confirmed Contreras and umpire Alfonso Marquez had "a little bit of a discussion" after Game 5.

Meet me in Cleveland: President Theo Epstein said he sent a text message to Indians manager Terry Francona, whom he hired over Maddon for the Red Sox before the 2004 season.

Epstein said he told Francona he hoped to see him soon.
Ecstatic Cubs fans on World Series: 'It's finally here'
By Patrick M. O'Connell, Tony Briscoe and Marwa Eltagouri

The last time the Cubs reached the World Series, Harry Truman was president, World War II had just ended and a
gallon of gas cost 21 cents.

And fans like Christian Hansen? They weren't even a twinkle in their great-grandparents' eyes.

Yet there was 20-year-old Hansen on Saturday night, celebrating with the tens of thousands of Cubs faithful —
both inside and outside Wrigley Field — on hand to witness history.

Young and old. Lifelong fans and bandwagon jumpers. North Siders and even those from the south. They all came
together in Wrigleyville to rejoice in a team that won't have to wait until next year.

“This win is something everyone can shoot for. It's a light at the end of the tunnel,” said Hansen, of South Elgin,
who arrived at the stadium without a ticket at noon and soaked up the excitement from outside for the next 10
hours. “We've gotta enjoy this, because you never know when it'll be another 71 years.”

Indeed, as the game ended on a double play, only 2016 mattered.

The Cubs beat the Dodgers 5-0 to earn the North Side team's first World Series berth since 1945. The team hasn't
won the world championship since 1908, though such records mean little to this team that has thumbed its nose at
history for much of this thrilling season.

Inside the park, fans wiped away tears of joy and shook the bleachers with their raucous celebrations. Outside,
they clogged the streets around Wrigley Field for blocks in all directions. North Side bars popped Champagne
bottles and residents shot off fireworks when the final out was recorded.

“I'm just happy that there's something good for the city finally, something good in the news,” Paxton Tomlin, 20,
said as he stood with his father in a parking lot off Addison Street, within sight of Wrigley. “It's fantastic. The town
needs this.”

The victory celebrations began as early as the fifth inning. With the Cubs up 5-0, many already were convinced that
the team would be playing in the World Series, which starts Tuesday in Cleveland.

“Let's celebrate, but it's not over,” Forrest Engelman, 33, of the West Loop said as the players did a victory lap
around the outfield. “It's been 71 years since we clinched the pennant, so we'll celebrate, but it's not over.”

It was a crisp late-October evening, typically not a time when the Cubs are playing baseball — but no one seemed
to mind the chill. Not even the memory of the crushing defeat the last time the Cubs played a Game 6 in the NLCS
at Wrigley Field 13 years ago threatened their spirits. The Cubs were up 3-2 in that series and then went on to lose.

Rogers Park native Jim Phillips, 32, was determined to make it inside Wrigley Field for Game 6 after watching the
2003 game from a friend's apartment on Waveland Avenue.

From a bird's-eye perch high above center field in the bleachers, he readied himself for a different outcome this
time. The lifelong fan recalled playing hooky from school and heading to Wrigley, where he would buy $10 tickets
to the games.

“I just feel grateful to be here,” he said. “Look at this. Look at this! It's beautiful.”
With history on the line, fans descended on the ballpark hours ahead of the first pitch. They came by “L” and yellow shuttle buses, riding Divvy bikes and spilling out of ride shares and taxis. They pushed toddlers in strollers and walked their dogs, dressing both in Cubs regalia. Hundreds of police officers looked on.

The intersection of Clark and Addison turned into a giant outdoor photo studio, with fans of all ages extending their arms for selfies and asking strangers to take group shots with the iconic Wrigley Field marquee as the backdrop.

Kelly Roccasalva took photos of 3-month-old daughter Caroline, aloft in the arms of husband Andrew in the middle of Addison Street, the Wrigley marquee in the background.

“We're hoping she's bringing the Cubs good luck,” Kelly Roccasalva said. “Hopefully, this will be remembered as the year she was born and the year the Cubs went to the World Series.”

The line to get into the bars adjacent to the ballpark snaked down the block hours before the game started. Those who couldn't get in watched the game on TVs from the sidewalks outside.

“I knew they were good from day one,” said Bob Ward, who watched from a spot on a sidewalk outside a North Side bar. “This is the year. It's finally here.”

Vendors near the stadium hawked “Ain't Afraid of No Goat” T-shirts for $25 and a fan wore a “#WaitTilThisYear” shirt. Another vendor, willing to tempt fate, proclaimed that he was selling “World Series water.”

Behind the center field scoreboard, fans took photos in front of the Harry Caray statue and lined up to watch the FS1 pregame show, which was broadcasting live from an outdoor studio platform in the parking lot across from Murphy's Bleachers.

When baseball great Pete Rose arrived for the show, he waved a small “W” flag. Cubs fans, who have been critical of Rose's playoff analysis, cheered.

Christine Jacobs, 63, and daughter Caroline Wisler, 27, flew in from Philadelphia. They visited the family's commemorative brick, one of many that fill the sidewalk behind the bleachers. The brick that honors Jacobs' father reads “Robert J. Jacobs, A Cub Family Since 1920.” Robert Jacobs died in 2008.

“I'm going to see them win,” Christine Jacobs said. “I'm going to see them win for my dad.”

The pair, who sprawled on the sidewalk to take a picture with the brick, bought their tickets to the game on StubHub last week, intent on watching their beloved Cubs in the playoffs, and with a win, a berth in the World Series.

Even White Sox fan Alicia Lau and her husband made the trip to Wrigleyville to watch the game at a bar with the Cubs faithful. “I'm rooting for the Cubs,” she said. “I'm a Chicagoan.”

The game was expected to draw some of the Cubs' most famous fans, including Plain White T's lead singer Tom Higgenson, actress Bonnie Hunt and actor Jim Belushi. Former Cubs pitcher Kerry Wood threw out the ceremonial first pitch while Bulls legend Scottie Pippen was tapped to sing “Take Me Out to the Ballgame” during the seventh-inning stretch.

Before the game, Pearl Jam singer Eddie Vedder started the celebration early by tossing Cubs-themed guitar picks with his initials to fans from the roof of Murphy's Bleachers. Actor John Cusack, who has been Vedder's seatmate at other playoff games, joined him at the Wrigleyville bar.

Anticipating a clinch, season ticket holder Debbie Manfredi, 49, is now far ahead of other fans. She already has hotel space booked relatively close to Wrigley Field for next week's championship series against the Indians.

“It's going to be crazy,” said Manfredi, of Algonquin. “It'll be a nonstop party into next week.”
Every Cubs home playoff game, the Tribune will introduce you to fans sitting in Aisle 240, Row 23 of Wrigley Field during what fans hope will be a historic run.

Tammy Frame, 46, and son Trenton Haraminac, 16, of Portage, Ind.

How did you get your ticket?

Frame bought the tickets online.

How much did it cost?

$450

Do you believe in the curse?

Frame said no.

If you had two free tickets to a Cubs World Series, but you had to take a goat or Steve Bartman, who would you choose?

After a small cringe, Trenton said, "I'd have to choose Steve Bartman."

Frame: "I'm not so superstitious. I'd choose the goat."

What is your favorite ballpark tradition?

They both choose the singing of "Take me out to the Ballgame" for the seventh-inning stretch.

Who has been the best celebrity seventh-inning stretch singer?

Frame said former Bears coach Mike Ditka's quick-paced rendition was her favorite.

Trenton preferred actor Jim Belushi.

Two outs, top of the ninth, Game 7 of the World Series, Cubs down by one with the bases loaded, whom do you want at the plate?

Trenton and Frame both chose first baseman Anthony Rizzo.

How did you first became a Cubs fan?

Frame: "I had family members. My grandpa was a Cubs fan and when I was a little girl he would say he couldn't die that year because the Cubs hadn't won the World Series. I think a lot people have said that, but he's long gone now. So, I'm here to hopefully see it happen for him."

Trenton: "I became a Cubs fan because my parents were Cubs fans."
What is your favorite Cubs memory?

One win away from the team's first trip to a World Series since 1945, Frame said, "I think today will be my favorite Cubs memory. And when I was younger in college (at Loyola) even if I couldn't afford to come to the games, I would come down here all the time and just hang out."

Trenton: "So far, I think it was the 100th anniversary game. I got in and it was packed. It was really fun."

What do you remember about your first trip to Wrigley?

Trenton: "I remember walking out and seeing the field and saying it's a lot bigger than the one we play on. It's amazing. The ivy."

Frame: "I thought it was cool that we were going to a baseball game. I think it was my first sporting game or event I've ever been to professionally."

Who is your favorite Cub player of all time?

Frame: Ryne Sandberg

Trenton: "Even though I never saw him play, I'm going to choose Ron Santo."

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**Chicago Tribune**

Celebrities flocking to Wrigley Field for Cubs-Dodgers Game 6

By Phil Thompson

Game 6 will draw a slew of athletes and stars with Chicago ties to Wrigley Field, including Bulls legend Scottie Pippen, Blackhawks great Chris Chelios and actors Bonnie Hunt and Jim Belushi, as well as several former Cubs. Here's the list of VIPs expected to attend on Saturday, according to the Cubs.

Athletes and actors:

- Jimmy Butler, Bulls forward
- Rajon Rondo, Bulls guard
- Doug McDermott, Bulls forward
- Scottie Pippen, retired Bulls forward
- Michael Wilbon, ESPN personality
- Tom Morello, musician of Rage Against the Machine and The Nightwatchman fame, Libertyville native
- Jim Belushi, actor
- Zach Miller, Bears tight end
- Bonnie Hunt, actor
- CM Punk, UFC fighter, former WWE wrestler
- Jason Beghe, actor (“Chicago P.D.”)
Dan Dakich, college basketball analyst

Chris Jacobs, co-host of TLC series "Long Lost Family" who got engaged at Wrigley Field in August

Tom Higgenson, Plain White T's lead singer

Eddie Vedder, Pearl Jam lead singer

Chris Chelios, retired Blackhawks defenseman

John Cusack, actor

Billy Corgan, Smashing Pumpkins and Elk Grove native

Mitch Unrein, Bears defensive end

Shawn Marion, retired NBA player and North Chicago native

Former Cubs:

Andre Dawson, retired outfielder (Cubs: 1987-92)

Ryan Dempster, retired pitcher (Cubs: 1998-2008, 2011-12)

Kerry Wood, retired pitcher (Cubs: 2004-12)

Alfonso Soriano, outfielder (Cubs: 2007-13)

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**Chicago Sun-Times**

A fan snags the limelight in the Bartman seat

By Dan McGrath

Bryan, a good-natured, 38-year-old employee of a family-entertainment company, was quite surprised to find a scrum of reporters awaiting him when he arrived at Section 4, Row 8, Seat 113 in Wrigley Field on Saturday night, minutes before the start of Game 6 of the Cubs-Dodgers National League Championship Series.

Bryan, who chose not to divulge his last name or many personal details, wore a blue “14” Ernie Banks cap and a blue-on-white “W” sticker on his jacket. He was not aware of the historical significance of the seat he acquired in the Cubs’ online lottery. “But I am now,” he said.

The seat belonged to luckless Steve Bartman for Game 6 of the 2003 NLCS, Cubs vs. Florida Marlins. It’s the seat from which his ill-timed lunge for a foul ball off the bat of the Marlins’ Luis Castillo launched a two-day series of events that ended the Cubs’ quest for the World Series after they had been five outs away. As they took the field against the Dodgers on Saturday, they hadn’t been closer since their last Series appearance 71 years ago.

Bryan, originally from Detroit, was not in ballpark that night, “but I lived in the area and I was aware,” he said. “I was still a Tiger fan, to be honest. Now it’s Cubs. If a foul ball comes this way, I’m keeping my hands to myself.”

A gnarly-looking fan in a Cubs hoodie observed the conversation from a few seats over and mistook -Bryan’s Banks hat for a Dodgers cap. “You reach for a foul ball tonight and we’ll come find you,” he warned, perhaps kidding, perhaps not.

“No worries,” Bryan -replied cheerfully. “Let’s -enjoy the game.”
The mood in the seats surrounding Bryan’s was festive before he arrived. A few fans came by to take photos, including Heather Johns, from Richmond, Virginia. Her 9-year-old son, William, wasn’t alive on Oct. 14, 2003, but he wanted a picture of the seat because he felt sorry for Bartman after seeing how fellow fans turned on him in “Catching Hell,” an ESPN documentary on the infamous night.

John Zeitz, who had driven over from Kansas with his pregnant wife, Jillian, watched the collapse on television in his dorm room at Kansas University and was dismayed to learn later that Bartman was from Northbrook, “my hometown.”

Brandon Jones brought his 10-year-old son, Kai, over from Section 105 and wore a horrified look when told where he was standing. Cubs reliever Pedro Strop then flipped a baseball to Kai, and the seat seemed pretty nice to the Joneses.

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Chicago Sun-Times
Cubs’ Hendricks has night for the ages; wild celebration ensues
By Steve Greenberg

All that discouraging history. All that fear and doubt.

All gone.

If anyone was cursed Saturday night at Wrigley Field, it was the visiting Dodgers. Cursed by the baseball gods, who lined them up against an absolute buzzsaw of a team and a stoic savant of a pitcher.

Clayton Kershaw, you are dismissed.

Kyle Hendricks, you are everything you’ve been cracked up to be and more.

The Cubs are going to the World Series. Let’s say that once more, with feeling: The Cubs are going to the World Series.

Their 5-0 victory in Game 6 touched off a celebration that will live forever in the hearts of these Cubs and their massive following. And it will be ages before anyone forgets how it happened, with Hendricks — the 2016 major league ERA champ — delivering the performance of his life and Kershaw, the most ballyhooed pitcher of his time, left standing hopelessly in front of a runaway Cubs train.

For the Cubs, there was no waiting to get rolling. They jumped on Kershaw in the first inning, with leadoff man Dexter Fowler dropping a double down the right-field line. Kris Bryant followed with an RBI single, taking a two-strike single to the opposite field as if he’d been doing that sort of thing his whole career.

When Dodgers left fielder Andrew Toles dropped a line shot from Anthony Rizzo for an error, one began to see that the guys from Los Angeles — not the ones bearing the weight of 1908 and 1945 and monstrous expectations — might not be built for a moment the size of this one. The Cubs? Ready. Willing. Able as all get-out.

They put two runs on the Dodgers in that first, with Kershaw toiling for 30 pitches, and ran the lead to 5-0 — with home runs from Willson Contreras and Anthony Rizzo — by the time they were done bullying the lefty.

Hendricks, meanwhile, was at his unflappable best. At the end of each of his seven innings — and when he left the game with one out in the eighth — he pulled down the brim of his cap, lowered his head and slowly, serenely walked to the dugout. Same as always, but on this night quite a juxtaposition against the gathering chaos in the stands.

Speaking of chaos, here’s the gist of what you need to know about the postgame clubhouse. Hugs, piggy-back rides, a dance party. Of course, champagne and Budweiser everywhere. Also:
“I’m proud of you.”

“I love you.”

These are words shared by many of these Cubs on a routine basis. They flowed as freely and sweetly as the bubbly Saturday night.

“Best group of guys in the world,” Jon Lester said. “Closest team in the world.”

Jayson Heyward, the first-year Cub with the massive contract and the undersized batting average, embraced Anthony Rizzo and congratulated him for fighting out of his own playoff slump.

“I’m proud to feel a part of a group that looks every challenge in the eye,” Heyward said.

It’s what the Cubs did in their second crack at Kershaw, and it’s what Hendricks did — again — because that’s who he has become as much as anyone on this team.

“We’re not done,” Hendricks said as Jake Arrieta walked up behind him and prepared to empty a bottle of Bud onto his head. “We’re still going.”

Arrieta called Hendricks “as well-prepared and well-poised as anybody in baseball. And you put those two things together and you get a guy like that.”

Lester described Hendricks’ outing as “(bleeping) unbelievable” and said he had been “the best pitcher all season.” Both Lester and Hendricks are in the running for this year’s N.L. Cy Young award.

“It’s him. It’s Kyle,” Lester said. “He deserves everything that’s coming his way.”

It was time for the party to move back outside. Addison Russell, Jason Hammel, Carl Edwards Jr., David Ross — one by one, they rushed out of the clubhouse and up the tunnel to the field, two-fisted with celebratory beverages.

Former pitcher Kerry Wood — who was on the mound in 2003 the last time the Cubs tried to clinch a World Series berth — was on hand to revel with them. Billy Williams and other ex-Cubs, too, not to mention a few locally grown Hollywood celebrities.

When Hendricks saw his mother on the field, she took his face in her hands and said, “Oh, baby. You did it.”

He sure did. He took the baton from Game 5 winner Lester and ran with it — a pair of elite pitchers at their best exactly when the Cubs needed them to be, and a hell of a one-two punch.

Kershaw and the Dodgers went down for the count. Hendricks rose to the occasion like a champion.

Like there was never any doubt.

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Chicago Sun-Times
World Series bound: ‘This is a new Chicago Cubs team’
By Gordon Wittenmyer

These aren’t your father’s Cubs.

Or your grandfather’s — or his goat’s.
Maybe one day next month or next spring – after Addison Russell, Kris Bryant and Javy Baez have had a chance to rest up from a month in their personal October sandbox – they might even realize it themselves.

Until then, know only this: Next year finally arrived for the Cubs, at roughly 9:45 p.m. Saturday night – just 71 years and 12 days since the last time they saw a pitch in the World Series.

“We don’t care about history,” said Bryant after he drove in the first run in a 5-0 victory over the Dodgers in the National League Championship Series clincher that shook Wrigley Field to its newly poured foundation.

“This is a completely different team,” Bryant said. “Different people all around. It don’t matter. This is a new Chicago Cubs team. And we’re certainly a very confident group.”

Different? Confident?

Kyle Hendricks outpitched three-time Cy Young winner Clayton Kershaw with 7 1/3 near-flawless innings, and the youngest lineup to ever take the field in a league championship series clincher did the rest to propel the Cubs to their first World Series since 1945.

They’ll face the American League-champion Indians in Game 1 on Tuesday night in Cleveland.

“There’s another trophy we want,” said general manager Jed Hoyer, who came in with team president Theo Epstein in the fall of 2011 and began a full rebuild. “You take a little bit of time to appreciate doing something that hasn’t been doing in 71 years—you look at the way these people are celebrating, and it’s awesome.

“But we’re not going to be satisfied,” he said. “We want one more trophy; that’s the goal. So you take tonight, you enjoy it, and then you get ready to win four more games.”

If there was a downbeat note on this night of unbridled release by generations of fans who were packed 42,000 deep in the ballpark – and tens of thousands deeper in the surrounding streets and sidewalks – it was the moment manager Joe Maddon made the slow walk to the mound to pull Kyle Hendricks from the historic start.

Maddon, the first manager to take the Cubs to the World Series since Charlie Grimm, was booed by the full-house, full-throated crowd – which then quickly pivoted into a standing ovation for Hendricks.

“Our young players are playing like they’re 32-year-old veterans,” pitcher Jake Arrieta said of Hendricks, 26, and a lineup that included two rookies and three other players 25 or younger.

“I saw the young players that were in this organization, and I saw the leadership from the front office,” Arrieta said of his first impression after arriving in a 2013 trade. “And you knew this was a possibility.

“The growth and development from guys like [Russell] and Javier Baez and [Willson] Contreras – you can’t make this stuff up,” he added. “You don’t expect to see the maturity from guys at such a young age. And you combine that with guys like Jon Lester and [John] Lackey coming in here and bringing some veteran leadership – and Kyle Hendricks. I mean, what more can you say about that guy?”

Hendricks left the game after allowing his first hit since the first batter of the game – a one-out single by Josh Reddick in the eighth – as the public address system played his walkup music (Aerosmith’s “Sweet Emotion”) instead of incoming closer Aroldis Chapman’s.

Hendricks retired 18 straight before the hit (including a pickoff to end the second).

Kershaw?

The greatest pitcher on earth succumbed to the biggest American sports story in a century as the Cubs jumped on the left-hander for two quick runs in the first and never looked back.
“I don’t think they’re oblivious; that would be insulting to them,” Hoyer said. “They know the history. I just don’t think they care.”

Lester, who started the Cubs’ victories in Games 1 and 5 allowed just two hits in 13 innings, earned co-MVP honors for the series with defensive and offensive hero Baez.

“Listen, man, I know that we played a great, great team. And we’re going to have to play another really great team,” said front office special assistant Ryan Dempster, the Game 1 starter for the Cubs’ 2008 playoff favorite. “But this group, they’re special, man. I’ve been around a few. And they’re special.

“I don’t know what tomorrow holds. I don’t know who’s going to end up in jail tonight or whatever happens. But this group deserves every bit of everything they get tonight. These guys are amazing.”

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Chicago Sun-Times
History takes a hike as the Cubs head to the World Series
By Rick Morrissey

Like the wind on so many days at Wrigley Field, history was blowing out Saturday night.

Seventy-one years of it flew out of the old yard, just breezed right on by, as if it had finally realized it had overstayed its welcome. Dude, way to take a hint. The big, bad stuff went quickly – 1969, 1984, 1989, 2003, 2008 – the rest of it followed and all that was left was the Cubs’ first pennant since 1945. Well, that and a party of prodigious proportions inside and outside Wrigley.

The Cubs are going to the World Series. Oh, so this is how it feels.

They will face the Indians with the hope of winning their first title since 1908. OK, OK, maybe there is more history in need of another gale-force ride out of Wrigley.

The Cubs beat the Dodgers 5-0 in Game 6 of the National League Championship Series, which explains the scene that took place after shortstop Addison Russell fielded Yasiel Puig’s grounder and threw to Javy Baez, who stepped on second to force out Carlos Ruiz, then threw to Anthony Rizzo for the double play. (Score that 6-4-3 equals 71.)

The party commenced. Rizzo raised his arms, players romped like kids at the pitcher’s mound, and gloves and caps went flying. If there had been a giant statue for fans to topple with ropes and mallets, they would have. That’s how heavy this history has been, how it had weighed on the franchise and those parts of the city that bled blue profusely over the years.

It’s amazing what a crowd of 42,386 pent-up, repressed, deprived souls can do. For one thing, it can make the Wrigley press box shake over and over again. This is what happens when you let Cubs fans go wild. Could be a gateway drug. That’s all I’m saying.

Holding the championship trophy, Cubs chairman Tom Ricketts thanked “the greatest fans in the world,” and, trust me, no one inside Wrigley was disagreeing. Nor did they have any objections when he said, “All I know is we have to win four more games.”

Theo Epstein, the Cubs president of baseball operations, wouldn’t touch the trophy, surely because he has a better one in mind. He should. His team is a monster.

And then came manager Joe Maddon, the chemist, the conjurer, the ... couch potato?

“I just wanted to watch football tomorrow,” he told the cheering crowd.
The craziest part of the whole, crazy night was how easy it was. You kept waiting for the Dodgers to make a game of it, but almost from the moment Dexter Fowler opened the Cubs’ half of the first with a double off Dodgers ace Clayton Kershaw, there was little in the way of resistance. There was too much Kyle Hendricks, too much Rizzo and — am I writing this? — too much Willson Contreras.

Kris Bryant knocked in Fowler with a single, and then Dodgers leftfielder Andrew Toles inexplicably forgot to look a Rizzo line drive into his glove. Dropping the ball is the kind of mistake historically associated with the Cubs. Now, it was somebody else’s turn to do the wrong thing at the wrong time. Such a strange, foreign sensation. Two-nothing Cubs after an inning.

The park rocked after Toles’ error, and it would rock again as the Wrigley faithful celebrated rookie Contreras’ fourth-inning home run. Same with Rizzo’s homer in the fifth.

The best way to stave off even the slightest chance of a spirit-crushing comeback is to not allow it a foothold. After giving up a hit on his first pitch of the night, Hendricks retired 17 straight Dodgers. That’s the stuff of legend.

The fans stayed late, singing that bad “Go, Cubs, Go” song, but, hey, it was their night and they could do with it what they like.

“These fans certainly deserve it way more than us,” Bryant said. “They have waited a long time. We aren’t done.”

This might take some getting used to.

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**Chicago Sun-Times**

Curse-shaw: Cubs breeze by Dodgers ace on way to World Series

By Steve Greenberg

All that discouraging history. All that fear and doubt.

All gone.

If anyone was cursed Saturday night at Wrigley Field, it was the visiting Dodgers. Cursed by the baseball gods, who lined them up against an absolute buzzsaw of a team and a stoic savant of a pitcher.

Clayton Kershaw, you are dismissed.

Kyle Hendricks, you are everything you’ve been cracked up to be and more.

The Cubs are going to the World Series. Let’s say that once more, with emphasis: The Cubs are going to the World Series.

Their 5-0 victory in Game 6 touched off a celebration that will live forever in the hearts of these Cubs ands their massive following. And it will be ages before anyone forgets how it happened, with Hendricks — the 2016 major league ERA champ — delivering the performance of his life and Kershaw, the most ballyhooed pitcher of his time, left standing hopelessly in front of a runaway Cubs train.

“We’re not done,” Hendricks said. “We’re still going.”

For the Cubs, there was no waiting to get rolling. They jumped on Kershaw in the first inning, with leadoff man Dexter Fowler dropping a double down the right-field line. Kris Bryant followed with an RBI single, taking a two-strike single to the opposite field as if he’d been doing that sort of thing his whole career.
When Dodgers left fielder Andrew Toles dropped a line shot from Anthony Rizzo for an error, one began to see that the guys from Los Angeles — not the ones bearing the weight of 1908 and 1945 and monstrous expectations — might not be built for a moment the size of this one. The Cubs? Ready. Willing. Able as all get-out.

They put two runs on the Dodgers in that first, with Kershaw toiling for 30 pitches, and ran the lead to 5-0 — with home runs from Willson Contreras and Anthony Rizzo — by the time they were done bullying the lefty.

Hendricks, meanwhile, was at his unflappable best. After he picked off Josh Reddick at first base to end the second inning, Hendricks did what Hendricks does — turn, pull down the brim of his cap, lower his head and slowly, ever so calmly walk to the dugout. It was an epic reaction in its utter serenity, an impossibly juxtaposition against the gathering chaos in the stands.

Jake Arrieta recently described that side of Hendricks, the one that never gets higher or lower than the dead middle. It’s an approach, a tactic, a gift — whatever you want to call it — that no one else on these crazy Cubs has.

“It was funny to me at first. I thought it was odd,” Arrieta said. “But the guy’s as even-keeled as they come. He never shows his emotion whether he’s getting his ass kicked or throwing a shutout.”

Hendricks probably could’ve done the latter had Joe Maddon let him. Instead, he went 7 1/3 innings, allowing two hits and striking out six, with zero walks. He took the baton from Game 5 winner Jon Lester and ran with it — a pair of Cy Young-level outings and a hell of a one-two punch.

Kershaw and the Dodgers went down for the count. Hendricks rose to the occasion like a boss. Like there was never any doubt.

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Chicago Sun-Times
‘It’s finally happened,’ Cubs fans ecstatic at NL pennant win
By Jacob Wittich

Ecstatic Cubs fans poured into the streets outside Wrigley Field Saturday night after a 5-0 victory over the Los Angeles Dodgers in the National League Championship Series sent the team to its first World Series since 1945.

“It’s finally happened,” said 63-year-old Bob Drinkall. “I’ve waited for this since I was 5 years old. You never believe it’s going to happen. And now it’s happening.”

Cheers mixed with tears among the sea of Cubbie blue and “W” flags. Some people cried. Others hugged, danced and just jumped around in excitement.

“My dad died in 2009, and he never got to see the Cubs in the World Series, but I feel him here tonight with us,” a teary-eyed Ryan Patrick said as he celebrated in the streets. “This is the greatest thing that’s ever happened. And I’ve never felt so amazing.

“People have lived and died waiting to see this moment, so to cheer them into the World Series is special,” his brother Kyle Daby said.

“Cheering the Cubs to the World Series has been the greatest experience of my life, and it’s not over yet,” another fan, T.J. Leonard, said. “I cried when we won tonight. And if anyone tells you they didn’t, they’re a liar.”

Also outside the ballpark, William Rosales said, “I’m in disbelief. I’ve never felt better. We’ll be out here celebrating all night — and we’ll be out here the entire World Series for our team.”

Another happy fan, Lee Berry, said, “This is history, and we’re here making magic together. The Cubs finally made it. And I can’t imagine being anywhere else right now.”
Ed Koenig of Darien was still in his seat an hour after the game — among thousands who stayed. His eyes welled up as he talked about his father, who died in May.

Koenig said he didn’t feel up for going to a Cubs game all season after that. So, when a friend won a lottery for tickets, he had to be convinced to go.

He showed off his father’s watch on his wrist and said, “I thought I was going without my dad — but I’m with him.”

A few miles away, Justin Moore, owner of barrel Maker Printing, began printing the Major League Baseball official Cubs’ post-season T-shirts. The company will print approximately 2,600 shirts an hour through the night that will be sold in sporting stores throughout the country, Moore said.

“I grew up in Chicago, so I’m a Cubs fan, and it’s cool to be a part of something in the city that’s so big,” Moore said.

Mayor Rahm Emanuel called the Cubs’ victory “incredible. Absolutely incredible.

“We are witnessing history right before our eyes,” the mayor said. “Our Cubs just won the pennant. So fly the ‘W,’ Chicago. The fun continues in Cleveland on Tuesday night. Go, Cubs!”

Shawn Zuydema, celebrating with his daughter outside Wrigley Field, said, “I was at the Cubs game in 2008 when the Cubs lost to the Dodgers. This is vengeance. It feels great right now to see this happening.”

Eva Peroulas missed the game because she had a reception to go to, but she and John Laftsidis decided to head to Wrigley Field afterward to join in the celebration.

“We’ve waited for this forever, so we had to come out here and celebrate,” Peroulas said. “I could cry. We’re going to celebrate until we can’t anymore. This is for my brother — he’s got a Cubs emblem on his tombstone, so we’re celebrating for him.”

Muhammad Vaince, a lifelong Cubs fan, said he flew from Orlando to cheer the Cubs on.

“I bought a ticket and flew all the way out here, and it was worth it,” Vaince said. “Chicago deserves this.”

Even on the South Side, there were some cheers for the North Siders.

“I’m a diehard Sox fan, no rooting for the Cubbies for me, but the crowd tonight is,” said Renee Renaud, who said she’s been a bartender for 26 years at First Base, 3201 S. Normal Ave. in Bridgeport near Sox park. “We have a lot of Cubs fans. It’s like a sea of blue in here tonight.”

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Chicago Sun-Times
Theo and Tito together again on another curse-busting stage
By Gordon Wittenmyer

The man Theo Epstein hired in Boston to manage the team that would end the Curse of the Bambino in 2004 now awaits in Cleveland for the chance to spoil the Cubs’ and Epstein’s shot at ending another.

Epstein and Terry Francona went their separate ways after the Red Sox’ epic beer-and-chicken collapse in 2011, with Epstein embarking on an overhaul in Chicago and Francon landing with the Indians – who beat the Blue Jays in five games in the ALCS.

“I texted him right after they won,” said Epstein, who hired Francona over finalist Joe Maddon for the Red Sox job before the 2003 season. “He said he hoped to see me next week.”
It starts Tuesday night in Cleveland for Game 1. The Cubs trying to end a 108-year drought; the Indians, a 68-year drought.

“What we’re in for is what [Francona has] shown all postseason,” said Cubs GM Jed Hoyer, who was with Epstein and Francona in Boston. “He’s going to do everything he can to win that night’s game. Joe [Maddon] manages the same way, and I love that.”

Rookie moments

The Cubs took the field Saturday for Game 6 with two rookies in the lineup for the first time this postseason, with Maddon electing to start right-handed hitting Albert Almora Jr. in $184 million Jason Heyward’s spot in right field.

Rookie Willson Contreras was behind the plate, catching Kyle Hendricks. Seven of the Cubs starters were 27 or younger.

“You look at [Clayton Kershaw’s] numbers, and they’re absurd against lefties,” Maddon said. “Albert’s swinging the bat well, and I like his defense a lot, so we chose to go with one more right-handed bat.”

Maddon said he texted Heyward – who’s just 2-for-28 this postseason – the night before about the decision.

“It’s never easy,” Maddon said. “I’m certain he’s not very happy with the whole thing. I wouldn’t be if I was him either.

“At the end of the day, man, you’ve just got to make some tough calls, some tough decisions.”

Cubs buzz

Epstein sees what the Cubs are doing to the city and its surroundings, whether he’s out walking his dog, out about town or at the ballpark.

“I love being in a city that’s playing October baseball where you can just feel everyone captivated by the ballclub,” he said. “Everyone walking around tired from staying up late, prioritizing baseball above all else. It’s a great phenomenon.”

Maddon said he was struck by the seen outside the ballpark a few hours before Saturday’s game.

“Driving up Clark, it’s like a video game coming up there,” he said. “You’ve got to be careful. If they wanted to hand out jay-walking tickets today they’d make a lot of money. I mean, it’s one big frat party constantly, man.”

Blowing off History class

Jake Arrieta watched Game 6 in the unusual position of not knowing whether he’d be starting a game the following day. The last thing on Arrieta’s mind as he watched Game 6 was the Cubs’ storied history of failures.

Arrieta and everyone else in the dugout, for that matter.

“Obviously we know that it’s something that’s going to be talked about with the history of the organization, but it’s really not something we focus on at all,” Arrieta said. “So we just kind of disregard it and go out and play.”

Said Maddon: “Of course, you understand the moment and how everybody’s waiting on the birth. In the meantime, you’ve got to go about the day the same way.”

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Chicago Sun-Times
With Cubs on the cusp, fans get ready to dig deep for Series tix
By Andy Grimm

Jay Bontempo is a man of modest means, but he is also a Cubs fan, and a Cubs fan knows sacrifice. And so, the 61-year-old service supervisor shelled out $1,500 to take his wife to Saturday’s game against the Dodgers.

If the Cubs return to Wrigley Field for a World Series game, Bontempo will dig deeper: he’s signed a contract with a ticket-broker friend to shell out $10,000 for two tickets if the Cubs dispatch the Dodgers and advance to the World Series for the first time since World War II.

“This is coming out of the kids’ inheritance,” said Bontempo, who grew up in Jefferson Park and can recall paying $2 for bleacher seats as a schoolboy — then staying after the game to collect trash at the ballpark in exchange for a general admission ticket for the next day.

“This is our year. I have got to do this. I could not not do this because of the money thing. I have waited my whole life for this. I learned to swear listening to my dad when we would watch the games on TV.”

The term “pent-up demand” might not do justice to the forces driving re-sale prices for the first World Series games played at Wrigley since 1945.

World Series games at Wrigley Field will be the most expensive ticket in baseball, with standing-room passes going for nearly $2,155 for Game 3, according to StubHub. The median price for the three potential games in Chicago rises from $3,000 for Game 1 to $3,600 for Game 5.

The highest sale price on StubHub to date: $71,800 for four bullpen box seats for a potential Game 5 at Wrigley, $17,950 each, spokesman Cameron Papp said. The price is refundable should the Cubs fall to the Dodgers, Papp said.

Games in Cleveland, which clinched their first appearance in the Series since 1996, are selling for about half the price of games at Wrigley, starting $795 with the median price rising to $1,125 for a Game 7.

Cubs ticket prices to date have surpassed the second-highest average for a World Series seen on StubHub, $1,800 for the Red Sox-Cardinals matchup in 2004 — the year the the Boston Red Sox finally exorcised the Curse of the Bambino and bumped Cleveland into second place on the list of longest World Series droughts. The Misery Multiplier effect on prices long-suffering fans are willing to pay not have peaked, Papp said.

“Will that price go up at Wrigley? It’s tough to predict Cubs demand at this point, because it’s like nothing we usually see,” Papp said. “It’s unprecedented.”

Longtime Chicago ticket broker Steve Buzil said prices are likely to fall as the games grow closer.

“The market right now is way over-inflated,” Buzil said Friday, estimating the cheapest tickets might fetch $1,500 by the first pitch at Wrigley Field. “I think you’re going to see prices fall 30, 40 percent.

“What you’re seeing in the websites now is people go out and have delusions of grandeur is what it is.”

Still, Wrigley has been the most expensive destination for fans throughout the playoffs, with an average ticket price of $530 for games in the National League Divisional Series, more than double the price of tickets for playoff games at AT&T Park in San Francisco, according to Jared Cooper, spokesman for TicketiQ, a website that aggregates sales data from ticket-resale sites.

Cooper advised that Buzil’s theory is correct: there will be an initial spike in prices online as sellers hope to get fantastical prices from must-have buyers who can’t withstand the anxiety of missing their chance to see a World Series game in Chicago. Prices for NLDS games against San Francisco dropped 42 percent after the first game of the series, according to TicketIQ data.
Papp said the prospect of being on hand if the Cubs are on the verge of winning their first World Series in 108 years could drive re-sale prices further into uncharted territory.

“I don’t think prices are going to tank by any means, but they might fall a little,” Papp said. “Then again, who knows? We’ve never seen anything like this.”

On Friday, as he contemplated the joy of being in Wrigley to see the Cubs overcome Dodgers starter Clayton Kershaw and earn a trip to the World Series, Bontempo worked himself into a state of irrational exuberance.

“Maybe I’ll even do another $5,000 each to bring my two sons to the World Series,” Bontempo said, choking up. “I know there’s people out there that don’t have enough to eat, that don’t have a place to stay. This was something I thought about, you know. But to be there, with my family. Maybe I will do it.”

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Chicago Sun-Times
FINAL: Cubs blank Dodgers 5-0, head to World Series
By Daryl Van Schouwen

If you are a Cubs fan and your head is exploding right now, you are not alone.

The Cubs are going to the World Series.

After going 71 years without, the Cubs punched their ticket to the Fall Classic on a brisk October Saturday night by defeating the Los Angeles Dodgers 5-0 in Game 6 of the National League Championship Series before 42,386 beside-themselves fans.

The Cubs led from start to finish, jumping on Dodgers ace Clayton Kershaw for two runs in the first inning and adding single runs in the second, fourth and fifth. Cubs right-hander Kyle Hendricks was dominant with 7 1/3 innings of two-hit ball.

Aroldis Chapman recorded the last five outs to cap a 4-2 NLCS victory.

Anthony Rizzo and Willson Contreras homered for the Cubs.

Game 1 of the World Series is Tuesday in Cleveland against the American League champion Indians. The Indians host the first two games, and the series returns to Wrigley Field for Games 3, 4 and 5 (if necessary) on Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

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Chicago Sun-Times
Cubs’ Schwarber cleared to hit, could be in play for World Series
By Gordon Wittenmyer

What could possibly have enough power to upstage Game 6 at Wrigley Field with the Cubs on the brink of the World Series?

Perhaps only the guy who hit a ball on top of the right-field video board in the playoffs last October.

The pregame buzz before the Cubs’ Saturday night date with history was about the sudden revelation that young slugger Kyle Schwarber might be in play for the Cubs’ World Series roster after spending the last 6½ months on the disabled list.
“Obviously we have to be smart with this and weigh the risk,” said team president Theo Epstein after Schwarber was activated from the 60-day DL and scheduled to bat as the designated hitter for the Mesa Solar Sox in Saturday night’s Arizona Fall League game.

Depending on how he holds up physically and what the Cubs’ baseball evaluators say about his performance, the Cubs are prepared to add Schwarber to their World Series roster against Cleveland as a DH and pinch hitter.

The lefty-hitting Schwarber was deemed well ahead of schedule and cleared to swing the bat and run the bases during his six-month checkup Monday with his surgeon in Dallas – surprising the player and the team.

He immediately called team president Theo Epstein seeking a chance to play in the postseason, and started taking batting practice that night after flying from Dallas to join the team in Los Angeles.

“We’ll see where this goes. We’re not ruling anything in. We’re not ruling anything out,” Epstein said. “We’re not getting ahead of ourselves. We have a lot of work to do here before this becomes pertinent on a short-term basis.

“But it’s a testament to how hard Kyle has worked to even be in this position where it’s a possibility. … With as hard as Kyle’s worked and as much as this means to him and potentially to us, we wanted to give him that opportunity [after consulting with medical staff].”

Since Schwarber suffered a season-ending injury to his left knee in the third game of the season, Epstein and other team officials had repeatedly ruled out Schwarber from returning to the active roster no matter how deep their playoff run lasted.

“It’s awesome, man,” manager Joe Maddon said. “I didn’t see it coming. My conversations with him have been primarily about next year. So honestly when this all popped up the other day I was really surprised.”

Schwarber, who has taken batting practice all week — including a session of live BP against a Cubs minor leaguer on Friday — was to wear a brace on the knee and bat second in Saturday’s AFL lineup. He went 0-for-3 with a walk, lining a 340-foot ball to right-center that required a diving catch in his last at-bat in the eighth inning.

He has not been cleared to play in the field.

“It wouldn’t surprise me if he is ready,” teammate Jake Arrieta said, lauding Schwarber’s exhaustive rehab work. “It’s just in a moment like that, it’s different than working out and being in the training room and being 100 percent there. Not that he can’t be 100 percent; it’s just a little scary situation for me. But having that bat, that’s hard to turn away if he’s ready to go.”

Assuming he fares well into Sunday morning, the Cubs were considering a simulated game Sunday as a next step, with the Solar Sox idle.

“He’s a pretty special person, and a special hitter,” Epstein said. “I don’t want to get ahead of ourselves, but if it does get to a point where we think he can help us, it says a lot about his talent and his work ethic.”

As a rookie last October, Schwarber broke the Cubs’ single-postseason record with five home runs and was considered a key bat in their plans to contend this season — until tearing his ACL in an outfield collision with Dexter Fowler April 7.

Games 1 and 2, and then Games 6 and 7 of the World Series would be played in Cleveland with the DH rule in effect.

“We were looking at winter ball at some point,” Epstein said of the anticipated timeline for Schwarber’s return to playing. “We weren’t proactive. We didn’t request anything from [the surgeon].
“Just the fact that he’s gotten to this point is a testament to his character, and he’s got everyone in the organization pulling for him,” Epstein added. “No matter what happens the rest of the way, we’re proud of him that he’s at this point, and it bodes really well for next year.”

Chicago Sun-Times
The moment finally has come: A celebration a long time coming
By Rick Telander

This one is for Ronnie and Ernie and Milt and Gentleman Jim and all the departed Cub souls of yore who never saw it happen.

It’s for the current players and their families and Cubs management and can-eating goats everywhere.

It’s for executive chairman Tom Ricketts, who walked through the upper deck in the fourth inning and was mobbed with joyful high fives as he moved along.

But most of all, it’s for Cubs fans here and beyond, the ones on this earth, up in the air, out in the ether, in family rooms, sick rooms, the living and the spirits who waited 71 years for their beloved team to make it once more into the World Series.

Ding-dong, half the witch is dead!

The Cubs have won the National League Championship Series, moving to a place they haven’t been since 1945.

A World Series crown? We’ll get to that after this feat sinks in.

Bring on Cleveland and their Indians and that hideous, politically incorrect mascot Chief Wahoo, who is to gentle Clark the bear as a hatchet is to a butter knife. Yes, you have suffered Indians fans, and welcome to the final showdown. But the Cubs have suffered more. And their fans most of all.

The moment Cubs center fielder Dexter Fowler led off against Dodgers lefty ace Clayton Kershaw with a ground-rule double that bounced over the brick wall past the Dodgers’ bullpen, you knew something was up.

Maybe it was true that Kershaw doesn’t do all that well in cold weather.

There was a large hanging sign fans brought, with a statement that might have been offensive a generation ago, but now is part of manager Joe Maddon’s T-shirt lexicon. It read: “Kershaw — Please Try to Suck!”

Mission accomplished.

When you chase a guy like Kershaw after taking a 5-0 lead in the fifth inning, you know it’s your night. No more sixth game blues. No more five outs from anywhere. Come on out of hiding, Steve Bartman! Enjoy this! Life is good, pal!

It’s impossible to look at the Cubs future without drifting into the past. Call it sentiment, call it shared yearning, call it the bonding of so many years.

But those hard-luck 1969 Cubs with Fergie Jenkins and Ron Santo and Ernie Banks, Billy Williams, Glenn Beckert, Randy Hundley, Don Kessinger — this is for them. Even for Don Young.

This is for the 1984 Cubs of Rick Sutcliffe, Bobby Dernier, Jody Davis and Steve Trout, who had their hearts cruelly broken by the Padres in the NLCS. This is for Leon Durham. That ball that went between your legs? Forget about it!
This is for the 1989 Cubs and the 1998 Cubs, and, of course, the 2003 Cubs of Mark Prior, Kerry Wood, Sammy Sosa, et al. — the “five outs away” team. That’s all gone. All washed away.

“Shout,” that joyous gospel/rock tune came blasting out of the PA before the Cubs started batting in the eighth inning. The fans sang along and the stadium swayed. That’s a scary feeling, people, an ancient structure like this rocking from delirium.

Before the ninth inning Eminem shouted defiantly: ‘The music, the moment, you own it!’ and again the building quaked.

The last out came and the Cubs’ gloves went flying into the air in ecstasy.

As the Cubs ran around the field in joy after the 5-0 win, waving to the fans still packed postgame at Wrigley Field — if anybody left early, I’m not aware of it — it was just a shocking sight. It’s just hard to believe. You know what I mean.

This one goes out to lifetime fan Bill Murray, who would have been here were he not in Washington, D.C., receiving the Mark Twain Prize for American Humor.

It goes out to Steve Goodman, the troubadour who died young, and, like the rest of us, never knew Cubs success. It goes out to his family and his late mom, Minnette, the 4-9, 90-pound dynamo who was as sweet and spirited as any Cubs fan anywhere.

It’s there for the 2007 and 2008 Cubs, great teams that couldn’t make it out of the first round.

As everybody sang “Go, Cub, Go,” Goodman’s anthem to possibility, sang it once, then sang it again after the trophy presentation, and the white “W” flags flew, it was, indeed — at last — all good.

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Daily Herald
A Schwarber return looks possible
By Bruce Miles

Chicago Cubs president Theo Epstein called it "a pleasant surprise."

It would be that and more if it panned out.

Epstein and the Cubs said Saturday that catcher-outfielder Kyle Schwarber was going to the Arizona Fall League to play in games as he recovers from major knee surgery he underwent in April. Schwarber injured his left knee April 7 in an outfield collision with center fielder Dexter Fowler in a game at Arizona.

Schwarber visited his surgeon, Dr. Daniel Cooper, in Dallas this past Monday and got extraordinarily good news. Cooper cleared Schwarber for hitting and running, but no fielding.

That gave the Cubs hope Schwarber could be able to DH at Cleveland should they make the World Series. Schwarber was scheduled to be the DH Saturday for the Mesa Solar Sox.

Last year, the left-handed hitting Schwarber hit 5 home runs in the postseason as a rookie.

"Kyle immediately called me from Dallas," Epstein said. "I wasn't expecting the call. He told me he had been cleared and asked for a chance to do this. With as hard as Kyle has worked and as much as this means to him and potentially us, we wanted to give him that opportunity after consulting our medical guys.

"Kyle flew from Dallas to L.A. Monday afternoon and a few of the guys stayed late and met him at the ballpark. He hit in the cage for the first time Monday night in L.A. and then he hit again in L.A. Tuesday, batting practice."
Wednesday was a recovery day and a travel day for him. He went down to Mesa and tracked a bunch of balls. On Thursday he took BP on the field in Mesa and tracked 400-500 balls off the pitching machine. (Friday) he took batting practice and live batting practice.

Epstein made his comments before Saturday night's sixth game of the National League championship series, and he wanted to make sure he wasn't coming off as assuming anything about the World Series.

"We'll see where this goes," he said. "We're not ruling anything in. We're not ruling anything out. We're not getting ahead of ourselves. We have a lot of work to do here before this becomes pertinent."

The 23-year-old Schwarber was the Cubs' first-round draft pick in 2014, and he made it to the major leagues last season.

Determination has been his strongest suit. Although some have doubted his skills as a catcher, Schwarber continued to work on it until he got hurt. That same determination seems to be paying off now.

"He's so passionate about baseball and his teammates and an incredibly hard worker and humble," Epstein said. "He's just been behind the scenes working his tail off and managing to stay part of the team. Physically, he's on an accelerated time table. From a baseball standpoint, he's only got about a week or so to get ready, but mentally he's been preparing for this for six months. Mentally he's been preparing for this a long time and he's itching to contribute."

Epstein said the Cubs will evaluate Schwarber from medical and baseball standpoints before making any decisions. Schwarber's left-handed bat would be welcome in the Cubs lineup at any point.

About the only problem Schwarber has had, according to Epstein, were blisters on his hands because of how many swings he has taken.

"He's a pretty special person and special hitter," Epstein said. "I don't want to get ahead of ourselves, but if it does get to a point where we think he can help us, it says a lot about his talent and his work ethic."

Back to the drawing board:

Right fielder Jason Heyward was not in Saturday's Game 6 lineup against Dodgers left-hander Clayton Kershaw. Rookie Albert Almora Jr. started in right.

Heyward, who signed an eight-year, $184 million contract with the Cubs last winter, batted .230 with 7 homers during the regular season. He entered Saturday 2-for-28 in the postseason.

"Kershaw's pretty good," said Cubs manager Joe Maddon. "You look at his numbers. He's been absurd against lefties also. Get another right-handed bat out there. The way Albert can play defense really makes it a little bit easier."

The Cubs may try to rebuild Heyward's swing this off-season.

"I'm sure there's going to be a lot of internal work done in the off-season with him, no question," Maddon said. "You know he's not satisfied with the year. But he keeps going out there, and again, he's a big part of our 100-plus wins this year. It is something he has to work on. He will work on it. But by no means has anybody given up on him. He just needs probably to clear his mind a little bit when this is all said and done and get back to the drawing board."
Daily Herald
Cubs heading to first World Series in 71 years
By Bruce Miles

It's OK to say it now: The Chicago Cubs are going to the World Series.

Repeat: The Chicago Cubs are going to the World Series.

A self-assured 5-0 victory Saturday night over the Los Angeles Dodgers at Wrigley Field in Game 6 of the National League championship series sent the Cubs to their first Fall Classic since the immediate post-World War II days of 1945.

Getting solid pitching from Kyle Hendricks and home runs from Willson Contreras and Anthony Rizzo, the Cubs wrapped up the NLCS in six games after having been down two games to one. They scored 5 runs against Dodgers ace left-hander Clayton Kershaw. The co-MVPs of the series were infielder Javier Baez and pitcher Jon Lester.

The Cubs will meet the Cleveland Indians in a World Series matchup featuring charter members of the National and American Leagues. The Series begins Tuesday in Cleveland at Progressive Field.

The Cubs will be seeking their first world championship since 1908, but for the 42,386 fans in the ballpark and the thousands on the streets outside, getting to the World Series was sweet relief. Cubs teams in 1984 and 2003 were one victory away from the series, but each of those teams lost the final three games of their championship series.

"The magic number is 4," Rizzo said. "Four games. Cleveland. That city is deserving of the World Series, too. It's going to be a clash of two cities that have been in a long drought, and this is really good for baseball.

"We see the signs saying, 'It's happening.' All these signs, all the fans bringing it. And here we are."

The pennant clincher resonated with the young and the young at heart.

"I can't believe it," said Cubs Hall of Famer Billy Williams. "I'm standing here on the field, and all of a sudden, we're in the World Series. Man, I'm telling you, this is really, really something. Standing on the field here. Standing on this sacred ground, celebrating tonight, is a great feeling."

The Cubs once again got a solid, team effort in the pennant-clincher. The 26-year-old Hendricks was sailing in calm waters all night. He gave up a single to Andrew Toles to begin the ballgame, and that was it until Josh Reddick singled with one out in the eighth.

At that point, manager Joe Maddon turned to closer Aroldis Chapman, who got pinch hitter Howie Kendrick on a 4-6-3 double play, as Cubs second baseman Javier Baez played the ball on the short hop to start the inning-ending play.

The game ended with another double play, with Yasiel Puig going out 6-4-3, and the celebration was on.

"It's one of those things that it's everything you think it is, but then again you have to -- you need time to really process the entire situation," said Maddon, in his second year with the team. "You stand out on that platform afterward and you're looking at the ballpark and the fans and the 'W' flags everywhere, and truthfully I do think about everybody, I think about the fans and their parents and their grandparents and great-grandparents and everything that's been going on here for a while."

The Cubs got things going right away with 2 runs in the first. Dexter Fowler led off with a double and came home when Kris Bryant singled to right. Rizzo came up and hit a flyball to left field. Toles dropped it for an error, putting runners on second and third.

Ben Zobrist followed with a sacrifice fly to center. The Cubs got no more runs in the first, but they ran Kershaw's pitch count up to 30.
Addison Russell led off the Cubs second with a double to the wall in left. Albert Almora Jr. grounded out to third, and Hendricks struck out. Fowler saved the inning with an RBI single to score Addison Russell.

Rookie catcher Willson Contreras led off the bottom of the fourth by hitting a line-drive home run to left. It was Rizzo's turn in the fifth, as he homered to right.

Hendricks, the major leagues' ERA champion, was calm and cool all night.

"That was my one goal coming into the game," he said. "I knew it wasn't just me. It was a team effort. It has been all year long. All I had to do was keep my team in the game. That brings the pressure down a lot."

Before heading into the clubhouse, the team celebrated on the field, in front of the fans. Everyone was there, from team chairman Tom Ricketts, to general manager Jed Hoyer to baseball president Theo Epstein, who took over in the fall of 2011 and transformed the Cubs into a team that is now National League champions.

"Kind of soaking it all in," Epstein said. "Really happy but also still focused on winning four more games at the same time ... More happiness, pride in our organization and our players and more excitement about the Fall Classic coming to Wrigley Field for our fans."

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Daily Herald
Constable: Cubs going to World Series without baggage
By Burt Constable

For the first time since 1945, the Chicago Cubs are going to the World Series. And they won't be taking all their usual baggage.

For the past 71 years, the Cubs franchise has been lugging around the weight of memories about fans and foul balls, black cats and mangy goats, close calls and curses that were old news before any of the current Cubs players or even manager Joe Maddon were born. These young and talented 2016 Cubs exorcised those demons Saturday night with a 5-0 win against the Los Angeles Dodgers at Wrigley Field to win the National League championship series 4 games to 2.

Cubs starting pitcher Kyle Hendricks was almost perfect. Teammates Anthony Rizzo and Willson Contreras hit homers. And ...

The Cubs are going to the World Series. Fans, who have been dreaming of that moment for a lifetime and then some, still have a hard time believing that. They hug after every Cubs hit and Dodgers out. They rise to applaud Hendricks when Maddon replaces him with closer Aroldis Chapman with five outs to go.

Holding their phones aloft to record the game-ending double play, they soak in the moment. There are a few tears. At least one newspaper columnist phones his 89-year-old mom just to mark the moment. The players celebrate on a field not used to postseason joy for the home team.

"I’m sleeping with this thing tonight. Are you kidding me. We’re going to the World Series!" Rizzo says during the postgame interview on the field as he holds the ball involved in that final out.

"I can’t stop smiling," likely NL MVP Kris Bryant gushes. "This is the coolest feeling of my life."

Pitcher Jon Lester and second-baseman Javier Baez share the MVP award for the National League championship series. Fans embrace the moment.

"Listen to them," Lester says as the fans cheer.
"We want the World Series to start," says Wally Scott, 54, a bleachers season-ticket holder from Palatine. He remembers soul-crushing postseason exits in 1984, 2003, 2015 and even eight years ago, when the Cubs had the league’s best record and were swept by the Dodgers.

"In 2008, I sat there after the last out. I had to be the last guy leaving. I just sat in my seat dejected, so depressed," Scott remembers. "But this team gives a different feel … This is a team that is built to run for a while. And that's what makes me the happiest."

Well, that, and the fact that the Cubs (take a deep breath) open the World Series on Tuesday in Cleveland against the Indians.

Dodgers' ace Clayton Kershaw, whom TV viewers listening to national broadcaster Jack Buck know as the greatest pitcher on the planet, came into Game 6 having shut out the Cubs in L.A.'s Game 2 victory at Wrigley. But Kershaw's campaign to "Make Chicago Fans Wait Again" fell apart in the very first inning. Cubs' leadoff man Dexter Fowler doubled and scored on a single by the Cubs' Kris Bryant. Then came a Dodgers' error, and before the inning was over, the Cubs held a 2-0 lead and Kershaw already had thrown 30 pitches.

Cubs starter Hendricks, MLB's ERA leader in the regular season who lost 1-0 to Kershaw in their first matchup, gave up a hit on his first pitch and then cruised until he gave up a second hit in the eighth.

Longtime Cubs fan and legendary "Bleacher Preacher" Jerry Pritikin has been waiting for the Cubs to make the World Series since he was a 9-year-old Cubs fan. His father took a co-worker to a 1945 World Series game at Wrigley, but promised his son that he'd take him next time. Pritikin, who turns 80 in January, has been a fixture in the bleachers and around Wrigleyville for decades. Wearing his pith helmet with a propeller, Pritikin has a collection of homemade signs that he updated for Saturday's clincher.

"Younger fans won't understand this, but remember what (President) Gerry Ford said after Nixon resigned?" says Pritikin. who updated Ford's famous quotation by adding the word "League" on a sign reading, "Our long National League nightmare is over."

Contreras, an exciting 24-year-old rookie catcher, launched a ball into the left field bleachers in the fourth inning to make it 4-0, and jubilant Cubs fans literally danced in the aisles before starting a slow, mocking chant of "Kershaw." That chant changed to a thundering "Rizz-O" in the 5th inning after the Cubs first-baseman lifted a home run deep into the right-field bleachers.

There is no collapse. There are no curses. The Cubs are going to the World Series.

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Daily Herald
Imrem: 'Cubs' and 'World Series' finally belong in same sentence
By Mike Imrem

Full disclosure: I had no right to moan that the Cubs never won anything in my lifetime.

I was seven months old the last time they won a National League pennant.

It's difficult to remember too much about it but all these years later I'm able to use "Cubs" and "World Series" in the same sentence without drawing snickers.

My fingers barely can type it, my head barely can comprehend it: The Cubs are in the World Series for the first time since 1945.

No, seriously, it's true after the Cubs disposed of the Dodgers 5-0 in Saturday night's Game 6 of the NLCS before a raucous hockey-style crowd in Wrigley Field.
The Cubs exorcised the demons of not winning a National League pennant in 71 years. Starting Tuesday at Cleveland they have a chance to exorcise the demons of not winning a World Series in 108 years.

It was exhilarating to stand and watch the Cubs jump around on the middle of the infield to celebrate their newly minted pennant.

You don't have to be a Cubs fan to recognize the magnitude of this, right, White Sox fans?

I expected to live to 100 or 1,000 or forever without seeing the Cubs play a World Series game.

What I just saw was so surreal that my entire life as a Chicago baseball fan flashed before my eyes.

For starters, my parents took me to Wrigley Field for the first time at age 5. Walking up through the tunnel into the grandstands, it was awesome how bright everything was.

Moving on, I'm thinking of my friend's father who painted apartments in Logan Square. During the summer he scheduled jobs for when the Cubs were on road trips so he could take us to the ballpark during homestands.

Then there's the older man who stocked shelves in a neighborhood drugstore. He always happened to be working near the radio when Cub games were on.

Look, there's my older brother taking me to the ballpark. We were first in line at the bleacher gate, raced up to get front-row seats and tossed packs of gum down to Hank Sauer because we weren't old enough to buy him chewing tobacco.

So many of those folks left us without ever seeing the Cubs win a pennant.

Today they're up somewhere listening to late broadcasters Jack Quinlan, Jack Brickhouse, Lou Boudreau, Vince Lloyd and Harry Caray capturing Saturday night's milestone.

My goodness, Ron Santo lived for this day before dying without witnessing it. Ernie Banks didn't live long enough to say, "The Cubs got their kicks in 2-0-1-6!"

Bless all the Cub fans who on their deathbeds sighed, "The Cubs are killing me."

For seven decades, as bouncing babies aged into senior citizens, the Cubs couldn't advance to a World Series.

No wonder it has been easy for me to remember all the close calls, starting with sitting in the right-field bleachers as the Cubs soared in 1969 and on a bar stool at Keystone Liquors as they came crashing down.

Among other teases were the free-fall of 1977, the Gatorade glove of '84 and the collapse of '03.

Curses!

Now the Cubs and their fans are celebrating a National League pennant.

Ponder that a moment ... the Cubs and their fans are celebrating a National League pennant.

All the Cubs have to do from here is win the World Series to complete the journey of a lifetime.
Almost any Cubs fan will default to the odds, an understandable resignation given the circumstances.

Nearly every one of you has set the wager at a billion-to-1, the chances of the team ever reaching the World Series in your lifetime.

But it wasn't actually quite that high.

If you go back to 2011, the Red Sox had just a 0.3 percent chance of failing to make the playoffs on Sept. 3.

On Sept. 28, 2011, the Rays had just a 0.3 percent chance of coming back after trailing 7-0 with 2 innings to play.

The Red Sox had only a 2 percent chance of losing their game against Baltimore that night, when the Orioles were down to their last strike.

The Rays had a 2 percent chance of winning in the bottom of the 9th, with Dan Johnson also down to his last strike before his monumental, game-tying home run.

Multiply all four together, and according to noted mathematician Nate Silver, you get a combined probability of one chance in 278 million that of all those events would occur, coming together at once and creating the greatest night in baseball history.

It created something else rather significant. It created the 2016 Chicago Cubs.

If the Red Sox had made the 2011 playoffs, Terry Francona would not have been fired. If he hadn't been fired, Theo Epstein never would have left Boston.

But the Red Sox crumbled, Francona got his pink slip and the Cubs at that very moment just happened to be looking for someone to take over their baseball operation.

Yup, 278-million-to-1. So much for the odds.

"Baseball is a funny game," Epstein said. "And life can be funny, too. No one could have possibly predicted all of this."

Epstein's Cubs reached the World Series for the first time since 1945 Saturday at 9:45 p.m. and touched off a party in Wrigleyville unlike any ever seen in these parts.

With apologies to Jon Bon Jovi and all who have hit their knees in the last seven decades, the Cubs are halfway there -- and it has little to do with livin' on a prayer.

It has everything to do with a plan, a plan that was mocked and derided by the cynics incapable of seeing past the obtuseness of it all.

Not that Epstein cared.

The man had a formula for building a World Series team. He just didn't imagine he could do it from scratch in five years.

But he has done precisely that -- and now the Cubs are halfway to a dream season.

The magic number is 4.
"It's great to be this far and we celebrate that," Epstein said. "We'll get back to business soon because we have unfinished business, but we'll take this tonight and make sure we celebrate that."

For the thousands who have waited since 1945 to say they saw the Cubs in the World Series again, and for the millions who have doubted they would witness it, this is a wondrous and bewildering occasion.

The Cubs are built to last, young and good and sustainable -- many bites at the apple, as it were -- but there are no guarantees of a return engagement, so halfway there is not enough.

It is not nearly enough.

And it's too painful to consider the downside, because as the Bears proved in 2006, getting there and losing is worse than not getting there at all.

So now comes the real pressure -- and maybe the real pleasure.

Celebrate they may, and celebrate they have, but come what may the Cubs must win the World Series or face the unkindest of music, the most cruel of jokes.

No one wants to say the Cubs finally made it to a World Series, and, of course, lost.

The Cubs got there Saturday night at Wrigley Field before 42,386 crazed fanatics, and they did it against the very best there is, Clayton Kershaw.

The Dodgers monster starter looked uncomfortable from the beginning and the Cubs had good swings throughout Kershaw's 5 innings, posting 5 runs on 7 hits and a couple of home runs. They also got a few breaks along the way, perhaps cashing in on a century's worth they've saved up.

At the same time, Kyle Hendricks was absolutely brilliant, forcing more Greg Maddux comparisons, keeping the Dodgers off balance and breezing through 7⅓ strong innings on only 2 hits.

When Aroldis Chapman got the final out for a 5-0 victory, Cubs players, execs and families poured out onto the field and celebrated with the faithful, who endured this rebuild and got their reward Saturday.

But the Cubs to a man say that they have not reached their goal, that the Cleveland Indians await and that the real test has not yet been taken.

In less than two weeks, they hope to tell a very different story.

So if you made a deal with the Devil Saturday morning, if you sold your tortured soul for a chance to see the Cubs in a World Series, this is your time.

Pay up and enjoy the next 11 days, because it won't get any hotter than this.

Rejoice Chicago, you're four wins away from the real party.

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Cubs.com
No drought: Cubs put curse, Kersh to rest
By Carrie Muskat

HICAGO -- Less than an hour after the Cubs had secured their first trip to the World Series since 1945, chairman Tom Ricketts, former pitcher Kerry Wood and Hall of Famer Billy Williams had a quiet moment in the clubhouse. They tapped their drinks together in a toast to a team that has a chance to do something that hasn't been done in more than 100 years.
The Cubs posted the best record in the Major Leagues this season, winning 103 games, and now need four more wins to claim their first World Series since 1908. Chicago earned the trip with a 5-0 win over Los Angeles at Wrigley Field on Saturday night to take the National League Championship Series, four games to two.

"We're the best team in the National League, we showed that, we won the pennant," Cubs general manager Jed Hoyer said. "It hasn't been done here in 71 years. You have to take a brief moment and reflect on that. We did something special -- we're going to the World Series. People are going to watch a World Series in Wrigley Field.

Aroldis Chapman got the final out, getting Yasiel Puig to ground into a 6-4-3 double play, to spark a celebration around the world for Cubs fans who have been waiting to see the team play for a championship. Cubs starter Kyle Hendricks and Chapman faced the minimum for the win, combining on a two-hitter.

Cubs players rushed to the mound after the last out to celebrate, greeting teammates with hugs, smiles and a few tears. The standing-room-only crowd of 42,386 at Wrigley Field sang "Go Cubs Go" perfectly, and the throngs of people outside the ballpark joined in. Grown men cried, car horns honked, and the party was underway.

Next up? The American League champion Indians in Game 1 on Tuesday in Cleveland. It'll be an interesting matchup featuring a manager -- Terry Francona -- who the Cubs' front office knows well from their days together in Boston.

"He'll do everything he can to win that night's game," Hoyer said of Francona. "[Joe Maddon] manages the same way. Tito is aggressive and I thought he set the tone for the whole postseason in Game 1 against Boston. He went to [Andrew] Miller and he showed, 'That's how I'm going to manage.' You have to respect that. He's trying to win that night's game. Players respect that. I've said since the beginning, Joe manages a pure game like that, too. He's doing everything he can as far as pitching changes and aggressiveness. How do you not want to play for a manager like that?"

Indeed.

"Joe doesn't ever shy away from anything," said Ben Zobrist, who played for Maddon in Tampa Bay and is in his first season in Chicago. "He's fearless. When it comes to the expectations that have happened for a long time, he told us at the start of the year, we're the best team and we'll have a lot of expectations but we just need to play our game and we need to keep it simple, and do simple better, one of his other phrases. That's how we approached every game and focused on staying in the moment."

Hoyer and Cubs president of baseball operations Theo Epstein helped end the Red Sox's long drought in 2004, but the rebuilding process in Chicago was more extensive. In their first season in 2012, the Cubs went 61-101. They lost 96 games in '13, and 89 games in '14. Last year, the young Cubs surged to a 97-win season and reached the NLCS, only to be swept by the Mets.

"This is more special," Hoyer said, comparing the Cubs and Red Sox. "The hours from 7 [p.m.] to 10 [p.m.] were pretty tough for a bunch of years. To come in here and win and do this in year five with all these kids, it really is special. With anything in life, if something is difficult and you have some adversity, it is sweeter. We got swept last year in this round and I don't think anyone liked that taste in their mouth. To play like we did the last three games [against the Dodgers] was unbelievable."

The Cubs were the preseason favorites to win the World Series, and the players ignored all the hype. "We're living the dream," Anthony Rizzo said. "This is what you dream of as a kid. I know it's cliché, but we're going to the World Series. This is what you dream of, and we're going to enjoy it as much as we can."

The players aren't surprised.

"I don't want to sound cocky, but we went into Spring Training with the goal of getting to the World Series," said Jon Lester, who was named co-Most Valuable Player along with Javier Baez. "We talked about it. But at the same
time, we knew not to take anything for granted. We've got a bunch of grinders. We have goals. Now the next goal is to try to win."

Lester went 1-0 with a 1.38 ERA in two NLCS starts, while Baez, who began the season on the bench, batted .318 with five RBIs. They know, all the Cubs need is four more.

"Look, you just smile, soak it all in, let it take your breath away," Epstein said, "and then get back to work to get four more wins."

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**Cubs.com**

Wait of the World: Cubs win NL pennant!

By Ken Gurnick and Carrie Muskat

CHICAGO -- For the first time since 1945, the Cubs are going to the World Series. You shouldn't be surprised. That's been their plan since Spring Training, when manager Joe Maddon told them to embrace the target. All they had to do to erase years of angst was have the pitcher with the best ERA in the Majors in 2016 beat the best pitcher on the planet, and Kyle Hendricks did just that on Saturday night.

Anthony Rizzo and Willson Contreras each belted solo home runs to back Hendricks -- who outdueled Clayton Kershaw -- and power the Cubs to a 5-0 victory over the Dodgers to take the National League Championship Series, four games to two, at a rocking Wrigley Field. Yes, the Cubs are going to the World Series.

"There's a lot of pent up angst and emotion in this city, and all over the nation, Cubs fans who have been loyal through the hard times," Chicago's Ben Zobrist said. "We know that, but the bottom line is you have to execute at the right time and stay here in 2016. These guys have done it all year long with all the expectations on their backs. We only have four more, so let's go do it now. We're in the exact spot we wanted to be in. We've got a chance to do something that hasn't been done in 108 years. Let's go do it."

Hall of Famers Ernie Banks, Billy Williams and Ron Santo never played in a World Series but these young Cubs will, and now face the Indians on Tuesday night in Cleveland.

"I think this is one of the biggest things in the world of sports after so many years of trying to get here," Williams said. "People have been waiting for so long, and all of a sudden, we're here. This is not the end -- we want to go a little farther. All the guys in that clubhouse, they're in there celebrating now, but they have something else in mind."

"The thing I preach from [the first] day in Spring Training is I want us to play the same game regardless of the date on the calendar," Maddon said. "You should not change what you're doing regardless of the time of the year. You want to come out in October and play the same game you've been playing all summer."

Hendricks treated it as just another game. Think about this: The Cubs faced the minimum in a playoff game.

"There was a lot of talk, obviously, about the guy on the other side there, Kershaw," Hendricks said. "Best in the game, he lived up to it in Game 2, but my focus was the same as always, make good pitches, simplify as much as I can, and keep my team in the game. It's not just me out there. We've got a good group of guys behind me, awesome lineup. This make it's so much fun to accomplish it with them."

Do simple better. That's another Maddon-ism.

"Unbelievable job by Joe ever since he got here," Cubs president of baseball operations Theo Epstein said. "Changed the culture at the Major League level. We loved everything that was bubbling up in the organization from the Minor Leagues, but to finish it off in the big league level, Joe is the best in the business in getting guys to relax, be themselves, focus."
"We embraced the target this year, his leadership has been everything for a lot of our young guys to settle in and play as well as they did tonight."

The Cubs faced Kershaw in Game 2, and he didn't get much support but still won, 1-0. On Saturday, an error by Andrew Toles contributed to a Cubs run in a two-run first, and Hendricks did the rest. Toles collected the first hit off the right-hander when he singled to lead off the game, but he was snuffed out on a double play by second baseman Javier Baez -- who shared NLCS MVP honors with left-handed pitcher Jon Lester.

The team that scored first won each game in this series, and the Cubs got off to a quick start in the first. The Wrigley Field crowd cheered Kershaw's first pitch because it wasn't a strike, and Dexter Fowler, who had a career .409 average against the Dodgers' ace, doubled on the third pitch from the lefty. Fowler scored on Kris Bryant's single, and Bryant eventually tallied on Zobrist's sacrifice fly.

"Making the World Series is no small feat," Kershaw said. "Give a lot of credit to the Cubs the whole series, they started swinging the bats the last three games. Better team."

Contreras led off the fourth with a blast to left. According to Statcast™, the exit velocity was 105.5 mph, and it was the third-hardest-hit homer off Kershaw this season. Of course, Kershaw only served up eight homers all season. Rizzo didn't need to hit his that hard, just far, and he crushed a 1-1 pitch into the right-field bleachers with two outs in the fifth.

"You know what, I think that they beat us," said Dodgers manager Dave Roberts. "We made mistakes. And you hate to have sour grapes, but the better team won the series. That's why you play seven-game series, and they showed it."

"I think that the first thing I saw is the Cubs' hitters, they had a great game plan tonight [against Kershaw]. And there was a couple mistake sliders that they took advantage of. But they were running counts, they used the whole field, and there was traffic all night for Clayton. And he gave it everything he had, but when they did -- when he did make a mistake, they made him pay."

Hendricks, a Dartmouth grad who majored in finance, began this season as the fifth starter, but will forever be remembered in Cubs lore as the best pitcher this season. He was lifted after Josh Reddick's single with one out in the eighth, striking out six.

"I thought we had a plan to get the ball up, but this guy was the ERA leader," Roberts said. "He pitched well all year long, he consistently made pitches, didn't make any mistakes tonight, kept the ball down, kept us off-balance. And I think that you could have a plan, but if the opposing pitcher doesn't make mistakes, then it's still tough to execute. I thought, again, Kyle pitched a perfect game."

Aroldis Chapman took over, got a double play to end the eighth, and then a scoreless ninth to end the game.

"I wasn't thinking I was going to come in the eighth inning -- he had a one-hitter going," Chapman said. "I thought he was going to throw a complete game. I was ready, I wasn't expecting the eighth inning, but I was prepared to do it."

Hendricks wasn't fazed by fireworks that were ignited outside Wrigley Field during Joc Pederson's at-bat in the second inning. It's OK -- Cubs fans have been waiting a long time to celebrate.

MOMENTS THAT MATTERED

Dazzling leather: The Cubs' defense shined again. Toles singled to lead off but was snuffed out on an acrobatic play by -- who else? -- Baez, who grabbed Corey Seager's grounder, somehow tagged the speedy Toles, and then threw off balance to first in time for a double play. Baez, however, was charged with an error in the second, when Reddick's ball bounced off his chest and then out of his glove. But Hendricks and Rizzo combined to pick off Reddick at first to end the Dodgers' inning.
"That was absolutely huge," shortstop Addison Russell said of the Cubs' first double play. "That built up momentum going into the second inning. That was a huge moment right there."

Shakey Toles: Toles, who made a bad throw to the plate in Game 4, cost Kershaw a run in the first inning when, after a long sprint, he lost Rizzo's fly ball in the left-center gap in the lights and it dropped for a two-base error. Toles, who might have had a double-play chance on Bryant at first base if he had caught the ball, committed two errors in 48 regular-season games.

"It went up in the lights," said Toles. "Joc was coming, but I couldn't hear him call it, so I looked out of my peripheral [vision], and when I looked back, it was in the lights."

You go, we go: Fowler showed why the Cubs wanted him back last offseason. He doubled to lead off the first and eventually scored on Bryant's single. In the second, Fowler hit an RBI single to drive in Russell, who had doubled. Fowler knew what to expect from Kershaw; he entered the game 18-for-44 (.409) in his career against the lefty.

"We were just trying to make him feel uncomfortable," Fowler said of their approach with Kershaw. "We're at home. We're comfortable. We wanted to make him throw some pitches. I think everybody took a deep breath. You never know how it's going to start. Once that dude, Kershaw, gets his momentum, he keeps it going. We tried to take that out."

Jansen, no joke: After Kershaw's five innings, Roberts gave the ball to Kenley Jansen. In what might be his final Dodgers appearance with free agency imminent, Jansen pitched a career-high three perfect innings with four strikeouts.

"All I cared about was doing my part and helping the team," said Jansen. "We just want to win the World Series, bad. This group of guys, we were together. I was locked in, and it didn't matter if they wanted me for one, two or three innings. I just wanted to go out there and keep us in the game."

WHAT'S NEXT

Dodgers: The Dodgers' season is complete. The 2017 season opener is scheduled for April 3 at Dodger Stadium against the Padres.

Cubs: The Cubs will face the American League-champion Indians in Game 1 of the World Series on Tuesday night at Progressive Field in Cleveland. The Indians, seeking their first World Series title since 1948, have home-field advantage in the World Series due to the AL's win over the NL in this past summer's All-Star Game in San Diego. The clubs did not meet in Interleague action this past season.

Cubs.com
Hendricks a rock star: G6 start legendary
By Jenifer Langosch

CHICAGO -- The text arrived early Saturday, just as it does on the morning before each of the son's starts. John Hendricks scripts it to be simple -- "You don't want to clutter him" -- and positive, hoping it's a reminder that Dad is watching and rooting and so very proud.

"Good luck tonight," started the message to a 26-year-old about to make the biggest start of his life. "Remember, great mechanics and preparation will prevail. Just let it go."

Hours later, cramped inside Wrigley Field among the sellout crowd of 42,386, John Hendricks watched through a father's eyes as his son, Kyle, carved up the Dodgers' lineup over 7 1/3 innings to lift the Cubs to a 5-0 victory in Game 6 of the National League Championship Series. The win sent the franchise to its first World Series since 1945.
Hendricks, appearing entirely unfazed by the moment, and Aroldis Chapman, who took the ball with one out in the eighth, combined to face the minimum, never allowing the Dodgers to move a man as far as second base.

"He didn't flinch," marveled first baseman Anthony Rizzo afterward.

"The unsung hero of this team," Kris Bryant called him.

Hendricks pitched the game of his life to get the Cubs to where they haven't been in the lifetimes of most on hand at a rocking Wrigley Field. And he became the first pitcher in baseball history to throw seven-plus scoreless innings and allow two or fewer baserunners in a potential postseason clincher.

"It doesn't really seem like reality around here," said a champagne-soaked Hendricks. "There's so much going on around here. I'm just trying to soak in the snapshots right now, so I can remember later."

Hendricks recalled feeling sharp in his pregame bullpen session, though the first batter he faced, Andrew Toles, reached on a first-pitch single. That was as precarious as things would get all night. On his next pitch, Hendricks induced a double play that calmed the nerves and initiated a clinic in pitching from the regular-season's ERA leader.

After picking off a runner for the second out of the second inning, Hendricks proceeded to retire every hitter thereafter until Josh Reddick's one-out single in the eighth. His night ended there at 88 pitches.

"He was unbelievable, phenomenal," catcher Willson Contreras said. "I just put my fingers down. He executed the pitches."

In doing so, Hendricks upstaged the greatest pitcher of his generation. While so many wondered how dominant Clayton Kershaw might be on this stage, it was Hendricks who introduced himself to those who may have missed his standout regular season.

With velocity that maxed out at 90.5 mph, Hendricks displayed the sort of command that prompted Kershaw to evoke the name Greg Maddux when describing his opponent before the game.

Being staked to a two-run lead in the first and a four-run lead by the fourth helped set the tone for Hendricks, as it allowed him the freedom to go after Dodgers' hitters in a way he didn't when there was no breathing room in Game 2. And he did it with remarkable composure, hardly cracking a grin or a scowl or anything else that may have indicated all that was at stake.

"That's the only way you can be, honestly," Hendricks said. "At the end of the day, your sole focus has to be making good pitches. All I was trying to do was to do that. I treated the day like any other start."

Not until he walked off the field to a rousing standing ovation did Hendricks allow himself to soak up the moment and absorb what he had just done. He waved to the crowd before dipping into the dugout, where he waited with anticipation before joining the midfield mob upon the Cubs' series-ending double play.

"We give him a hard time, because he never shows emotion, but this guy has done it all year," starter Jon Lester said. "He had the toughest task out of all of us. He had to face Kershaw twice. He deserves what he got tonight -- a win on the biggest stage against one of the best pitchers that could ever go down in the history of the game."

Hendricks did finally crack a smile when it was all over and, in a poignant personal moment amid a raucous celebration, gathered with his family for a group embrace.

"I'm just numb," John Hendricks said. "No matter what he's done in life, whether it was sports or school, he's always had that poise. I've obviously watched him since he could walk and throw a baseball, and that was his dream. To live out his dream in Wrigley Field, it's unbelievable."
Cubs.com
Lester, Baez share MVP honors
By Jenifer Langosch

CHICAGO -- On one side there was the seasoned postseason pitcher the Cubs pursued two winters ago with the vision that he could get this franchise to where it hadn’t been in decades. On the other was a second baseman who has used this October stage to emerge as one of the game’s rising stars.

And together, Jon Lester and Javier Baez hoisted the MVP trophy, having been named as co-recipients for their performances in this National League Championship Series that the Cubs closed out with a 5-0 win over the Dodgers on Saturday.

"Amazing. Amazing," Baez said, as fans chanted his name around him. "It's crazy living this life right now."

Before this postseason began, Baez was a raw talent without a set position. His defensive ability earned Baez a start at second base in the Cubs' first postseason game, one that he then won with an eighth-inning home run. He hasn't left the Cubs' lineup since.

In this six-game NLCS, Baez hit .318 with four doubles, five RBIs and two stolen bases. His three-hit game in Game 5 helped the Cubs to a win that gave them a series edge coming home for Game 6. With 13 hits in the team's 10 playoff games, Baez, 23, has already climbed to third on the franchise list for most hits in a single postseason.

And then there are the defensive gems, of which Baez contributed several to help the Cubs dispatch the Dodgers.

"Javy has been unbelievable," teammate Dexter Fowler said. "He's a diamond in the rough. He makes plays. He plays hard. He loves the game."

While Baez introduced his talents to a broader audience in this series, Lester merely reminded how great a postseason resume he has built by the age of 32. Having already won a pair of World Series rings in Boston, Lester came to Chicago to try to do the same for a franchise thirsty for such success.

Lester allowed two runs over 13 innings while striking out the same number of batters (nine) that he allowed hits to. His performances helped the Cubs to wins in Games 1 and 5. Chicago never trailed in either of his NLCS starts.

"It's unbelievable," Lester said as he soaked in the champagne celebration going on around him. "This is why they signed me. This is why they wanted me to come here, to win a World Series. This is why I wanted to come here. I wanted to win a World Series for this city, for this organization, for this ownership and front office. It's awesome to be a part of this organization and be where we're at right now."

Lester and Baez become the first co-NLCS MVPs since 1990, when Cincinnati's Rob Dibble and Randy Myers shared the honors.

"It's unbelievable just to be considered," Lester said. "It's something you never expect. There's a ton of guys on this team who deserve this award. To be honored is humbling and at the same time very rewarding."

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Cubs.com
Fly The WS! Rarefied air for Wrigley, fans
By Scott Merkin

CHICAGO -- Jimmy Orlandi passed away last summer, one year before the Cubs made history by claiming their first National League pennant since 1945 with a 5-0 victory over the Dodgers on Saturday night at Wrigley Field.
TJ Orlandi, Jimmy’s grandson, carried on the Cubs fandom as part of the excited throng of people making their way to Wrigley Field throughout Saturday’s contest. In fact, the apartment where Orlandi and his friends live on Sheffield, about one-half block from the stadium, became a focal point for approximately 100 fans over the last two innings, with the game being shown on a front-porch television.

The 38-year-old remembers tougher Cubs postseason finishes, such as in 1984, when they blew a 2-0 lead over the Padres by losing three straight in the then best-of-five NLCS.

"I remember crying on my grandpa's lap in Game 5," said Orlandi on Saturday night. "I was at home. My mom said to go to grandpa's down the street because he's a Cubs fan and he's going to bring you good luck. I cried on his lap.

"We didn't win. My grandpa, a die-hard Cubs fan, the last time he saw a World Series was World War II over in Europe. He listened on the USO Network with a guy from Detroit. I never thought I would see this day, but here we are."

Streets around Wrigley Field started filling up at least four hours before the 7:08 p.m. CT first pitch. More fans made their way toward the celebratory point in the seventh and eighth innings, letting the festivities begin in full force once they heard the Yasiel Puig double play completed, closing out Game 6 and the series.

Due to the clogged streets around Wrigley, the Dodgers' buses were not able to leave the area until about 11:30 p.m., nearly two hours after the game ended.

"You would expect overturning cars," said Jake Saylor, one of the fans taking in the baseball history. "The housing is so close. The bars are so close. The people on the streets are so close. The stadium emptying out full and happy is so close. You would expect chaos, but it was so nice and calm and respectful."

"It's surprisingly peaceful," said Chris Broyles, who was standing with his friend Saylor.

Fans were celebrating in the moment, belting out "Go Cubs Go" and featuring jerseys from all generations, all the while capturing every moment on video with their phones. There was even one fan paying homage to Elvis Presley in a Cubs jumpsuit.

But this celebration was for more than just the present. It honored the fans such as Orlandi's late grandfather who waited for the Cubs to get to the Fall Classic, but never saw the exciting moment.

"It means a lot to me, but my dad has been waiting for this," said Tara Gallagly, celebrating for her 76-year-old father. "I'm cheering for it for myself, but for him too. My grandfather never saw one."

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Cubs.com
Next year is here! Screams like old times
By Manny Randhawa

Dan Pellettieri was 9 years old in October 1945, when his older brother, John, took him to the World Series at Wrigley Field.

John was 27 and had returned that summer from serving in the Army during World War II. He came home to Chicago a hero after fighting with the 712th tank battalion that landed on Utah Beach in Normandy in the weeks following D-Day.

As Dan, now 80, watched Cubs first baseman Anthony Rizzo squeeze the final out of the National League Championship Series in a 5-0 win over the Dodgers on Saturday night in the same ballpark seven decades later, he thought of his late brother as tears streamed down his face.
Dan brought with him to the ballpark a photograph of himself standing next to his brother, holding his tickets to the 1945 Series, the last one the Cubs had played in before clinching the NL pennant on Saturday.

"He reached into his pocket, unfolded the picture, and held it up to the sky," said John Jr., who took his uncle to Game 6 in the hopes that the family would see something he's waited 71 years to witness.

The Pellettieri brothers were devoted Cubs fans, as was their father and his father before them. After being awarded two Purple Hearts, two Bronze Stars and a Silver Star among other service medals, John was thrilled to take his younger brother and father to see his beloved ballclub take on the Tigers for the championship.

"My brother was quite proud to be able to do this," Dan said. "It was an important thing."

John died on Aug. 6, 1980, 36 years to the day he was wounded in combat while in Mayenne, France. The Cubs lost both ends of a doubleheader to the Pirates at Forbes Field that day in 1944. And on the day he passed, the Cubs lost both ends of a doubleheader ... against the Pirates at Wrigley.

But the Cubs won on Saturday night, bringing joy too sweet to be expressed in words for Dan Pellettieri and countless others who have been waiting to see this day, not entirely sure it would come again during their lifetime. It didn't come in his brother John's, but Dan's tears at the final out were joyous in his memory as he hugged his family around him.

"It was like, 'My God, I've died and gone to heaven,'" Dan said. "And it happened before I actually do die."

Jerry Pritkin, a 79-year-old Chicagoan, went to his first Cubs game in the late summer of 1945, just weeks before the club won the pennant.

"My father bought me a two-wheel Schwinn, gave me a J.C. Higgins mitt and gave me a crash course in Cubs history," Pritkin said. "I asked him to take me to the World Series, but he felt I was a little too young at 8 years old. But he made me a promise: he would take me the next time."

"So I've been living on a promise."

That promise was closer to being fulfilled than ever before on Saturday, at the same site Pritkin watched his first big league game in wonder 71 years earlier.

"I'm awake. It's happening," Pritkin said. "It usually only happens in my dreams."

Known as the "Bleacher Preacher" for his decades of dedication to trying to "convert" fans of other teams to the Cubs, Pritkin doesn't go to every Cubs game anymore. But he would never miss Game 6.

"It's the most euphoric feeling of my lifetime," he said of the Cubs' pennant-clinching victory. "There's a tear coming down my eye, and I'm not an actor."

Cubs fans have waited 71 years to reach the World Series again, and now that their beloved club has made it back to the Fall Classic, it faces a team that seeks to end a long drought of its own: The Indians haven't won a championship in 68 years.

The last living member of the 1948 Indians, the last in franchise history to win the World Series, hopes he will bear that distinction no more in a matter of days.

"I just hope Cleveland wins it," said Eddie Robinson, a first baseman on that 1948 club, now 95 years old. "I think it's time."

Robinson sees similarities between his championship club and this year's Indians, and hopes the result for the 2016 Tribe will be the same.
"That team is a better team than I thought it was," Robinson said about this year's club. "They've proven it by going out and winning, but they've actually won it with a lot of guys that the baseball world isn't too familiar with."

Back in 1948, the Indians were coming off a fourth-place finish in the American League, 17 games out of first.

"We won our first four games of the season, and Joe Gordon, who was my roommate on the road, told me, 'We're going to win the pennant,'" Robinson said. "The whole year was a wonderful year. It was the highlight of my whole big league career."

As the Cubs meet the Indians in Cleveland for Game 1 of the 2016 World Series at 8 p.m. ET on FOX on Tuesday, fans across the country and across the world who have waited their entire lives to witness their storied ballclub play in the Fall Classic will be watching with bated breath.

When the Series comes to the North Side of Chicago beginning with Game 3 on Friday, both Dan Pellettieri and Jerry Pritkin will be in attendance, living out a dream they thought they may never realize.

"I've been to a couple of thousand Cubs games," Pritkin said. "I'm looking forward to my first-ever World Series game. I can feel it. I can touch it. I can smell it."

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Cubs.com
Rogers: Goat of confidence! Cubs like chances
By Phil Rogers

CHICAGO -- Next year? Did somebody say next year?

That's so 2015 for the Cubs.

Next year is now.

Manager Joe Maddon and his players have known that since February, when they reported to Spring Training. They served notice on the rest of the National League with a 103-win season and made it official on a picture-perfect Saturday night at Wrigley Field, riding Kyle Hendricks' blank-stare focus and precision pitching to a relatively angst-free, 5-0, pennant-clinching victory over the Dodgers in the NL Championship Series.

There were no black cats in the on-deck circle or headphones-wearing fans reaching out for foul balls. No goats were admitted to the ballpark, and if any were turned away, no one cared.

And because they beat the Dodgers -- outsoring them, 23-4, over the final 24 innings to dig themselves out of a hole -- the Cubs are off to the World Series for the first time since 1945.

"They lifted that gigantic gorilla off a lot of our backs," said Bob Dernier, who played center field for the Cubs in 1984, when they lost the NLCS to the Padres despite leading, 2-0. "They did it with style. That's the way you do it."

Dexter Fowler's leadoff double and Kris Bryant's single gave the Cubs the lead after Clayton Kershaw's first seven pitches. Kershaw would allow runs in four of the five innings he pitched, the last two on solo homers by rookie catcher Willson Contreras and cornerstone first baseman Anthony Rizzo.

Hendricks and closer Aroldis Chapman not only made sure there was no repeat of the late-game meltdown in the infamous Game 6 against the Marlins in 2003, they avoided the drama of the '45 clincher. In that game, the Pirates had the tying run on third and the winning run on second when Paul Ericsson got pinch-hitter Tommy O'Brien to take a called third strike, giving the Cubs a three-game lead over the Cardinals with two games left in the season.

Hendricks and the hitters who attacked Kershaw from the first inning through the fifth kept the 42,386 at Wrigley almost giddy throughout the evening.
"That was as good of a sporting atmosphere as I’ve ever seen," general manager Jed Hoyer said. "An hour before the first pitch, everyone was ready to go, and the whole game, it just kept building and building. I thought our guys played one of the best games of the year. We got the lead, grinded out at-bats against Kershaw all night. Kyle was unbelievable, changing speeds. He pitched like the Major League ERA leader tonight, for sure."

Tom Ricketts’ vision; the roster-building genius of Theo Epstein, scouting director Jason McLeod and Hoyer; and Maddon’s genius in handling his gifted players paid off with a league championship only four years after a 101-loss season. But everyone involved will tell you they’re only halfway to the Holy Grail, which is the first successful World Series since 1908.

"Four more wins," Ricketts said. "We have a great team, have a lot of momentum, a great manager. I’m looking forward to those four wins. Let’s hope we can get it done this year."

Four wins -- 108 outs -- to break a 108-year-old curse (using balls that have 108 double stitches).

One way or another, one team is going to end a monumental championship drought. The Indians haven’t won since the Indians of Bob Feller, Bob Lemon, Joe Gordon and Lou Boudreau beat the Boston Braves in 1948.

Jon Lester, who has given up two runs in 23 innings this postseason and was named co-MVP along with Javier Baez, is set to face the Indians' Corey Kluber on Tuesday night at Progressive Field in Cleveland.

"What could be better for baseball?" Ricketts asked. "I have a lot of respect for the Cleveland Indians, a lot of friends there. I’m anxious to get there. On top of that, we beat a great Dodger team. Great organization. Give a lot of credit to the Dodgers and the Giants. We’re going through the tough teams. Let’s get one more. Four more wins."

It was fitting that the final out was a double play turned by 22-year-old shortstop Addison Russell and 23-year-old second baseman Baez. Maddon went with five players 24 or younger against Kershaw, a three-time Cy Young winner, and that recipe cooked up a 3-0 lead in the first two innings for Hendricks, the craftsman who was turned down by Stanford and traded to the Cubs from the Rangers when he was in the high Class A Carolina League.

"[Hendricks is] as stoic as it gets," Hoyer said. "He’s very calm. He went out there and executed as well as he can execute. The information we had was [that] his makeup was off the charts. That’s really why we made the deal. His stuff is not eye-popping. It’s about command and execution, and he has the command and intelligence to pull it off."

Hoyer loved how the game ended. A walk by Chapman put Carlos Ruiz on first with one out in the ninth, which set up the last bit of defensive flash in the series.

Yasiel Puig hit a grounder to deep short. Russell fielded it cleanly and made a nice throw to Baez, who fired it to Rizzo for the game-ending double play. Baez shared the MVP honors with Lester as much because of his play in the field as for his four doubles and five RBIs.

"Look at the lineup card today," Hoyer said. "When you go Baez, Contreras, Russell, [Albert] Almora at the bottom of the order, not to mention Rizzo and [Kris] Bryant, that’s who we are. We’re a veteran team in some ways pitching-wise, but we’re a young offensive team, and we’re really athletic in the field. It is fitting those guys turn that double play."

While his team was taking care of business on the field, Ricketts was walking the Wrigley Field stands -- a habit he began almost immediately after purchasing the franchise in 2009. He’s never going to forget the joy he experienced on this magical night.

Victory has seldom brought about so many tears as it did on the night the Cubs punched their return ticket to the World Series.
"My poor little 10-year-old daughter cried for joy," Ricketts said in the celebration, standing near the pitcher's mound. "That was pretty amazing. Walking through the upper deck tonight, high-fiving people, nobody was worried, everybody was confident. People really believed in this team. Just the fact that after all this hard work, all the work done by all the people in this organization, it's just great to have this moment to pay the fans back for all the support they've given us."

Job well done, by everyone.

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**Cubs.com**
Schwarber to AFL; World Series a possibility?
By Carrie Muskat

CHICAGO -- On Monday, Kyle Schwarber went to Dallas for the six-month checkup on his left knee, which was injured in the third game of the regular season. Both he and the Cubs were surprised when he got the go-ahead to play games, and he could be on the roster for the World Series.

Schwarber played for the Mesa Solar Sox on Saturday night in Arizona, and monitored the Cubs' 5-0 win over the Dodgers in Game 6 of the National League Championship Series on an iPad in the dugout. The Cubs are going to the World Series. Schwarber may be going, too.

"It's well deserved," Schwarber said. "I can't be happier for those guys. Those guys went about their business. We've got everything rolling over there. We've got the clubhouse, we've got the players, we've got the pitching, we've got the offense, we've got the defense. So if we keep rolling, keep playing our game, we'll be just fine."

"Those guys deserve it. I'm down here trying to get my work in, and I'm going to join them up in Cleveland; it's either cheering or whatever it is, I'm all in for it."

The Cubs aren't surprised that Schwarber might be ready.

"He's a pretty special person; a special hitter," Theo Epstein, president of baseball operations, said prior to Saturday's game. "I don't want to get ahead of ourselves, but if it does get to the point where we think he can help us [in the World Series], it says a lot about his talent and his work ethic."

Schwarber, who tore both the ACL and the LCL in his knee, will be wearing a brace.

"We'll see where this goes," Epstein said. "We're not ruling anything in, we're not ruling anything out. We're not getting ahead of ourselves."

"It's a testament to how hard Kyle has worked to be in this position, and [it's] a credit to him and all the members of the medical staff. He's put his head down and quietly gone about his business to come back."

Though Schwarber couldn't be with the Cubs to celebrate their NL pennant, those with him in Arizona made sure he had a chance to celebrate, spraying him with champagne in a video posted to Twitter by Cubs scout Spike Lundberg.

Late Monday, Schwarber joined the Cubs in Los Angeles for the NLCS, and he hit in the batting cage at Dodger Stadium. He hit again on Tuesday, then traveled to Mesa, Ariz., on Wednesday to work out at the Cubs' complex.

On Thursday, Schwarber took batting practice on the field in Mesa, hitting 400 to 500 balls off the hitting machine. On Friday, he took batting practice and faced right-handed pitcher James Farris, who is playing in the AFL.

The only problems have been blisters from all the hitting, Epstein said. The Cubs' medical staff will keep a close eye on Schwarber.
"He looks really good," Epstein said of the reports so far. "He's running well, he's running the bases. He's cut and changed directions. We'll evaluate from a medical standpoint and make sure there's no soreness. From a baseball standpoint, typically guys need much longer to get their timing down to get ready, but I wouldn't put anything past Kyle."

Schwarber, 23, made his first Major League start against the Indians at Progressive Field as a DH on June 17, 2015, and he went 4-for-5 with a triple and two RBIs. He served as the Cubs' DH during a five-game road Interleague stint that month and returned to the Minors before joining the team for good in mid-July, hitting .246 with 16 homers and 43 RBIs in 69 games.

Epstein said they were expecting the six-month checkup to simply be a progress report, not the chance to add another slugger to the lineup.

"We got news that was better than we could've expected," Epstein said. "With as hard as Kyle has worked and as much as this means to him and potentially to us, we wanted to give him the opportunity.

"He's so passionate about baseball and his teammates and an incredibly hard worker, and he's been working his tail off and managed to stay part of the team," Epstein said. "Physically, he's on an accelerated timetable. Mentally, he's been preparing this for six months: he's been doing advanced scouting, he's watched how pitchers attack hitters, studying video, opposing pitchers' video. He's such a great kid, he's got every teammate rooting for him. Just the fact that he's gotten to this point is a testament to his character. No matter what happens, we're proud of him."

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Cubs.com
Chappily ever after: Final outs for the ages
By Alyson Footer

CHICAGO -- In a postseason filled with unconventional pitching decisions and bullpen moves by the managers, Cubs skipper Joe Maddon inserting closer Aroldis Chapman into the eighth inning with a man on first base in Game 6 of the National League Championship Series at Wrigley Field on Saturday didn't seem, on its face, all that unusual.

Except, of course, for the fact that Chapman had not been very effective the other times Maddon turned to the flame-throwing left-hander in anything but the start of the ninth inning, void of baserunners and distractions.

But this time, the tactic worked. Chapman, who allowed a game-tying base hit in the eighth inning of Game 1 of the NLCS and was charged with a blown save in Game 3 of the Division Series, did not have a major misstep in the most important outing of his short Cubs career. He nailed down the eighth, the ninth -- and the pennant during a 5-0 victory.

Chapman induced two double plays: one from Howie Kendrick in the eighth, and the pennant-clinching 6-4-3 with Yasiel Puig at the plate to close it out.

"We actually were trying to get one," second baseman Javier Baez said. "I saw that ball and I decided to turn it and we made it happen."

For now, it's one of the most famous double plays in history, not because of the acrobatics of the fielders, but because of the frenzied celebration that followed, both on the field and in the stands.

"You stand out on that platform afterwards and you're looking at the ballpark and the fans and the W flags everywhere, and truthfully I do think about everybody," Maddon said. "I think about the fans and their parents and their grandparents and great-grandparents, and everything that's been going on here for a while."
The party seemed to last as long as the Cubs' seven decades-long drought since their last pennant in 1945. The stands at historic Wrigley Field were rocking throughout the game, but once the final out was recorded, it was really on.

"Really special looking into the crowd," Maddon said. "When you're on that moment up front like that and you just look around and you look out at the bleachers and it's -- that's kind of one of those surreal things right there; that you really want to slow it down and really try to take a mental snapshot so you don't forget that."

Said first baseman Anthony Rizzo: "This is as special as it is in sports. I know my parents are crying. My girlfriend is crying. Everyone is crying. It's amazing."

Rizzo was spot-on about the crying. There was a lot of that happening in the stands, along with screaming, yelling and hugging -- a gigantic love-fest among more than 42,000 fans, all witnessing history at the Friendly Confines.

Fans high-fived, embraced strangers and danced in the aisles in a scene that soon turned into the world's largest karaoke sing-a-long, first, the "Go Cubs Go" tune that has long been a staple after home wins, followed by "Sweet Home Chicago."

"It's crazy living this life right now," Baez said, taking in the scene around him.

"I would say thank you for hanging in there," said shortstop Addison Russell, asked for his message to the fans. "They deserve it more than we do. They've lived the Cubbie way for X amount of years. We're just happy they could live through us. We're just happy they could see us on the big stage."

And the biggest, if this story is to have the ultimate happy ending, is up next, starting Tuesday in Cleveland.

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Cubs.com

Did you know? NLCS Game 6
By David Adler, Matt Kelly and Manny Randwaha

After 71 long years, the Cubs are headed back to the World Series.

Kyle Hendricks and the Cubs defeated Clayton Kershaw and the Dodgers, 5-0, in Game 6 of the National League Championship Series on Saturday night at Wrigley Field, claiming the franchise's first pennant and World Series appearance since 1945.

The world is much different since the Cubs last played in the Fall Classic. For instance, only 2.5 billion humans roamed the Earth in 1945, and approximately 7.4 billion do so today. Twelve U.S. presidents have occupied the Oval Office since the Cubs claimed the pennant in Harry Truman's first year in office, and 38 members of the National Baseball Hall of Fame had not even been born.

Now, incredibly, the Cubs stand just four wins shy of capturing their first championship since 1908. Before Chicago takes the field against the Cleveland Indians (who themselves are hoping to break a long winless streak, dating to 1948) in Game 1 of the World Series on Tuesday, here are some facts and figures you should know about the Cubs' historic Game 6 victory.

• The Cubs have snapped the longest streak without an appearance in a championship game or series in any of the four major North American sports.

• The 174 combined years between championships for the Cubs and Indians -- is the highest total of any final two teams, topping the 130 combined winless years between the Astros and White Sox in the 2005 Fall Classic.
• Tavern owner Billy Sianis, who supposedly set the "Curse of the Billy Goat" in motion during the 1945 World Series, passed away on Oct. 22, 1970 -- exactly 46 years to the day before the Cubs finally clinched another trip to the Fall Classic.

• The Cubs are the first team to win a LCS-clinching game with at least five players 25-or-younger in the starting lineup.

• Chicago snapped an 0-for-6 streak in potential NLCS clinching games, which included those famously painful defeats in 1984 and 2003.

• A total of 403 World Series games have been played since the last contest featuring the Cubs in 1945.

• A dominant combination of Hendricks and Aroldis Chapman faced the minimum 27 batters. The Cubs are only the second team to face the minimum number of batters in a postseason win. The other? The 1956 Yankees, who rode a perfect game from Don Larsen to a 2-0 win over the Dodgers in Game 5 of the World Series.

• Hendricks completed 7 1/3 brilliant scoreless innings for Chicago, making him only the fourth pitcher in Cubs postseason history to post a scoreless start in a series-clinching game.

• Hendricks stayed ahead of the Dodgers' hitters all night. The right-hander faced a total of 23 batters and threw a first-pitch strike to 16 of them -- including 11 called strikes.

• Hendricks' game score of 82 (using the Bill James formula) tied John Smoltz (who was in the FOX broadcast booth Saturday) for the second-highest of any starting pitcher in a potential clinching game in the NLCS. Only Mike Hampton of the Mets posted a higher game score -- an 88 in the decisive Game 5 of the 2000 NLCS.

• Hendricks became the first starting pitcher in Cubs postseason history to face the minimum required batters through the first seven innings. Andrew Toles lined Hendricks' first pitch of the game for a single, but was immediately retired on a double play. Then, Josh Reddick reached on an error by Javier Baez in the second inning, but was wiped away on an inning-ending pickoff by Hendricks.

• That was the first time a pitcher had recorded a pickoff in a potential clinching game for his team in the NLCS since Andy Pettitte for the Houston Astros in Game 5 of the 2005 NLCS. Hendricks' eight pickoffs dating back to the beginning of the 2015 are tied with Atlanta’s Julio Teheran for the most of any right-handed pitcher.

• Hendricks is now 26-0 in his career in games in which he's received at least three runs of support from his offense.

• The Cubs plated two runs against Kershaw in the bottom of the first, marking the first time an opponent has ever scored multiple first-inning runs against the Dodgers’ ace in the postseason. The last time Kershaw gave up more than one first-inning run in any game was on June 27, 2015, when the Miami Marlins plated two runs in the opening frame.

• Teams that scored first went a combined 11-0 between the two LCS this year.

• Kershaw threw 30 pitches in the first inning, the most pitches he's ever thrown in the first inning of a postseason game and the most he's thrown in any inning this season. Interestingly, only one of those pitches -- his 27th of the inning -- was his trademark curveball.

• The Cubs had just one plate appearance with a runner in scoring position during Kershaw's seven shutout innings in Game 2. They had nine through the first three innings of Game 6, and converted two RBI hits and a sacrifice fly.

• Willson Contreras' solo home run in the bottom of the fourth left the bat at 105.5 miles per hour, making it the third-hardest-hit homer off Kershaw in 2016. Only Giancarlo Stanton (109.5 mph) and Matt Duffy (105.9) hit harder round-trippers off the ace this year.
• Anthony Rizzo followed with his own home run off Kershaw in the fifth, making him the first left-handed hitter to homer off Kershaw since Daniel Murphy in Game 4 of the 2015 NL Division Series -- a span of 166 plate appearances.

• In nine previous career starts against the Cubs (including Game 2 of the NLCS), Kershaw had a 1.93 ERA, and he had never allowed more than three runs.

• Kershaw had only allowed two extra-base hits (both doubles) in his first 19 1/3 innings this postseason, but the Cubs knocked five extra-base hits (three doubles and two home runs) against the left-hander Saturday night. Those five extra-base hits are tied for the most Kershaw has allowed in any start in his Major League career. Kershaw gave up an extra-base hit in each of his five innings pitched, the first time in his career he had ever given up an extra-base hit in five consecutive innings.

• The Cubs were able to tally four barrels off Kershaw on Saturday, according to Statcast™, which is tied for the most barrels Kershaw has given up in any start this year. The Giants also hit four barrels off the lefty on June 10.

• The Dodgers are now 0-46 in road playoff games in which they trailed by at least three runs.

• Los Angeles has now gone 10 consecutive postseason appearances without reaching the World Series, setting a new record, according to the Elias Sports Bureau.

• The Cubs are now just 108 outs away from claiming their first World Series championship since the 1908 World Series -- which took place 108 years ago.

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Cubs.com
Castro: For Merullo family, Cubs' run 'beautiful'
By Anthony Castrovince

The scar was his souvenir, the physical reminder of his professional height. And so, on the off chance it was fixing to fade, the old man used to pick at that thing on his left forearm, a habit that would have been disgusting if it weren't so oddly endearing.

Lennie Merullo's scar was a remnant of the 1945 World Series -- the last Fall Classic to feature the Chicago Cubs until the one that begins Tuesday night at Progressive Field. Merullo so loved the Cubs and his experience with them that the scar was, to him, a meaningful memento, regardless of the end result, and he remained fond of that physical feature up until his death, at age 98, in 2015, when he became the last player from that '45 team to pass away.

"I can't remember the player who slid into him on a tag play and cut up his forearm, but it wasn't a dirty play or anything like that," said Lennie's grandson, Matt Merullo. "He was so happy to have that. He wanted to have that nasty scar his whole life so he could tell people he got it in the World Series. That was his thing."

Matt was himself a Major League player, serving parts of six seasons with the White Sox, Indians and Twins. He also played briefly in the Angels' and Cubs' organizations. Then he served as an area scout for the D-backs and, until recently, as a Minor League manager for the Orioles.

The point is that the younger Merullo bounced around quite a bit, thus informing his accurate opinion that in the baseball industry, you are often merely a mercenary with no true ties.

For Lennie, the experience could not have been more different.

"He was just Cubs, Cubs, Cubs, Cubs, Cubs," Matt said with a laugh. "He was just a piece of work."
Lennie loved the Cubs. Aside from a short stint in the Philadelphia Athletics' organization in Double-A, they were the only team he had any association with. They signed him when he was still a senior at Villanova in the late 1930s, ending his amateur status. Lennie was put on a train, met owner Philip K. Wrigley, was taken downtown to get fitted for a new suit and returned home to East Boston with a $1,500 check in hand.

"The story goes that he walks into his parents' house, pounds on the door, puts his foot on the table and slides the check across to his parents," Matt said. "He says, 'This is a check for playing baseball,' and his mother stands up and says [to his siblings], 'Everybody go play ball!'"

Rather than finish his senior year, Merullo showed up at Spring Training in '39, and he wound up reaching the big leagues two years later, at the age of 24. This was in the midst of the World War II effort, when many frontline players were in military service. Merullo got a deferment because of his colorblindness, and his career, which touched seven seasons, was not one of great distinction.

If not for outliving all his '45 teammates, his career would best be remembered for his fielding faux pas on Sept. 13, 1942, when he committed four errors in a single inning against the Braves in Boston. The errors were attributable to nerves, for that just so happened to double as the day Merullo's first son (and Matt's father), Len, was born. Merullo, ever the jovial sort who could laugh at himself, actually took the cue from the Chicago newspapers in giving the boy the nickname "Boots" on account of the errors. "Boots" Merullo went on to become a Pirates prospect whose career was cut short by a freak injury.

Lennie appeared in 639 games, compiling a .240 average and a ton of stories he'd pass along to his kin. But nothing made him prouder than having appeared in the '45 Fall Classic against the Tigers, even if only for two unsuccessful at-bats in a seven-game series the Cubs lost.

"He thought about it the same way a kid would think about it," Matt recalled. "He'd say, 'Boy it was really a lot of fun.' He treasured the experience his whole life."

His wife, Jean, who is still living, did not look back on the experience quite as fondly. She would tell Matt stories about how upset the Cubs' wives were with the accommodations Wrigley initially arranged for the Series.

"They put them on a boat on Lake Michigan, because they wanted to keep everybody under the same roof," Matt said. "It was a fancy boat, but the women didn't want to be on a boat. The women put up such a stink that he moved them to a regular hotel downtown."

Years later, it was a different Cubs ownership group -- the Ricketts family -- that got in touch with Merullo and, as part of the celebration of 100 years at Wrigley Field in 2014, asked him to throw out a ceremonial first pitch before a game against the Marlins. Merullo used a walker to go from his wheelchair to the mound, and he got a rousing ovation from the fans both for his pitch and for his seventh-inning-stretch rendition of "Take Me Out to the Ball Game."

"While I have experienced many joys as owner of this great franchise," owner Tom Ricketts said at the time of Merullo's death, "one of the most memorable was meeting Lennie."

So the Cubs return to the Series stage for the first time since '45, they've got a big fan -- one with the scar to prove it -- pulling for them in the heavens.

"He was a real, true Cubs fan and loyal," Matt said. "So this is beautiful. It's great to see the Cubs doing this."
Cubs.com
Cubs visit Indians vying to end World Series title drought
By Anthony Castrovince

Cubs. Indians. World Series.

It's about time.

Time is truly the essence of this fascinating Fall Classic pairing, because, in a Series that gets underway Tuesday 7:30 p.m. ET air time/8 p.m. game time on FOX at Progressive Field, one of the two longest active championship droughts in the game is about to come to its merciful conclusion.

Only adding to the allure, the guys at the helm of these two clubs know a bit about drought destruction. Cubs president of baseball operations Theo Epstein and Indians manager Terry Francona once collaborated on the end of the "Curse of the Bambino" in Boston, so it's oddly appropriate that they'll now have their curse-breaking abilities in other markets tested head-to-head.

For the Cubs and their fans, it has been 108 years of unrewarded hope and, for that matter, 71 years of waiting just to even get back to this point of the postseason. And whether you believe that's attributable to bad luck, bad management or a bitter billy goat owner, the bottom line is that this current concoction of the Cubs constructed by Epstein and Co. was built to be a juggernaut. And the 103-win regular season only amped-up the expectations.

For the Indians and their fans, it has been a 68-year wait for a title, prolonged by the heartbreak of watching two of the greatest regular-season winning percentages in history snuffed out on the Series stage in 1954 and 1995, and the utter agony of losing a Game 7 lead with two outs in the ninth in '97. The Indians weren't nearly as widely acclaimed as World Series contenders, especially when they lost prominent players like Michael Brantley, Carlos Carrasco and Danny Salazar to injury, but Francona has again proven himself as a skipper capable of exceeding the sum of his parts.

Clearly, there is a decent amount of emotional baggage rolling into this one. While the players and coaches -- and particularly expected Game 1 starters Corey Kluber and Jon Lester -- can't afford to let thoughts of curses or droughts seep into their subconscious, there's simply no denying the storyline is striking for everybody else.

The Cubs possess the National League's longest drought, the Indians have the American League's, and so the alignment of angst, which will be extinguished for one organization and extended for another, is pretty much perfect.

The Indians, who just so happen to be benefiting from Kluber's claim of the victory in July's All-Star Game at Petco Park, have the schedule strength that accompanies home-field advantage. But by the time the first pitch of Game 1 is thrown, their efficient win over the Blue Jays in the League Championship Series round will have granted them five days of downtime spelled only by full-squad workouts and a Sunday sim game. The rest was probably good for their overworked arms in the back of the bullpen (Andrew Miller, Cody Allen and Bryan Shaw have accounted for 35 percent of the Tribe's postseason innings thrown), but it could throw the bats out of whack.

"Because our game is so much rhythm and timing, the rest is good for their bodies," Francona said. "But you also try to let them see some pitching so having five or six days between games doesn't get in the way of their hitting."

The Cubs had a slightly more arduous road through the LCS, as they had to rebound from a 2-1 series deficit and overcome Clayton Kershaw in Game 6. But they got where they were expected to be, and in a game that rarely rewards the regular-season hierarchy (2013 marked the only time in the previous six seasons in which a team with the best record in the Majors advanced to the World Series), that's quite a feat, in and of itself.

But anything short of a World Series title will be deemed disappointment on the North Side, and so the pressure is once again heightened here.
"Obviously, we know that it's something that's going to be talked about with the history of the organization," Cubs starter Jake Arrieta said. "But it's really not something we focus on at all. We just kind of disregard it and go out and play."

The Cubs had arguably an on-paper edge over any and all potential opponents on this October stage, and that applies in the matchup with the Indians. Miller, the ALCS MVP, has been the Tribe's separator so far, but this Cubs team finished the regular season with the game's second-highest OPS (.807) off left-handed pitching, so perhaps they're in better position to neutralize that strength.

Ultimately, you don't get to this point without belief in your abilities and your destiny. Both of these clubs have had a magical month, and they've each got a fan base hoping, praying and urging the magic to continue, so that a multi-generational dry spell can finally come to a close.

The awesome October stories of the Cubs and Indians are colliding on the World Series stage, and they're both on the clock.

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Cubs.com
Catch this: Cubs' catchers make HR history
By Matt Kelly

A catcher's tasks over the course of a game are clearly defined: Call the game for the pitcher, coordinate the infield defense and hit at the plate -- usually in that order.

But in this year's National League playoffs, the Cubs' catchers exceeded all expectations at the plate, matching average with power. In fact, Chicago is the first team in history to have all three of its catchers hit a home run in the same postseason, helping to propel the Cubs to their first NL pennant since 1945.

The Cubs' trio of backstops -- Willson Contreras, Miguel Montero and David Ross -- combined to hit .282 (11-for-39) over the first two rounds of the postseason. Each of them also hit a home run that swung a ton of momentum the Chicago's way -- which can't be overstated, considering the amount of history and "curses" the Cubs are contending with this October.

The first clutch homer came from Ross, or 'Grandpa Rossy,' as he's affectionately known to his teammates. The Cubs were ahead 2-1 in the NLDS but trailed the Giants, 1-0, in the top of the third inning in Game 4, and were looking to avoid going back to Wrigley for a winner-take-all Game 5. On an 1-0 count, Ross hit a long fly ball over the left-field wall off Matt Moore to tie the game. With the blast, the 39-year old Ross became the oldest catcher to ever homer in the postseason. The Cubs would eventually claim a breathtaking, come-from-behind 6-5 win to advance to the NLCS.

"We've been down this road together," said John Lackey, Ross' Game 4 batterymate. "I couldn't really root for a better dude. This is his last year. I'd love to be in a fight with him any day of the week."

Four days later, Cubs fans were on the edge of their seats again when Aroldis Chapman's blown save in the top of the eighth tied Game 1 of the NLCS at 3. In the bottom of the frame, Montero -- pinch-hitting for Chapman -- gave them a reason to jump out of those seats in celebration. Montero, who had tallied only four plate appearances in the NLDS, came up with the bases loaded and smacked an 0-2 pitch from the Dodgers' Joe Blanton deep over the right-field wall and into the Chicago night to give his team a reassuring 7-3 lead.

"I thought the roof was coming down from the fans jumping," said teammate Javier Baez.

Montero's first playoff homer sure was a memorable one, as it was the first go-ahead pinch-hit grand slam hit by any player in postseason history. And with an exit velocity of 105.3 mph, according to Statcast™, the shot was Montero's hardest-hit of the year. The Cubs never looked back that night, running away with an 8-4 victory to claim a 1-0 lead in the series.
Contreras’ .400 average this postseason is the best of the Cubs’ three catchers, but he waited to hit his first home run until one of the most memorable games in franchise history. Facing the venerable Clayton Kershaw in the bottom of the fourth inning in Game 6 on Saturday, Contreras blasted an 0-1 slider at an exit velocity of 105.5 mph for a solo homer that pushed the Cubs’ lead to 4-0 on the Dodgers’ ace. Contreras’ blast was the third-hardest hit homer off Kershaw in 2016, and completed the historic trifecta for Chicago’s backstops.

"I don’t know if it was a mistake [from Kershaw]," Contreras said after Game 6, "but I was looking for a fastball middle-up and he threw a slider. I got to it. I hit it well. It reminded me of when I hit my first homer."

The Cubs’ depth and versatility have been among their leading advantages all season long. If Chicago can continue to get this kind of production up and down the roster during the World Series, it would go a long way toward helping the long-suffering club finally "reverse the curse" for good.

Cubs.com
Cubs get to Kershaw early in NLCS clincher
By Jenifer Langsoch

CHICAGO -- As Wrigleyville teemed with anticipation about a potential historic night ahead, the Cubs gave the sellout crowd an early reason to cheer -- and relax -- by jumping on Clayton Kershaw for two first-inning runs in a 5-0 Game 6 victory in the National League Championship Series on Saturday night. With the win, the Cubs advanced to the World Series for the first time since 1945.

After being shut out by Kershaw for seven innings in Game 2, the Cubs wasted no time giving their starter, Kyle Hendricks, an opportunity to pitch with the lead. After Hendricks breezed through the top half of the first on nine pitches, Dexter Fowler opened the bottom half of the frame by dropping a ground-rule double in along the right-field foul line. Kris Bryant followed with an RBI single, giving the Cubs a lead just seven pitches in.

Chicago then capitalized on an error by Dodgers left fielder Andrew Toles to add on one more. Toles dropped a fly ball by three-hole hitter Anthony Rizzo, which allowed Rizzo to scoot into second and pushed Bryant to third. Bryant scored on a sacrifice fly by Ben Zobrist.

The two runs scored matched the number of hits the Cubs mustered off the Dodgers’ ace six days earlier. He had allowed only three first-inning runs in total over 21 regular-season starts. By the time he wrapped up the first inning on Saturday, Kershaw had thrown 30 pitches.

The Cubs weren’t done, either. Wrigley Field continued rocking as the Cubs built that lead to five runs. Fowler drove in a second-inning run with a two-out single. Willson Contreras and Rizzo then connected for solo homers in the fourth and fifth innings, respectively, to put the Cubs ahead, 5-0, with 16 outs left to get.

According to Statcast™, Contreras’ homer left his bat at 105.5 mph, with a launch angle of 24 degrees and traveled 379 feet. It was the third-hardest-hit homer off Kershaw in 2016, trailing only Giancarlo Stanton (109.5 mph) and Matt Duffy (105.9).

Kershaw, who had not allowed five runs in a game since April 26, allowed four hits with an exit velocity of 105-plus mph. That’s the most he had ever given up in a game. Kershaw had not allowed a multihomer game since April 9. The Dodgers pinch-hit for Kershaw in the sixth, ending his start at 93 pitches.

Before Saturday’s first pitch, Cubs manager Joe Maddon impressed upon his team the importance of scoring first in this game. Why? The team that has scored first has won every game of this NLCS.

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CHICAGO -- Seven-time All-Star Alfonso Soriano played in Chicago long enough during his 16-year Major League career to understand the anxiety -- "angst," as manager Joe Maddon described it -- Cubs fans were experiencing in the hours leading up to Game 6 of the National League Championship Series on Saturday night.

"The city's waited for so long," Soriano said. "I hope they have the opportunity to celebrate tonight."

They certainly did, as the Cubs topped the Dodgers, 5-0, to clinch a spot in the World Series against the Indians. The Cubs took the series, 4-2.

Soriano was with his family on the field during batting practice, a guest at Wrigley Field after first baseman Anthony Rizzo encouraged the former outfielder to come to the game. Soriano, who played in nine postseason series, including Division Series with the Cubs in 2007 and 2008, sounded like a typical Cubs fan when he expressed his excitement to be at Wrigley for this game and his hope to witness history with the Cubs' first NL pennant in 71 years.

"I wanted to be here," he said. "This is very exciting for the organization and the fans of Chicago. I hope they win tonight and the city can celebrate."

While he understands the anxiousness of the fans, Soriano was certain that nervousness did not filter down to the Cubs' clubhouse. Leave the worrying up to the long-time Chicagoans who have experienced their share of euphoria and heartache. The players? They just go out and play.

"The fans are nervous," he said. "Not the players. Being a player, you just have to play baseball. Those guys inside, they have the same mentality. Just play the game. So far, they're doing good. They don't have to panic. They just play the game and they know how to play the game. I hope they can do it, and everybody can celebrate."

Soriano would know about postseason jitters, or lack thereof. He played in three American League DS, two AL Championship Series and two World Series with the Yankees, in addition to his two NLDS appearances with the Cubs. He retired after the 2014 season, following a two-year return stint with the Yankees after a 6 1/2-year run with the Cubs.

"It was an honor for me to play for the organization," Soriano said. "I'm happy to see them again."

Cubs history was again on display during the pregame ceremony, which featured former star pitcher Kerry Wood, wearing a Ron Santo jersey, throwing out the first pitch.

Wood, the National League Rookie of the Year Award winner in 1998, pitched most of his career with the Cubs and was part of their postseasons in '98, '03, '07 and '08. He also was with the Yankees during their playoff run in '10.

Chicago native Jim Belushi, as well known for his Cubs fandom as he is for his acting, was the designated "Play Ball" announcer before first pitch. Former Chicago Bulls legend and NBA Hall of Famer Scottie Pippen was slated to lead the crowd in "Take Me Out to the Ballgame" during the seventh-inning stretch.

The pregame ceremony began with the presentation of the colors by the 2nd Battalion 24th Marines. The national anthem was performed by Wrigley Field regular John Vincent.
Schwarber shakes off rust in Fall League debut
By Jim Callis

MESA, Ariz. -- For the first time since he tore up his left knee on April 7, Kyle Schwarber returned to the diamond Saturday night, as a member of the Arizona Fall League's Mesa Solar Sox. The next time he takes the field, it could be in the World Series.

Schwarber batted second and went 0-for-3 as the DH in a 7-2 loss to the Salt River Rafters, grounding out in his first two at-bats, drawing a walk and then driving a ball in the right-center field gap that seemed destined for extra bases until center fielder Noel Cuevas (Rockies) robbed him with a diving catch.

Schwarber said he felt good at the plate, though he wouldn't speculate as to whether the Cubs might restore him to their roster for the World Series, which begins Tuesday. It's also possible that he could play in another AFL game Monday before the Fall Classic begins.

"I feel like I put in two good at-bats, the last couple," he said. "The first two, I chased a little bit. I was a little antsy up at the plate, as expected. Once it started getting back to being normal baseball again, it all started slowing down... Overall, that was a really plus day for me, feeling confident, so we'll see where this goes."

Schwarber tore the anterior and lateral cruciate ligaments in his knee in an outfield collision with Dexter Fowler in his second game of the season. He's wearing a brace on the knee and ran conservatively during Saturday's game, though he said it felt fine afterward.

"I've been doing running every day," Schwarber said. "We're going to take it step-by-step. I've got full confidence in my knee. My knee doesn't bother me. It's probably my hands that hurt the worst. I have about eight blisters on them. I guess I should have done something better, like keep rubbing a bat when I was on the bench or something."

Until Monday, the expectation was that Schwarber would serve as a cheerleader in the postseason and get back on the field with the Cubs in Spring Training. Then he visited Dr. Dan Cooper, the Dallas Cowboys' orthopedic specialist who performed his surgery, and Cooper surprised him by giving him the go-ahead to return.

Schwarber spent two days in Los Angeles taking batting practice with the Cubs before flying to their Mesa training base on Wednesday. He worked on hitting and running for three days before playing in an AFL game.

"It was the best-case scenario that could have came out," Schwarber said, "and I'm doing my best."

While Schwarber was making his AFL debut, the Cubs were busy defeating the Dodgers for their first National League pennant since 1945. He said he monitored the game via an iPad the Solar Sox had in their dugout.

"Those guys deserve it," said Schwarber, the Cubs' all-time postseason home run leader with five. "I'm down here trying to get my work in and I'm going to join them up in Cleveland, it's either cheering or whatever it is, I'm all in for it."

Right-hander Michael Peoples (Indians) threw five shutout innings for the Solar Sox and left with a 1-0 lead before the Rafters rallied against the Mesa bullpen. Dylan Moore (Braves) tied the game with a solo homer in the seventh inning, and Isan Diaz's (Brewers' No. 8) two-run double sparked a six-run outburst in the eighth. With the win, Salt River stretched its Eastern Division lead over Mesa to 2 1/2 games.