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CINCINNATI — With September looming for the Cubs on the calendar almost as closely as the Brewers loom in the standings, losses like this one against the last-place Reds sting now — and can bite later.

Four outs from a one-run victory with nobody on base in the bottom of the eighth, the Cubs instead suffered a 4-2 loss Thursday night at Great American Ball Park after the Reds staged a two-out rally against reliever Pedro Strop and a second-best defensive alignment in the outfield.

Instead of a sweep of the Reds halfway through a two-city road trip, the Cubs had their five-game winning streak snapped with a loss that cost them a chance to take a four-game division lead into Philadelphia.

A loss that could become even bigger if the race stays tight in the final month?

“That’s easy to say, yes. But we’re the team in first place,” said right-hander Jake Arrieta, who was in line for the victory after allowing one unearned run in 5⅔ innings. “We’re up, what, three games?

“Even though it was a tough loss, we’re going into Philly still feeling pretty good about where we’re at.”

After a single, double and intentional walk, slumping Reds infielder Jose Peraza delivered the game-winner, lofting a high fly to deep left-center — against a shallow-right shift — that went for a ground-rule double when center fielder Ian Happ missed making a long-running catch by “centimeters,” he said.

Manager Joe Maddon said the reason his best center fielder, Albert Almora Jr., wasn’t on the field for late-inning run prevention was because of the “one-run lead.”

Happ said he came within “centimeters” of what would have been a game-saving catch.

“If they were to tie it, I wanted the lefties up against [closer Raisel] Iglesias [in the ninth],” he said. “Although [Almora] wouldn’t have caught that ball, either.

“When you have a one-run lead, it’s different than having a two- or three-run lead with that kind of a closer in Iglesias.”

Any chance the Cubs had of their own rally in the ninth was quelled quickly when Jon Jay followed his one-out pinch single by inexplicably deciding the Reds wouldn’t throw because they weren’t holding him on and getting thrown out trying to steal, trailing by two.

Third shift

Happ, who said he hasn’t played third base at any level, took grounders at the position before the game.

“I just wanted to make sure that if we have a moment like we did the other night that he’s somewhat familiar,” Maddon said.

When third baseman Kris Bryant was forced to leave the game Tuesday after being hit on the hand by a pitch in the ninth, Maddon shoe-horned Anthony Rizzo into the left-side defense to cover the bottom of the inning.

Happ has played second base and all three outfield spots this season.

Grimm tale

Reliever Justin Grimm, who went on the disabled list last week because of an infection in his right index finger, threw a bullpen session Wednesday and is scheduled for one more Saturday.
Barring a setback, his next step would be a brief minor-league rehab assignment before returning from the DL when rosters expand Sept. 1.

Notes: Happ’s second-inning home run Thursday was No. 19 this season for the rookie who debuted May 13. One more for Happ and the Cubs will set a franchise record with six 20-homer players (also Rizzo, Bryant, Willson Contreras, Kyle Schwarber and Javy Baez). ... The Cubs’ inconsistent hitting this year is nothing that can’t be solved by a few more games against the Reds. With their 9-3 victory in Cincinnati Wednesday night, the Cubs had scored nine or more in seven of 15 games against the Reds this year — compared to 10 of 110 other games this year.

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Chicago Sun-Times
Too much flash? Javy Baez ‘not going to change’ for old-school critics
By Gordon Wittenmyer

CINCINNATI — Javy Baez still gets people who tell him he should tone down his flair or flash or whatever somebody wants to call his playing style.

He also has a street in Chicago named after him, large sections of fans — even in Cincinnati this week — who chant his name when he steps to the plate and kids in ballparks around the league who line up for his autograph.

He also has no intention of changing who he is on the baseball field for the sake of some antiquated definition of respect for the game.

“I’m not going to change because somebody doesn’t like it,” said Baez, whose knack for the spectacular and no-look tags played a big role in the Cubs’ 2016 postseason run and could be big down the stretch again this year. “There’s a lot of people that take it the wrong way.”

People such as Steve Blass. Blass, the 75-year-old former big-league pitcher now broadcasting games for the Pirates, took a shot at Baez a few days ago, singling him out when the subject of the Cubs came up, calling him “a difficult player for me to root for.”

Because of his “flashiness?”

Blass: “That’s a nice way to put it ... flashiness.”

Baez smiled when asked about it because he has heard it so many times before from so-called old-school types, and he was not surprised that a 75-year-old white guy in Pittsburgh has a problem with his style.

“Not really,” he said. “People have different views. Not everybody has to like you. But it’s the way that I am. You can take it the right way, or you can take it the wrong way. I don’t really pay attention to negative stuff like that.”

It’s one of the most common personal criticisms that persist in a major-league culture that tends to lag behind much of the rest of society: older, often white, players and media bemoaning the displays of passion or “flashiness” of younger, often Latin, players.

Baez, who was born in Puerto Rico and raised in Florida, said he doesn’t think it’s racism.

“It’s just the way that they played the game,” he said. “Baseball’s changed so much from the past. The game is still the same, but the way it [is played], the way it’s handled is different.

“I don’t show anybody up. There’s not one player that’s going to be the same as somebody else. We’ve all got different styles.”
What’s clear is that teammates and management want Baez to keep the passion and even the flash, no matter what critics such as Blass say.

“That’s just a dried-up, old-school opinion of one of the game’s brightest athletes,” pitcher Jake Arrieta said. “I think we should just all enjoy watching guys like that play and leave him the hell alone.”

Case in point: Thursday’s sixth inning against the Reds. After an intentional walk, Baez lined a go-ahead, two-out single to left. Then in the bottom of the inning, he made a perfect relay throw from shallow left to throw out the potential tying run at the plate.

Then he pointed emphatically and victoriously back at left fielder Kyle Schwarber, who had made a strong throw to Baez. And then he held his pose and slowly smiled.

“Sometimes old-school guys forget what they looked like when they were young-school guys,” said manager Joe Maddon, who considers any effort to coach the fire and flash out of Baez a risky proposition for such a talented player.

He said some of the mistakes Baez makes now – with his strike zone and in the field – will fade as he gets more established the next two or three years. “And then heads up,” Maddon said.

It’s already starting to happen as Baez has had a chance the last month to play every day at shortstop in place of the injured Addison Russell, said Maddon – who compares Baez’ skill level and style to Magic Johnson in basketball.

“And [Omar] Vizquel. [Roberto] Alomar. They had a little flash about their game,” Maddon said. “The moment you start trying to subtract from a player’s joy on the field by making him into your perception of what it’s supposed to look like, you may lose a really good player.”

Said Baez: “As long you’re playing the game right and doing the right thing, it’s going to go all right. A lot of people take this game as a job. It is something serious, but at the end of the day it’s still a game.”

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Daily Herald
Arrieta solid, but Strop blows it in Cubs’ loss
By Bruce Miles

Jake Arrieta knows a little something about second-half runs.

He continued his post-all-star break string of good starts Thursday night, but got a tough-luck no decision as the Cincinnati Reds scored 3 runs in the bottom of the eighth inning against Pedro Strop to beat the Cubs 4-2. Jose Peraza hit a pinch 2-run double with two outs, and Strop let go a wild pitch to score another run as the Reds snapped the Cubs’ winning streak at five.

Although Arrieta had his streak of quality starts snapped at 7, he allowed only 1 unearned run in 5⅓ innings as he lowered his ERA from 3.63 to 3.49.

Arrieta’s second-half record held at 5-1 with a 1.78 ERA.

Of course, that’s still a far cry from Arrieta’s post-all-star-break run in 2015, when he went 12-1 with an 0.75 ERA on the way to the Cy Young Award.

But Arrieta has come up big for both the Cubs and himself in the unofficial second half. When play resumed after the All-Star Game, both Kyle Hendricks and John Lackey were on the disabled list. The Cubs did pick up Jose Quintana during the break, but last week, Jon Lester went on the DL with shoulder fatigue.
Through it all, Arrieta has stepped in and pitched like the ace he was in 2015 and at the start of 2016.

It's been all about the command for Arrieta, especially during this run.

"Same cliches," pitching coach Chris Bosio said on his WSCR radio pregame show. "Fastball command, being pitch-efficient. Knock on wood, he's been our rock on that rotation. Like he's done in the second half the last couple of years, he's been a guy that we've really been able to count on every fifth day -- his consistency, his work ethic."

Arrieta isn't going to win the Cy Young this year, but he has steadily moved up in the rankings, entering Thursday tied for fifth in the National League in wins and cracking the top 10 in ERA and WHIP.

Of course, there's the little matter of Arrieta becoming a free agent in the fall. If this second-half success continues, there will be teams lined up at his door to sign him to a big multiyear contract.

Against the Reds, he struck out the side in the first inning and was perfect through 3 innings, with 6 strikeouts.

Ian Happ gave Arrieta a 1-0 lead in the second g with his 19th home run of the season. Zack Cozart reached second base on an error by Cubs third baseman with one out in the fourth, and he scored on a single by Joey Votto.

An RBI single by Javier Baez in the sixth scored Bryant and put the Cubs ahead 2-1.

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Cubs.com
'Snake' continues to charm at crunch time
By Andy Call

CINCINNATI -- After a disappointing loss, count on a veteran like Jake Arrieta to think of the big picture.

The Cubs right-hander pitched well enough to earn another win Thursday, but his team couldn't hold onto a 2-1 lead in the eighth inning and lost, 4-2, to Cincinnati at Great American Ball Park. Afterward, Arrieta was asked if there is a high cost of such an unexpected defeat for a team in a pennant race.

"It's easy to say yes, but we're the team in first place," Arrieta said. "We won five in a row, then we lost a tough one. We go into [Philadelphia] still feeling pretty good."

The Cubs do indeed enter the Players Weekend series against the Phillies with a three-game lead in the National League Central over idle Milwaukee and a 4 1/2-game lead over St. Louis, which lost to San Diego.

But, as well as Arrieta pitched (again), those leads might well have been bigger.

Arrieta, who'll wear the nickname "Snake" on the back of his jersey during Players Weekend, was charged with an unearned run over 5 2/3 innings, lowering his season ERA to 3.49. He has not allowed more than two earned runs in any of his last eight starts dating back to July 8. He was dominant at the start, retiring the first 10 Cincinnati batters before Zack Cozart reached on an error and Joey Votto followed with an RBI single.

Arrietta worked out of trouble in the fifth and left the bases loaded in the sixth, but left-hander Brian Duensing ("Deuce") extinguished that threat by inducing an inning-ending groundout from Jesse Winker.

"I felt like I had good tempo, really good sequences," Arrieta said. "The only trouble I got into, I got out of in the fifth (after the first two batters reached) by making some really good pitches. In the sixth, I tried to do a little too much, tried to overthrow and missed some spots."

Cincinnati's 23-year old Sal Romano was able to match Arrieta, allowing two runs over seven innings to give his team a chance.
"Not a whole lot to talk about offensively, Arrieta was good again," Reds manager Bryan Price said. "Both Arrieta and Sal were throwing that kind of off-body to the left-handed hitter that comes back over the inside corner. That’s really hard to commit to swing at because it’s a ball out of the hand. [Romano] just had it going on, a nice feel for the changeup and breaking ball. When you have those three pitches and throw it around the plate, you have a chance to be successful."

Arrieta was certainly successful, even if he left with the same 13-8 record he entered with. He struck out eight and walked three.

"It just came down to them making one more play," he said.

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Cubs.com
Cubs foiled late despite gem from 'Snake'
By Mark Sheldon and Andy Call

CINCINNATI -- The Reds were able to contain the Cubs' bats for much of Thursday night, just long enough to get a big hit when they needed it most. Pinch-hitting in the bottom of the eighth, Jose Peraza (aka "Miguel Angel" on his Players Weekend jersey) drove a two-out, two-run double that lifted Cincinnati to a 4-2 victory over Chicago at Great American Ball Park.

Pedro Strop worked the eighth inning for the Cubs and got two quick outs, including a nice diving catch from right fielder Jason Heyward that robbed Joey Votto of a hit. But Adam Duvall followed with a single and Scooter Gennett added a double. Eugenio Suarez ran a 3-0 count before given the intentional walk to load the bases.

Peraza hit a first-pitch drive to center field that bounced on the warning track just out of reach for Ian Happ before skipping over the wall for a ground-rule double.

"He's a really good pitcher. He's got a good fastball. I was ready for that," Peraza said. "I was just working in the cage to be ready for this at-bat."

"I ran a pretty long way for it," Happ said. "I had an opportunity; I just couldn't haul it in."

When asked how close he came to the ball, Happ replied, "centimeters."

"That was the last thing we saw coming," Chicago manager Joe Maddon said. "Give [Peraza] credit."

A wild pitch to Tucker Barnhart scored Suarez for an insurance run. The Cubs' five-game winning streak was snapped and they saw their National League Central lead shaved to three games over the idle Brewers.

Happ hit a solo home run in the second inning for the game's first run but it was Javier Baez's RBI single off Sal Romano in the sixth that snapped a 1-1 tie for the Cubs' go-ahead run.

In a no-decision, Romano allowed two earned runs over seven innings with six hits, three walks and seven strikeouts. Jake Arrieta pitched 5 2/3 innings with one unearned run, four hits, three walks and eight strikeouts. Michael Lorenzen earned the win in the top of the eighth by striking out the side with one walk. Raisel Iglesias handled the top of the ninth for his 24th save in 25 tries.

"They have a great lineup," Arrieta said of the Reds. "When Sal goes out and pitches the way he does, it makes them that much tougher. If he pitches like tonight, they're a really good team."

Arrieta ("Snake") retired the first 10 batters he faced before Zack Cozart ("Coach") reached second base on an error by third baseman Kris Bryant on a ball down the line. Votto ("Tokki 2") followed with an RBI single to reach safely in his 28th consecutive game.
MOMENTS THAT MATTERED

Nice relay to the plate: Cozart hit a leadoff single in the Reds' sixth inning before Votto drove a double to the left-field wall that Kyle Schwarber struggled to corral. Despite being under orders to not run at full speed on a sore right quadriceps, Cozart was waved around to the plate by third-base coach Billy Hatcher. Schwarber threw to Baez, who made a perfect relay throw to catcher Rene Rivera that nailed Cozart for the first out. Cincinnati would go on to load the bases but come up empty.

Been caught stealing: With one out in the ninth, Iglesias walked pinch-hitter Jon Jay and brought the tying run to the plate in pinch-hitter Alex Avila. On an 0-1 pitch, Jay attempted to steal second base but Barnhart reacted quickly and fired a perfect throw to second base that easily caught Jay for the second out. Avila was called out on strikes two pitches later from Iglesias to end the game. According to Statcast™, Barnhart's pop time was 1.94 seconds and his arm strength was 81.0 mph. The MLB-average pop time is 2.02 seconds. Barnhart's throw was the fifth-fastest tracked from him this season. His high is 83.5 mph.

QUOTABLE

"I think anyone that has listened to me talk looks at the Reds 20 games under .500 and is going to say, 'This guy is a nut case if he's going to talk about how great the team is.' But, what we do do is show up every day and play hard. Today we got a really nice start, really good bullpen work and some really phenomenal late-game heroics. ... I think that's what the fans should expect and as we continue to tighten things up and get stronger and get healthier with our pitching. I think this is something that could happen rather quickly, where we start to become a team that isn't just talking about playing hard but talking about winning streaks and better positioning in the standings." -- Reds manager Bryan Price.

REPLAY CHALLENGE

In the seventh inning with Rivera on first base, pinch-hitter Tommy La Stella grounded to Votto, who fielded the ball and touched first base. Votto fired a throw to Cozart covering second base, who had to tag Rivera as he slid. Umpire Bill Miller made a safe call but the Reds challenged it and upon review, the replay official overturned it and Rivera was out in a double play.

WHAT'S NEXT

Cubs: The Cubs open a three-game Players Weekend series at Philadelphia at 6:05 p.m. CT Friday. Jose Quintana ("Q") (4-2, 3.73) will start for Chicago against Jerad Eickhoff ("Eick") (3-7, 4.66). Quintana will be making his eighth start for the Cubs. He has a combined 8-10 record and 4.27 ERA with the White Sox and Cubs.

Reds: The homestand shifts to three games vs. the Pirates, with Friday's series opener set for 7:10 p.m. ET. While it will be Players Weekend and the Pirates will wear their special uniforms, the Reds are observing a military appreciation night and will don camouflage jerseys instead. Robert Stephenson will get the start for Cincinnati.

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Cubs.com
Explaining Cubs Players Weekend nicknames
By Andy Call

CINCINNATI -- What's in a nickname?

Maybe it's just a morphing of your given name, like "J-Hey" for Jason Heyward. Maybe it is just an easily recognized rhyme, like Jake Arrieta's "The Snake". Maybe it is in recognition of a particular skill set, like Javier Baez's "El Mago." In other cases, as with Alex Avila's "Parkman," perhaps the meaning requires an explanation.
Fans will be able to put a nickname with a face Friday-Sunday in Philadelphia as the Cubs will wear special edition jerseys as part of the inaugural Players Weekend. The non-traditional uniforms feature alternate designs, and players will have their nicknames on the back.

Cubs outfielader Jon Jay will wear a jersey with "305J" as his nickname, the area code for Miami, Jay's hometown. He attended George Washington Carver Middle School, Christopher Columbus High School (which won the state baseball championship during Jay's senior year) and spent three years at the University of Miami.

"Miami is the city that raised me," Jay said. "I have a lot of pride in that city. I learned a lot of life lessons there that made me who I am today."

And what about "Parkman?"

"I don't know who first started calling me that," Avila said. "Somebody thought, when I had my gear on, there was a resemblance to a character in [the movie] Major League II."

"When I was at the [2011] All-Star Game, Adrian Gonzalez noticed it and was telling people I looked like Parkman, and it just kind of spread. Then one of my teammates in Detroit told [MLB] after I was traded to Chicago to put that name on my shirt."

Besides the jerseys, made by Majestic Athletic, the players will wear uniquely colored and designed spikes, batting gloves, wristbands, compression sleeves and catcher's masks. Even the bats will get jazzed up that weekend. The caps are designed by New Era, and the socks by Stance. During pregame workouts and postgame interviews, players will wear T-shirts to highlight a charity or cause of their choice.

Each player also will wear a special patch on his sleeve showing the progression of a child evolving into a Major Leaguer. Under that logo is white space, and players can mark the name of a person whom they are grateful to for helping them advance their careers, such as family or a coach.

Game-worn Players Weekend jerseys will be auctioned at MLB.com/auctions with 100 percent of the net proceeds donated to the MLB-MLBPA Youth Development Foundation. That foundation is a joint effort established in July 2015 by MLB and the MLBPA with an initial commitment of $30 million focused on improving the caliber, effectiveness and availability of amateur baseball and softball programs across the U.S. and Canada.

Albert Almora Jr.: "Tico"
His father is Alberto, and Albert is known by family as "Albertico," hence "Tico."
Tribute patch: Mom & Dad

Jake Arrieta: "Snake"
"Snake" rhymes with "Jake," and is also a natural tie to WWE legend Jake "The Snake" Roberts, who filmed an encouraging message for Arrieta and the Cubs prior to Game 6 of last year's World Series.
Tribute patch: Lynda Arrieta (mom)

Alex Avila: "Parkman"
"It's from Jack Parkman, the character in [the movie] Major League II," Avila said. "I guess there's a [physical] resemblance."
Tribute patch: Mom & Dad

Javier Baez: "El Mago"
Spanish for "The Magician," Baez was given the nickname by fans in Puerto Rico after some impressive, almost magical, fielding during the 2016 postseason.
Tribute patch: God & Family

Willson Contreras: "Willy"
Tribute patch: Abuelo Ernesto Mom & Dad
Wade Davis: "Wader"
Tribute patch: Dad, LW Little League (Lake Wales, Fla.)

Brian Duensing: "Deuce"
Tribute patch: Mom & Dad

Carl Edwards Jr.: "Carl's Jr."
The nickname is a natural play on the fast-food burger chain. An endorsement seems like a perfect match, and although Edwards said he likes the product, he was not ready to commit to just one hamburger.
Tribute patch: Carl and Faith Edwards (parents)

Justin Grimm: "Reaper"
Tribute patch: Mom & Dad

Ian Happ: "Happer"
Tribute patch: Keith & Chris Happ (dad and brother)

Jason Heyward: "J-Hey"
Tribute patch: Eugene & Laura (parents)

Kyle Hendricks "Hendo"
Tribute patch: Mom & Dad

Jon Jay: "305J"
The area code for Miami, Jay's hometown.
Tribute patch: Mom

John Lackey: "Lack"
Tribute patch: Mom & Dad

Tommy La Stella: Using last name

Mike Montgomery: "Monty"
Tribute patch: Mom & Dad

Felix Pena: "Ricardon"
"Ricardo" is Pena's middle name.

Jose Quintana: "Q"
Tribute patch: Ariadna and Abel (parents)

Anthony Rizzo: "Tony"
Tribute patch: Mom & Dad

Hector Rondon: "Rondi"
Tribute patch: Ian Jose (son), Dafnee (daughter), Sophia (daughter), Benito (dad), Lissy (mom)

Addison Russell: "Addy"
Tribute patch: Wayne & Milany Russell

Kyle Schwarber: "Schwarbs"
Tribute patch: Mom & Dad

Pedro Strop: "Stropy"
Tribute patch: Manuel (dad)
Koji Uehara: "Koji"
Tribute patch: Ryuji & Tomoko (parents)

Justin Wilson: "J-Willy"
Tribute patch: Family

Ben Zobrist: "Zorilla"
"I started calling him that in 2008 when we were both with Tampa Bay and he really came on strong," Cubs manager Joe Maddon said. "It's sort of the antithesis of the man, but, as a player, it fits him perfectly."
Tribute patch: Mom & Dad

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Cubs.com
Bryant returns to lineup after Tuesday's HBP
By Andy Call

CINCINNATI -- On Thursday afternoon, Kris Bryant put away the pompons and went back to work.

"It was nice to sit back and watch the guys have fun and be a cheerleader for our game," said the Cubs' third baseman and three-time All-Star, who sat out Wednesday's 9-3 victory over Cincinnati after being hit on the left hand by a pitch Tuesday.

The reigning National League MVP was back in the lineup Thursday, batting third against the Reds at Great American Ball Park. Cubs manager Joe Maddon said their pregame conversation to discuss Bryant's health was a brief one.

"He said he was fine," Maddon said. "We talked it over, and he was adamant he was fine. I said, 'OK, then, let's go.'"

Bryant entered Thursday batting .287/.400/.529 with 23 home runs and 56 RBIs. He sprained his left pinkie July 19 while sliding into third base, the first notable injury of his career. Bryant played in more than 150 games in 2015 and 2016. He suffered a contusion Tuesday on the side of his hand, but X-rays came back negative.

"[This injury] felt like what I've been dealing with for the last month," Bryant said. "It didn't hit the area that's been sore, so that was good."

Bryant said he did not consider wearing any type of padding Thursday because he was concerned it would affect his swing.

"I'll just ride with it," Bryant said.

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Cubs.com
'Q' starts Players Weekend opener
By Todd Zolecki

The Cubs hope to take advantage of a three-game series this weekend against the team with the worst record in baseball to extend their lead in the National League Central.

Cubs left-hander Jose Quintana ("Q" for Players Weekend) faces Phillies right-hander Jerad Eickhoff (3-7, 4.46 ERA) in Friday night's series opener at Citizens Bank Park. Quintana is 4-2 with a 3.73 ERA in seven starts since joining the Cubs following a trade with the White Sox.
Eickhoff ("Eick") has pitched more than six innings only once since early April, and a decrease in velocity could be one reason why. His fastball is averaging 90.4 mph this season after averaging 91.6 mph the previous two, and it is just 89.3 mph in four starts this month. Eickhoff has said he is not concerned about it.

Things to know about this game

• Quintana's batting average allowed has dropped from .246 with the White Sox to .209 since joining the Cubs, but his expected average -- based partly on the quality of contact against him -- is just two points lower, at .229. The lefty's rate of batted balls hit with an exit velocity of 95-plus mph, according to Statcast, is actually up from 34.8 percent to 39.3 percent.

• Phillies catcher Jorge Alfaro hit his first career double Wednesday, and it left his bat at 114.5 mph. He has two extra-base hits in nine games this season, and both are among the three hardest-hit balls the Phillies have produced since the beginning of 2015.

ESPNChicago.com
Cubs find variety of ways to come up short
By Jesse Rogers

CINCINNATI -- Maybe it was Chicago Cubs manager Joe Maddon's fault his team lost Thursday's game to the Cincinnati Reds after he failed to employ his top defensive outfield in the eighth inning of a one-run game. Or perhaps fingers should point toward reliever Pedro Strop, who gave up the lead that same inning after getting the two first batters out. Then there was Jon Jay, who inexplicably tried to steal second base in the ninth inning with the Cubs down by two.

In other words, there was plenty of blame to go around in a 4-2 loss that snapped a five-game win streak. The good news is that these days the Cubs are in a position to survive such a perfect storm of mistakes.

"Two outs nobody on and he was throwing the ball great," Maddon said of Strop. "It's one those things that happens in this game. Strop has been pitching great, but [Jose] Peraza hitting the ball right there, in those circumstances, was the last thing we saw coming. We had everything on the other side."

The Cubs were up 2-1, but Strop loaded the bases with Peraza coming to the plate. Their defense set up shallow and toward right field. Peraza hit it deep to left-center, and despite a long sprint, center fielder Ian Happ couldn't snare it.

"We were in and oppo[site field] a little bit and he put a good swing on that ball and put it right in no-man's land," Happ said. "I ran to a place where I had an opportunity and just couldn't haul it in."

Could Albert Almora Jr. have tracked it down? Probably not, but we'll never know.

"It's a one-run lead," Maddon said of not changing his outfield. "If they tie it I want the lefties up against [Reds closer Raisel] Iglesias."

Some might find that backward-thinking. Is it best to have the better bats in the lineup or better gloves when nursing such a slim margin? Then again, who could have predicted Strop would melt down after getting the first two out in the inning?

A blunder no one can debate was Jay's attempted steal of second with one out in the ninth inning and Chicago down by that final margin.

"He went on his own," Maddon said. "He's thinking they're playing behind. He's thinking they're not going to throw. They did."
No matter the odds, it wasn’t worth the risk. But here’s the thing: every team -- even the good ones -- lose games like this. If the Cubs were trailing by three or four games in the division rather than three up on Milwaukee in the National League Central, a loss like this really could be devastating. As long as these kinds of games happen no more than once in a long while, there’s not a lot to be concerned about.

A questionable managerial decision, a perfectly placed hit and a rare mental mistake by a veteran. These aren’t habitual happenings with the Cubs despite their sometimes poor play this year.

"If you carry this with you until tomorrow, then it can be that game [that carries over]," Maddon said. "If you drop it in the waste can it can’t be that game. You win hard for 30 [minutes], lose hard for 30, then move on. It’s how you treat a loss like tonight. If you give it way more weight than it deserves then it can follow you around."

So the Cubs will trash this one, though if they lose the division by a game, it'll be remembered for various breakdowns. One of these games is OK. Several in a small time frame are not. How the Cubs respond is as important as anything. Thursday's starter, Jake Arrieta, was asked if the loss could come back to haunt his team.

"It’s easy to yes, but we’re the team in first place," he said. "We won five or six in a row and lost a tough one, but we go into Philly still feeling pretty good about the way we’re throwing the ball, swinging the bats and catching the ball. Even though it was a tough loss, we’re still feeling good about where we’re at."

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**Chicago Tribune**

Cubs’ bid for 6th consecutive win ends with 4-2 loss to Reds

By Mark Gonzales

The Cubs fell short in their bid to win their sixth consecutive game Thursday night as the Reds rallied for three runs in the eighth inning to seize a 4-2 victory at Great American Ball Park. Pinch-hitter Jose Peraza smacked a bases-loaded ground rule double off reliever Pedro Strop to put the Reds up for good.

At the plate: Ian Happ smacked a home run – his 19th – that barely cleared the right field fence with one out in the second against Sal Romero. Happ was intentionally walked in the sixth, but Javier Baez foiled the Reds’ strategy with a single that gave the Cubs a lead.

On the mound: Starting pitcher Jake Arrieta put his hands on his hips after manager Joe Maddon pulled him with the bases loaded and two outs in the sixth with the Cubs protecting a one-run lead. But left-hander Brian Duensing induced Jesse Winker to ground into a force-out.

In the field: Baez showed off his powerful arm by making a strong relay throw to home plate to nail Zack Cozart and prevent the Reds from tying the game in the sixth. But Maddon elected to keep Happ in center field in the eighth, with defensive specialist Albert Almora Jr. on the bench, when Peraza hit his deep drive that eluded Happ on the edge of the warning track.

Key number: 10-6 – Cubs’ record against the Reds.

The quote: "Moving forward, I want to keep an eye on (Bryant’s) hand and want him to be honest with me if he needs a day (off)." – Maddon

Up next: at Phillies, Friday, 6:05 p.m. LH Jose Quintana vs. RH Jerad Eickhoff.

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**Chicago Tribune**

Joe Maddon gives Cubs pitchers no restrictions while going for no-hitters

By Mark Gonzales
One night after Rich Hill of the Dodgers was allowed to pitch into the 10th inning in a failed no-hitter attempt, Cubs manager Joe Maddon said his starting pitchers have no restrictions if such situations.

"Yes, go for the no-no," Maddon said Thursday, after Hill lost on a home run by Josh Harrison of the Pirates on Hill's first pitch of the 10th inning, his 99th overall.

Pitching coach Chris Bosio informed the starters of the Cubs' policy before the 2016 season, and Jake Arrieta threw a 119-pitch no-hitter against the Reds that April.

The Cubs discreetly try to keep their relievers ready during a no-hitter by playing long toss with the outfielders in the latter innings.

"They have a chance for the no-no, they go," Maddon said.

Crowded corner: In an attempt to avoid a situation that saw left-handed throwing first baseman Anthony Rizzo play third base for one inning Tuesday, Ian Happ worked out there before Thursday's game.

"I never saw any game action (at Triple-A Iowa) but worked over there," Happ said. "I'm just continuing to be as versatile as I can be. It's always fun to be in a new spot and get into a learning process.

"It's not super foreign. I'm just trying to get comfortable there in case it's something that's needed."

Maddon said his biggest concern is making sure Happ is in the right position on cutoffs and rundowns, adding he felt comfortable with Tommy La Stella starting Wednesday in place of Kris Bryant.

"You see what Tommy did off the bench," Maddon said after La Stella homered, drove in three runs and played flawless defense Wednesday. "I feel good about giving KB a day off with Tommy willing to play third base."

Injury update: Shortstop Addison Russell rested his right foot Thursday. "He feels something a little bit when moving in a certain direction," Maddon said. "He's moving well, but we're not 100 percent satisfied it's not cleared out."

Pitchers Jon Lester (Friday) and Justin Grimm (Saturday) will throw bullpen sessions, with the likelihood that Grimm will start a minor-league rehab assignment if his right index finger feels well.

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**Chicago Tribune**

Kris Bryant unveils plans for customized cleats during Players Weekend

By Mark Gonzalez

Manager Joe Maddon will be besieged by a few family members and friends who will make the two-hour drive from Hazleton, Pa., to see their hometown hero when the Cubs visit the Phillies this weekend.

Maddon said he was known as Joey during his youth, and that nickname will resonate with him during Players Weekend, in which players and coaches will wear personalized names on the back of their jerseys.

“Anything that attracts youngsters to our game, I’m all about that,” Maddon said. “I don’t know to what extent nicknames on jerseys does that, but I do like it.”

Meanwhile, Kris Bryant will unveil three different pairs of customized cleats to raise awareness for spinal-cord injury research. Those cleats will have designs representing the three cities he has played in — his hometown of Las Vegas, San Diego and Chicago.

“It’s cool to have a weekend to do whatever we want,” Bryant said. “I’m sure a lot of guys have some pretty cool stuff.
“I might wear my pants up, and I never do that to show off the cleats a little bit.”

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**Chicago Tribune**

We're dyeing to know: What's up with Joe Maddon's darker hair?

By Paul Sullivan

The biggest mystery surrounding the Cubs' season isn't why Kris Bryant hasn't driven in more runs or what Jon Lester said to Chris Bosio after his shellacking by the Reds.

The question that really needs to be answered is this: What's up with Joe Maddon's hair?

When he left town Aug. 6 for the "Easy Rider" road trip out west, Maddon's bright, white mane was plain to see. The silver-haired look was part of his image, along with his dark-framed glasses. In Tampa they called him the Roger Sterling of the Rays, a nod to the "Mad Men" character.

But something strange happened in California, as it often does with the Cubs, and Maddon came home a changed man, at least from the ears up.

His hair is noticeably darker in spots, more of a salt-and-pepper look than a straight dye job. It almost seemed as though Maddon was auditioning for a part in one of those Grecian Formula ads.

Was it just an optical illusion? A midlife crisis? A Cubbie Occurrence? Was Maddon actually paid to dye his hair to endorse some product?

Only his hair stylist knew for sure.

Since Maddon wears a baseball cap during games, it was difficult to determine for sure whether he had colored his hair or not, so no one asked him. Maybe it just looked darker during his press conferences, when he typically goes hatless, because it was still wet from a shower. Or perhaps it was the mood lighting in the Cubs media room.

The question went unanswered, or more precisely, unasked, during the recent homestand. Most of the media members covering the Cubs are male, and guys typically don't ask guys about their hair color, even as they make fun of their bald friends for not having hair. Go figure.

Maddon's hair was the elephant in the media room, and the same color to boot. But as the homestand progressed, the topic of hair color receded in importance, replaced by more pressing matters like bullpen walks and Lester's shoulder.

But every day it gets a little darker, so on Thursday I buttonholed someone from Maddon's inner circle and asked point blank whether he's dying his hair.

The source, who asked to be called "Deep Root" so as not to reveal his identity, confirmed Maddon is in fact coloring his hair and was waiting on someone to notice. The idea to change hair color stemmed from a visit to a downtown Chicago hair stylist whom the source would only identify as "Fred."

In late July, Maddon was advised by Fred to "rock the blue-steel tone," which Ben Stiller adorned in "Zoolander."

Initially hesitant to mess with his famous follicles, Maddon finally decided to give the product a try after the Cubs lost their third straight series in San Francisco.

Maddon began to adopt the blue-steel look before the start of the Cubs series in Arizona on Aug. 11, and his hair has been getting darker by the day.
The early results have been promising, at least for the Cubs. They'd won 9 of 12 before Thursday's series finale against the Reds in Cincinnati, building their biggest lead in the NL Central Division.

If the trend continues and the Cubs win the World Series, Maddon's hair should be black by the end of the season, while Fred would be likely to get a championship ring.

Maddon apparently isn't worried about negative reaction to the new color, or any cracks he's trying to look younger than his 63 years. He already has shaved his head for his charity during spring training, and he dyed it jet black back in 2009 when the Rays had a "Ring of Fire" road trip in which they dressed in black like Johnny Cash. (Former Rays manager Lou Piniella set a precedent in Tampa in 2003 when he had blond streaks put in his hair after a three-game win streak.)

Strangely, no one in the clubhouse has said anything to Maddon. One of his coaches has been staring at him funny but hasn't asked about the hair.

None of the Cubs players had mentioned Maddon's changing hair color during their conversations with him, though what they're talking about in the hydrotherapy and sensory-deprivation tanks is anyone's guess.

Whether blue steel remains the look of choice may depend on how the Cubs fare the rest of the way.

Just remember that hair of the dog is the best way to cure a World Series hangover.

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Chicago Tribune
Longtime director of White Sox, Cubs telecasts Skip Ellison calling it a career
By Paul Sullivan

On any given day, most fans watching a baseball game are sitting on a couch at home, not in the stands at the ballpark.

Since they're not there, they depend on the local telecast to provide them with everything they need to see to follow the action.

Director Skip Ellison has been the eyes and ears of White Sox and Cubs fans over the last 27 years, but his hats shots are coming to an end.

Ellison is retiring, and his final telecast will be Monday night on WGN-9 when the Pirates and Cubs meet at Wrigley Field.

Ellison, 63, said he decided to get out of the business and relax because of "miserable" travel conditions that have only increased at airports over the last decade. For the last 16 years, he has been director of Cubs telecasts for WGN and Comcast SportsNet Chicago, along with some on ABC-7.

He has directed baseball games for 34 consecutive years, starting with the 1984 Braves before moving on to the White Sox in 1990 and Cubs in 2001.

Though you may not recognize the name unless you wait for the credits, Ellison is widely regarded as one of the best in the business.

"Skip was a great director because of how much he loves baseball," said Marc Brady, veteran producer of Cubs telecasts. "If he wasn't working the game he'd be home watching it. It's just part of his DNA."

When working a game at Wrigley, Ellison is seated inside a dark truck located on Waveland Avenue near the firehouse. It's equipped with a few dozen TV monitors showing scenes from eight cameras mounted around the ballpark.
The director chooses what goes onto your TV screen, whether it's a player watching his home run or jumping on a tarp to catch a foul ball, a fan grimacing during a tight game in the ninth inning or a seagull searching the bleachers for food scraps.

Ellison said the only real differences between Sox and Cubs broadcasts are the "angles of the ballpark" and the announcers.

"The way it's evolved, a director tries to tell the story of the game by complementing the announcers' commentary and analysis with the proper shots," Ellison said. "And when the ball is in play, everyone pretty much cuts the game the same way. Coverage has evolved into showing more action with fewer camera cuts than when I started.

"Now you've got HD TVs, the ability to show more of the field and people can still see what's going on without going tighter. For instance if there's a base hit to left and a runner at second, we always try to keep the runner rounding third in the shot along with the ball so you can see whether he's got a chance, like people in the ballpark see.

"At the same time we like to have some fun — kids with signs, people with goofy hats."

Ellison said late Cubs director Arne Harris didn't actually invent the "hat shot," a staple of Cubs telecasts back when Harry Caray was doing play-by-play.

"But he sure perfected it," Ellison said. "Watching a lot of those games, it made you feel like you were part of the crowd at the ballpark, seeing that stuff.

"A lot of broadcasts try to keep the cameras concentrated on the action on the field, and crowd shots are few and far between. But I think at Wrigley you've got to have them."

Along the way, Ellison has worked with announcing teams including Skip Caray and Pete Van Wieren, Chip Caray and Steve Stone, Ken "Hawk" Harrelson and Tom Paciorek and now Len Kasper and Jim Deshaies.

His toughest season was in 2004, when Cubs players ignited a feud with Stone and Chip Caray for heaping praise on Astros pitcher Roy Oswalt during a Cubs-Astros telecast.

Cubs reliever Kent Mercker called the press box and asked the media relations department to send a derogatory message to Stone and Caray about their commentary. The message wasn't sent, but news of Mercker's call was reported in the Tribune, and the players feuded with Stone the rest of the season, which ended with a final week collapse from a wild-card spot.

"It was so unnecessary," Ellison said. "I really empathized with Stoney and Chip because they were just doing their job. The comment that sparked the thing, 'Roy Oswalt did a great job because he was hammered early and the bullpen was spent, but he hung in there and shut the door,' it was so innocuous. And yet somebody took exception to that."

Picking a favorite team was impossible for Ellison. He said he learned something from everyone he worked with along the way.

"Skip and Pete took me under their wing and taught me a lot starting out," he said. "They were easy on me. Working with Hawk was great because he was so easy to follow. You knew where he was going all the time. Chip was great too. I met him when he was an intern at TBS, and I worked with two of the three Carays.

"And I think Cubs fans are really set up with Len and J.D. Len is so comprehensive in his preparation for a game, not just the teams on the field but what's going on around baseball, and J.D.'s wit is so sharp."

A tip of the hat shot goes out to Ellison, who deserves a respite from the daily grind.
Now he can watch the rest of this crazy Cubs season from his couch like everyone else.