Mike Maddux’s methods attractive to Cubs
By: GORDON WITTENMYER

Whether Texas Rangers pitching coach Mike Maddux is the next generation of Moneyball, he is at least ready to be part of the next breed of major-league managers, say those who have worked closely with him.

Perhaps of most immediate importance to the Cubs, Maddux is ready to interview for the team’s vacancy Wednesday, just two days after withdrawing his name from the Boston Red Sox’ process. That could put him in the driver’s seat for a job he already seemed to be an early favorite to land.

“He cares about what he’s doing, and he cares about the people that he’s doing it with,” said Rangers manager Ron Washington, who has worked with Maddux the last three seasons. “He does a great job of hands-on. He does a good job of directing people and helping them find their way. I think that type of quality is what has separated him from other guys that have done his job as pitching coach.”

Maddux, 50, has built a reputation as one of the top pitching coaches in his nine-season big-league coaching career, with stops in Milwaukee and Texas.

“He’s a teacher, and he has the ability of winning people over,” said Cubs hitting coach Rudy Jaramillo, who coached on the same Rangers staff with Maddux in 2009. “When you can do that, you can be an excellent coach and an excellent manager.”

More than communication skills and a reputation for outside-the-box thinking, Maddux also has gained notoriety for conditioning and maintenance programs that have helped keep his key pitchers healthy.

Cubs president Theo Epstein, general manager Jed Hoyer and others in the game consider pitching injuries the next Moneyball frontier to conquer, the market inefficiency that will create a competitive advantage for any team that systematically reduces an injury rate that has gone largely unchanged for decades.

Maddux, the third candidate to interview with the Cubs, is the only pitching coach among the known candidates, the only one who seems to fit this new-generation mold. Former infielders Pete Mackanin and Dale Sveum have interviewed, and team sources confirmed Cleveland Indians bench coach Sandy Alomar Jr., a former catcher, is scheduled later this week.

“Since I’ve been with him, he certainly has a program for all his pitchers, both starting pitchers and relievers,” Washington said of Maddux. “Every day he makes them accountable for making sure they’re prepared [to work] and for what may happen that day during the course of the ballgame.”
“I haven’t seen many guys that decipher things and get prepared as much as Mike does, and the way the Texas Rangers have come along with the pitching staff is a testament to that.”

The Rangers’ ERA has dropped every season Maddux has been with the team, starting with nearly a full run improvement from the 5.37 ERA of the staff he inherited.

He oversaw the successful conversions from bullpen to rotation of C.J. Wilson in 2010 and Alexi Ogando this past season, and the Rangers’ staff got an incredible 157 starts from its primary five starters.

“It’s really more old-school,” Washington said. “He and [Rangers president] Nolan Ryan believe the more you throw the baseball, the stronger the arm becomes and the more you can control it.”

That means throwing batting practice between spring-training starts and following a strict between-starts throwing program during the season.

Maddux, a journeyman reliever with 15 seasons in the big leagues, also is an expert with pitching mechanics, Jaramillo said, which “has a lot to do with saving pitchers’ arms.”

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Cubs.com
Inbox: Loyalty a factor in manager search?
Beat reporter Carrie Muskat answers Cubs fans' questions
By: Carrie Muskat

Ryne Sandberg, Aramis Ramirez and Carlos Zambrano are among the topics in this week's Inbox. Send your questions to CubsInbox@gmail.com, and please include your name and hometown.

Why is Ryno not a candidate to be the next Cubs manager? Theo Epstein talks about wanting to build from within. What better person than Ryno, who has managed most of the upcoming talent in the Minor Leagues? At least he could be a bench coach for perhaps Mike Maddux. He knows the kids coming up and could help with defense. Where is the loyalty for an icon like Ryno?
-- Adrian H., Quincy, Ill.

What Epstein and GM Jed Hoyer are looking for is someone who is like-minded in what they want to do with the Cubs. They also want someone with experience either as a big league manager or coach. Sandberg doesn't have that experience on his resume. Sandberg has managed several of the young Cubs like Darwin Barney, Tyler Colvin, Andrew Cashner and Starlin Castro. Epstein did interview Sandberg for the Triple-A manager’s job in the Red Sox system, and Sandberg chose to go to the Phillies. This is not about loyalty or a popularity contest, which some fans seem to think. It's finding the right match.

Epstein showed how much he respects Sandberg last week. After meeting with Mike Quade, Epstein called Cubs chairman Tom Ricketts and then Sandberg. He knows what Sandberg means to the Cubs.

"I told him, I’ve only been in Chicago for a little more than a week, but it was clear what an incredible impact he had made on the people here and this organization, even greater than what I imagined from afar," Epstein said. "I said I hoped we could turn the organization into something that would make him proud."

If the next Cubs manager wanted Sandberg on his coaching staff, Epstein said he wouldn't rule that out.
Now that the Cubs exercised their option on Aramis Ramirez for next year, are they guaranteed to receive Draft compensation if he leaves via free agency? I understand you must offer a player arbitration in order to receive compensation, but I’m not sure how things work when there's a mutual option like Ramirez has. Since he's in the top 20 percent at his position, it would be nice to get the two high Draft picks as he walks out the door. I know a lot of people aren't fans of Jim Hendry, but turning Bobby Hill, Jose Hernandez and Matt Bruback into nine years of Aramis and a couple high Draft choices would have to rank as one of the all-time fleeces in Cubs history.
-- Tom D., Madison, Wisc.

 Ramirez is considered a Type B free agent, which means if he signs with another team, the Cubs would receive a pick in the supplemental round of the Draft.

What will the Cubs do with Carlos Zambrano? He's one of the best hitters as a pitcher that the Cubs have.
-- Leonard J., Rockford, Ill.

The Cubs need more help with pitching than hitting, and Epstein hasn't totally ruled out the possibility that Zambrano could return. On Sunday, Zambrano threw 2 2/3 innings for Caribes in the Venezuelan Winter League, and he said he felt like a rookie again. His next start was scheduled for Friday. Epstein has talked to Zambrano's agent, Barry Praver, and wants to speak with the pitcher himself before deciding what to do with him.

With Kerry Wood taking a hometown discount last year and speaking of retirement other than playing for anyone else, and no other reliever as good for the price, the Cubs are not seriously considering not re-signing him, are they?
-- Richard D., Paducah, Ky.

Epstein and Wood have talked, but just casually. They most likely will come to some kind of agreement; it’s just not a top priority.

I heard a hideous rumor that Epstein wants to replace the Wrigley Field scoreboard with a jumbotron. Is this a joke?
-- Jaime S., Universal City, Texas

That's not the "Cubs way," and not going to happen. Also, the scoreboard has landmark status.

With the obvious need for some quality starting pitching, I’m curious who the Cubs might realistically go after. It seems like the market is pretty weak or full of names that you would like to have seen five years ago. It looks like two decent options are Edwin Jackson and C.J. Wilson. They both are relatively young and should be able to give you 200-plus quality innings. Any chance of going after or landing either of them?
-- Kevin C., Columbus, Ohio

It may depend on what Jackson and Wilson are seeking in terms of compensation. Epstein and Hoyer don’t seem inclined to sign players to long term, big money deals. They also are not going to turn the Cubs around overnight. The key question is: Are Cubs fans patient enough to wait?

Cubs.com
Cubs Convention passes set to go on sale
By: Carrie Muskat

CHICAGO -- Fans can hear what new Cubs president of baseball operations Theo Epstein and general manager Jed Hoyer have to say at the 27th Cubs Convention, Jan. 13-15, at the Hilton Chicago.
Weekend passes go on sale Wednesday at 10 a.m. CT. Fans can purchase up to six passes per person while they are in supply. Each weekend pass is $60 plus convenience fees, with proceeds benefitting Chicago Cubs Charities. Passes will be available for purchase by visiting cubs.com or by calling 1-800-THE-CUBS.

Besides seminars with Epstein and Hoyer, fans will see Hall of Famers Ernie Banks, Billy Williams and Fergie Jenkins at the event.

The 2012 Cubs Convention will feature enhanced layouts and new exhibits, such as an interactive baseball area hosted by the Illinois Baseball Academy, a new electronic gaming zone and the LEGOLAND® Discovery Zone.

A weekend pass will include access to those features, as well as autograph/photo opportunities, question and answer sessions, and a variety of memorabilia and vendor booths.

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Cubs.com
Cubs manager job a win-win situation
If the new skipper loses, big deal, so has everyone else
By: Alden Gonzalez

If managing the Red Sox, Cardinals and Cubs were the cast of “Ocean's Eleven,” the Red Sox and Cardinals would be George Clooney and Brat Pitt; the Cubs would be Matt Damon.

On the Miami Heat, the Red Sox and Cardinals are Dwyane Wade and LeBron James; the Cubs are Chris Bosh.

And if we're talking music, the Red Sox and Cardinals are more Jay-Z and Kanye West; the Cubs are more, what, Pitbull?

OK, you get the picture. The Red Sox, Cardinals and the Cubs are each looking for a new field manager. That's three storied franchises with three large payrolls and three infinitely loyal fan bases. In terms of prestige and track record, though, two of them are at least one notch above the other.

If I had my choice, I’d take the other.

Contrary to the sentiments of colleagues Anthony Castrovine and Marty Noble, it's the Cubs job that's most appealing.

That's right, the Cubs. The "Lovable Losers," the forever cursed and the eternally hopeless of the bunch. Tito Jackson in a household with Michael and Janet (last one, I promise). The ones who haven't won it all in more than a century, are coming off a 91-loss season, have bad contracts on their payroll and will require a top-to-bottom overhaul.

The biggest reason the Cubs' job trumps the vacancies in St. Louis and Boston is perhaps the same one that prompted Theo Epstein to leave his job as general manager in Beantown to become president of baseball operations in the Windy City.

Fail with the Cubs, you're simply the latest in a long line of distinguished baseball men who have come up short.

Bring a championship to that starved organization, and you'll be elevated to an unprecedented level.

"When we build that foundation for sustained success and it ultimately results in a World Series," Epstein said at his introductory press conference, "it's going to be more than just a World Series."
It would be baseball nirvana.

As the architect of a 2004 Red Sox team that ended an 86-year title drought, Epstein should know. And by going to Chicago and hiring two of the men who helped him achieve that success -- making Jed Hoyer his new executive vice president and GM and Jason McLeod his new VP of scouting and player development -- he has laid a similar foundation for success.

Once Epstein and his crew rids the club of short-sighted contracts, makes an imprint on its Minor League system and signs premier free agents -- maybe as early as this offseason, with Pujols or Prince Fielder -- it's entirely possible that the Cubs could enter their most successful era and eventually end their miserable championship drought.

"It's a rare chance to do something special in this city," Hoyer said, "to win a title that can transform a fan base and transform a region."

Wouldn't you like to be the manager credited for that?

Isn't that better than going to a Red Sox organization that's expected to win like the Yankees, competes in the same division as the Yankees and is coming off an epic collapse blamed mostly on a toxic clubhouse?

Or following up on a World Series championship in St. Louis, filling the shoes of the Hall of Fame-bound Tony La Russa and possibly doing so without Pujols?

The Cubs are a big-market team with a big-market fan base, a big-market payroll and on its way to eventually producing big-market wins -- and the best part is the job still doesn't come with big-market expectations. Epstein knows, as do knowledgeable fans, that this is the kind of project that requires a lot of work and will take plenty of time.

With that in mind, the new manager should and probably will be given plenty of leeway -- the type that would allow him to see this rebuilding project all the way through.

And whoever does become that next Cubs skipper -- whether it's Terry Francona, Pete Mackanin, Dale Sveum, Mike Maddux or somebody else -- will be forever worshiped in Chicago if he brings World Series glory for the first time since 1908.

If he doesn't? Well, it's not like he won't have company.

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Tribune
Maddux next up in managerial whirl
Rangers pitching coach considered strong candidate for Cubs
By: Paul Sullivan

Standing in front of the Cubs' dugout before a 1997 game at Wrigley Field, former Tribune Co. executive vice president James Dowdle was asked whether the team would draw the line at Sammy Sosa's salary demands.

"We paid (Mark) Grace," replied the then-Cubs' boss. "We signed (Ryne) Sandberg. We signed (Mel) Rojas. I think we'll put a decent offer on the table for Sammy. But our history says we could sign our free agents for the next 10-15 years, and Maddux is still going to come up."

The name Maddux still resonates in Cubs history, which is why Greg's older brother, Mike, is the first managerial candidate to stir some actual emotions in Chicago.
Mike Maddux, the Rangers pitching coach, will interview for the vacancy Wednesday at Wrigley Field, and then will have a news conference in a room full of reporters who also covered his brother.

Whether pitching genius is in the family DNA is unknown, but the name alone gives Cubs fans hope. Pete Mackanin and Dale Sveum may have impressed the Cubs' brass with their game simulation skills, but they have generated no groundswell of fan support.

Greg Maddux can give Mike a thorough scouting report on the organization, the executives, the media, the fans, the players, the farm system and the last few owners. If Mike Maddux is asked his theories on why the Cubs have not won a World Series in 103 years, as Sveum was on Monday, he can point to decisions such as the loss of his brother via free agency — what Dowdle conceded was a "miscalculation" for the ages.

Mike Maddux will be the third candidate interviewed, and the first whom the Red Sox already haven't interviewed. He took his name out of consideration for that job on Monday for family reasons, which fueled speculation he was the top candidate for the Cubs opening.

Cubs president of baseball operations Theo Epstein has not commented publicly on the managerial search since it began last week.

Indians coach Sandy Alomar, who meets Wednesday with Red Sox general manager Ben Cherington, is expected to follow Maddux on the Cubs' interview list later this week.

Maddux comes highly recommended by his more famous brother, a future Hall of Famer who was an assistant to former general manager Jim Hendry and remains on the team's payroll. Epstein said last week he hopes to keep Greg in the organization after his contract expires in December, but Maddux hasn't committed to 2012 because of a family issue.

"He wasn't sure how much he could do next year," Epstein said. "He wants to sort of put that off, but he certainly appreciated knowing he was welcome. I'm sure it will work out in some form or other down the road, and we agreed to stay in touch."

Even without the famous last name, Mike Maddux would be a strong candidate to fix the Cubs based on his resume alone.

The Rangers' earned-run average has been lowered in each of the three seasons he has been their pitching coach, despite playing in a hitter-friendly park. In 2011, the Rangers ranked fifth in the American League in pitching, fourth in strikeouts, third in fewest walks allowed and second in fewest hits allowed.

The Cubs finished 14th in the National League pitching, were last in walks allowed and 11th in hits allowed.

The new Cubs regime has made no bones about the need to improve the pitching. The Cubs staff was run by Larry Rothschild during most of the Hendry era, as Rothschild survived the departures of managers Don Baylor, Dusty Baker and Lou Piniella.

But Rothschild left for the Yankees' vacancy after 2010, and Mark Riggins struggled in his first and only year on the job.

Cubs general manager Jed Hoyer had a former pitching coach as manager in San Diego's Bud Black, who was hired by previous GM Kevin Towers.

"I was fortunate in San Diego," Hoyer said last week. "That (manager-GM) relationship is key, and I look forward to creating that with someone like I had with Bud Black in San Diego."

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The Kansas City Royals reportedly have interest in Carlos Zambrano if new Chicago Cubs baseball boss Theo Epstein is looking to unload the controversial pitcher.

"We would have to explore it because that's what you should do," Moore said in the interview. "You should explore every opportunity. Carlos Zambrano is a heckuva competitor.

"Carlos Zambrano has had a lot of success in the major leagues. Carlos Zambrano is actually a very pleasant, easy-going, classy person off the field. Sometimes, as with all of us, the competitiveness takes over and brings out qualities in us that we are not proud of.

"Obviously, the Cubs grew tired of some of his outbursts but I believe in our coaching staff and we'll always take a chance and a risk on certain players," Moore said. "We'll see how that particular situation unfolds."

In the information age, there aren't many secrets. Every team, to some degree, has already incorporated quantitative analysis. Across the industry, baseball players are viewed through similar lenses.

"Moneyball" wasn't so much about on-base percentage. That statistic just happened to be undervalued almost 10 years ago. Billy Beane and the Oakland A's were really hunting for market inefficiencies.

The Red Sox had their own ideas, which weren't quite revolutionary, because some could be traced all the way back to Branch Rickey. But big-market resources allowed them to take things to the next level. Sports Illustrated went to Boston for a recent cover story on the best-selling book and Hollywood movie.

Before he jumped to the Cubs as their new president of baseball operations, Theo Epstein was asked where the next "Moneyball" inefficiency will be found.

"I've been giving the same answer for years," Epstein told the magazine. "It's keeping pitchers healthy, and it's better drafting."

To make sure the organization drafts better, Epstein has already hired Jason McLeod in a hybrid executive role to oversee the scouting and player development departments. How Epstein chooses the next manager could be another window into his thinking.

Rangers pitching coach Mike Maddux is still scheduled to interview at Wrigley Field on Wednesday, even after withdrawing from the Red Sox managerial search out of family considerations.

Maddux indicated that Boston would have put too much distance between his wife and two daughters, who are all in Texas. He was supposed to fly to Chicago on Tuesday night. It's unclear what exactly this city - where his brother Greg once starred - would mean to his family.
But Maddux makes sense when you consider that Epstein views understanding and maximizing pitching as the next frontier. Remember that Epstein has talked about building a research-and-development wing to his front office.

Maddux has guided his staff to two consecutive American League pennants. Along with team president Nolan Ryan, Maddux didn’t baby his pitchers and pushed them harder. They transformed a team whose entire identity used to revolve around offense.

In 2008 – the year before Maddux arrived in Texas – the Rangers were last in the majors with a 5.37 ERA. The past three seasons they’ve dropped to 4.38, 3.93 and 3.79.

During that time, C.J. Wilson was converted into a starter and set himself up for a huge contract this winter. Colby Lewis returned from Japan and threw more than 400 innings the past two years. Derek Holland and Matt Harrison, two young left-handers, won 30 games between them in 2011. Neftali Feliz emerged as an All-Star closer.

It’s logical to think that Maddux could have some input on the player development manual that will be scripted by Epstein and his staff. “The Cubs Way” could reflect Maddux and his belief system.

Maddux has never run an entire team before. But hiring a pitching coach as manager isn’t viewed as the same gamble it once was.

If the Blue Jays hadn’t lured John Farrell away last year, he might already be Terry Francona’s replacement in Boston. New Cubs general manager Jed Hoyer also developed a strong relationship working with Bud Black in San Diego.

More than Prince Fielder or Albert Pujols, the Cubs need to address their rotation this winter. Once Randy Wells and Andrew Cashner went on the disabled list in April, the season was essentially over and the Cubs were exposed.

“We do have to spend time rebuilding the pitching staff,” Hoyer said last week. “I look at what happened last year from the outside. Losing two starters the first week of the season is very difficult for any team to survive, (but) certainly the Cubs didn’t have the depth to do that.

“No team (stays with) the five starters you pencil in (during) the winter. You look at your team on paper (and) it never works that way. You have to have a lot of depth.

“Even though we have confidence in some starters that are here, we need to add more (because) injuries can never be an excuse for a bad season. You have to make sure that you have depth to survive the inevitable injuries.”

If Maddux is as good as advertised, he could build up Cashner and push the buttons that would make Wells trust his stuff. He could set Jeff Samardzija – who’s still learning how to pitch – on the path to becoming a force.

Maddux could help Carlos Marmol rediscover his slider and the sense of fearlessness that once made him a dominant closer. He could force Matt Garza to channel all that adrenaline and become a Cy Young contender.

Epstein is trying to raise intellectual capital at Clark and Addison. The Cubs are looking for creative solutions that don’t automatically involve writing huge checks for free agents. Maddux has unique insight into an area of the game where everyone is looking for answers.

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While Theo Epstein, Jed Hoyer, and company continue the interview process for a new field manager this week on a parallel track of importance is what they can do to dramatically improve a Cubs team that finished the 2011 season 71-91 and 25 games in back of the division champion Milwaukee Brewers in the NL Central. While adding players is a top priority, subtracting players such as Carlos Zambrano is also extremely important.

Yesterday, our friend Mark Carman at 610 Sports Radio in Kansas City spoke with Royals GM Dayton Moore who indicated that he would consider taking on Zambrano if the deal made sense for his club. "We would have to be interested. We would have to explore it because that's what you should do. You should explore every opportunity. Carlos Zambrano is a heckuva competitor," said Moore. "Carlos Zambrano has had a lot of success in the major leagues. Carlos Zambrano is actually a very pleasant, easy going, classy person off the field. Sometimes, as with all of us the competitiveness takes over and brings out qualities in us that we are not proud of. Obviously the Cubs grew tired of some of his outbursts but I believe in our coaching staff and we'll always take a chance and a risk on certain players. We'll see how that particular situation unfolds," he said.

Moore then went on point out the problem with the remainder of Zambrano's contract. "He has a no trade clause for 29 other teams so he is going to have to be comfortable wherever he goes and there is a lot of money attached to his deal. There is a vesting option that is a part of that worth $18 or 19 million going forward. We certainly wouldn't want to put ourselves in a position where we have to honor a contract of that nature."

In speaking with a number of baseball front office types since Theo and Co. joined the Cubs they all have said the same thing, with teams so starved for pitching they would be willing to take a chance on Big Z as long as the deal made sense for them from a financial standpoint. That way if he was a problem in the clubhouse or did not perform on the field they could release him without absorbing a major financial blow. So, it appears that whenever Epstein wants to move Zambrano he will have plenty of suitors. The question is how much money the Cubs are willing to swallow. No matter the answer it appears that Big Z has thrown his final pitch in a Cubs uniform. However, in speaking with Epstein and Hoyer both have told me on the record that they have okay from the Ricketts family to eat any contract they want to improve the ball club.

"To answer your question, yes, we have the ability to eat any contract we feel is necessary to improve the club," Hoyer said last week on Chicago Tribune Live. Epstein also confirmed that position when he was in our Chicago Tribune Live studios adding "but before you do that you have to determine what value that player has to the ball club. If you then determine that you need to move that player then yes we have the ability to swallow whatever contract we need to."