Addison Russell's All-Star experience: Finding out you’re an All-Star for first time
By Jesse Rogers

As Addison Russell makes his way to San Diego for this year's All-Star Game, we'll be chronicling the experience through his eyes, starting with when he found out he was voted the National League’s starting shortstop and continuing through Tuesday's Midsummer Classic.

CHICAGO -- For Chicago Cubs shortstop Addison Russell, the hardest part about finding out Tuesday morning that he was an All-Star for the first time was keeping it to himself for the rest of the day. His family and friends didn't find out until about 45 minutes after Tuesday's matinee against the Cincinnati Reds.

Then came the phone call.

"I called my parents and told them," Russell recalled Wednesday morning. "They're stoked, already booking flights and everything. At first, they said they weren't sure if they could get off work. I was like, 'Yeah, you're going to take off work for me.'"

Russell estimates that he'll have six or seven guests with him next week in San Diego, where he will take the field as the youngest player in Cubs franchise history to start an All-Star Game. His mom might have been the most exuberant of the Russells.

"She's a little more excited than I am," Russell said with a laugh. "I'm grateful. I had family asking me all day. I kept it from them until after the game."

Russell has already received advice from Cubs manager Joe Maddon, among others: Soak it in.

"I want them to slow it down and enjoy every second of it," Maddon said. "The tendency when you get there -- especially the first time -- it's quick."

Russell will be joined by teammates -- and fellow infielders -- Anthony Rizzo, Ben Zobrist and Kris Bryant, which will make the whole experience surreal for the youngest of the seven Cubs who made the NL team.

"I can't believe it," Russell said with a wide grin. "All of us going. I can lean on Rizzo and Bryant. They've been there before."

Zobrist and Jon Lester are also previous All-Stars, so Russell will have plenty of support. He plans on using it and taking the time to realize what he has accomplished as a second-year player in the league.

"I want to make sure I enjoy it," he said. "My family as well. It's special to go at my age. We're all looking forward to San Diego."
CHICAGO -- The Chicago Cubs' bullpen is going to make a liar out of the team's manager. Before the Cubs' latest series-deciding loss, 5-3 to the Cincinnati Reds on Wednesday, Joe Maddon declared the bullpen fixes he needs can be found within the organization.

"I believe that the talent pool is absolutely here," Maddon said. "We know Clayton [Richard] is able to do that. Getting [Justin] Grimm back on the mound [is important]. Grimm is one of our lefties actually. We have it right here. We just have to get the performance. We will. I feel confident."

Maddon might be a little less confident after two of his reliable relief arms gave up runs as the Cubs blew a 3-1 seventh-inning lead. Trevor Cahill served up a three-run home run to Tucker Barnhart and one inning later Carl Edwards Jr. threw behind a batter -- he tripped on the mound -- with two outs and a runner on third, allowing a run to score easily.

"We have to really be vigilant not to abuse anybody and make sure everyone is fresh," Maddon said. "It starts with the starting pitchers. [If] the starters are on, the rest of the game is going to play well."

The Cubs haven't abused their relievers outside of Travis Wood, though lately they've been called upon more and more as their starting staff has been coming up short. Adam Warren threw well in his first start of the year on Wednesday, giving up just one run over five innings without walking anyone. But five innings isn't long enough these days -- not with a struggling bullpen. The Cubs' starting staff has finally come back to the pack.

It's happening to a lot of different teams, Maddon said: "Guys are a little fatigued. Let's get through this stretch, get a break, set up on the backside then really pay attention to it [workload]."

The Cubs may not get to the break without giving back a good portion of their huge lead in the NL Central. The Pittsburgh Pirates are finally playing better and host a Cubs team this weekend that will finish a string of 24 games in 24 days. They're worn out, injured and vulnerable. After the game Wednesday, Maddon was asked if he's seeing any disturbing trends while losing four of their past five series, or if this was just a "snapshot" of a long season.

"It's more of a snapshot based on people in and out of the lineup right now," Maddon said. "The bullpen isn't 100 percent. We're experimenting with different things."

Presumably Maddon isn't referencing health as much as effectiveness in the bullpen. And that might be one trend Maddon may want to pay attention to: According to research by ESPN Stats & Information, the Cubs are just 8-7 in their past 15 games in which they've held a lead. They were 44-5 over their first 49 games under the same circumstances. Instead of focusing solely on the bullpen, though, Maddon pointed to his team at the plate as well.

"We're not doing enough to finish games off offensively," Maddon stated.

That's true. When's the last time the Cubs robbed the closer of a save? It has been a while but at least we can point to injuries and assume things will get better when the players get healthy. The Cubs are 6-12 without Dexter Fowler, and with rookies and young players scattered throughout the lineup it's hard to point fingers at a 22 year old and say "There's the problem."

No, the problem is in a makeshift bullpen, which was always a question mark. There's a reason Cahill, Richard and Joel Peralta were available to anyone when the Cubs picked them up. You can cross Peralta off the list, as the Cubs designated him for assignment before the game -- so now it's on to the next arm or two. Will it come via the waiver wire or a big trade?

"We've run into a little bit of a rough patch," Maddon said. "Pitchers get tired, man."
So here is a suggestion: Leave Warren in the rotation until he really falters or the Cubs get more bullpen help. Perhaps an extra day of rest for each starter will allow them to last longer into games, reducing the use of the Cubs' relief staff. It's worth a shot. It sounds like they're considering it.

"Trying to be creative with rest post-break," Maddon said.

The good news is the Cubs will still have a decent lead in the division at the All-Star break no matter what happens the rest of this week -- beating Atlanta on Thursday is no gimme -- but that doesn't mean the feeling surrounding that lead will be a good one. Snapshot or trend?

"I can't connect a bunch of negative dots," Maddon said.

Plenty of Cubs' fans will for him.

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ESPNChicago.com
Cubs' Kyle Schwarber happy to hear he's staying put
By Jesse Rogers

CHICAGO -- Chicago Cubs injured catcher/outfielder Kyle Schwarber is progressing nicely after knee surgery and happy he'll remain a Cub for a while.

Schwarber has heard the internet rumors, which include the New York Yankees wanting him in a deal for lefty reliever Andrew Miller, but team president Theo Epstein recently stated Schwarber isn't going anywhere.

"I love this organization," Schwarber said Wednesday. "I love this team. I want to stay here. Since he did say that, I did take that to heart. It means a lot.

"Rumors are going to be rumors. Until something actually happens, you don't worry about it."

In reality there was no concrete evidence the Cubs and Yankees were talking about Schwarber only reports that it would take a Schwarber-like player to acquire Miller. For now, Schwarber is simply working hard to return from two torn ligaments in his left knee, which occurred in a collision with centerfielder Dexter Fowler in the third game of the season.

"It is challenging," Schwarber said of rehab. "There are times when you're going to get frustrated because you feel like you're doing the same thing over and over again but that's just the process.

"I want to do more, but you can't do more because if you do you can definitely have another setback."

When the Cubs are at home, Schwarber will do his rehab work, which includes jogging in water, in the morning and then dress in uniform and watch the game from the dugout. He brought out the lineup card without crunches or a brace on Wednesday afternoon when the Cubs faced the Cincinnati Reds. When the Cubs are on the road he gets his rehab work in then goes home to watch them play.

"Right now it's the strengthening part," Schwarber explained. "Past the first phase, range of motion...Next step is jogging."

Schwarber says he's more aware of things around the game now that he's not playing - like twitter - but his only goal is to get back on the field as soon as possible.

"I'm going to work my butt off to get back as soon as I can whenever the timetable is," Schwarber said. "That's a good mindset to have. Whatever happens, happens."
Asked about the recent collision in the outfield between Kris Bryant and Albert Almora Jr. which brought back memories of Schwarber’s own injury, the second year player had one piece of advice for the all-star Bryant.

"Don’t get hurt," he said with a smirk.

ESPNChicago.com

Cubs’ Dexter Fowler eyeing first All-Star Game, but goal is health
By Jesse Rogers

CHICAGO - While the Chicago Cubs hope injured outfielder Dexter Fowler can play in his first All-Star Game next week, their bigger concern is getting him healthy for the second half of the season.

Fowler has been out of the lineup since injuring his right hamstring on June 18.

"He wants to play in the All-Star Game," manager Joe Maddon said Wednesday morning. "Don’t anyone fault him for that. It’s a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. And I’m all for it. Let’s see how this plays the rest of the weekend, but the overriding concern is that he plays for us the rest of the year."

Fowler was eligible to come off the disabled list on Monday but wasn’t deemed ready. On Tuesday he was elected to start his first All-Star Game, July 12.

The plan, according to Maddon, is for Fowler to play a couple days in the minors later this week then play in the All-Star Game and be activated after the break. If he can't go on a rehab assignment by the weekend, then he would probably miss the All-Star Game.

"We have a potential plan in regards to when he'll be available," Maddon said. "We have to know something by Thursday or Friday. The next two days will tell if he can participate or not.

"It's just how the leg reacts. When he comes back, whether it's this week, All-Star Game or after the break, he'll still have to be guarded when he runs."

Maddon didn't rule anything out, including Fowler playing this weekend for the Cubs in Pittsburgh, though that's doubtful.

The Cubs are 6-11 since Fowler was injured.

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CSNChicago.com

Why Cubs Can See Andrew Miller As Great Fit And Long Shot At The Same Time
By Patrick Mooney

Andrew Miller tries to ignore the trade rumors surrounding the New York Yankees, the identity crisis for a win-at-all-costs franchise trying to get younger and more athletic and prepare for the future without a total teardown.

But if the Yankees look in the mirror and ultimately decide to sell just before the Aug. 1 trade deadline, the Cubs will be in those conversations, because a team with seven All Stars could use another for October.

“We’re here to win,” Miller said this week at U.S. Cellular Field during the Yankees-White Sox series. “We’re here to compete every year. And that’s from the top down, whether you hear it from (general manager Brian) Cashman or (manager Joe) Girardi or the players.

“That was a big selling point about me coming here — and the goal is to win here. That’s what I want to be a part of.”
The Cubs checked in with Miller’s camp during his free-agent process after the 2014 season but didn’t feel like getting into a bidding war to add a setup guy to an 89-loss team made that much sense.

If Miller on a four-year, $36 million contract looked like a luxury item then, he would be a perfect fit now, giving another late-inning weapon to Joe Maddon, arguably the game’s best bullpen manager. Watching Trevor Cahill serve up the go-ahead, three-run homer to Tucker Barnhart in the seventh inning of Wednesday afternoon’s 5-3 loss to the Cincinnati Reds only reinforced that view at Wrigley Field.

Theo Epstein’s front office could justify the cost by looking at it as an investment in 2016 and beyond, acquiring an All-Star reliever who can close now and potentially impact three pennant races on the North Side.

“I love Andrew,” said pitcher Jon Lester, who played with Miller on the 2013 Boston Red Sox team that won the World Series. “I definitely would vouch for Andrew. Obviously, his stuff and stats speak for itself.

“And it would be nice to get him out of the Yankees organization and somewhere he could grow his beard and long hair back and we could call him ‘Jesus’ (Spanish pronunciation) again.”

Lester lobbied for Epstein to acquire Jonathan Papelbon last summer, saying a strong clubhouse culture could handle the enigmatic closer who got traded from the Philadelphia Phillies to the Washington Nationals and wound up choking Bryce Harper in the dugout.

Epstein’s Cubs keep going back to their Red Sox connections, but in signing a minor-league deal and reviving his career at Fenway Park, Miller formed more of a bond with Ben Cherington, the Boston personnel executive who eventually got hired and essentially fired as general manager.

For a Cubs team with a glaring bullpen need, Miller, 31, checks the boxes as a left-hander who can get all types of hitters out with velocity (94.1-mph average fastball) and swing-and-miss stuff (66 strikeouts through 36-plus innings this season).

Miller has size (6-foot-7), first-round pedigree (sixth overall out of the University of North Carolina in 2006), playoff experience, a strong clubhouse reputation and what’s turned out to be a reasonable contract.

“Great teammate,” said catcher David Ross, who played with Miller in Boston. “He’s had struggles. He’s had success. He’s won a World Series. So he knows about winning, he knows about losing. When you have guys who have gone through the spectrum like that in their careers, you just gain perspective. So you can relate to a lot of different guys at different times during the season.

“He’s a winner. He’s got nasty stuff. He throws mid-to-upper 90s with a filthy, filthy slider. Righties and lefties — it doesn’t matter. (Whatever) the matchup, he can get through the inning.

“He doesn’t have an ego. I’ve read his quotes in New York where it’s: ‘I don’t care if I’m closing.’ And that fits right into this team. We’re here as a 25-man group that is after one goal. And he understands that.”

As someone who got traded out of his Boston comfort zone to the Oakland A’s at the 2014 deadline, Lester recognizes the many dimensions to those deals, as well as the unique chemistry in Wrigleyville.

“At the same time, you’re talking about now we got to move some pieces around in that bullpen,” Lester said. “You get a guy like Andrew Miller, now you’re subtracting somehow, and that’s always tough when you’ve been grinding with guys (the whole year).

“(But) I know Andrew, and I think his personality would fit in just fine here. He wouldn’t have an issue with the transition — (and) that is a tough transition.
“I always go back to Joe. Joe does such a good job with situations. Whatever the situation may be, he does such a good job with making guys feel comfortable. So if we did get a guy like that, I think you would definitely get the best out of him.”

Lester — who believed in The Plan enough to join a last-place team after the 2014 season and signed a six-year, $155 million megadeal with the understanding that he would be in the loop — doesn’t know if Epstein’s group will think big again at the trade deadline.

“A lot can happen,” Lester said. “Hopefully, nobody goes down and we don’t have a dire need. Any time you’re talking about an addition, you’re going to have a subtraction. That’s always a tough thing. (But) I’d like to say: ‘Yeah, it would be awesome to get some big-name stud in here.’”

The Yankees woke up on Wednesday as a 41-42 team, stuck in fourth place in the American League East, but only four games out of a wild-card spot. Whether or not the Cubs are willing to pay the price for a brand-name reliever — or hoping to get lucky again with under-the-radar additions — it still starts with the Yankees either giving up on 2016 or going for it.

“That’s what the Yankees do,” Miller said. “Their track record shows that’s what we do. They haven’t had a losing record since ’92.

“The expectation is that we’re going to be in the thick of it. And I think the 25 guys in here think that we’re capable of winning enough games to be in it.”

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CSNChicago.com
Joe Maddon Won’t Connect All The ‘Negative Dots’ Around Cubs
By Patrick Mooney

The Cubs have used the Cincinnati Reds as a punching bag this season, beating up on the kind of rebuilding team they used to roll out at Wrigley Field. This was supposed to be a chance to pad the record, pile up stats and take out some frustrations. Both Jake Arrieta’s no-hitter and Kris Bryant’s three-homer, 5-for-5 laser show happened at Great American Ball Park.

But even seeing the Reds on the North Side – and the national exposure from seven Cubs earning All-Star selections – didn’t distract from some of the deeper issues for this World Series-or-bust team.

“Everybody goes through these trials,” manager Joe Maddon said after Wednesday afternoon’s 5-3 loss. “I can’t connect a bunch of negative dots.”

The Cubs have now lost four of their last five series, and five of their last seven, looking like a team that needs an All-Star break, if not some reinforcements by the Aug. 1 trade deadline.

The Cubs didn’t need to use their sixth starter until July 6, a remarkable run of pitching health that begins to explain their 100-win pace but probably won’t last. That’s why Adam Warren – the swingman acquired from the New York Yankees in the Starlin Castro trade – returned from a tune-up at Triple-A Iowa to face a Reds lineup that still has Joey Votto and some interesting hitters.

Warren is an in-case-of-emergency option at a time when Arrieta is still trying to rediscover his Cy Young Award feel, Jon Lester is coming off perhaps the worst start of his career, Jason Hammel might be beginning another second-half fade and John Lackey is in the middle of his age-37 season.

“Everybody’s talking about the offensive run differential,” Maddon said. “But it’s all about starting pitching. Period.

“We’ve run into a little bit of a rough patch. That’s going to happen. But if you look around baseball right now, I’m seeing a lot of double-digit to one, double-digit to two wins. Pitchers get tired, man, regardless of their
(willingness) to concede to that point or not, which they never will. That’s why you have to be kind of proactive regarding doing things like we’re doing right now involving a sixth starter.

“Protect these guys like the family jewels, man, because starting pitching, you’re not going to go out there and shake a tree and find them. They’re not going to be there.”

Warren limited the Reds to one run across five innings – a Zack Cozart homer leading off the game at the end of a 10-pitch at-bat. Warren threw 93 pitches in this spot start, allowing only two more hits and giving up zero walks after an up-and-down performance as a reliever (4.56 ERA).

But that won’t do much for a bullpen where Justin Grimm has a 5.59 ERA, there are no lefty options besides Travis Wood and Joel Peralta just got designated for assignment after a four-inning audition. This time, it was Trevor Cahill giving up the go-ahead, three-run homer to Tucker Barnhart in the seventh inning.

“It’s more likely a snapshot,” Maddon said, “just based on people in and out of the lineup right now. The bullpen isn’t 100 percent. We’re experimenting with different things.

“The big part is we need to do better in the latter part of the game scoring runs, too. If it’s close, or we get behind, or even if it’s tied, we’re just not doing a really good job of finishing off games offensively.”

That relentless lineup everyone talked about in April is 1-30 when trailing entering the ninth inning. Miguel Montero got charged with four more stolen bases, meaning the veteran catcher has gone 3-for-42 in throwing out runners this season.

With David Ross on the seven-day concussion disabled list, Lester will have to throw to rookie Willson Contreras instead of his personal catcher this weekend against the Pittsburgh Pirates at PNC Park. And Maddon was saying it’s doubtful Dexter Fowler (hamstring injury) will return before the All-Star break, leaving it unclear when the leadoff guy will go on a rehab assignment and if he can play in next week’s All-Star Game.

“I really can’t explain it right now,” shortstop Addison Russell said. “But we’re still going to try and go out there and get the job done. Obviously, the past few weeks, it hasn’t been working. But we still have high hope and high faith. We just got to go to the next day and get better.”

CSNChicago.com
Kyle Schwarber Blocks Out Trade Speculation To Focus On Recovery With Cubs
By Patrick Mooney

Theo Epstein wanted it out there in the media, offering up a quote to beat writers last week at Citi Field, saying how he’s looking forward to Kyle Schwarber hitting a big home run in a Cubs uniform early next season.

The Cubs were in New York to play the Mets, but the Yankees still move the needle, perhaps quietly floating the idea that it would take Schwarber to swing a deal for All-Star reliever Andrew Miller.

Schwarber heard the message loud and clear during his grueling recovery from knee surgery, even if he never discussed that part of his future directly with the president of baseball operations.

“You got to know in your own mind that rumors are rumors,” Schwarber said Wednesday inside the Wrigley Field clubhouse. “There’s always going to be rumors, and things are going to happen, but I’m going to worry about being a Cub. I can’t worry about any of that stuff.

“I’m going to worry about my rehab. I’m going to worry about this team and them winning a World Series.”
Beyond the complications in trying to move a player who underwent a procedure on his left knee that reconstructed the ACL and repaired the LCL after an outfield collision in early April, the trade speculation didn’t account for Epstein’s connection to Schwarber.

An executive who tries to stay emotionally detached believes Schwarber will someday become the leader of this team. A franchise built around youth and left-handed power won’t be selling a 23-year-old slugger who blasted 16 homers in 69 games last season and then hit five more during the playoffs.

For now, forget the talk about Schwarber being a better American League fit, because the Cubs saw more defensive upside/versatility as a catcher/outfielder than the industry’s conventional wisdom when they drafted him No. 4 overall out of Indiana University in 2014.

“It’s obviously nice that they feel like that about me,” Schwarber said. “I love this organization. I love this team. I want to stay here. But, obviously, things are out of my control. I take that to heart. It means a lot.”

Schwarber can now walk around without a crutch, and has been jogging and hopping underwater and watching the road games on TV. The Cubs allowed him to rehab in Chicago instead of the team’s Arizona complex, encouraging him to sit in the draft room and meetings with the pitching staff, more status symbols for a guy who’s only had one full season in professional baseball.

“You don’t pay attention to as much stuff when you’re playing,” Schwarber said. “You get the luxury of being on Twitter, I guess, trying to look at updates on what the team’s doing right now. But you get more respect for the game when you’re away from it.”

Epstein has already ruled out a return this year, hoping to see Schwarber in the 2017 Opening Day lineup. Cubs fans, of course, will dream about a Willis Reed moment in October.

“I’m going to work my butt off to get back as soon as I can, whatever the timetable is,” Schwarber said. “I want to do more, and I think that’s only a good mindset to have. And whatever happens, happens.”

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Chicago Tribune
It's OK to worry about Cubs, whose future is now
By David Haugh

Without sounding the least bit boastful, Cubs manager Joe Maddon beamed describing what ran through his mind the other day as he fielded a lineup full of players 26 or younger against the Reds.

"Seeing them all run out there was something else," Maddon said, sounding like a proud Little League parent. "And if you like them right now, that's great. ... They're only going to get better."

The Cubs are only going to get better. That has become a baseball mantra of the Midway, one of the indisputable truths of Chicago sports. The Cubs' future has become easier to peddle at Wrigley Field than beer and sunshine.

But suddenly legitimate questions persist about the present. Anybody else wonder if free-agent disappointment Jason Heyward ever will hit, if ace Jake Arrieta can return to dominance, if struggling starters Jason Hammel and John Lackey will continue to fade or if the bullpen that blew a lead in Wednesday's 5-3 loss to the Reds can recover?

Feel free to worry. It's OK, you won't lose your seat on the bandwagon. You can acknowledge reality without giving up on the fantasy of the Cubs winning it all. A comfortable middle ground exists where rational Cubs fans can probe their inner fears without resorting to full-fledged panic.

The Cubs still have every reason to believe they can win the World Series. Repeat that sentence if it helps. They have perhaps the most potent power combination in baseball in Kris Bryant, in the midst of an MVP-like season,
and Anthony Rizzo. They have seven National League All-Stars, an explosive everyday lineup and a deep, versatile bench. They have proven, elite starting pitchers, a solid closer in Hector Rondon and the game's most creative manager in Maddon.

But in the past month of mediocrity, they also have raised enough doubt that nobody in town should be in denial. No matter how good things looked early, sometimes baseball happens late. North Siders remember last October … and the last 108 years.

After starting 25-6 and making every game must-see for folks from Elias and Cooperstown, N.Y., the Cubs nonchalantly cruised and now stand at 27-26 since. The Marlins were 27-25 in the same 57-day span. They have gone 18-4 against the Reds and Pirates but only six games above .500 against everyone else. Nobody needs to apologize for the Cubs' schedule; nor can anyone deny how it has contributed to such a terrific first-half record. No team in baseball will welcome the All-Star break more than a tired Cubs team. The aura of invincibility has vanished, and you can't blame global warming — or Dexter Fowler's injury.

Any Chicago-area book publishers nervous yet?

Until further notice, we really should stop considering the Cubs a traveling museum exhibit and start thinking of them as a baseball team again, one susceptible to slumps and losing streaks over the grind of a 162-game regular season. We should strike magical and historic and legendary from our vocabulary when discussing the Cubs' summer. We can find other ways to impress friends at the bar without citing the team's run differential, the pitching staff's WAR or Maddon's latest clever T-shirt design. We have reached the time to quit treating the Cubs like they are the 1927 Yankees. We are best to focus on ways they can avoid becoming the 2001 Mariners.

Those Mariners tied the Cubs' 1906 major-league record with 116 victories — and lost in the American League Championship Series to the Yankees. If the Cubs lose in the NLCS again, this season will go down as a failure. The way 2016 ends matters so much more than how it began, however fun the start was. And if you don't believe expectations have raised World Series-or-bust levels in Wrigleyville, you didn't hear the boos Tuesday after Reds slugger Jay Bruce homered.

Rest assured Cubs President Theo Epstein understands and accepts the new realities of Cubdom he helped create, which will make a busy month even busier for Epstein. Approaching the Aug. 1 trade deadline, he must decide how to address three areas of urgency: 1) a late-inning reliever, in addition to rehabilitating veteran closer Joe Nathan; 2) a dangerous bat to improve hitting with runners in scoring position and 3) the back of a once-dominant starting rotation.

Kyle Hendricks keeps impressing but Hammel, notorious for second-half struggles, has gone five straight games without a decision and hasn't won since June 5. Hammel gave up 10 earned runs in four innings against the Mets, a warning the Cubs can ignore at their own risk. As for Lackey, the only thing he can guarantee lately is attitude. He hasn't won since June 8 and has given up five or more earned runs in two of his last three starts. While they aren't "big-boy games," to him, hopefully the cranky 37-year-old isn't showing signs of old-man problems.

Take nothing for granted about the Cubs anymore. Assume even less. The trade deadline no longer represents just another day closer to a memorable October.

It seems hard to envision the Cubs standing pat — and harder to imagine them winning a pennant without Epstein making an impact move, even if it means putting the present ahead of the future. Next year is here, and it's the one that matters most.

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Chicago Tribune
Cubs' Kyle Schwarber progressing in recovery from knee injury
By Chris Kuc
Chicago Cubs catcher Kyle Schwarber has ditched the crutches as he progresses in his recovery from reconstructive knee surgery.

"Right now, it’s just the strengthening part," Schwarber said before the Cubs faced the Cincinnati Reds on Wednesday at Wrigley Field. "We pretty much got past the first phase, which was range of motion and trying to control swelling. Now that I pretty much have that back I’m walking on it and I’m off the crutches. That helped free up the knee and get things working more."

Schwarber has been declared out for the season after undergoing surgery to reconstruct his anterior cruciate ligament and a repair of his lateral collateral ligament April 19 in Dallas.

"Those first six weeks ... it was just trying to get my knee to bend and I was done," Schwarber said. "Now that I’m doing a lot more it’s been more challenging."

Schwarber was injured April 7 when he collided with center fielder Dexter Fowler on a drive hit by the Arizona Diamondbacks' Jean Segura.

Schwarber’s rehab has progressed to the point where he is jogging under water and hopping on the knee in the water.

"It is a little challenging," Schwarber said. "There are times when you’re going to get frustrated because you feel you’re doing the same thing over and over again. It’s just a process. I feel like I want to do more but you can’t do more because if you do, you can definitely have another setback."

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**Chicago Tribune**
Willson Contreras will catch Jon Lester with David Ross on DL
By Mark Gonzales

The major-league education of Willson Contreras continues Saturday as the Cubs' prized rookie will start at catcher for left-hander Jon Lester.

Manager Joe Maddon said Wednesday that the rookie will replace David Ross, who was put on the seven-day disabled list because of concussion-like symptoms after taking a foul tip off his face mask in Tuesday's loss to the Reds.

Contreras got the nod over veteran left-handed hitter Miguel Montero, who handled Lester when Ross missed parts of last season. But the Cubs are scheduled to face left-hander Francisco Liriano on Saturday so Contreras could give the offense more power while working with Lester in what could be a future battery.

"It's another dream come true," said Contreras, who was promoted from Triple-A Iowa on June 18 and has played left field, first base and catcher because of his offense. "(Lester) has been in the big leagues for a lot of years and has thrown a no-hitter. It means a lot to me."

Contreras caught Lester's bullpen session before Wednesday game and said he plans to talk to Ross on Thursday about a game plan for Lester.

Lester, who was named to the National League All-Star team on Tuesday, declined to talk after throwing his bullpen session.

Infielder Tommy La Stella took Ross’ roster spot.

**Durable Wood:** Left-hander Travis Wood, arguably the Cubs' most effective reliever, said he feels strong despite watching his ERA swell from 2.14 to 3.03 in his last two outings.
Wood was tied for second in the NL in appearances (42) entering play Wednesday. Wood maintains he merely was trying to induce contact Monday with a 10-1 lead (allowing three runs) and that Billy Hamilton's bloop single set up Joey Votto's RBI double, which came off a tough pitch.

"I'm not worried about it," said Wood, who said his arm is used to the heavy workload after throwing 200 innings in 2013.

Extra innings: Center fielder Dexter Fowler said his right hamstring felt fine after running the bases before Wednesday's game. Maddon seemed skeptical Fowler would rejoin the Cubs before the All-Star break. Fowler still could play in the All-Star Game on Tuesday if the Cubs activate him before the game. ... Reliever Joel Peralta was designated for assignment to make room for pitcher Adam Warren.

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**Chicago Tribune**

Cubs bullpen wastes strong effort from Adam Warren in 5-3 loss to Reds
By Chris Kuc

Adam Warren gave manager Joe Maddon and the Cubs everything they could have wanted in a spot start Wednesday at Wrigley Field.

The bullpen, however, was a different story.

The Cubs fell for the sixth time in their last seven games when they allowed the Reds to rally for a 5-3 victory before a crowd of 41,262 sun-baked fans.

Making his first start since Sept. 26, 2015 for the Yankees, Warren shook off Zack Cozart's leadoff home run and held off the Reds the rest of his five innings to put the Cubs in position to claim the series.

Instead, the Cubs' slide continued when Tucker Barnhart launched a three-run homer off reliever Trevor Cahill in the seventh inning to give the Reds a lead they didn't relinquish.

"(Warren) pitched really well," Maddon said. "It was obviously pretty warm out there and getting through five was a great ... on his part. He did an outstanding job.

"It just happens that we don't execute a pitch and a guy hits a three-run homer and that's that. I can't connect a bunch of negative dots. It just happened."

It has been happening quite frequently lately as the Cubs now have dropped 12 of their last 17 games and stand at 52-32 on the season.

"I really can't explain it," said Cubs shortstop Addison Russell, who went 1-for-4 with an RBI double. "Obviously, the past few weeks it hasn't been working but we still have high hopes and high faith."

Warren couldn't have been a whole lot better in making the start that Maddon hopes will help refresh his fatigued rotation. The right-hander became the sixth pitcher to make a start for the Cubs this season, the fourth-latest game (No. 84) the franchise has used a sixth starting pitcher. The Cubs now leave the Cardinals as the only team to have used just five starters this season.

In his five innings, Warren allowed the one run on three hits while walking none and striking out six. He was lifted after making 93 pitches, 66 for strikes.

"They kind of battled and ... worked my pitch count up a little bit early on. That was frustrating," said Warren, who retired the final 11 Reds he faced. "Ideally, I'd like to go longer than that with 90 or some pitches but I was pleased with the way I threw."
It was an inauspicious beginning for Warren as Cozart sent his 10th pitch of the game deep into the left-field bleachers. Warren then worked out of a jam in the second before going into cruise control.

Meanwhile, the Cubs' offense ignited in their half of the second when Tommy La Stella singled and later scored on Russell's double to even the game 1-1. Miguel Montero promptly singled to drive in Russell.

In the fifth, Ben Zobrist gave the Cubs some breathing room when he sent an Anthony DeSclafani pitch over the wall in right for a 3-1 margin.

The lead lasted two innings and Warren came away with a no-decision after Barnhart reached the basket in left-center off Cahill to put the Reds in front. The Reds tacked on an insurance run in the eighth, scoring on Carl Edwards Jr.'s wild pitch.

Warren may have earned himself another start after the Cubs return from the All-Star break. With July 21 an off-day, another Warren start would give the starters a sixth day of rest.

"Our five starters have been doing great and you don't want to take anything away from those guys," Warren said. "If they want to give those guys another breather it (could be) an opportunity for me. If not, I'll do whatever they tell me to do."

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**Chicago Tribune**

Kyle Schwarber upbeat over future even as he copes with sitting out season

By Paul Sullivan

Four catchers dressed at their lockers at Wrigley Field on Wednesday morning, including the current catcher of the future, Willson Contreras, and the rehabbing catcher of the future, Kyle Schwarber.

A few lockers down was the old, struggling catcher, Miguel Montero, and the older, avuncular catcher, David Ross.

This was supposed to be the year Ross and Montero mentored Schwarber, but an ACL injury ended Schwarber's season before it really started, and now they're tasked with mentoring Contreras.

The early results are promising, despite the team's poor performance since sweeping the Pirates June 17-19, including losing their first series to an overmatched Reds team.

Schwarber has been doing whatever he has been asked while rehabbing in Chicago, from helping out on draft day to cheerleading in the dugout. He's not coming back in 2016, a fact Schwarber has had to deal with mentally for three months.

But he won't shut out the possibility completely, saying before Wednesday's 5-3 loss: "I'm going to work my butt off to get back as soon as I can, whatever the timetable is. I want to do more. I think that's only a good mindset to have, and whatever happens happens."

Cubs President Theo Epstein already has said he's looking forward to seeing a healthy Schwarber hitting next spring.

Epstein doesn't want to give false hope to Cubs fans, despite the fact they have been fed a steady diet of false hope their entire lives and still haven't walked away.

Seeing Schwarber finally off his crutches and walking around the clubhouse, you can't help but think he could hit a home run at Wrigley right now, even if he had to take a leisurely stroll around the bases.

So imagine the sight of Schwarber waltzing up to the plate at Wrigley in October.
Oh, you already have?

Never mind.

That's what happens when you have hit a bomb that landed on top of the Wrigley Field video board, cranked a home run into the Allegheny River and smashed the windshield of a car parked behind the fence of your spring training facility.

People think if Schwarber can bend it like Beckham, he can play, even if he can't.

Schwarber said he's hopping now and jogging under water in the Cubs spanking new hydrotherapy room in their expanded clubhouse. He's happy to be able to rehab in Chicago instead of broiling at the spring training complex in Mesa, Ariz.

"Those first six weeks ... it was just trying to get my knee to bend, and (then) I was done," Schwarber said. "Now that I'm doing a lot more, it has been more challenging."

What's next for Schwarber — meaning in 2017 — remains to be seen. It could be a three catcher situation again, with Schwarber replacing the retiring Ross and both Contreras and Schwarber also playing left.

One thing we do know is Epstein made a point to tell the media in New York that Schwarber will be in spring training with the Cubs, hoping to squelch any trade rumors.

"It's obviously nice they feel that way," Schwarber said. "I love this organization and I love this team. But obviously things are out of my control. But since he did say that, I take that to heart. It means a lot."

Schwarber likely will hear more rumors as the month goes on, because it's July, when half-baked rumors and fully-baked rumors fly side-by-side.

"You have to know in your own mind that rumors are rumors and there are always going to be rumors," he said.

"Things are going to happen.

"I can't worry about any of that stuff. I'm going to worry about being a Cub and worry about my rehab and worry about this team and them going to the World Series."

Worrying about the Cubs, Schwarber will learn soon, is a lifetime occupation.

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Chicago Tribune

More questions about Dexter Fowler's return to Cubs

By Mark Gonzales

After running the bases under the close watch of trainer P.J. Mainville and conditioning coordinator Tim Buss, center fielder Dexter Fowler said his right hamstring felt fine.

But Chicago Cubs manager Joe Maddon wasn't so sure Fowler would rejoin the Cubs by the time the first half ends on Sunday.

"It's not out out, but it probably is," Maddon said before Wednesday's game. "I hate to be ambiguous, but I want to be as honest as I can."

Fowler was eligible to come off the 15-day disabled list on Monday, but the Cubs want to ensure his health for the second half. Fowler can play in the All-Star Game on Tuesday in San Diego as long as the Cubs activate him before the game.
"We got to know something by Thursday or Friday," Maddon said. "The next two days will tell whether he’s able to participate or not. We’re getting close."

Maddon did acknowledge that Fowler’s leg feels better, but preferred that Fowler gets some game action to see how his leg reacts before rejoining the Cubs.

"With the hamstring issues, you always got to be careful," Maddon said.

"I know he wants to play in the All-Star game. I don’t fault him for that. It’s a once in a lifetime opportunity. Who knows if it’s going to happen again. And I’m all for it. Let’s see how it plays the rest of the weekend. But the overriding concern is that he plays for us the rest of the year and helps us get to our goal."

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**Chicago Sun-Times**

Adam and peeve: Warren does job, but Cubs lose 12th of 17
By Josh Tolentino

Right-hander Adam Warren did his part in a spot start Wednesday against the Reds, but the rest of the day didn’t go so well for the Cubs in a 5-3 loss at Wrigley Field.

“He did an outstanding job,” manager Joe Maddon said of Warren, who retired the last 11 batters he faced and turned over a 3-1 lead to the bullpen after five innings. He struck out six and gave up one run, a home run by Zack Cozart to start the game.

Maddon said Warren might get another spot start after the All-Star break.

“I was pleased with the way I threw the ball,” Warren said. “It’s nice to be able to give the starters a break during a long stretch.”

Shortstop Addison Russell, who was named a starter for the National League All-Star team Tuesday, was one of the more productive Cubs in the series. He had three homers, a double and seven RBI in a 5-for-13 series — putting him on pace for 21 home runs and 95 RBIs this season.

But the Cubs lost the series, and they’ve dropped 12 of their last 17 games.

“I really can’t explain it right now,” Russell said. “Obviously, the past few weeks, it hasn’t been working. But we still have high hopes and high faith.”

Notes: To make room on the roster for Adam Warren, veteran Joel Peralta, who joined the bullpen last week, was designated for assignment. He allowed four earned runs in four innings. ... The Cubs put catcher David Ross, who left the game Tuesday after taking a hard foul ball off his mask, on the seven-day disabled list for concussions. ... With Ross unavailable Saturday, Maddon said rookie Willson Contreras will catch veteran All-Star Jon Lester in is final start before the break. ... Infielder Tommy La Stella (hamstring) was activated after spending four weeks on the disabled list and started at third base. He singled and scored in four at-bats. ... When catcher Miguel Montero caught Jay Bruce trying to steal second in the ninth inning, it marked the first time in eight tries in the last two games the Reds were thrown out. Billy Hamilton (three), Jose Peraza (two), Brandon Phillips and Zack Cozart were successful. ... Maddon said a decision must be made before Friday when All-Star Dexter Fowler (hamstring) goes out on a one- or two-day minor-league rehab assignment. That “probably” rules him out for a weekend return against the Pirates before the All-Star break. But the Cubs aren’t ruling out activating Fowler for the July 12 All-Star Game if he’s ready.

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Chicago Sun-Times
Seeing stars: Even All-Star selections come with critics for Cubs
By Gordon Wittenmyer

Maybe it’s just the way it’s going to be with this team all year.

The fun-loving Cubs – the team opponents love to hate – could barely enjoy the moment of their All-Star haul on Tuesday before the social-media backlash began over their MLB-high seven selections.

Shortstop Addison Russell got the early brunt of it – his MLB.com Twitter announcement filled with comments ranging from “not even close to worthy” to “freaking joke” to “lmao.”

The Washington Post featured him under the heading “what fans got wrong.” Fox Sports and ESPN also piled on.

And one of Corey Seager’s Dodgers teammates, Enrique Hernandez, even joined in from his own account, tweeting “Corey Seager not the NL Starting SS?! SMH!!”

“It is what it is,” said Russell – who has three home runs, a double and six RBIs the last three games. “I’ve never been one to listen to what anyone says or speculate how they think I play the game. I know how I play the game. I know what I bring to the table, and ultimately I know where my growth is going to be.

“It doesn’t mean anything to me.”

But it’s not just about Russell, who earned his first All-Star selection at 22.

The National League shortstop field certainly was robust, and debatable, with the Giants’ Brandon Crawford and three rookies – Seager (.304, 17 homers), Aledmys Diaz of the Cardinals (.314, 11 homers) and Trevor Story of Colorado (19 homers, 50 RBIs) – all with strong cases.

Seager was selected as a reserve; Story earned a spot on the fans’ final-vote ballot. The two others were left out.

“It stinks,” second-time All-Star Kris Bryant said of the criticism. “And then you just watch these TV shows, too. And some guys are talking about who deserves to be there.

“I’m hearing some of it, too,” Bryant added. “I think everybody here is.”

It wouldn’t be anything new for this team, which drew sideways glances from fans and opponents from afar almost as soon as they were installed as Vegas favorites to win the World Series and then decided to “embrace the target” – along with embracing mimes in spring training and wacky costumes on themed road trips.

Apparently getting off to the hottest start in baseball didn’t help to endear them to the rest of baseball.

Not one of the Cubs’ infielders finished first on the players’ All-Star ballots.

Could the All-Star backlash and criticism be about the “target” thing?

“Maybe a little bit,” Bryant acknowledged. “But I think it’s more just in general the world we live in nowadays, which is sad.

“It’s just part of society now, to maybe undercut someone’s achievements,” he said. “I think it’s just important for us to tune that out. It’s a skill you need in this game. I learned that [as a well-known prospect] in high school.”

The Cubs’ recent struggles on the field might only be encouraging the critics. The Cubs’ 5-3 loss Wednesday to the last-place Reds was their 12th loss in 17 games.
“The way we’re approaching what we’re doing right now hasn’t changed from the beginning of the season,” said veteran Jason Hammel, who could have made his own All-Star case each of three years in a row. “Obviously, we’re not playing as well as we did during the beginning of the season. When that happens people will talk.

“Even if you do something well, there’s going to be somebody that says you’re not doing it the right way.”

As for Russell who’s on pace for 20 home runs and almost 100 RBIs as one of the better fielding shortstops in the league, Bryant says the critics are uninformed.

“We would not be where we are without him,” he said. “And I think that’s kind of a definition of an All-Star what he does for the team. We certainly would not have as many wins as we do if we didn’t have Addison at shortstop.”

Said Hammel: “It’s noise. It’s just noise.”

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**Chicago Sun-Times**
When do Cubs’ struggles become something to worry about? Now
By Rick Morrissey

How long are we going to pretend that things are just dandy with the Cubs? How long are we going to explain away a two-month stretch of blahness, which includes a two-week stretch of badness? How often are we going to trot out the defense that the Cubs went through the same kind of troubles last season on the way to 97 victories?

They just lost two of three to the Reds, who, until that series started, had been the answer to just about anybody’s slump. After starting the season 25-6, the Cubs have gone 27-26. They have lost 12 of their last 17 games. Against teams with winning records, well, you don’t want to know.

This isn’t the time to celebrate that the National League’s starting infield for the All-Star Game will be made up entirely of Cubs, nor is it the time to celebrate seven Cubs All-Stars. It’s the time to ask when president of baseball operations Theo Epstein is going to do something about his bullpen, which imploded Wednesday via Trevor Cahill.

It’s the time to ask whether John Lackey’s 2.77 earned-run average last season with the Cardinals was a fluke. It’s time to ask where Joe Maddon’s magic act has gone.

That’s not panic. That’s questioning born of events. Those of you saying that all teams go through struggles are correct. But these are prolonged struggles, not brought on by injuries or youth but by decidedly uninspired play. The hitting has been average for a long time. Is it fair to expect Jake Arrieta to have anywhere close to the historic second half he had last season? No, it’s not

Who is going to make all the mediocrity go away?

The math says the club is on pace to win 100 games this season. The past two months are cackling at the math.

The Cubs have a makeup game against the lowly Braves on Thursday. Hey, you have to start somewhere.

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**Chicago Sun-Times**
Schwarber takes Epstein support ‘to heart,’ pushes rehab clock
By Gordon Wittenmyer

Kyle Schwarber used the word “luxury” to describe the extra time he has to look at his Twitter feed while he rehabs his injured knee.

Luxury? Really?
“I know, right?”

Considering the so-called luxury has meant seeing his name regularly pop up in trade rumors the last few weeks, it makes you wonder what’s on his list of things that suck.

“It’s out of your control. Rumors are going to be rumors,” said Schwarber, the homer-hitting playoff hero for the Cubs as a rookie last fall. “Until something actually happens, you can’t worry about it.”

The Cubs continue to hunt aggressively for pitching help toward the Aug. 1 trade deadline, with the Yankees’ back-end bullpen lefties – Aroldis Chapman and Andrew Miller – as coveted as any potential options.

Yankees insiders and New York media have floated Schwarber’s name almost every time the teams have been linked, but Cubs president Theo Epstein made it clear while talking to Chicago media last week that Schwarber is as close to off-limits as it gets in the organization.

“It’s nice they feel about me like that,” said Schwarber, who was upbeat Wednesday about the progress of his rehab work since season-ending knee surgery in April. “I love this organization, I love this team, and I want to stay here. Obviously, things are out of my control, but since he did say that I take that to heart. It means a lot.”

Schwarber, the lefty slugger who hasn’t played since an outfield collision the third game of the season, hasn’t heard from Epstein directly on the subject, he said.

But the club made the commitment to keeping him part of the team while he undergoes his rehab in Chicago, including him in catcher and pitcher meetings during home stands. He even represented the Cubs in full uniform for the lineup exchange before Wednesday’s game.

And the only question on his mind these days seems to be the one that everybody keeps bringing up – could he actually be ready to hit by playoff time, even if it’s DH duty in a potential World Series?

Epstein last week was firm in reiterating the “next-season” timeline. Schwarber, who hasn’t been allowed to jog outside of a therapy pool yet, was less firm.

“I’m going to work my butt off to get back as soon as I can, whatever the timetable is,” he said. “I want to do more, do more [than advised sometimes]. I think that’s only a good mindset to have. And whatever happens, happens.”

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**Daily Herald**
Cubs' Schwarber off crutches, taking part in team meetings
By Bruce Miles

Little by little, injured Cubs catcher-outfielder Kyle Schwarber is moving around better and better.

Schwarber is out for the season after undergoing surgery on his left knee in April.

"Just trying to get strength back in the knee," he said Wednesday. "Going from there, it's a slow process. I'm pretty happy with where I am right now.

"Right now, it's just a strengthening part. We pretty much got past the first phase, which is range of motion and trying to control swelling. I've pretty much got that back. I'm walking on it now. I'm off the crutches. That helps free up the knee, get things working now."

In the meantime, Schwarber stays around the team as much as he can, cheering his teammates on and taking part in pitchers and catchers meetings.
"I'm glad they kept me around to be a part of it to cheer these guys on," he said. "It's been a fun season so far to watch. I'm going to keep cheering them on."

Schwarber has heard his name attached to various trade rumors, and he was glad to hear team president Theo Epstein say he was still in the Cubs' long-term plans.

"I want to stay here," he said. "The thing is, it's out of your control. Rumors are going to be rumors. Until something actually happens physically, you can't worry about it."

Comings and goings:

The Cubs activated infielder Tommy La Stella off the disabled list and started him at third base in Wednesday's 5-3 loss to the Cincinnati Reds. They also called up pitcher Adam Warren to start the game.

To make room, the Cubs placed catcher David Ross on the 7-day concussion disabled list. Ross took a foul ball off his mask in Tuesday's game.

The Cubs also designated veteran reliever Joel Peralta for assignment. Peralta appeared 5 games.

"Very difficult," manager Joe Maddon said of cutting the 40-year-old Peralta. "Actually, I thought (Tuesday) was his best day. I think he really looked closer to normal. It's just a matter of what we need right now. And he understood that. We had a really good conversation.

"If he chooses to not continue to play, he is going to be a fabulous pitching coach, bullpen coach or some kind of coach in major-league baseball. He relates really well to others."

Fowler tests it:

Injured center fielder Dexter Fowler tested his right hamstring by running the bases Wednesday morning. Fowler is hoping to come off the disabled list and play in next Tuesday's All-Star Game. He has made the all-star team for the first time in his career.

The Cubs are hoping he can make at least a minor-league rehab appearance by the weekend.

"The next two days will tell whether or not he's going to be able to participate," Maddon said. "When he comes back, whether it's the end of this week, the All-Star Game or after the break, he's still going to have to be guarded when he runs, somehow. The hamstring issue's always ... you've got to be careful.

"We're looking for the end of this week, possibly, rehab. Possibly, not for sure. And if that were to happen, then there's a possibility for the All-Star Game. Not sure. But hopefully, absolutely ready post all-star break for us."

Daily Herald
Maddon says recent Cubs losses just a 'snapshot,' not a trend
By Bruce Miles

Is what the Cubs are going through right now a snapshot of their season, or are there troubling trends that need addressing?

That's the question I put to manager Joe Maddon after Wednesday's disappointing 5-3 loss to the Cincinnati Reds at Wrigley Field.

The Cubs came from behind early and led 3-1 in the seventh on a decent pitching performance by spot starter Adam Warren.
But reliever Trevor Cahill gave up a 3-run homer to No. 8 hitter Tucker Barnhart in the seventh, and the Reds added an insurance run against Carl Edwards Jr. in the eighth.

Beginning with a June 20 loss to the Cardinals, the Cubs are 5-12 and have suffered series sweeps against the Cardinals and Mets.

"It's more likely a snapshot, just based on people in and out of the lineup," said Maddon, whose team lost two of three to the Reds and fell to 52-32 for the season. "Our bullpen isn’t 100 percent. We're experimenting with different things.

"Listen, the big part, we need to do better in the latter part of the game scoring runs, too. That's another part. Even if it's close, we get behind or even if it's tied, we're just not doing a really good job of finishing off games offensively. But overall, man, everything is good. They beat us with the 3-run homer." Even though the Cubs do miss injured leadoff man Dexter Fowler, much of what's gone wrong over the last 17 games can be traced to starting pitching.

Cubs starters have turned in 6 quality starts and 11 non-quality starts over this current span, and the starters' overall ERA is 5.60.

Although Warren worked 5 innings of 3-hit, 1-run ball Wednesday, it was technically not a quality start, and it was the sixth non-quality start the Cubs have gotten in their last six outings.

Earlier in the season, starting pitching set the tone for almost all of the Cubs' success.

Wednesday also marked the 20th of 24 consecutive days the Cubs have played a game. Warren got a spot start to give the rest of the rotation a break.

"That's what I've been talking about the whole year," Maddon said of the importance of pitching. "Everybody's talking about the offense and the run differential, but it's all about starting pitching, period, because that also impacts your bullpen. We've run into a little bit of a rough patch. That's going to happen.

"If you look around baseball, I've seen a lot of double-digit-to-1, double-digit-to-2 victories. Pitchers get tired, man. Regardless of their wanting to concede to that point or not, which they never will, that's why you have to be kind of proactive regarding doing things like we're doing right now involving a sixth starter, if you can. I think it's really pertinent, especially when you don't have days off or the rainout doesn't occur that you push things."

Warren gave up a leadoff homer to Zack Cozart to start Wednesday's game. The Cubs got 2 in the second, on an RBI double by Addison Russell and a run-scoring single by Miguel Montero. They went up 3-1 in the fifth on a one-out homer by Ben Zobrist.

But the Cubs did not get a hit from the sixth through the ninth.

"I really can't explain it right now," said Russell, a newly named all-star who has 7 RBI in his last three games. "But we're still going to go out there and try to get the job done. Obviously, the past few weeks, it hasn't been working, but we still have high hopes and high faith. We've just got to go to the next day and get better."

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Daily Herald
Spot-starter Warren solid in Cubs loss
By John Lemon

Adam Warren provided a small bright spot Wednesday on an otherwise disappointing day for 41,262 at Wrigley Field who watched the Cubs fall 5-3 to Cincinnati -- losing the series and their sixth game in the last seven.
Making his first start with the Cubs, Warren did all he could to prevent the loss, handing a 3-1 lead to the bullpen after striking out 6 and walking none in his 5 innings.

Warren got better as the game went on, retiring the final 11 batters he faced.

"He pitched really well," Cubs manager Joe Maddon said. "That actually obviously was pretty warm out there. Getting through 5 was a great piece on his part."

Warren, whom the Cubs acquired in the offseason for Starlin Castro, made 17 starts for the Yankees a year ago while finishing 7-7 with a 3.29 ERA.

He opened this season pitching well out of the bullpen, going 3-0 with a 1.72 ERA in his first 15 appearances before struggling with a 9.00 ERA in his last 10 games.

The Cubs sent him to Triple-A Iowa to stretch him out and give their starting rotation an extra day of rest during this current stretch of 24 straight game days. After 2 starts at Iowa, Warren was ready for his shot.

"The biggest thing for me even going down and getting a couple starts was getting back to my identity as a pitcher," Warren said. "I kind of got away from that a little bit in the bullpen. I wanted to get back to throwing all four pitches both sides of the plate. I feel I did a good job of doing that. Part of that is getting ahead in the count instead of always being behind. I think that's what helped me today."

Cincinnati's only run against Warren came from the first batter of the game when Zack Cozart ended a 10-pitch at-bat with a home run to left-center.

Warren worked out of a jam stranding runners at second and third in the second, then didn't allow a runner his final 3 innings.

"He (Cozart) had a great at-bat," Warren said. "I was pounding the zone, trying to set the tone early. I tried pretty much everything and sometimes you have to tip your hat."

Wednesday marked the first time in 84 games the Cubs used a sixth starter, the fourth-latest in their history. Only the Cardinals have used just five starters this season.

Warren said he has 'no idea' if he will get another start after the break, but he stated his case.

"Got better game in progress," Maddon said. "I thought the quality of pitches continued to get better. I talked to him about that after I took him out. He did an outstanding job."

"I just wanted to go out there and prove I could do that and that was the first step today," Warren said. "Our five starters are doing great so you don't want to take anything away from those guys and just leave it at that. If they want to give those guys another breather I see it as an opportunity for me. If not I'll be ready to come in relief."

Being able to handle both roles is a big reason the Cubs traded for Warren, and it could be important to helping them snap out of a 5-12 stretch in their last 17 games.

"I think a lot of my value comes in being versatile, going back and forth between starting and relieving, being able to throw multiple innings out of the bullpen," Warren said. "It's nice to be able to give the starters a break in a long stretch or eat up the five innings. It's nice to get out there and get some quality innings."

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Cubs.com
All-Stars build early lead, but 'pen can't finish Reds
By Carrie Muskat and Mark Sheldon
CHICAGO -- The Cubs clubbed their 32nd home run off Reds pitchers this season when All-Star Ben Zobrist connected in the fifth inning on Wednesday. But Zack Cozart got things started with a leadoff homer in the first and Tucker Barnhart belted a key three-run blast in the seventh to lead Cincinnati to a 5-3 win over Chicago at Wrigley Field. It was the Reds' first series win over the rivals this season and the first time since Aug. 27-28, 2014, that they won back-to-back games over the Cubs.

Anthony DeSclafani, making his sixth start, picked up the win, scattering eight hits over six innings, and the Reds took the series, 2-1. The Cubs lead the season series, 10-3.

"These guys have beat us up pretty good this year. Truth be told, they've had our number, not just beating us, but beating us with emphasis," Reds manager Bryan Price said. "We should be more competitive against everybody, I think, once we get our pitching into good shape. I think we're closer. Nobody should be beating up a Major League team the way they've beaten us this year. I think this is a good sign to our guys that if we play our game of baseball and put the ball in play and defend and pitchers throw strikes, you can compete."

All-Stars Addison Russell and Zobrist each drove in a run for the Cubs, who have lost 12 of their last 17 games.

"The effort is good," Cubs manager Joe Maddon said of his players. "They beat us with a three-run homer."

Both teams were wearing throwback uniforms from 1916 to celebrate the Cubs' first game at Wrigley Field -- which was then known as Weeghman Park -- on April 20, 1916, against the Reds. The Cubs won that game, 7-6, in 11 innings despite a home run by Cincinnati's Johnny Beall.

MOMENTS THAT MATTERED

Cozart equals 1-0: For the eighth time in his career, and the fourth this season, Cozart hit a leadoff home run after he took Adam Warren's 3-2 pitch deep to left-center field in the top of the first inning. Statcast™ estimated that the drive -- during a 10-pitch at-bat -- traveled 431 feet with an exit velocity of 105 mph. It was also Cozart's third straight game with a homer, and it was his 14th for the season, leaving him one away from the career high of 15 he set in 2012.

Welcome back: Tommy La Stella, activated from the disabled list on Wednesday, blooped a single to right to lead off the Cubs' second, and one out later, he showed his right hamstring was OK when he scored on Russell's double, the shortstop's seventh RBIs in his last three games. Miguel Montero followed with an RBI single, his first at Wrigley since June 2, to put Chicago ahead, 2-1.

Barnhart burning up: Barnhart's homer off Trevor Cahill in the seventh not only put Cincinnati back ahead, but continued his personal hot stretch. In 14 games since June 18, the switch-hitting catcher is batting .348 (16-for-46) with eight RBIs. On the in-progress road trip, he is 8-for-20. With runners on second and third in the seventh, Barnhart was simply trying for a sacrifice fly -- especially after he struck out in a similar situation in the second inning.

"I was battling as bad as I have in a while, just trying to get my foot down and kind of flick something to the outfield," Barnhart said. "I got a fastball out over the plate. It was probably the last pitch I thought would come there. I kind of reacted to it, trying to get something to the outfield. I wasn't sitting on a certain pitch, but tried to make contact on something."

Start me up: Rainouts and days off had given the Cubs' starting staff enough of a breather so the team didn't need extra help. But a stretch of 24 straight games prior to the All-Star break prompted the Cubs to insert Warren into the rotation as the sixth man and have him make a spot start Wednesday. Warren battled Cozart in a 10-pitch at-bat that ended with a leadoff home run. The right-hander did not get a decision, giving up one run over five innings. While he was the sixth starting pitcher used by the Cubs this season, the Reds have tapped 12 different starters, most in the Major Leagues.

"It's a rough way to start," Warren said of Cozart's at-bat. "He put together a great at-bat. I was pounding the zone, trying to set the tone early. I pretty much tried everything. I made a mistake and he punished me."
Neither Warren nor the Cubs know if he'll make another start after the break, but he felt he gave them something to think about.

"I was happy I got back to who I was, working both sides of the plate with all my pitches," Warren said.

QUOTABLE

"You don't execute a pitch and a guy hits a three-run homer and that's that. I can't connect a bunch of negative thoughts. It happened. I think it is a snapshot [of the season] and I'm not overly concerned." -- Maddon, on the Cubs' recent struggles

"Obviously it changed everything. It put us up in the lead, and then we were able to scratch another run across the board. That's huge. It changed the momentum and kind of gets the guys up in the dugout and brings a little life. That was obviously the changing point of the game for sure. I was trying to keep it as close as possible. If you get guys on base, one swing can change the game like that. Just fighting not to give up every run and try to keep the game as close as possible. Tucker called a great game and obviously was able to turn it around as well." -- DeSclafani, on Barnhart's homer and the victory

SOUND SMART WITH YOUR FRIENDS

The Reds stole four bases against the Cubs, who have given up 69 steals this season, second most in baseball behind the Mets.

REPLAY REVIEW

Jay Bruce was called out trying to steal second base in the ninth inning, and after a review, umpires said the call stands.

WHAT'S NEXT

Reds: Following an off-day on Thursday, the Reds will wrap up the road trip and the first half with a three-game series vs. the Marlins. Dan Straily will take the mound for the 7:10 p.m. ET opener at Marlins Park. Cincinnati has won 13 of its last 21 games vs. Miami over the past three seasons.

Cubs: The Cubs will play host to the Braves on Thursday in a makeup game. Jason Hammel gets the start, his 17th and last before the All-Star break. In his last start, he served up a career-high five home runs and 10 earned runs over four innings. First pitch is scheduled for 7:05 p.m. CT at Wrigley Field.

Cubs.com

Cubs should know Fowler's status in next day or two
By Carrie Muskat

CHICAGO -- Dexter Fowler was named to his first Midsummer Classic, but the outfielder is still on the disabled list and the Cubs want to see him play in some Minor League games before saying whether he'll participate in Tuesday's All-Star Game presented by MasterCard (6:30 p.m. CT on FOX) in San Diego.

Fowler has been sidelined since June 19 with a right hamstring strain and was eligible to come off the DL on Monday.

"He's feeling better," Cubs manager Joe Maddon said on Wednesday. "We have a potential plan as to when he'll be available. We have to know something by Thursday, Friday. The next two days will tell whether he can participate or not."

And Maddon is talking about Fowler being ready to participate in a Minor League rehab assignment.
"If [he can play in Minors], then there's the possibility for the All-Star Game, but not sure," Maddon said. "[He'll be ready] absolutely post All-Star break for us."

Maddon talked to Fowler on Tuesday about the plan.

"He wants to play in the All-Star Game," Maddon said. "Don't anybody fault him for that. This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Who knows if it will happen again. I'm all for it. The overriding concern is that he plays for us the rest of the year and he helps us get to our goal."

Fowler was batting .290 in 64 games, and he has provided the spark at the top of the Cubs' lineup. He was one of seven Cubs players named to the National League All-Star team, joining Anthony Rizzo, Ben Zobrist, Addison Russell, Kris Bryant, Jake Arrieta and Jon Lester.

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Cubs.com
Cubs designate Peralta in series of moves
By Carrie Muskat

CHICAGO -- Joel Peralta was designated for assignment on Wednesday to make room on the Cubs' roster for Adam Warren, who was recalled from Triple-A Iowa to start against the Reds.

The right-handed Peralta, whom manager Joe Maddon had in Tampa Bay, had made five relief appearance with the Cubs since he joined them on June 27.

"It was very difficult," Maddon said of his conversation with Peralta, 40, on Wednesday. "It's just a matter of what we need now, and he understood that. If he chooses to not continue to play, he'll be a fabulous pitching coach or some kind of coach in Major League Baseball. ... He'll find his niche eventually."

Warren was sent to Triple-A Iowa to make two starts so he could go on Wednesday, giving the Cubs' other starters a breather. Wednesday was game No. 84 of the season, and this was the fourth latest that the franchise used a sixth starting pitcher. In 2003, the Cubs didn't use a sixth starter until game No. 99. In 1891 and 1892, they didn't need an extra starter until games No. 99 and 102, respectively. Those two seasons were the final ones before the mound was moved back to 60 feet, six inches.

• Catcher David Ross, who had to leave Tuesday's game after taking a foul ball off his mask, was placed on the seven-day concussion disabled list on Wednesday and infielder Tommy La Stella was activated from the disabled list.

Ross, 39, was batting .234 with six homers and 23 RBIs in 43 games.

La Stella, 27, was batting .291 with eight doubles, one triple, two homers and seven RBIs in 38 games with the Cubs before he was sidelined June 8 with a with a right hamstring strain. He went 6-for-21 with one homer and three RBIs in a six-game rehab assignment with Iowa.

• Kyle Schwarber nearly has all of the range of motion back in his left knee, and he is continuing to strengthen it. The young Cubs outfielder tore two ligaments in his knee in the third game of the season.

"It's a slow process, but I'm pretty happy where I'm at right now," Schwarber said Wednesday.

If the Cubs are home, Schwarber gets his work done early so he can watch the game from the dugout. Because of the severity of the injury, Schwarber is not expected back until 2017. Could he return this season?

"I'm going to work my butt off to get back as soon as I can, whatever the timetable is," he said. "Whatever happens, happens."
The Cubs' game July 19 against the Mets at Wrigley Field will start at 6:05 p.m. CT to accommodate a national broadcast by ESPN. The game was originally scheduled to begin at 7:05 p.m.

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Cubs.com
Zobrist revels in fan support, first All-Star start
By Carrie Muskat

CHICAGO -- Ben Zobrist remembers his first All-Star Game in 2009, and how starstruck he was, being in the same clubhouse with all the top players in the game. On Tuesday, Zobrist was named to the National League starting lineup at second base, and he will join six of his Cubs teammates at the All-Star Game presented by MasterCard in San Diego (6:30 p.m. CT on FOX).

"It's a huge honor, and especially special for me to be able to wear a Cubs uniform and be an All-Star," Zobrist said Wednesday.

Zobrist topped the Nationals' Daniel Murphy by 88 votes in the fan balloting at second base, and he was thankful for his hometown support as well as voting by others.

"There were a lot from Eureka [Ill.], there were a lot of family member votes, people from my church in Nashville, close friends -- you name it, and I could go to every one of those people and say 'thank you' for the votes," Zobrist said. "It's going to be a really special experience for me to be out there as a starter. This will be a huge honor."

This will be Zobrist's third All-Star Game, but the first time he will start. It's the first All-Star Game for Dexter Fowler, Addison Russell and Jake Arrieta, and Zobrist planned on giving them a little advice.

"It's a little like your wedding day in the fact that you do a lot of smiling and answering questions," Zobrist said. "If you don't slow yourself down, you could miss a lot of it."

The event can be tiring, but Zobrist said it's worth it.

"To be sitting around a locker room and looking at all the guys in the locker room, it's a special feeling," he said.

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Cubs.com
Hammel, Harrell to face off in makeup game
By Evan Webeck

Let's try this again.

The first time the Braves and Cubs tried to get this game in, it was rained out on April 30. Back then, Fredi Gonzalez was still managing the Braves. The Cubs had yet to lose back-to-back games. The matchup was originally slated to be Julio Teheran facing John Lackey.

But now it will be Lucas Harrell (1-0, 1.50 ERA) vs. Jason Hammel (7-5, 3.45 ERA). Brian Snitker has been in charge in Atlanta since May 17. And the Cubs not only have lost two straight by now, they dropped five of their last six entering Wednesday's game.

The 31-year-old Harrell will be making his second start of the season after getting a surprise promotion five days ago to make his first big league start in more than two years. He held the Marlins to one run over six innings in his return the Majors.

The Mets torched Hammel in his last start, putting up a 10-spot before Joe Maddon pulled Hammel after four-plus innings. He'll be looking to get back on track against the worst offense in the Majors, though he didn't have a
stellar outing against Atlanta in his lone start against the Braves this season. He pitched 5 2/3 innings, giving up three runs in a June 10 loss.

Three things to know:

• Both teams have hit a bit of a cold streak. Entering Wednesday's games, the Braves had dropped 10 of their last 14 and the Cubs five of their last six.

• Albeit in only 11 at-bats, but Freddie Freeman has owned Hammel, as he's compiled five hits, including two home runs. Nick Markakis has had his own success against the Cubs' starter, going 9-for-22 with a home run.

• The Cubs had a MLB-high seven All-Stars announced on Tuesday. They join the 1963 Cardinals as the only teams to represent the entire starting All-Star infield. Chicago is the first team since the 1985 Padres to have five players start the All-Star Game.