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- CSNChicago.com, Eddie Butler Or Mike Montgomery Looks Like Next Man Up In Cubs Rotation
There's a reason we keep harping on the stat of quality starts in this space.

If your team gets them, it wins. If your team doesn't get quality starts, it's asking for trouble.

Consider the Chicago Cubs to be asking for big trouble these days.

Left-hander Brett Anderson made another short start Saturday night against the New York Yankees at Wrigley Field.

After working just 1⅓ inning against the Phillies last Monday, Anderson could not get out of the first Saturday, as he went just one-third of an inning and gave up 6 hits and 5 runs. The Yankees went on to win the game 11-6.

Anderson left the game accompanied by an athletic trainer. The Cubs said Anderson experienced tightness in his lower back.
The Cubs have played 30 games, and they have gotten only 10 quality starts. Last season, they had 21 quality starts through their first 30 games and were 24-6. Today, the Cubs are 16-14 overall and 9-11 when they don't get a quality start.

Things finished on a somewhat amusing note with catcher Miguel Montero pitching the ninth inning for the Cubs.

"The last two starts here have been embarrassing from my perspective," said Anderson, who has a history of back problems and who said he felt the back tighten during the first inning. "This feels a little bit different. Different side. A little bit higher up. Hopefully it's not a disc issue."

Manager Joe Maddon said Anderson is likely facing a stint on the disabled list. Reliever Mike Montgomery is one possibility to replace Anderson in the rotation.

"The biggest thing for me is just to get our starters more deeply into the game," Maddon said. "As of right now, if you look at our bullpen, if you actually look at the numbers, easily the best bullpen in the National League on a lot of different fronts. And they've actually been pitching too often.

"Really, to make this all right, we've just got to get our starting pitching straightened out. Last year, if you remember, the bullpen didn't pitch a whole lot because the starters were so good. And I thought that's what kept the bullpen really solid during the course of the season. With the starting (pitchers) pitching so well, there was not as much emphasis of having to score so many runs because they were that good."

The Yankees sent nine men to the plate in the first. Anderson left after he gave up a 2-run double to No. 7 hitter Chase Headley. Felix Pena relieved Anderson and worked the next 3⅔ innings before he gave way to Rob Zastryzny, who was called up from Class AAA Iowa before the game. Zastryzny wound up pitching 4 innings before Montero mopped up.

"We're a little short in the bullpen," said Montero, who walked two but did not give up a run. "I was willing to help the team even if it needed to be a little bit earlier in the game."

Anderson took note.

"Whenever the catcher or backup catcher gets more outs than you, that's not a positive," he said.

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**Daily Herald**

Maddon not yet ready to commit to electronic umpires

By Bruce Miles

There’s no question the Cubs and manager Joe Maddon were less than enamored of some of the ball-and-strike calls over the past week.

After one game, Maddon said the home-plate umpire, Toby Basner, had a "ball zone" instead of a strike zone.

While calls for electronic, or "robo-umpires," has intensified in recent years, Maddon said Saturday he’s not sure if he wants to go there yet even though he likes replay for calls in the field.

"Honestly, I've been vacillating on that," Maddon said. "I love what's going on on the bases. I admit that. I've talked about that because in spring training, when it wasn't there, you really found out how much you liked it being there. I'm convinced of that although there are a couple tweaks I would still like to see.

"Balls and strikes. It's just hard to tell. You don't even know. It's be careful what you wish for or unintended consequences. If there is an electronically controlled zone, which I've been speaking more in favor of recently, are veteran umpires actually really good at understanding nuance of the game and what actually is a good pitch and what needs to be called a strike based on how the game is supposed to be played and run, whatever? Or does it
have to be more exact regarding, 'This is exactly the strike zone against this guy, how tall he is, however he stands, whatever that means' Is that going to be important? I'm really vacillating on this right now."

Another roster move:

Because their bullpen has been overtaxed by non-quality starts, the Cubs made a roster move, recalling left-handed reliever Rob Zastryzny from Class AAA Iowa.

To make room, they designated outfielder Matt Szczur for assignment.

Zastryzny was 0-1 with 1 save and a 6.88 ERA at Iowa in 7 games. He made his big-league debut with the Cubs last season, going 1-0 with a 1.13 ERA in 8 games, 1 as a starter. He was a second-round draft pick of the Cubs in 2013.

Szczur was 4-for-19 this year. Over four seasons with the Cubs, he batted .243 with 8 homers.

It was the second roster move in two days for the Cubs. On Friday they optioned reliever Justin Grimm to Iowa and recalled reliever Felix Pena. Pena had to come into Saturday's game in the first inning after starter Brett Anderson was ineffective.

Heyward held out:

Right fielder Jason Heyward was kept out of Saturday's starting lineup against the Yankees because of a sore knuckle on his right hand. Joe Maddon said Heyward injured himself diving for a ball in Friday's series opener.

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**Daily Herald**

Ostrowski: Relief pitchers' roles are always evolving

By Joe Ostrowski

Outs 25, 26, and 27. Many believe the last three outs of a game are the most difficult. Some new-age thinkers are certain that closers should be used in high-leverage situations, not just saved for the ninth inning.

Wade Davis wasn't available on Friday after pitching three straight days. Hector Rondon came in to close the game with a 2-0 lead. Brett Gardner nailed Rondon's slider for a game-winning 3-run homer with two outs for the Yankees.

Since 2015, the Cubs were 152-0 when entering the ninth with a 2-plus run lead, according to ESPN Stats and Info. That startling statistic makes you realize that Cubs fans have been spoiled with closers. When San Francisco lost to the Cubs in the NLDS last season, it was the Giants' 32nd blown save of the season.

How relief pitchers are viewed in the game continues to evolve. Relievers were paid a ton of money in the offseason and were targeted heavily at the 2016 trade deadline.

Only one closer, Eric Gagne, has won the Cy Young Award in the past 24 years. Eight pitchers captured the award between 1974 and 1992. Dennis Eckersley, Willie Hernandez, and Rollie Fingers even won the MVP.

It's clear that the Cubs value the last three outs immensely, and the front office has made numerous trades to fix the closer position for now and the future. Here's a look at the past and the future:

Wade Davis: Since arriving in a trade from Kansas City for Jorge Soler, Davis has been everything Joe Maddon could ask for. He hasn't allowed a run in 14 games, including a perfect 7-for-7 in save opportunities.

Carl Edwards Jr.: Maddon believes Edwards is a future closer. Edwards has a 0.69 ERA in 13 appearances. The 1,464th pick of the 2011 MLB draft was trusted to pitch in Games 5 and 7 of the World Series. Edwards arrived in the Matt Garza trade and doesn't become a free agent until 2023.
Mike Montgomery: Many believe Montgomery will be moved into the Cubs' starting rotation, but he's one of the team's best relievers for now. The lefty has thrown 21 innings in 11 games with a 1.29 ERA. Maddon went to him five times in the World Series. Montgomery came from Seattle in a trade for Dan Vogelbach and he won't be able to hit the open market until 2022.

Aroldis Chapman: Chapman, now back with the Yankees, received his World Series ring on Friday. The dominant closer was the piece that put the Cubs over the top last season. The Cubs sent top prospect Gleyber Torres and three others to get three months of Chapman. Maddon started using Chapman for more than just the ninth in Game 6 of the NLCS.

We have a habit of only talking about the bullpen when things go wrong. If Davis and company continue to lock down the late innings, give them the credit they deserve.

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Cubs.com
Cubs can't recover from tough 1st, fall to Yanks
By Carrie Muskat and Bryan Hoch

CHICAGO -- Starlin Castro looked right at home at Wrigley Field on Saturday night, smacking an RBI double in a five-run first inning and adding a two-run homer in the fourth, and Aaron Hicks had four hits, including a three-run homer, to power the Yankees to an 11-6 Interleague victory over the Cubs.

Castro, who played for the Cubs from 2010 until he was dealt to the Yankees in December 2015, was welcomed back on Friday with a video tribute and his walk-up music. He didn't need to hear his song on Saturday. The American League batting leader notched his fifth straight multihit game and launched his sixth homer of the season against Felix Pena.

"It's awesome," said Castro, who is now hitting .381. "I think it's good to come here and compete, especially against a really good team. That's the World Series champions last year. It's pretty good. That tests us, how good we can be and how good we are."

Pena was recalled from Triple-A Iowa on Friday, and the Cubs added Rob Zastryzny on Saturday to give them 14 pitchers on the active roster. They needed both as starter Brett Anderson retired one of the seven batters he faced in the first before exiting with lower back tightness. The lefty missed nearly all of last season after undergoing back surgery in March 2016 and is likely headed for the disabled list.

The Cubs turned to backup catcher Miguel Montero to pitch the ninth and help fill in because of Anderson's early exit.

"Whenever the backup catcher gets more outs than you, it's not positive," Anderson said. "You need to figure some things out and get healthy and get some more people out going forward. It's as simple as that."

New York starter Jordan Montgomery allowed just three hits over 6 2/3 innings, striking out three. The rookie left-hander has been stingy, and has now given up three runs or fewer in each of his five starts this season. Montgomery said that the early cushion helped him settle in, using both his curveball and changeup effectively.

"You need to still throw like it's 0-0," Montgomery said. "You can't get too relaxed. These guys can still put up big numbers if you throw it right down the middle. You want to pitch your game and just roll with the catcher."

The Yankees now have won 18 of their last 23 games to move a season-high 10 games over .500 (19-9).

"We have a lot of great players," Castro said. "It's pretty good to be part of a team like that."

MOMENTS THAT MATTERED
Quick start: Anderson was coming off a short outing Monday in which he lasted 1 1/3 innings, and Saturday was the shortest start of his career. Brett Gardner doubled to lead off. Hicks bunted and Anderson fielded the ball, but he made an off-balance throw into foul territory and Gardner scored on the error. Castro followed with an RBI double and one out later, he scored on Gary Sanchez’s single. Didi Gregorius singled, and he and Sanchez tallied on Chase Headley’s double. Pitching coach Chris Bosio went to the mound and then called for the trainer, and Anderson was removed. The Cubs now have given up 38 earned runs in the first inning over 30 games for an 11.40 ERA.

“We need to get in a groove," Montero said. "I think the whole team needs to get in a groove. For the hitters, for the most part, we've been coming from behind. First inning, they score some runs and it's hard to come back all the time."

Hitting machine: Hicks matched his career high with the four hits. He singled in the first and second, doubled in the fourth and added a three-run homer in the eighth. The home run, which came off a 2-1 pitch from Zastryzny, was his sixth of the season. It’s the third time he’s totaled four hits in a game, and first since Aug. 12, 2015, against the Rangers. His homer mattered as the Cubs scored three runs in the eighth, including a pair on Montero’s pinch-hit single.

"I've just been making some good passes on some hittable pitches," Hicks said. "I've been able to put the ball in play hard and good things have happened."

QUOTABLE

"This is a fierce lineup. They can score a lot of runs really quickly and they have a lot of power in their lineup. To be able to do that, to pitch really well for 6 2/3 innings, should be a nice stepping stone for him." -- Yankees manager Joe Girardi, on Montgomery’s outing

"We lost badly tonight. But we just came off a three-game winning streak -- the sky is not falling, we just had a bad night. Putting the pieces together, and having to move [Matt Szczur] out of here, that was the tough part of the day, and that's the part that lingers with you organizationally as a manager, as a [general manager], as a [team] president. It's a lost ballgame, you throw it away. When you have to lose a guy like Matty, that's the most difficult part of the day." -- manager Joe Maddon, on the Cubs designating Szczur for assignment to make room for Zastryzny

SOUND SMART WITH YOUR FRIENDS

According to Statcast™, Cubs starters began the night with the highest average exit velocity allowed in the first inning (91.5 mph) of any team. Anderson gave up three batted balls hit at 95 mph or above to contribute to that.

EXTRA ARMS

Montero made his second career appearance on the mound in the ninth. The catcher also pitched 1 1/3 innings on July 3, 2016, against the Mets in a 14-3 loss. He faced five Yankees batters, walked two, and threw 25 pitches, 11 for strikes, in a scoreless inning.

WHAT'S NEXT

Yankees: Luis Severino will face the Cubs for the first time in his career on Sunday at 8:05 p.m. ET, looking to bounce back from a rough outing against the Blue Jays in which he served up two homers and was handed his second loss of the year. Primarily relying on his fastball and slider, Severino has struck out 36 against six walks in 32 2/3 innings this year.

Cubs: Jon Lester will close the Interleague series against the Yankees at Wrigley Field. The lefty has a 13-6 record and a 3.78 ERA in 29 career starts against the Yankees, who he has not faced since June 28, 2014. After going 0-1 in five April starts, Lester picked up a win in his last outing against the Phillies. First pitch will be at 7:05 p.m. CT.
Cubs.com
Anderson exits with back tightness; DL likely
By Carrie Muskat

CHICAGO -- Cubs starter Brett Anderson is likely headed to the disabled list after feeling tightness in his lower back after he fielded a bunt by the second batter of Saturday's game, the Yankees' Aaron Hicks.

Anderson retired one of the seven batters he faced in the first inning of the Cubs' 11-6 Interleague loss to the Yankees. It's his second straight abbreviated outing; he lasted 1 1/3 innings Monday against the Phillies.

"I felt fine warming up, I felt fine coming into the game," Anderson said. "[Hicks] bunts, and I made a weird play and it stiffened up. With my history of back problems and everything considered, I didn't want to make it worse. I felt it was time to get out of there."

Relievers Felix Pena and Rob Zastryzny, who were called up from Triple-A Iowa on Friday and Saturday, respectively, tried to fill in for Anderson, but when they both ran out of gas, Cubs manager Joe Maddon turned to catcher Miguel Montero to pitch the ninth. Montero, making his second career appearance on the mound, walked two of the five batters he faced but finished the inning without allowing a run.

"Whenever the backup catcher gets more outs than you, it's not positive," Anderson said. "You need to figure some things out and get healthy and get some more people out going forward. It's as simple as that."

Losing Anderson is the first major injury to the Cubs this season. Their options for starting pitching include Mike Montgomery, who is currently on the 25-man roster, and right-hander Eddie Butler, who threw six shutout innings on Saturday for Triple-A Iowa against Memphis. Butler struck out six and allowed four hits.

"We definitely have good options," Maddon said.

The Cubs also have a break in the schedule with two off-days in the next nine days.

This was the first time Anderson has experienced problems with his back this season. He missed nearly all of last year after needing back surgery in March 2016 for a herniated disk.

"The last two starts at home have been embarrassing from my perspective," Anderson said. "It's something you deal with. Unfortunately, I have a history of back issues, but this feels a little bit different. It's a different side, a little higher up. Hopefully, it's not a disk issue. I'll come in [Sunday] and go from there."

After Chase Headley hit a two-run double to open a 5-0 lead in the first, Cubs pitching coach Chris Bosio went to the mound and called for athletic trainer Ed Halbur. Anderson was then removed from the game.

"They're a good lineup and they made me pay," Anderson said. "I wanted to have a quality start based on my last outing when I didn't get very deep in the game. I didn't want to throw the new guys in that situation, and unfortunately I did."

This was the shortest outing of Anderson's career; he went one inning on Aug. 14, 2016, against the Pirates, which was his first start back following back surgery.

"I still think when I'm healthy, I'm a good pitcher," Anderson said. "It's a combination of things -- everything that can go wrong, has gone wrong. I still have confidence in myself. I wouldn't be in the league this long if I haven't been able to put some things behind me and deal with the cards I've been dealt."
Cubs recall lefty Zastryzny, DFA Szczur

By Carrie Muskat

CHICAGO -- The Cubs not only lost a game on Saturday night, but also a key piece of their roster when outfielder Matt Szczur was designated for assignment to make room for reliever Rob Zastryzny.

"It's excruciating," Cubs manager Joe Maddon said about the roster move after Saturday's 11-6 loss to the Yankees. "He's everything you want in a teammate. He just is."

The Cubs have been short pitching-wise since Brett Anderson went 1 1/3 innings on Monday against the Phillies. They played a 13-inning game on Thursday, and wanted to be prepared with Anderson starting Saturday. Zastryzny ended up pitching a career-high four innings because Anderson lasted just one-third of an inning due to lower back tightness.

"'Rob Z' has not thrown anywhere near 90 pitches," Maddon said of the lefty, who allowed three runs on three hits and four walks. "He said, 'I felt great, I felt fine.' Give [Zastryzny and Felix Pena] credit for keeping us kind of intact over the next several days, the next week. It's really that important what they did tonight. Hats off to both Pena and 'Rob Z,' because they were outstanding."

Zastryzny had one save and a 6.88 ERA in seven relief appearances with Iowa, giving up 13 earned runs over 17 innings. He made his big league debut last season with the Cubs, and was 1-0 with a 1.13 ERA in eight appearances.

"[By designating him], we're giving him the opportunity to play somewhere else and get to play -- we like that part of it," Maddon said. "We don't like him not being here."

Szczur wasn't on the Cubs' National League Championship Series or World Series rosters last year but was with the team, and he became part of the story as Anthony Rizzo borrowed one of his bats and broke out of a mini-slump against the Dodgers. Szczur also loaned some of his clothing to shortstop Addison Russell.

"He's always upbeat, he's always ready to play," Maddon said of the right-handed hitter. "He always supports everybody around him. You want him on your team, you want him in your organization, he's that kind of guy."

Szczur was selected by the Cubs in the fifth round of the 2010 Draft out of Villanova and made his big league debut in 2014. Overall, he batted .243 with eight homers and 40 RBIs in 202 games covering four seasons with the Cubs. This year, he batted .211 in 15 games.

Cubs.com
Lester set to face Yanks for 1st time since '14
By Bryan Hoch

It has been suggested that the Cubs' thunderous lineup might not look out of place in the American League East, a division where the Yankees have surprised many by muscling their way to the top through the season's first five weeks.

Cubs manager Joe Maddon experienced his share of those big-hitting tilts when he was at the helm of the Rays. As he nightly fills out a lineup card populated by big names like Kyle Schwarber, Kris Bryant and Anthony Rizzo, Maddon agrees that the Cubs are a lot like one of the AL East's powerhouses.
"The pitcher hitting here [in the National League] really makes the game different, it just does," Maddon said. "If you had a DH -- which I don't want, but if you did, there would be many more similarities to an American League East team just by adding one more hitter."

Sunday’s 8:05 p.m. ET finale between the Yankees and Cubs pits Chicago left-hander Jon Lester (1-1, 3.67) against New York right-hander Luis Severino (2-2, 3.86), with the Yanks going for the sweep. Lester faced the Yankees 29 times as a member of the Red Sox, going 13-6 with a 3.78 ERA in those efforts.

This will mark Lester's first opportunity to face the Yankees since June 28, 2014, when he saw a lineup that included Derek Jeter, Mark Teixeira, Alfonso Soriano and Brian Roberts, all now retired. Only Brett Gardner and Jacoby Ellsbury remain on the Yanks' roster from the players who batted that day at Yankee Stadium.

The Yanks hope Severino can replicate what he did at Fenway Park on April 26, when he blanked Boston on three hits over seven sharp innings. Yankees manager Joe Girardi said that he believes efforts like that should help Severino be more equipped for this national stage against the defending World Series champions.

"I think just going to Boston and pitching that game there probably helps him in this situation," Girardi said. "Struggles can really help a player grow up a lot. I think it really helped him to understand what he needs to do to be successful. You'd love to say that everyone can just come up and have success, but a lot of times the best learning experiences are in the struggles, and I think that's what he gained last year."

Things to know about this game

• Lester picked up his first victory of the season his last time out, limiting the Phillies to three runs (two earned) and four hits over five innings in an 8-3 Cubs victory on Tuesday at Wrigley. Lester walked five and struck out five in the outing, giving up a first-inning homer to Aaron Altherr.

• Matt Holliday has played just 10 career games at first base, all of them last year with the Cardinals, but the Yankees are leaning toward putting him there on Sunday to get his bat in the lineup. Holliday is 6-for-12 with a double and three RBIs lifetime vs. Lester. Chris Carter has been drawing starts at first base with Greg Bird on the disabled list.

• The Cubs will be facing a fresh arm, as Severino has never faced any member of their lineup. He has struck out 36 against six walks in 32 2/3 innings, but served up five runs and eight hits to the Blue Jays last time out, working 5 2/3 innings as he was handed his second loss of the year.

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Cubs.com
Maddon wants to see starters give 'pen a break
By Carrie Muskat

CHICAGO -- Last year, Cubs relievers didn't get much work, as the starters not only led the National League in ERA, but also innings pitched. This season, the bullpen has been busy, and Cubs relievers ranked fifth in the NL in innings pitched entering Saturday.

"If you look at our bullpen, it's easily the best bullpen in the National League on a lot of different fronts and they've been pitching too often," manager Joe Maddon said Saturday.

Chicago's starters ranked ninth in innings pitched, and to get things back on track, Maddon would like to see them go deeper in games. At this point last year, the Cubs had 21 quality starts. They had 10 heading into Saturday's game against the Yankees. Jake Arrieta led Cubs starters with three.

"At the end of the day, you have to have the starting pitchers well to play this game properly," Maddon said. He couldn't pinpoint one reason for the inability to go deeper in games, and said he does not feel there's any carryover from the fact the Cubs played in the postseason in back-to-back years.
"These guys just need one or two consecutive good starts and it'll start morphing into what it's supposed to look like," Maddon said. "It's May, and I think we're OK. I think they're fine. I don't think they're beat up mentally or have been pushed physically."

Worth noting

- Outfielder Jason Heyward did not start Saturday so he could receive treatment on a sore right knuckle injured when he was diving for a ball on Friday. Maddon said Heyward was available to pinch-hit Saturday.
- Would Maddon like to see Major League Baseball adopt an electronic way to call balls and strikes?

"I've been vacillating on that," Maddon said. "I love what's going on [with replay] on the bases. In Spring Training, when it wasn't there, you really found out how much you liked it being there. ... With balls and strikes, it's hard to tell."

Maddon wasn’t sure if a strike zone could be adjusted with an electronic device for each player’s height and how he stands in the batter’s box.

"I think a lot of what's occurring now, maybe some umpires are umpiring to get a good score based on how they're being evaluated, whatever," he said. "Maybe a group is umpiring the good old-fashioned way. I don't know the answer. I'm trying to figure it out myself. We're all looking for the perfect game all the time from an ump and that's not going to happen. We always talk about how pitchers and hitters have to adjust to an umpire."

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ESPNChicago.com
The surprising soundtrack behind Kris Bryant's hot streak
By Jesse Rogers

CHICAGO – One of the hottest hitters in the National League since the second week of the season is getting daily inspiration from a Disney movie, of all places. Kris Bryant, the Chicago Cubs' reigning MVP, has been listening to the soundtrack from "Moana" as part of his daily preparation, and the results have been pretty good. Since April 8, Bryant is hitting .364 with a .453 OBP and 1.120 OPS.

“It was on the plane on a road trip,” Bryant said. “I like Disney movies, so I watched it. It was good. The music was good. There’s something about Disney movies that make you feel good, you know?”

Bryant particularly likes the song The Rock performs in the movie -- Dwayne Johnson is his favorite actor -- but he enjoys the entire soundtrack and now listens to it before every game. Why a Disney soundtrack, Bryant was asked?

“People look at me and they’re like, ‘He’s got that calm demeanor,’ but I actually need to calm myself down,” he explained.

His locker-mate, Anthony Rizzo, “likes” the songs, as well (at least according to Bryant), though he was surprised to hear that Bryant listens to them so often. It’s almost become a superstition for the 25-year-old infielder.

“We all love the songs,” Bryant said. “I told them I’m listening to it and they’re like, ‘You are?’”

Bryant is a fan of Disney shows in general; both he and his wife are Netflix fans and movie buffs. Little did he know he would use "Moana" -- a computer-animated, children’s film about an ancient Polynesian curse and a young girl’s quest to reverse its course -- to motivate him in the batter’s box. It might seem a sophomoric superstition, but Bryant would be foolish to mess with it, given his recent production. Bryant was hitting .322 with six home runs and 16 RBIs entering Saturday’s game against the New York Yankees after beginning the season 0-for-14. That early-season slump was pre-"Moana," of course.
“I don’t know how they do it, how they’re so successful with it, but they do everything perfect,” Bryant said of Disney. “Their movies are never flops.”

ESPNChicago.com
Could Joe Girardi, not Joe Maddon, have broken the Cubs’ curse?
By Andrew Marchand

It was October 2012 and New York Yankees general manager Brian Cashman was prepared to let Joe Girardi go. Not only was Cashman willing to allow Girardi to return home to the Chicago Cubs, he was prepared to help move Girardi into the manager’s office at Wrigley Field.

With Girardi’s Yankees contract set to expire after the 2013 season, Cashman told him, “If you want to go to the Cubs, let me know.”

Girardi grew up a Cubs fan. In the ’70s, he and his dad would drive the two hours from Peoria, Illinois, to attend Cubs games and watch Girardi’s favorite players, Ron Santo and Jose Cardenal. In the ’80s, he attended Northwestern, where he and his future wife, Kim, would sit in the bleachers for day games.

Girardi was drafted by the Cubs in 1986; he made his major league debut at Wrigley in 1989. He was picked for his only All-Star team -- in 2000 -- as a Cub. All of this added personal appeal to the already enticing idea of becoming the manager who finally broke the Cubs’ curse.

The Cubs had lost 101 games in 2012, while the Yankees had won the American League East with 95 victories. But even at that point, Chicago looked as if it were going in the right direction because of its young talent.

What if Girardi had wanted to return to the Midwest? Cashman said he would have secretly begun his search for a new Yankees manager -- while working undercover for Girardi.

“I would have bid the price up,” Cashman said. “He would’ve gotten the most if his destination was there. I told him, ‘Let me know and I’ll help you get there.’ My interest was in keeping him. But if the endgame is there, let me in, so I can privately prepare to replace you if I’m forced to do something like that. And you can get the most money you can get.”

Ultimately, Girardi’s bond with the Bronx won out.

“New York has been home to us,” Girardi said. “As a baseball player, you move around a lot. The Yankees have been great to me. They have been loyal to me and I have been loyal to them. This is home for us. We have made it our home. I wanted to stay.”

It could have been Joe Girardi, instead of Joe Maddon, leading the Cubs to their first World Series since 1908. Instead, during Game 7 of the 2016 World Series, Girardi was fighting sleep as a rain delay stopped play not long after the Indians’ Rajai Davis’ home run off Aroldis Chapman.

Girardi was awake to witness a smiling Kris Bryant throw across the diamond to record the final out and clinch the Cubs’ title.

“I was happy for them,” Girardi said. “I think about all the people who have been waiting and waiting and waiting. My father waited and waited and never got to see it. I’m happy for the people who are Cubs fans because it is a long time coming.”

Girardi felt the pain of all those losing seasons as a kid. Even when he made it to the majors on April 4, 1989, the painful childhood memories echoed in his head. On Opening Day, the Cubs played the Phillies, who were led by the fearsome Mike Schmidt.
Schmidt just owned the Cubs. In his career, he played 138 games at Wrigley, hitting .307, smashing 50 homers and driving in 124 runs. Girardi felt nearly each and every one of them.

When Schmidt walked to the plate to begin the second inning, Girardi, the Cubs' catcher that day, could hardly believe it.

“I followed him the whole way,” Girardi said. “I couldn’t separate that I was on the same field as Mike Schmidt, or was I mad all the heartache he caused my family because he killed the Cubs -- killed them. It was just really, really weird.”

Girardi said that when Schmidt walked to the batter’s box, Girardi didn’t just stay behind the plate. Instead, he walked right behind Schmidt, like he was getting in line after him.

“He was probably like, ‘What is this kid doing?’” Girardi said. “I was in complete awe. The numbers that he had put up, just thinking about [how] I’d seen him hit so many home runs against the Cubs, it was unbelievable.”

Schmidt hit another of his home runs against the Cubs, in the eighth inning off Calvin Schiraldi. Girardi went 2-for-3, though, and the Cubs won 5-4.

Girardi hung around for four seasons in Chicago before being picked by the Colorado Rockies in the 1992 expansion draft. In 1995, he was traded to the Yankees for Mike DeJean. After winning three rings with the Yankees and forging an important relationship with Cashman, Girardi returned to Chicago as a free agent after the 1999 season. In his first year back with the Cubs, he made his only All-Star team.

More than a decade later, Girardi had the chance to go back again to try to win one for the Cubs. He passed, but he's very satisfied with his choice.

“Any manager would like to win,” Girardi said. “They hadn’t won it in so long. I love where I’m at. I love what we are doing. I love the talent in our organization.”

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ESPNChicago.com
Brett Anderson has 2nd straight poor start, leaves with back injury
By Jesse Rogers

CHICAGO -- Cubs starter Brett Anderson left Saturday's game against the New York Yankees in the first inning with lower back tightness and likely will be placed on the disabled list, manager Joe Maddon said after his team's 11-6 loss.

Anderson, 29, has a history of back problems and was able to get only one batter out while giving up five runs Saturday. Over his past two starts he's thrown a total of 1 2/3 innings while giving up 12 earned runs.

"It's two starts in a row, and he probably felt something in his back tonight, but we just can't continue on that path right now," Maddon said.

Anderson said he felt something in his back while fielding a bunt by Yankees center fielder Aaron Hicks, then he threw awkwardly toward first base, bouncing the ball past Anthony Rizzo.

"Make kind of a weird play, then it stiffens up, and with my history of back problems and everything considered, I didn't want to make it worse on everybody," Anderson said. "Felt it was time to get out of there. Couldn't make the pitches I needed to. The last two starts here at home have been embarrassing from my perspective."

Anderson’s quick performance against the Phillies last Monday (1 1/3 innings) and then again on Saturday taxed the Cubs’ bullpen. In anticipation of a short start the team called up reliever Rob Zastryzny on Saturday afternoon
while designating popular outfielder Matt Szczur for assignment. The move meant the Cubs had nine relievers in the bullpen for the game, though Maddon said they'll rearrange some things before Sunday's contest against the Yankees, as Zastryzny threw 88 pitches in relief.

"Moving Szczur out of here because this might occur, that was the tough part of the day," Maddon said. "That's the part that lingers with you."

Anderson has had two back surgeries in recent years and has been injury-prone since making it to the majors with the Oakland A's in 2009. The Cubs have some time before they need to replace him in the rotation as they have off days on Thursday and the following Monday, so the need for a fifth starter could be pushed. Maddon mentioned two names as possible replacements.

"(Mike) Montgomery, and (Eddie) Butler down at Triple-A is throwing the ball really well, so we definitely have good options," Maddon said.

Montgomery was discussed as a starter over the winter until the Cubs signed Anderson to a one-year, $3.5 million deal. He's pitched out of the bullpen so far this season. Butler was acquired from the Rockies late in the winter and is off to a good start at Triple-A Iowa. He lowered his ERA to 1.17 after six shutout innings on Saturday against Memphis. The Cubs need all the help they can get in the rotation as they have a 11.40 first-inning ERA this season and overall are ranked 11th in the National League after leading from start to finish last season.

"I really anticipate good out of the other guys," Maddon said. "Listen, we lost badly tonight. Last night we were ahead for eight innings. We just came off a three-game winning streak. The sky is not falling for me. We just had a bad night."

As for Anderson, it's unclear what his future is with the Cubs. He's hopeful his back injury is minor and he can get back to getting guys out. His ERA ballooned to 8.18 after Saturday's outing.

"When I'm healthy and everything is going right, I think I'm a good pitcher," he said. "It's a combination of things. Everything that can go wrong has gone wrong here lately, especially at home.

"It's embarrassing. It's pretty much the only way I can put it."

To make matters worse for him, catcher Miguel Montero pitched a clean ninth inning, lasting two more outs than Anderson did.

"Whenever the backup catcher gets more outs than you, that's obviously not a positive," Anderson said in less than a joking manner.

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ESPNChicago.com
Cubs' Joe Maddon intrigued by robot umpires to call balls, strikes
By Jesse Rogers

CHICAGO -- Cubs manager Joe Maddon says he's "vacillating" on the idea of using "robot" umpires to call balls and strikes after a week in which he thought a couple of strike zones were too tight for his pitchers.

"Once again the umpire had a ball [tight] zone," Maddon said after a 3-2 loss to the New York Yankees on Friday. "That's twice this week we've been victimized by really tight strike zones."

Maddon is intrigued by using technology behind the plate but isn't close to being convinced either way.

"I'm really vacillating on this right now," he said before Saturday's game. "A lot of what's occurring right now, maybe some umpires are umpiring to get a good score just based on how they are being evaluated; whereas,
there's a group umpiring the good old-fashioned way, so there's still some inconsistencies with that. I don't know the answer. I'm trying to figure out the answers myself."

The Cubs have often indicated they might be at more of a disadvantage when it comes to inconsistent strike zones due to their discerning eye at the plate, as they led all of baseball in walks last season.

"The ball and strike component, I'm fascinated by it," Maddon continued. "I am, because normally I'm pretty good regarding what I think. I'm going back and forth on this one. I don't know."

Maddon was convinced quickly that replay on the base paths was the right decision, so now he's turned his attention to what the umpires are doing behind the plate.

"I love what's going on, on the bases," he said. "I admit that. In spring training when it wasn't there, you really found out how much you liked it being there.

"This [balls and strikes] is a tough one. You could [go] on and on, around and around. I think we nailed it on the bases, but actually calling balls and strikes, I can't really come up with a solid conclusion even for myself."

Maddon admits there could be a "careful what you wish for" effect if robots began calling balls and strikes, as no one can say right now what the "unintended consequences" would be -- but the veteran manager is open to exploring the notion.

"From a hitter's and pitcher's perspective, all you want to know, what a strike is, consistently," Maddon said. "At the end of the day I'd like to know more about this electronic thing as we move forward."

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CSNChicago.com
Yankees Knock Around Brett Anderson As Another Painful First Inning Sinks Cubs
By Vinnie Duber

The start of games seems to be the most difficult part for Cubs starters.

A disturbing trend of Cubs starting pitchers giving up first-inning runs — and a lot of them — continued Saturday night, as the visiting New York Yankees knocked around Brett Anderson for five first-inning tallies, effectively finishing this one as it started. Down in another big hole before they even stepped to the plate, the Cubs stumbled to an ugly 11-6 loss at Wrigley Field.

Joe Maddon spent the bulk of his pregame press conference Saturday detailing why his starting pitchers need to be pitching deeper into games, but he sure didn't get what he wanted out of Anderson, who followed up Monday's performance — in which he recorded just four outs against the Philadelphia Phillies — by surrendering five runs on six hits while throwing just 23 pitches to only seven batters before exiting with an injury and only one out on the board.

"No one feels worse than I do," Anderson said after the game. "I wanted to have a quality start based on my last outing. I didn't get very deep into the game, obviously.

"Need to figure some things out, get healthy and get some more people out going forward. It's as simple as that."

That first inning was a hit parade for the Yankees, six of the game's first seven batters reaching via a base knock. Brett Gardner, Starlin Castro and Chase Headley all doubled off Anderson, the latter two driving in a combined three runs.

Cubs pitchers entered with an already oversized 10.24 first-inning ERA through the team's first 29 games. After five runs in the first inning of Game No. 30, that ERA is an even more grotesque 11.40.
Anderson entered with a 6.23 ERA and saw it jump up to 7.83 on Saturday night. Maddon said after the game that Anderson will likely head to the disabled list. Throughout his career, it’s been injuries that have slowed Anderson down. This season, the on-field performance hasn’t gone well, either.

"It’s a combination of getting healthy and figuring out how to get people out again," Anderson said. "Right now, every ball that gets put in play seems like it’s a hit, and every ball that’s put in play seems like it’s a run.

"Last two starts at home for me, personally, have been embarrassing."

But it wasn’t just the starting pitching, as this was an all-around stinker for the Cubs. Anderson committed a throwing error that allowed the Yankees’ first run to score. Two innings later, a ball bounced over Kris Bryant’s glove at third base, and the Yankees crossed the plate for the sixth time.

Cubs relievers were tagged for six runs, five of them earned, with the Yankees showing a pair of pitchers called up in the last two days why they’re called the Bronx Bombers. Castro blasted a two-run homer off Felix Pena in the fourth to make it 8-0. Rob Zastryzny, called up before Saturday’s game in a bullpen-strengthening move that saw outfielder Matt Szczur designated for assignment, gave up a three-run homer to Aaron Hicks that made it 11-3 in the eighth.

In how bad of shape is the Cubs’ bullpen right now? Miguel Montero pitched the ninth inning for the North Siders.

The Cubs’ offense didn’t do much against Yankees starter Jordan Montgomery, who allowed just three hits in his 6.2 innings of work.

It didn’t mean Cubs hitters didn’t score, though. But unfortunately for them it all came after the Yankees jumped out to an 8-0 lead.

Albert Almora Jr. and Javier Baez came home on ground balls in the fifth, with Baez scoring thanks to a Didi Gregorius throwing error. In the seventh, Ben Zobrist chased home Jon Jay with a triple into the left-field corner. Baez plated Addison Russell with an RBI hit in the eighth, and two more runs scored when a Montero hit bounced off the glove of Rob Refsnyder at second base.

But for all of Maddon’s chatting about his confidence that his starting staff will turn things around, the Cubs needed a whopping 8.2 innings out of their bullpen Saturday night. This at the end of an already taxing week for the relief corps.

"They need to get in the groove," Montero said of the starting rotation. "And I think the whole team needs to get in a groove right now. For the hitters, obviously we’re putting a lot of pressure on them because for the most part this year we’ve been coming from behind because in the first inning (the opponents) score some runs. And it’s hard to come back all the time, even though we have done it quite a few times this year. But it’s not easy. And it’s something we need to get better at in order to give us a chance early in the game. Put some zeroes on the board, and that way our hitters feel a little bit better going in to do some offense."

Jon Lester takes the hill Sunday night to try and avoid a sweep at the hands of the Yankees. He’ll also try to become just the second Cubs starter this week to get out of the sixth inning.

Maddon, who preached patience during his pregame talk about the starting rotation, showed the same kind of stay-the-course approach after the game.

"Listen, we lost badly tonight," he said before shifting to the positives. "Last night, we were ahead for eight innings. And we just came off a three-game winning streak.

"The sky is not falling for me. We just had a bad night."
"It's still my goal to make this team out of camp," Eddie Butler said near the end of spring training, sounding very confident and a little delusional, or the type of attitude needed to make the leap from prospect and survive in this game. "I'm doing everything I possibly can to try to force their hand."

The Cubs talked up Butler as the next great hope for their pitching infrastructure, an ideal change-of-scenery guy to get out of Coors Field in a minor deal with the Colorado Rockies. But the entire fifth/sixth starter conversation revolved around Brett Anderson and Mike Montgomery — and the Cubs hoped to get through more than 19 percent of their schedule before the rotation became a problem.

Anderson forced the issue during Saturday night's 11-6 loss to the New York Yankees at Wrigley Field, exiting in the first inning with a back issue that will likely put him on the disabled list for the 10th time in his career. The injury-prone lefty is 1-6 in quality starts with an 8.18 ERA as a Cub.

Now what?

"You got Montgomery right here," manager Joe Maddon said. "Butler down in Triple-A, I hear, is throwing the ball really well. We definitely have good options."

Montgomery, the lefty swingman who got the final out in last year's World Series Game 7, might have more value at the moment out of the bullpen, where he's put together 14 consecutive scoreless innings.

The Cubs could eventually trade for pitching from their surplus of hitters at Iowa — Ian Happ, Jeimer Candelario, Victor Caratini — but three weeks out from Memorial Day weekend isn't the time to make deals.

Remember when the Cubs "jumped the market" as sellers in 2013? Flipping Scott Feldman to the Baltimore Orioles in the Jake Arrieta/Pedro Strop heist didn't happen until July 2 that summer.

It says something about the state of the farm system - plus the nonlinear nature of developing arms and the difficulty in pitching through mile-high altitude — that the Cubs could pin their hopes on a guy who's 6-16 with a 6.50 ERA across parts of three seasons in the big leagues.

But Butler does have pedigree as a supplemental first-round draft pick (2012), All-Star Futures Game selection (2013) and Baseball America's No. 24 overall prospect (2014).

That sense of momentum in Arizona carried over to Des Moines, where Butler threw six scoreless innings on Saturday night against the Triple-A affiliate of the St. Louis Cardinals, slicing his ERA to 1.17 through five starts.

Sooner or later, the Cubs are going to get another look at Butler, but they will ultimately need Jon Lester, Jake Arrieta, John Lackey and Kyle Hendricks to kick-start a 16-14 team with a 4.79 rotation ERA.

"My biggest concern is always health (and) if they're trying to pitch through issues," Maddon said. "None of them are. With Anderson right now, maybe he has been. But we're going to eliminate that for now."

The sound of boos filled Wrigley Field in the first inning as Brett Anderson walked off the mound Saturday night with assistant athletic trainer Ed Halbur, Cubs fans already on edge with the New York Yankees leading by five runs in another national TV game.
Pitching coach Chris Bosio pointed to his side as he looked at home plate umpire Alan Porter while manager Joe Maddon motioned toward what had become a nine-man bullpen, a clear sign the Cubs didn't trust Anderson against The Bronx Bombers.

"It's embarrassing," Anderson said at least four times in the interview room after an 11-6 loss to the Yankees in front of a disappearing crowd of 40,735.

Less than 30 minutes before first pitch, a voice on the press box loudspeaker announced that the Cubs designated outfielder Matt Szczur for assignment and promoted lefty Rob Zastryzny from Triple-A Iowa, the day after sending reliever Justin Grimm to Des Moines and calling up right-hander Felix Pena.

The chain reaction started five days earlier, when Anderson couldn't finish the second inning during a 10-2 loss to the Philadelphia Phillies, taxing the bullpen at a time when the rest of the rotation still appears to be trying to ramp up after back-to-back playoff runs into October.

Anderson called that "kind of a colossal failure." This led to Miguel Montero tipping his cap as he ran off the field after throwing a scoreless ninth inning, a distraction from an ugly loss.

"Whenever the backup catcher gets more outs than you, that's obviously not a positive," Anderson said. "You need to figure some things out and get healthy."

The Cubs described Anderson as being evaluated for "low back tightness" and expect him to go on the disabled list after a thumping Yankee lineup made this look like batting practice, hitting the ball all over Wrigley Field.

Anderson said he felt his back stiffen up when he fielded an Aaron Hicks bunt and bounced the ball away from first baseman Anthony Rizzo, allowing the first run to score. At that point, a Fox Sports camera got a classic reaction shot of a visibly annoyed Maddon, the normally cool manager shaking his head in the dugout.

Combine Anderson's last two starts and the lefty has gotten five outs and given up 12 runs, allowing 13 hits and a walk to the 19 batters he faced.

"We just can't continue on that path right now," Maddon said.

So much for the best defense in the majors last year backing up the guy who put up a 66.7 groundball percentage and made 31 starts for the Los Angeles Dodgers in 2015.

The extensive medical file - Anderson has already undergone two surgical procedures on his lower back and landed on the disabled list nine times since 2010 - led to a one-year, incentive-laden $3.5 million deal this winter as the Cubs tried to reshape the rotation that would defend their World Series title.

"With my history, you never want to take it too lightly," Anderson said. "It's a combination of getting healthy and figuring out how to get people out again, because right now every ball that's put in play seems like it's a hit, and every ball that's put in play seems like it's a run.

"I haven't given us a chance."

Anderson said this issue was on a different side than his previous back injuries, that this time he didn't feel pain shooting down his leg. Anderson doesn't believe it's a disc problem and hopes it can be written off as spasms. But it's time for the Cubs to find the next man up.

"Everything that can go wrong has gone wrong here lately," Anderson said. "I still think when I'm healthy and everything's going right, for the most part, I'm a good pitcher.

"I still have confidence in myself. I could sulk and be mad at myself, but I got to deal with it. I wouldn't be in the league this long if I hadn't been able to put some things behind me and deal with the cards I've been dealt."
The Cubs could see this coming, creating a nine-man bullpen by designating outfielder Matt Szczur for assignment and promoting lefty Rob Zastryzny from Triple-A Iowa before Saturday night’s 11-6 loss to the New York Yankees at Wrigley Field.

Zastryzny became insurance against Brett Anderson and a Yankee lineup that leads the American League in runs scored, homers, on-base percentage and slugging percentage. The bullpen has been feeling the domino effect since five days ago, when Anderson got only four outs in a 10-2 loss to the Philadelphia Phillies, part of a deeper problem where the Cubs haven’t been getting enough innings out of their rotation.

Zastryzny earned a World Series ring after last year’s impressive big-league debut, putting up a 1.13 ERA in 16 innings and becoming the first pitcher drafted by the Theo Epstein administration to play for the Cubs.

A two-sport star at Villanova University, Szczur could have pursued opportunities in the NFL but chose baseball after getting drafted in the fifth round in 2010 and agreeing to a $1.5 million bonus. Buried on the depth chart in Chicago, Szczur is out of minor-league options and should draw trade interest from a team that might ultimately advance his career.

“It’s excruciating,” manager Joe Maddon said. “He’s everything you want in a teammate. He’s always upbeat. He’s always ready to play. He knows he’s not playing, but he’s always upbeat and ready to go. And then he supports everybody around him. You want him on your team. You want him in your organization. He’s that kind of a guy.”

“What’s the deal with the Cubs’ bullpen?”

That might have been a common query in barrooms and basements all over Chicagoland after Friday afternoon’s result at Wrigley Field, when Brett Gardner turned a Cubs win into a victory for the visiting New York Yankees with a two-out, go-ahead home run off Hector Rondon in the ninth inning.

But a better question is this: “What’s the deal with the Cubs’ starting rotation?”

No, it wasn’t Kyle Hendricks who coughed up that two-run lead Friday. But once again a Cubs starter failed to get out of the sixth inning. Through the first 29 games of this season, every Cubs starter is averaging fewer than six innings an outing. That cumulative total of short work by the starting pitchers is having a detrimental effect on the relief corps, says Cubs manager Joe Maddon. And it’s the biggest issue on a team that while still in first place isn’t exactly setting the world on fire the same way it did last spring.

“The biggest thing for me is just to get our starters more deeply into the game,” Maddon said ahead of Saturday’s game against the Yankees. “As of right now, if you look at our bullpen, actually look at the numbers, easily the best bullpen in the National League on a lot of different fronts. And they’ve actually been pitching too often, and that was personified yesterday by the fact we didn’t have enough guys left for that game.

“So really to get this all right, we’ve got to get our starting pitching straightened out. Last year, if you remember, the bullpen didn’t pitch a whole lot because the starters were so good, and I thought that’s what kept the bullpen
really solid through the course of the season. And with the starting pitching pitching so well, there was not as much emphasis of having to score so many runs. They were that good.

“I think it all starts with the starting pitching. When we get these guys back on solid ground being like they can be, the hitting’s going to show up and the bullpen won’t be utilized so much. That’s always, for me, the equation for success. ... At the end of the day, you’ve got to starting pitch well to really play this game properly.”

As Maddon pointed out, the Cubs’ bullpen has been one of baseball’s best. The team entered Saturday’s game with the best relief ERA in the NL, at 2.84. And no relief corps in baseball is holding opposing hitters to a lower batting average than the minuscule .191 mark batters are putting up against the guys dispatched from underneath the left-field bleachers.

But Cubs starters rank just 19th in baseball in innings pitched (159.1), while Cubs relievers have thrown the seventh-most innings in the game (104.2).

“When people have always talked in the past about pitchers who throw 200 innings, ‘Why is that so important?’ Everything we’re talking about is the complementary positive effects of starting pitchers pitching more innings,” Maddon said. “You’re able to do what you want to do at the latter part of the game and you don’t wear people out. But when they’re called upon, the relievers, to do more than that consistently, it makes it difficult.”

There’s been no better evidence of that than this week. Brett Anderson, also Saturday night’s starter, recorded just four outs before exiting Monday’s game against the Philadelphia Phillies. Jon Lester and John Lackey went just five innings in their respective starts in that series with Philadelphia, and Hendricks went just 5.1 innings Friday against the Yankees. That’s a lot of innings for the bullpen to pick up. Throw in the offense’s penchant for scoring late and playing close games, and the late-inning portion of the Cubs’ bullpen gets more work, too. Closer Wade Davis pitched Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. Koji Uehara pitched Wednesday and Thursday. Pedro Strop pitched Thursday and Friday. Carl Edwards pitched Tuesday and Thursday.

That kind of usage limits Maddon’s options late in games like Friday’s. So even if he did want to give Rondon some help after he put two men on base ahead of Gardner, the option wasn’t there.

The Cubs swapped Justin Grimm for Felix Pena before Friday’s game. They added another arm to the bullpen before Saturday’s, bringing up Rob Zastryzny and designating outfielder Matt Szczur for assignment.

It all stems from the starting pitchers getting early hooks.

“That’s the perfect example, not having enough guys available to really work the end of that game,” Maddon said. “But that’s just the way it happens sometimes. And that’s based on starting pitching not getting deeply and having to utilize too many folks.

“It’s part of the nature of the game over the course of the season. But we expect that good number from the starting pitching on a consistent basis. I see this working its way through. The innings are going to pick up.”

What’s the solution?

Maddon preached patience, which isn’t bad advice in a 162-game season. He went through the list of Cubs’ starting pitchers and said he didn’t see much difference between last season’s championship campaign and this season. Only Hendricks, whose dip in velocity has been well chronicled in the early going of 2017, warranted a mention.

And while one could understand any fatigue from back-to-back runs through October, Maddon said it’s not that either. He’s willing to ride things out. And considering three of the Cubs’ five starters have finished in the top three in Cy Young voting in the past two seasons, it seems like a perfectly reasonable strategy.

“We’re in May, so I think we’re OK by now. I think they’re fine,” Maddon said. “I don’t think they’re beat up mentally, I don’t think they’ve been pushed physically. It’s always a concern when you play — not only just last
year but two seasons in a row — deeply that you have that among your pitchers, no doubt. But I’m not seeing, even speaking to them I’m not hearing wear and tear.

“I’m just going to be patient and see it evolve back to what it’s supposed to look like.”

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Chicago Tribune
Red Sox and Yankees bring Cubs back to earth in interleague showdowns
By Paul Sullivan

Back-to-back weekend series against the Red Sox and Yankees have provided the Cubs with an early-season litmus test, the kind that usually doesn’t matter in the long run.

Still, it shows how the Cubs stack up for now against two of the best teams from baseball's strongest division, and the results aren't promising.

After losing 11-6 to the Yankees on Saturday on a night when Brett Anderson was rocked for five runs and booed off the mound after retiring one batter, the Cubs have dropped four of five to their American League East foes.

Do these two series mean anything, or are they mere blips in the marathon season?

"The sky is not falling," manager Joe Maddon said. "Please."

Kris Bryant said beforehand he doesn't like comparing the Cubs to other teams.

"I've always liked the idea of a nameless, faceless opponent and just go out there and play the game," he said.

OK. But neither the Red Sox nor the Yankees are nameless or faceless teams like the Padres or the A's. These are two historic franchises the Cubs are trying to emulate, and for good reason.

"At times it's hard (to ignore the opponent), playing at Fenway Park and playing against the Yankees," Bryant said. "But the interleague games, they're just weird to me because you never get a chance to see them. They just have a different feel to them.

"Obviously there is going to be a good team coming out of (the AL East) and they can really hit. But I think we'll stack up fine."

The Cubs quickly moved on from Saturday's drubbing, and Maddon inserted Miguel Montero in the ninth to save the pen and for comic relief. Montero pitched a scoreless inning and tipped his cap to the fans.

"The crowd gave me a little standing ovation there," he said. "I put a zero on the board. An ugly one, but a zero."

The Red Sox and Yankees are both possible opponents the Cubs could face in the World Series, if they manage to get back. Of course no one is thinking that far ahead, with the possible exception of every single Cubs fan.

The Cubs are 16-14, still talented enough to believe they will go on a long run but mediocre enough to need some help, particularly another starting pitcher.

They made one significant move before Saturday's game, designating outfielder Matt Szczur for assignment.

Rob Zastryzny was called up to help in the bullpen, and was put to use immediately thanks to Anderson's start. The Cubs may have to make another move soon.

Anderson, who left with lower back tightness and has an 8.18 ERA, including 15.09 over his last four starts, is expected to be placed on the DL.
Saturday's nationally televised game was a dud for Fox Sports and the sellout crowd of 40,735. It was one of the three games in the newly created "diamond tier" of prices, the highest-priced tickets created to take advantage of the Yankees being on the schedule.

For only $189, plus the 12 percent amusement tax, fans sitting in infield club boxes were able to watch Anderson dig a huge first-inning hole, a recurring theme in 2017. The starters began the night ranked 22nd in the majors, and the starters’ ERA rose to 4.79 after Anderson flopped.

"These guys just have to get one or two nice, consecutive starts in a row, then all of a sudden it starts morphing into what it’s supposed to look like," Maddon said. "I just think this is a patience thing."

With the exception of Saturday's game, the rest of the Red Sox and Yankees series have been fun to watch, and the atmosphere has been reminiscent of October baseball.

"It's hard to really compare it to last year because everything was just overdone (in ’16)," Bryant said. "It was loud every game, and some of the craziest games I've played myself."

But it's hard to get loud when the Cubs are down five before the first $10 beer is consumed.

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**Chicago Tribune**

Catcher Miguel Montero a hit — as a ninth-inning relief pitcher for Cubs

By Paul Skrbina

The catcher outpitched the starting pitcher Saturday night at Wrigley Field.

And what was left of the crowd of 40,735 loved it.

Miguel Montero finished what Brett Anderson barely started during the Cubs' 11-6 loss to the Yankees.

Montero, the catcher, pitched the ninth inning and allowed no runs, two walks and an I'm-sorry pitch behind Chris Carter's head — he apologized to Carter — before tipping his cap in response to the standing ovation he received afterward.

"I put a zero on the board," Montero said. "An ugly one, but a zero."

In contrast, the Yankees hit Anderson hard. The left-hander was booed as he walked off the field with a trainer and a back injury that likely will land him on the disabled list. He retired only one batter while allowing five runs on five hits one start after going just 11/3 innings and giving up seven runs on seven hits.

The Cubs' bullpen has been taxed to the tune of 34 innings since Monday, not counting Montero's appearance.

Montero said he put a bug in manager Joe Maddon's ear a few weeks ago about possibly pitching. He allowed four hits and a run in 11/3 innings last season, his only other appearance.

"We needed that, like oxygen," Maddon said. "It's somewhat entertaining in an ugly game."

Out of zone: Ball zones. Strike zones. Twilight zones.

They are all the same to Maddon, at least lately.

"Once again the umpire had a 'ball zone,'" Maddon said Friday after his team's 3-2 loss to the Yankees. "That's twice this week we have been victimized by really tight strike zones."
"I know it works both ways, but I really thought it had some impact on the game."

A few days earlier, Maddon took issue with a plate umpire's zone in a game with the Phillies.

Maddon stopped short of supporting an automated strike zone, which would take the human element out of the equation if it came to pass.

But he said he has been coming around to that school of thought.

"Be careful what you wish for, unintended consequences — if there actually is an electronically controlled zone, which I've been speaking more in favor of recently," Maddon said.

Cubs right-hander Kyle Hendricks said after throwing 5 1/3 innings of shutout ball Friday that he went deep into some counts because of a small strike zone.

"I wasn't getting calls early in the game, which got me into some bad counts I had to work out of," Hendricks said.

Szczur cut: The Cubs added another arm to their bullpen before Saturday's game — and lost a pinch-hitter in the process.

Left-handed reliever Rob Zastryzny was recalled from Triple-A Iowa to help a tired bullpen that had logged 261 3/4 innings since Monday. Zastryzny is 0-1 with a save and a 6.88 ERA in 17 innings for Iowa this year. He was 1-0 with a 1.13 ERA and 17 strikeouts in 16 innings for the Cubs last season.

Utility man Matt Szczur, who was fifth in baseball with 12 pinch hits last year, was designated for assignment to make room for Zastryzny. Szczur is 4-for-19 with a double and three RBIs in 15 games this year.

Szczur was removed from the 40-man roster and can be traded or placed on waivers within the next seven days. After that, the Cubs can outright him to Iowa.

Welcome back, Pat: Northwestern football coach Pat Fitzgerald led the crowd at Wrigley Field during the singing of the seventh-inning stretch. Fitzgerald last sang the stretch there May 7, 2016, a day shy of one year ago.

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Chicago Tribune
Brett Anderson shelled again in Cubs' 11-6 loss to Yankees
By Paul Skrbina

Joe Maddon said he would be happy with five or six innings from starter Brett Anderson on Saturday against the Yankees.

Anderson ended up throwing about as many warmup pitches as actual pitches, though, during his third consecutive poor start.

The left-hander made 23 to seven batters, only one of which he retired, during the Cubs' 11-6 loss at Wrigley Field.

Anderson was showered with boos from most of the 40,735 in the crowd as he left the mound with his head down, his team down 5-0 and a trainer at his side because of what the team described as "low back tightness."

That, Maddon said, likely will land Anderson on the disabled list and move either Mike Montgomery or Triple-A Iowa's Eddie Butler into the rotation.

Anderson used the word "embarrassing" numerous times to describe his performance.
"Whenever the backup catcher gets more outs than you, that's not a positive," Anderson said in reference to Miguel Montero's scoreless ninth inning in which he allowed two walks.

Brett Gardner, who won Friday's game with a three-run homer, began Saturday's matchup with a double that hugged the right-field line after barely eluding a diving Anthony Rizzo at first base.

Anderson then fielded Aaron Hicks' weak bouncer but bounced the ball past Rizzo for an error that allowed Gardner to score, a play Anderson said could have tweaked his back. (Hicks had four hits for the Yankees, including a three-run homer in the eighth.)

Former Cub Starlin Castro doubled the Yankees' double and run totals with his run-scoring hit to right that made it 2-0. (Castro later homered and finished with three hits to raise his average to .381.)

Anderson struck out baseball's home run leader, Aaron Judge, but then allowed an RBI single to Gary Sanchez and a single to Didi Gregorius before Chase Headley doubled them both home to make it 5-0 and end Anderson's evening.

Anderson said he will be re-evaluated Sunday, but his recent performances could force the team to re-evaluate its decision to sign the oft-injured pitcher to a one-year, $3.5 million deal.

Anderson pitched just 111/3 innings for the Dodgers last year thanks to back surgery.

Anderson also has had elbow surgery, another back surgery and hand, finger and foot problems that have kept him on the disabled list more than off it during the previous six seasons.

"It's two starts in a row," Maddon said. "I know he probably felt something in his back tonight. We just can't continue on that path right now."

The Cubs bullpen has been forced to throw 161/3 innings in Anderson's last two starts.

Anderson gave up seven runs, seven hits and a walk in 11/3 innings Monday against the Phillies.

The start before that he gave up five hits and three runs — one earned — in six innings but also walked six.

In all, he has allowed 24 of the last 47 batters he has faced to reach base via hit or walk in his last three starts.

Anderson, who competed with Montgomery for the final spot in the Cubs rotation, said in March he would do whatever was asked of him.

"Can't have a (worse) year than I had last year," he said in reference to recent injuries. "But if I can do my part, whether it be in the bullpen or every five days as a starter, I will."

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Chicago Tribune
Cubs designate Matt Szczur for assignment, recall Rob Zastryzny from Triple-A Iowa
By Paul Sullivan

The Cubs designated outfielder Matt Szczur for assignment before Saturday's game.

Szczur, a fifth-round pick in the 2010 draft, was hitting .211 with three RBI in 15 games, playing sparingly.

The Cubs called up left-hander Rob Zastryzny from Triple-A Iowa.

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Brett Anderson pressed an arm against his lower back and walked slowly off the mound with a trainer.

Forgive Cubs fans if they left their sympathy cards at home. After watching Anderson give up five runs and record only one out, they showered the left-hander with boos as he retreated down the dugout steps.

“Nobody feels worse than I do,” Anderson said.

It could be awhile before Anderson pitches again on the North Side. He likely will go on the 10-day disabled list because of a stiff back, which will be re-evaluated in the next couple of days.

Another miserable first inning cost the Cubs in an 11-6 loss to the Yankees on Saturday. The Cubs (16-14) dropped their second straight game and were forced to dig deep into their bullpen yet again — so deep that 33-year-old catcher Miguel Montero pitched a wild but scoreless ninth inning.

In his sixth start, Anderson (2-2) didn’t even last as long as Montero. He posted the shortest outing by a Cubs starting pitcher since Ryan Dempster lasted one-third of an inning on April 28, 2011.

“Whenever the backup catcher gets more outs than you, that’s obviously not a positive,” said Anderson, who described his performance as embarrassing. “I need to figure some things out and get healthy and get some more people out going forward. It’s as simple as that.”

Anderson allowed hits to six of the seven Yankees batters he faced. He also committed an error as he spun toward first base and fired a throw down the right-field line to allow the game’s first run.

By the time Anderson walked off the field, his ERA had climbed from 6.23 to 8.18. In his previous two outings, he has allowed 12 earned runs on 13 hits in 18 innings.

Manager Joe Maddon praised Felix Pena and Rob Zastryzny, who combined to pitch 7 2/3 innings of relief. The duo prevented the rest of a tired bullpen from logging more innings.

As for Anderson, Maddon made no declarations other than to say a trip to the disabled list was likely.

“We just can’t continue on that path right now,” Maddon said.

To replace Anderson, the Cubs could move left-hander Mike Montgomery from the bullpen to the starting rotation. Another option is right-hander Eddie Butler, who has pitched well for Class AAA Iowa.

The team’s latest nightmare start reinforced a troubling trend. Cubs starting pitchers have given up 38 earned runs in the first inning for an 11.40 ERA. From the second inning on, the rotation has a 3.25 ERA.

Maddon unfortunately has had to use the bullpen early on so far this season.

“Last year, if you remember, the bullpen didn’t pitch a whole lot because the starters were so good, and I thought that’s what kept the bullpen really solid during the course of the season,” Maddon said. “With the starting pitching doing so well, there was not as much emphasis of having to score so many runs because they were that good.

“I just think it always starts with the starting pitching. Once we get these guys back on solid ground being like they can be, the hitting is going to show up, and then the bullpen won’t be utilized so much. That’s always for me the equation for success.”

Maddon believes a turnaround could be imminent.
“I really see this working its way through,” Maddon said. “I think the hitting is going to pick up. I anticipate the defense to continue to be good and even better. And in the meantime, we’re doing OK.”

Except for Anderson.

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Chicago Sun-Times
Cubs recall Zastryzny, designate Szczur for assignment
By Tom Musick

A lack of quality starting pitching might have cost outfielder Matt Szczur his job with the Cubs.

The Cubs designated Szczur, 27, for assignment Saturday and recalled left-hander Rob Zastryzny from Class AAA Iowa. Zastryzny, 25, allowed three runs in four innings of relief in his season debut against the Yankees.

The Cubs needed a fresh arm for a bullpen that has been taxed recently by extra-inning games and ineffective starting pitchers. Zastryzny went 1-0 with a 1.13 ERA in eight appearances (one start) with the Cubs in 2016 and offers a long-relief option alongside southpaws Mike Montgomery and Brian Duensing.

Szczur is out of options and might be finished with the Cubs, who drafted him in the fifth round in 2010 and promoted him to the majors in 2014. He hit .211 (4-for-19) with one double and three RBI in 15 games this season and might be attractive to other teams looking for outfield depth.

“It’s excruciating,” manager Joe Maddon said. “He’s everything you want in a teammate. I wasn’t with him as long as [president] Theo [Epstein] and [general manager] Jed [Hoyer] had been, so it was really tough for those two guys.”

Szczur enjoyed more consistent playing time last season. He hit .259 with five home runs and 24 RBI in 107 games but didn’t appear in the playoffs as the Cubs won the World Series.

Maddon typically is pretty good at making up his mind. But when it comes to the possibility of robot umpires calling balls and strikes in the not-too-distant future, he freely admitted he keeps wavering on whether it would be good or bad for the game.

“This is a tough one,” Maddon said. “You could go on and on and round and round. I think we’ve nailed it on the bases, but actually calling balls and strikes, I can’t really come up with a solid conclusion.”

Maddon said many veteran umpires were skilled at understanding the nuances of the game. He wondered whether an electronic system would make too-rigid determinations based on a batter’s height or stance.

“The ball-and-strike component, I’m fascinated by it,” Maddon said.

On the bench

Outfielder Jason Heyward didn’t play because of a sore knuckle in his right index finger, but he was available, if needed.

Maddon said Heyward injured the knuckle on a dive in the series opener Friday. The rest came at a decent time for Heyward, who has one hit in his last 13 at-bats.

Outfielder Kyle Schwarber joined Heyward in the dugout a day after slamming his fifth homer. Jon Jay started in his place in left field, with Albert Almora Jr. in center and Ben Zobrist in right.

“Schwarber looked good [Friday], so I did not want to press it with a lefty [Jordan Montgomery] today,” Maddon said.
Maddon said Schwarber should be back in the lineup Sunday against right-hander Luis Severino.