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Ben Zobrist Breaks Down The 2017 Cubs So Far
By Patrick Mooney

Just as the Cubs invested $155 million in Jon Lester to stabilize their pitching staff, Ben Zobrist has absolutely been the right player at the right time on the hitting side, setting an example with his patient approach, taking pressure off the rest of the lineup and driving away with a 50th anniversary edition convertible Camaro for his World Series MVP performance.

Zobrist commands respect in the clubhouse as a self-made player with an unselfish attitude who will turn 36 later this month and hasn’t slowed down yet. It’s hard to find a Cub with better big-picture perspective, given his roots in downstate Illinois, long journey from undrafted to All-Star, history with manager Joe Maddon and collection of World Series rings.

Zobrist doesn’t buy the target-is-bigger theory for the defending champs. It’s the new normal for a marquee team that went into Tuesday’s doubleheader against the Colorado Rockies at Coors Field at 16-15 and in third place in the National League Central.

“It was pretty big last year as it was because of the moves in the offseason,” Zobrist said. “Everybody knows across the league how good we are, obviously, after watching last year. We’re kind of ‘the team’ to beat.

“If they’re going to beat any team – or say that they had a good series – they’re going to try to beat us. I think we’re getting everybody’s best. I felt like we were getting that in June last year, though.”

Zobrist has a unique ability to break down the team without overreacting or sugarcoating. He can criticize without making it personal and give context without making excuses.

As the Cubs faded last year – losing 15 of their last 20 games before the All-Star break – Zobrist explained the impact of a brutal schedule and how teams are “gunning for us” and suggested that trying to hit a Max Scherzer fastball 500 feet might not be a good idea.

When players started grumbling and second-guessing Maddon’s spring-training approach after the Cubs clinched the division title, Zobrist acknowledged the clubhouse frustration in a routine-oriented game and then pointed to the overall goal of staying fresh for October.

Even if the Cincinnati Reds and Milwaukee Brewers have made strides in their rebuilding programs, how much faith do you have in those small-market teams playing .500 through September, much less adding at the trade deadline and winning 85-plus games?
The Cubs possess the high-end talent and big-game experience to win playoff series, but a big idea behind this roster is having the redundancies and versatility to withstand the 162-game marathon.

“We were exhausted,” Zobrist said, after playing 24 games in 24 days last summer. “But everybody it seemed like was throwing their best games and we were just kind of getting everybody’s best for that middle of the season. As the year wore on and everybody got tired, it was harder to keep pace with us, because we were just so deep.

“We’ve started this year a little bit – obviously – more tired than we were last year and these other teams are all geared up to play us. And it’s just taken us longer to kind of get it going and really answer the bell, so to speak.”

The pitching is an immediate concern and a long-term issue. Brett Anderson is on the disabled list again with an 8.18 ERA and Jake Arrieta and John Lackey are positioned to become free agents after this season. The Theo Epstein regime is still waiting to produce an impact homegrown pitcher.

But right now it’s hard to find a team more heavily and as successfully invested in offense. All the answers for this lineup will eventually have to come from within.

The Cubs have already played 13 one-run games, four that went into extra innings and five that ended in walk-off fashion. The Cubs have so far played only three games in a stadium with a roof (Miller Park) and zero in a warm-weather city. The first-pitch temperature at Wrigley Field has been 50 degrees or below 11 times through 16 home games.

“It’s tough to get bats going in any of that,” Zobrist said. “I think some of that’s just getting in the flow, kind of getting the feel of a new season.

“We’ll score a lot of runs (as) everybody gets hot. ‘KB’ (Kris Bryant) now is getting hot. (Anthony) Rizzo is going to get hot. All of us are going to get hot. And when it happens, it’s going to be scary how many runs we score.”

CSNChicago.com
Cubs Call Up Jeimer Candelario For Doubleheader In Colorado
By Tony Andracki

The Cubs called up Jeimer Candelario as part of their day-night doubleheader against the Rockies Tuesday in Colorado.

Candelario — one of the organization’s top prospects — turned heads in spring training and has kept right on raking at Triple-A Iowa. In 28 games in 2017, the 23-year-old infielder has hit .340 with a 1.093 OPS while crushing 19 extra-base hits (12 doubles, four homers, three triples) and 22 RBI.

The switch-hitting Candelario has seen time at both third base (23 games) and first base (six games) in the minors. He is not in the starting lineup for Game 1, but may spell either Kris Bryant or Anthony Rizzo on the corners in Game 2.

As part of MLB rules, each team receives the option of adding a 26th man to the roster for doubleheaders.

Candelario made his big-league debut in 2016, going 1-for-11 in five games.

Chicago Tribune
Cubs’ Jason Heyward eager to return from disabled list
By Mark Gonzales
Most of the swelling in Jason Heyward's right index finger has subsided to the point where the Cubs' outfielder believes he can return from the disabled list after serving the minimum 10 days.

"I asked to swing, but we're going to make sure I get the pain out of it first," Heyward said late Tuesday night.

Heyward injured the finger while making a diving catch Friday but was unable to play the next two games. That caused the Cubs to take the safe route and place Heyward on the 10-day DL, which will cause him to miss this weekend's St. Louis series but return in time for the Cubs' homestand.

Heyward likes that the 10-day DL allows him to stay with the team and get treatment and stay in the loop, as opposed to the 15-day DL that was shortened as part of the new collective bargaining agreement.

But the discomfort was once so acute that Heyward was bypassed in favor of pitcher Kyle Hendricks as a pinch-hitter against the New York Yankees on Sunday night.

"If you heard me in the dugout when I heard Kyle was gong to hit, you you had to (hear) some expletives," Heyward quipped.

Heyward said he can grip a bat but still feels some discomfort on the follow through on his swing.

"It's come a long way since (the injury)," Heyward said.

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Chicago Tribune
Cubs gain split but poor command baffles Jake Arrieta as his woes linger
By Mark Gonzales

His velocity is down, and his pitches are up.

But Jake Arrieta calmly insists his looming free agency hasn't been a factor in his early struggles that were magnified Tuesday during a 10-4 loss to the Rockies in the first game of a doubleheader at Coors Field.

"I'm not worried about the contract year," Arrieta said after lasting only 3 2/3 innings — his shortest outing in 105 starts as a Cub. "I'm worried about being healthy and taking the ball every fifth day. If I'm able to do that, the results in the long run will play in my favor. I know that for sure.

"Financially, things will work out anyway. I don't put a whole lot of time and effort and energy into my free agency. I'm here now to try to win games for the team. I think guys respect that and teams respect that."

In the second game, John Lackey joined Pedro Martinez (Expos, 1997) as the only opposing starting pitchers to throw seven shutout innings and strike out 10 here as he led the Cubs to an 8-1 victory.

"Starting pitching drives the engine," manager Joe Maddon said. "Do not be deceived."

Jeimer Candelario, promoted from Triple-A Iowa for the second game as at 26th player, ripped a single that started a five-run second and capped the rally with a bases-loaded walk. Candelario may stick for Wednesday, with reliever Dylan Floro a candidate to be sent down after throwing 4 1/3 innings in relief of Arrieta.

Arrieta's dominance throughout his 2015 National League Cy Young Award winning season and his 18-win 2016 has vanished. Arrieta has allowed 45 hits in 38 2/3 innings and his ERA has swelled to 5.35.

In two career starts at Coors Field, Arrieta has allowed 14 earned runs on 22 hits in 8 2/3 innings.

"I didn't do my job," Arrieta said after his short outing. "It was a pretty poor performance on my part."
Arrieta struck out three during his brief stint, and the lack of swinging strikes was apparent to Maddon.

"There’s something different at the plate, they’re not missing it as often," Maddon said. "That’s what I’m seeing. The velocity is not the same, just looking at a (radar) gun."

This marked the second time in three starts that Arrieta failed to pitch five innings, but Maddon insisted that neither Arrieta nor the other three starters from last season — Jon Lester, Lackey and Kyle Hendricks — have expressed any kind of soreness.

Maddon, however, did say that regaining velocity can be a year-long struggle, and the returning four starters pitched in all three layers of the 2016 postseason.

"If something was bothering them, I would be more concerned," Maddon said. "But I’m not hearing anyone is hurting."

Meanwhile, Lackey’s outing was heartening.

"I think this is the first time I’ve been good here," said Lackey, who contributed an RBI single in the five-run second. "I’ve taken a couple beatings in this place."

The Cubs’ rotation for this weekend at St. Louis remains uncertain. All signs point to Eddie Butler being promoted from Iowa to start Friday night, with Jon Lester pushed back to Saturday after a 120-pitch outing Sunday.

But thunderstorms are forecast for Wednesday’s series finale, which could mean Kyle Hendricks would start the series opener Friday against the Cardinals.

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**Chicago Tribune**

John Lackey on win at Coors Field: 'I think that’s the first time I’ve been good here'

By Mark Gonzales

During his 15-year career, John Lackey has learned not to assume anything.

That theory stood out Tuesday night as Lackey reversed a couple of trends and beliefs in leading the Cubs to an 8-1 victory over the Colorado Rockies and snap the team’s four-game losing streak.

Lackey, who had allowed 17 earned runs in 16 2/3 innings in three previous starts at Coors Field, joined Pedro Martinez as the only visiting pitchers to pitch at least seven scoreless innings while striking out at least 10.

“I think that’s the first time I’ve been good here,” Lackey said. “Most of the time I’ve taken a couple beatings in this place.

“One thing I know about baseball is that I have no idea. You never know.”

And Lackey, 38, bucked one trend by displaying an effective curve and slider that produced many of his 10 strikeouts. There’s been a longstanding belief that breaking pitches don’t break in the high altitude of Denver, but Lackey continually had success with his slider and curve.

Manager Joe Maddon quipped that this was Lackey’s “barometric” version of his slider and curve.

“I was spinning it very well,” Lackey said. “I was locating it very well. You never know.”

Lackey’s performance occurred after Jake Arrieta lasted only 3 2/3 innings in a 10-4 loss. Reliever Dylan Floro pitched 4 1/3 innings, but Lackey’s performance lessened the need for an extra pitcher.
So after the game, Floro was optioned to Triple-A Iowa with infielder Jeimer Candelario — who was promoted for the second game of the doubleheader as the 26th player – staying with the team.

Candelario aided Lackey with a single that started a five-run second-inning rally, and he made a backhanded stop across the third base line and fired a throw to first to retire Dustin Garneau in the fourth.

But the spotlight belonged to Lackey as he restored some semblance of order on the Cubs’ pitching staff.

“That was outstanding,” Maddon said after Lackey’s 105-pitch performance. “He really picked us when it was needed. We needed that kind of start. That’s what we’re used to getting, that kind of starting performance from our entire staff, so hopefully he’s going to set the tone moving forward.

“It was really fun to watch. He had a really good breaking ball, and he commanded everything. Plus, he gets a big knock on top of it.”

Lackey ripped a single over second base during the Cubs’ five-run rally and took great pride in his hitting.

“The only thing I care about hitting-wise is that I have more hits than Jon Lester,” Lackey said within hearing distance of his close friend Lester. “And I’m a much better hitter than he is, and he’s going to owe me a lot of money at the end of the season.”

Cubs defense continues to show cracks
By Mark Gonzales

Javier Baez is regarded as the Cubs’ best defensive infielder, and Albert Almora Jr. arguably is the Cubs’ best center fielder.

But both were involved in misplays Tuesday that added to the list of defensive lapses this season during a 10-4 loss to the Rockies in the first game of a doubleheader.

The Cubs have committed 25 errors in their first 32 games and each miscue has tested the resolve of the pitching staff and manager Joe Maddon — whose spring slogan of “D-Peat” was illustrated on T-shirts and the need to play flawless defense to compete for a second consecutive World Series.

"We have to stop making those mistakes,” Maddon said in reference to Baez’s error on a throw to third that would have prevented the Rockies from scoring the tying run during a six-run third.

The other miscue occurred when Almora initially took a few steps back on a Ryan Hanigan blooper. Almora told coach Dave Martinez he was too late in getting to the ball that left fielder Kyle Schwarber missed on a diving attempt at the last moment. Three runs scored on the bloop single that could have been caught.

"We're good,” Maddon said. "They're going to start making plays. But those are the kind of (plays) we normally make."

Squeeze play: Infielder Jeimer Candelario was one of several prospects that drew high praise in spring training from Maddon, but his path is blocked by Kris Bryant at third base and Anthony Rizzo at first.

Candelario was promoted as the 26th player for Tuesday night’s second game after batting .340 with four home runs and 22 RBIs in 28 games for Triple-A Iowa. Maddon stressed the importance of Candelario continuing to produce to force the Cubs to make a move or use him as a versatile player.

"He has had a nice minor-league situation, don't get me wrong," Maddon said. "But you just don't start going nuts over a month or two sometimes."
Extra innings: The consolation prize from losing the first game was that reliever Dylan Floro preserved the bullpen some with a career-high 4 1/3 innings in his Cubs debut. ... Kris Bryant went 0-for-3 in the first game, thus ending his streak of reaching base safely at 18 games.

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**Chicago Tribune**

Kyle Schwarber: Clashes with coach helped me

By Phil Thompson

Kyle Schwarber was reminiscing about how much former football coach Jason Krause influenced him in high school, and he couldn't help but laugh when asked if the coach ever had to put him in check.

"It's funny because we got a lot of stories together, me being a knucklehead and getting a lot of personal fouls and not wanting to come out of the game," said the Cubs outfielder, who played middle linebacker for Middletown (Ohio) High School. "Me and him would be getting into it with each other because I'd want to make an adjustment and he didn't think we'd need to make the adjustment. ... I wanted to be out there every play. I wanted to make every tackle that I could. I think that's why he respects me a lot and that's why I respect him a lot because he wasn't afraid to put me right back in my place."

Schwarber talks about Krause's effect on him and other student-athletes in a video series for Sheraton Hotels called "Beyond Influential," which launched this month. Shane Victorino, Andrew McCutchen and Dave Winfield also share stories.

Speaking to reporters at the Sheraton Grand Chicago, Schwarber credited Krause (now the coach at Fairfield High School in Ohio) for helping him mentally endure rehab after last season's knee injury — from which Schwarber famously recovered in time to play in the World Series.

"We'd talk on the phone and we'd either talk about football, see how their (current) team is doing, or talk about the other team that I played for back in high school, talk about stories like that. I think that's kind of that 'feel' part that he had, making sure we didn't even talk about the injury," Schwarber said.

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**Chicago Tribune**

Cubs in no rush to announce weekend pitching plans

By Mark Gonzales

The Cubs have at least three days before setting their starting rotation plans for this weekend's series at St. Louis, and they could use that entire time before divulging their plans.

"We've discussed alternative plans," manager Joe Maddon said Tuesday. "We're not ready to divulge."

One of the assumptions is that Eddie Butler will be promoted from Triple-A Iowa to pitch Friday night's series opener, with Jon Lester moved back to Saturday.

Maddon acknowledged that Lester's 120-pitch outing Sunday could factor into the Cubs' plans.

But there's another consideration that could affect the Cubs' plans — weather.

Thunderstorms are forecasted for Wednesday in Denver. The Rockies are scheduled to play the Dodgers on Thursday, so a rainout would cause the Cubs and Rockies to schedule a makeup game in July or August.

And it could mean that Kyle Hendricks — who was corralled by reporters Tuesday in anticipation of his start Wednesday — could be pushed back to Friday night and eliminate the need to add a starter until next week.
Cubs manager Joe Maddon was disappointed that he forgot to ask Peyton Manning about the origin of yelling "Omaha" during the NFL great's signal-calling days.

But there wasn't much else left out during Maddon's discussion with Manning prior to Monday night's rainout against the Colorado Rockies at Coors Field.

"He's a nice man and very easy to speak with," Maddon said of Manning, who played 18 seasons with the Indianapolis Colts and Denver Broncos and won two Super Bowls. "I invited him to attend Cubs camp any time in the spring."

Manning's surprising visit stemmed from a series of missed appointments with pitchers Jon Lester and John Lackey, who heard that Manning was in Arizona during spring training and extended an invitation to play golf.

But Manning had just left the Phoenix area and told Lester and Lackey to contact him when they traveled to Denver.

Unfortunately for Lester, a planned round of golf scheduled for Tuesday was scratched when Monday's night's game was postponed due to rain and caused the game to be rescheduled for Tuesday as part of a split doubleheader.

Lester admitted he was tempted to ask Maddon to play golf before Tuesday's first game but passed on the inquiry.

Meanwhile, Maddon brought up Tom Moore, 78, who was Manning's offensive coordinator with the Colts and is a friend of Maddon.

"(Manning) does a wonderful Coach Moore imitation," Maddon said. "Peyton is very talented. I also texted Moore, who said (Manning) is the best he's ever worked with."

Maddon said Manning watched Sunday's 18-inning game against the Yankees and was aware of Anthony Rizzo's left forearm injury.

"He definitely pays attention," Maddon said.
Four pieces of folded tape is all the evidence that remains where a sheet of cards signed by various major-league players used to hang.

Russell, who said he collected the cards as a child, began again during the offseason. He decided to match Pokemon characters with baseball players and have them sign the cards.

Kris Bryant, the 2016 National League MVP, was the first affix his signature to a Charizard card. Though they aren’t on display, Russell said the collection still is growing.

"It’s a little niche I have," Russell said. "My family is going to be pretty excited when I show them the collection and the kind of autographs I got.

"I have fun with it, but over time, the media’s been crushing me with all these questions about Pokemon, which is fine."

Russell said he didn’t collect autographs as a child, but the 23-year-old is making up for lost time.

More than 25 players have signed cards, including Dodgers closer Kenley Jansen and the Astros' Jose Altuve.

Russell said he spent plenty of time perfecting his own autograph in high school, when he signed his first one as a sophomore after a game.

"It’s pretty cool to sign your card or a piece of paper for the first time for someone," he said.

Bryant’s reaction when Russell asked him to sign a Pokemon card? He laughed and praised his teammate.

"I was like, 'Yeah, man, I’m for real,'" Russell said.

Russell then went around the clubhouse and asked for a few more.

But his autograph collection stretches beyond Pokemon cards. His prized possession is a 2016 World Series wine glass signed by his teammates.

That, along with some signed baseballs, hats and bats are in storage for now, just like his Pokemon cards.

"Hopefully when I have a trophy room or whatever, that stuff will be there," he said.

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Chicago Sun-Times
John Lackey’s gem lifts Cubs over Rockies to earn twinbill split
By Gordon Wittenmyer

DENVER — Maybe this is what Cubs manager Joe Maddon meant when he said he wasn’t worried about his starting rotation.

John Lackey pitched what might have been the rotation’s best start of the season in Game 2, as the Cubs stopped a four-game skid by beating the Rockies 8-1 to earn a doubleheader split.

Lackey became only the second visiting pitcher in Coors Field history to pitch at least seven scoreless innings with 10 strikeouts. Pedro Martinez pitched a five-hitter 20 years ago.

“I think that’s the first time I’ve been good here,” said Lackey (3-3), who had allowed 17 earned runs in 16⅔ innings in his three previous career starts in Denver. “One thing I know about baseball is I have no idea. You never know what’s going to happen.”
John Lackey pitched seven scoreless innings Tuesday night to beat the Rockies at Coors Field. Good location and a good breaking ball in the toughest place in baseball to throw added up to a 105-pitch, seven-inning effort that gave a lift to a club that lost the first game 10-4, and a rotation that came into the game with a 4.81 ERA.

“He really picked us up when it was needed,” Maddon said. “That’s the kind of starting performance we’re used to getting out of our entire staff. So hopefully he’s going to set the tone moving forward.

“Starting pitching drives the engine. Don’t ever be deceived.”

Meet me in St. Louis?

Because Monday’s rainout pushed Jake Arrieta’s scheduled start into Tuesday, the Cubs can’t kick their four-man rotation can into next week.

Barring another rainout Wednesday, they’ll need a fifth starter during the weekend series in St. Louis, which likely means calling up right-hander Eddie Butler from Class AAA Iowa to start Friday.

After Brett Anderson (back) went on the disabled list over the weekend, the Cubs hoped to use off days to get to May 20 before needing a fifth starter.

Maddon said he wasn’t ready to say who the Cubs were considering for that start. But it was clear they were waiting out a questionable forecast for Wednesday to determine whether the fifth man would be needed.

Maddon did say he was considering moving Jon Lester back a day, to Saturday, after his 120-pitch outing Sunday. Butler (1-0 with a 1.17 ERA in five starts for Iowa) last pitched Saturday.

The Cubs’ other option would be left-hander Mike Montgomery, who has been stretched in recent relief outings and said he’s prepared to start if asked.

This and that

The unsung hero of the day was right-hander Dylan Floro, who was called up from Class AAA Iowa on Monday and pitched 4⅓ innings of strong relief in Game 1. The 61-pitch outing also assured he will be optioned back to Iowa on Wednesday.

• The Floro move means infielder Jeimer Candelario, who made a dazzling play at third and had two key at-bats in the Cubs’ five-run second as the cleanup hitter in Game 2, gets an extended stay with the club. He was added to the roster for the nightcap.

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Chicago Sun-Times
Coors Field no friend of struggling rotation as Cubs lose 10-4
By Gordon Wittenmyer

DENVER – Jake Arrieta’s rough stretch this season hit another skid in the third inning Tuesday afternoon as the Rockies batted around on the Cubs’ former Cy Young Award winner on the way to a 10-4 victory over the Cubs in the first game of a day-night doubleheader at Coors Field.

Arrieta (4-2) gave up six hits and a walk in the six-run third – with only two of the runs earned after a one-out throwing error by shortstop Javy Baez on an ill-advised attempt to throw out the lead runner at third.

It was the fourth loss in row for the Cubs, who fell to 16-16.
Unable to pitch around the error effectively, Arrieta wound up with his shortest start as a Cub when he failed to get out of a three-run fourth.

The 3 2/3-inning start was his shortest since July 5, 2012, when he was with the Orioles.

It also came just two starts after his 72-start streak of pitching at least five innings – which was the longest active such streak in the majors – ended with a 4 1/3-inning start in Boston.

Arrieta’s struggles are part of a larger issue with a starting rotation that led the majors with a 2.96 collective ERA last year.

Four of the top starters returned from that group, which has gone 11-9 with a 4.81 rotation ERA this year, averaging just 5 1/3 innings a start.

The doubleheader was created by Monday’s rain postponement.

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**Chicago Sun-Times**
Struggling Jake Arrieta ‘not worried about the contract year’
By Gordon Wittenmyer

DENVER — Jake Arrieta isn’t the only Cubs starter to struggle in the first five weeks of the team’s championship defense.

But another rough start has put him in places he has never experienced as a Cub. His 5.35 ERA after a 10-4 loss to the Rockies on Tuesday is the highest it has been since he joined the team.

What’s the deal with Arrieta?

That was supposed to be the megamillion dollar question at the end of the season.

But the question now is when will he regain the same form he had in two World Series wins last fall, never mind his 2015 Cy Young season.

One thing Arrieta isn’t concerned about is his next contract.

“‘I’m not worried about the contract year,’” he said after giving up five earned runs, nine hits and three walks in 3⅓ innings in the first game of a doubleheader at Coors Field. “‘I’m worried about being healthy and taking the ball every fifth day. If I’m able to do that, the results, in the long run, are going to play in my favor. I know that for sure.’”

Arrieta, whose velocity has been down 2-3 mph, was considered the top starter in the upcoming free-agent class.

Arrieta’s agent, Scott Boras, has compared him to Max Scherzer, a Cy Young winner with the Tigers in 2013, who got a seven-year, $210 million deal with the Nationals in 2015.

“Financially, things are going to work out anyway,” Arrieta added. “I don’t put a whole lot of time and effort and energy into my free agency. I’m here right now to try and win games for the team. I think guys respect that. I think teams respect that.

“And sometimes results, they stink. And right now they stink, from my last three or four starts.”

This one was his shortest since July 5, 2012, almost exactly a year to the day before the Orioles traded him to the Cubs.
It also came just two starts after his 72-start streak of pitching at least five innings — which was the longest active streak in the majors — ended with a 4⅓-inning start in Boston.

“I’m going through a period right now where it’s been tough,” said Arrieta, who added he needs to get more aggressive with more of his pitches. “And I’ve had many of these before in the past, and I know how to deal with it. I just look forward to getting back to work tomorrow and in the next couple days, trying to refine some stuff, and it’ll be better.”

Manager Joe Maddon pointed to a lack of swings and misses that he’s used to seeing from Arrieta and said it could be as simple as a dip in velocity in the early going, which was evident again Tuesday.

But neither he nor Arrieta are concerned about that. Both say he’s healthy and that’s a big factor in optimism for a turnaround.

A one-out throwing error by shortstop Javy Baez extended a six-run third inning in the first game. But Arrieta made no excuses.


“It happens,” he added, dismissing the contract-year theory. “There’s been times in the last few starts where things could have gone the complete opposite way. It just hasn’t fallen my way.

“I’m going to continue to try and do the same things, and typically that works out.”

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Cubs.com
Coors Field no house of horrors for Lackey
By Owen Perkins

DENVER -- Coors Field often feels like a house of horrors for some pitchers, but in the nightcap to Tuesday’s doubleheader, Cubs starter John Lackey turned the park into a fun house, capped by an 8-1 win over the Rockies.

Lackey threw seven shutout innings and struck out 10, making him just the second visiting pitcher to hit those benchmarks in the same game. Pedro Martinez also accomplished the feat in 1997 when he struck out 13.

Brian Bohanan (nine innings, four hits, 10 strikeouts in 1997) and John Gray (nine innings, four hits, 16 strikeouts in 2016) also accomplished the feat for the Rockies.

"It has been [a house of horrors] most of the time for me," Lackey said. "I think that’s the first time I’ve done good here. I’ve taken a couple beatings in this place."

Martinez allowed five hits in his outing -- albeit over nine innings -- but Lackey becomes the first visiting pitcher to hit the seven scoreless, 10 strikeouts, and only four hits allowed trifecta.

"One thing I know about baseball is I have no idea," Lackey said. "You never know what’s going to happen."

After a rough week with an 18-inning loss to the Yankees on Sunday, an all-night flight to Colorado, a lengthy rain delay and postponement Monday, and a 10-4 thrashing in the first game of Tuesday’s doubleheader, Lackey’s performance was exactly what the Cubs were craving.

"That was outstanding," manager Joe Madden said. "He really picked us up. We needed that kind of a start. We're used to getting that kind of starting performance from our entire staff, so hopefully he's going to set the tone moving forward. It was really fun to watch. He had a really, really good breaking ball, slider today and commanded everything."
The command was evidenced in the fact that 76 of his season-high 105 pitches were strikes -- his best strike-per-pitch ratio of the season at 72.4 percent. He notched 35 of those strikes as non-contact strikes -- either called or swung at and missed -- for his second highest total of the season.

"They're a really good hitting ballclub, so that's pretty good," Maddon said of the Rockies. "They beat us bad the first game. We're running on fumes a bit. We've had some very difficult games. But starting pitching drives the engine, don't ever be deceived."

Lackey came into Colorado feeling more like a caboose, with a 9.19 ERA in three previous Coors Field starts spanning 16 2/3 innings. He put those numbers in the rear view mirror as the high humidity -- 46%, or roughly double a typical day at Coors Field -- may have aided his breaking stuff.

"I located the ball pretty good," Lackey said. "The slider, curveball, in between was pretty good. I was spinning it pretty good."

The Rockies finally scored a run once Lackey left the game, but they were stymied for seven frames against the right-hander.

"There was a little bit of variance to his breaking ball, the velocity -- 3-4 mph," Rockies manager Bud Black said. "There's an 83-84 mph breaking ball, a 78-80. He was able to really mix. He threw a couple front-door breaking balls to our right-handed hitters. It starts on the left hip of a right-handed hitter and breaks in at the corner. He humped up a couple times at 92 to get it by us. So John pitched. He really did."

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Cubs.com
Baez, Bryant back Lackey as Cubs roll
By Thomas Harding and Owen Perkins

DENVER -- John Lackey struck out 10 in seven innings of a strike-throwing exhibition to subdue the Rockies, and the Cubs took advantage of risky defense to win, 8-1 on Tuesday night to earn a split of a split doubleheader at Coors Field.

The Rockies won the first game, 10-4.

Lackey (3-3) entered Tuesday 0-2 with a 9.18 ERA at Coors Field.

"It has been [a house of horrors] most of the time for me," Lackey said. "I've taken a couple beating in this place." But on Tuesday, Lackey threw 76 of his 105 pitches for strikes -- a season-best 72.4 percent -- while holding the National League West-leading Rockies to four hits, just one after the second.

"He had good command of the fastball, and the breaking ball was thrown at any time of the game," said Rockies manager Bud Black, who complimented Lackey -- a pitcher he worked with while the Angels' pitching coach several years back -- on varying speeds on breaking balls and finding a velocity when he needed it on the fastball.

Rockies rookie lefty Kyle Freeland (3-2) went six innings, with four hits, six strikeouts and four walks. He was solid outside of the second inning -- when he surrendered five runs. Two runs were unearned because shortstop Trevor Story and second baseman DJ LeMahieu each committed errors on exciting but desperate flips to second, attempting to steal outs.

"They made some great plays, first of all," Maddon said, giving the Rockies credit for getting to challenging balls. "They were the back ends of these things [when they made the errors]. Back-handed flips. Otherwise they made some great plays. They're a really outstanding defensive team."

Freeland had a bases-loaded walk in the second but rebounded to retire 13 of the last 14 Cubs he faced. More >>
"There was one blemish, one inning, where I didn't have my stuff and things didn't fall my way or the team's way, and the result was five runs," Freeland said.

The Cubs' Javier Baez knocked his fifth homer of the season, a two-run, opposite-way shot off Mike Dunn in the eighth.

Kris Bryant added a home run in the ninth.

MOMENTS THAT MATTERED

Abraca ... never mind: Story dove to stop Addison Russell's hard grounder with one on and one on in the second, rolled over and flipped wide of second for an error that put runners at second and third. Three batters later, first baseman Mark Reynolds dove, but the ball ticked off his glove. LeMahieu retrieved it but made a wild flip to second, and two runs scored.

"In the first game, our big inning was aided by a couple big breaks that went our way," Black said. "Trevor made a great play on a smash to his right and tried to make a play, and it just didn't happen for us. And the ball ricocheted off Reynolds."

He's got a bat; he's dangerous: With one out, Freeland pitched around Willson Contreras to load the bases and face Lackey, batting eighth. But with a .300 average, Lackey is no easy out. Lackey laced Freeland's first pitch -- a 93.6 mph fastball -- over a leaping LeMahieu and into right-center for an RBI. It made Freeland had to work harder to get through the frame.

"The only thing I really care about hitting is having more hits than Jon Lester," Lackey said, ribbing his fellow pitcher in the next locker. "I'm a much better hitter than he is."

QUOTABLE

"It's the barometric pressure version of slider and curveball versus a lower barometric pressure situation. And also the rotation of the earth has something to do with it." -- Madden's foray into the science behind the heightened humidity (46%, or more than double the average at Coors Field) that gave both Lackey and Brian Duensing their best breaking balls of the season.

SOUND SMART WITH YOUR FRIENDS

Lackey is the second visiting pitcher with 10 or more strikeouts and no walks in seven or more innings runs at Coors. Pedro Martinez threw nine with 13 strikeouts on July 29, 1997. Two home pitchers have accomplished the feat -- Jon Gray with 16 strikeouts in nine innings against the Padres last Sept. 17, and Brian Bohanon with nine innings and 10 strikeouts against the Phillies on Aug. 28, 1999, in the second game of a doubleheader. The Rockies have played 51 doubleheaders in their existence.

WHAT'S NEXT

Cubs: Kyle Hendricks toes the rubber for the Cubs in Wednesday's series finale at 2:10 p.m. CT,, bringing an impressive 3.44 Coors Field ERA to the game. In his only 2016 outing at Coors, Hendricks held the Rockies to one run on four hits over six innings.

Rockies: Righty German Marquez (0-2, 7.31 ERA) has made three starts -- a scoreless six innings on the road at Arizona and two rocky starts at Coors. He'll try to pitch better this time out in the series finale Wednesday at 1:10 p.m. MT.

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Cubs.com
Arrieta struggles as Cubs drop Game 1 to Rox
DENVER -- Ryan Hanigan's two-out bloop single in the third inning signaled Tuesday afternoon would be that kind of day for the Rockies -- and for Cubs pitcher Jake Arrieta. The Rockies bested Arrieta for nine runs (five earned) in 3 2/3 innings of a 10-4 victory in the opener of a split doubleheader at Coors Field.

Hanigan's single, which eluded the glove of sliding left fielder Kyle Schwarber, was part of a six-run third that included Charlie Blackmon's triple and DJ LeMahieu's double, and saw the Rockies take 10 turns at the plate. The National League West-leading Rockies matched their season high with 15 hits while winning their fifth in the last six games and seventh in the last 10.

Hanigan, a veteran who joined the Rockies last week from Triple-A Albuquerque, acknowledged the role of luck. "I didn't get it like I wanted to, but, hey, I'll take it any day," Hanigan said. "Soon as I hit it, I thought it was an out." Hanigan noted that Schwarber was disadvantaged because he had to play deep -- a necessary evil for most outfielders at Coors. But the field wasn't the whole story.

"They hit some balls really well, others they dropped it in front [of the outfielder]," Cubs manager Joe Maddon said. "You have to play such a big outfield here, it's so large. They just have good at-bats. They're really good offensively."

About the best that be could said for Arrieta (4-2), who yielded nine hits, was it wasn't as bad as his last Coors start, when he gave up 13 hits and nine earned runs on Aug. 6, 2014.

"They've got one of the better offenses in all of baseball, especially at Coors Field," Arrieta said. "They hit for a significantly higher average here. That's just a testament to their ability to play to their home park and have a good approach. I wanted to come into this game and establish strikes with all my pitches. I did it pretty well -- almost too well with too many hittable pitches, really."

Mark Reynolds went 3-for-4 and clubbed his 12th home run -- just two fewer than he managed last year in 118 games.

Meanwhile, "The Little Prince," Antonio Senzatela (5-1), a rookie right-hander, held the Cubs to two runs and five hits, struck out four and walked three in six innings.

MOMENTS THAT MATTERED

Ascending: After the Rockies' six-run third, Senzatela found himself facing loaded bases and no outs in the fourth. Lefty Chris Rusin was already warming up. But Senzatela forced an Albert Almora Jr. pop to second base, got one out and nearly two on Schwarber's RBI grounder, and worked Kris Bryant into a fly to right to escape the jam having allowed just one run. Rusin didn't enter until the seventh.

Senzatela managed a less-than-ideal 57.6 percent strike rate, but his final two innings were his best.

"Learning this fellow and knowing what our Minor League people say about the intangibles of competitiveness -- when in the game he has to step it up, when he has to make a pitch, when he has to throw a little harder or land a curveball, he sort of gets it," Rockies manager Bud Black said.

Story taking a turn: The Cubs were down, 3-1, with two outs in the third and Arrieta got away with a pitch in the middle of the plate that Trevor Story fouled off. However, Story rebounded from a 1-2 count to walk, bringing up Hanigan for his three-run blooper that blew the game open. Story, who entered with a .173 batting average, went 2-for-3 with an RBI.

QUOTABLE

"That's special because he's a good guy, a big guy, and he won the Cy Young two years ago."
-- Senzatela, on the victory over the Cubs, opposite Arrieta

"We're all focused on hitting, but I want us to play defense and pitch. ... Our guys are good, we're going to start making those plays. Those are the kind of plays that we normally do make that we're not. Sometimes it's not an error, but it's a play that we normally make that we're not."

-- Maddon, on the four unearned runs and the need for the defense to elevate its play

SOUND SMART WITH YOUR FRIENDS

Reynolds tied a personal best by hitting a homer in his fourth straight game. He accomplished the feat Aug. 6-9, 2009, with the D-backs.

FLORO STRONG IN DEBUT

Dylan Floro gave the Cubs exactly what they needed in his debut with the Cubs, throwing 4 1/3 innings of one-run ball to spare the 'pen in the doubleheader.

"One bright spot, Dylan came in and pitched very well," Arrieta said. "Enabling us to only use two pitchers moving into the second game of a doubleheader was huge."

Floro was called up Monday when Jason Heyward went on the disabled list with a sprained finger on his right hand.

"He got a lot of swings and misses," Maddon said. "He was outstanding today. Second game tonight we should be in good shape regarding our pitching."

Statcast™ SUPERLATIVE

Gonzalez covered 39.4 feet in 2.9 seconds to rob a Javier Baez liner in the sixth inning on a diving catch that registered with just a five percent catch probability, according to Statcast™ -- the lowest probability of any outfield catch this season.

"It was harder because it was do or die," Gonzalez said. "You can't hesitate on those plays. As soon as you go for it, you've got to go for it because if you think twice, it's going to hit the ground; those low line drives. So I was going for it since the beginning. If I wasn't going to make the catch, at least I wanted to keep it up front and avoid the extra base. It was just a good play."

A LITTLE PAIN, A LOT OF GAIN

Senzatela, while leading off the third inning, smashed a foul ball into the right hip of Blackmon, who was in the on-deck circle. Blackmon drew a few laughs by backing away so he would be protected by the backstop. Well, after Senzatela struck out, Blackmon promptly lined a triple -- his fifth this season -- to begin the big inning.

WHAT'S NEXT

Cubs: John Lackey is 2-2 against Colorado in his career, but Rockies hitters tend to get the best of him, running his ERA to 6.25. He's got some demons to exorcise at Coors Field, where he has allowed 17 earned runs in 16 2/3 innings for a 9.18 ERA.

Rockies: Rookie lefty Kyle Freeland (3-1, 2.65 ERA) will start the nightcap at 6:40 p.m. MT. Freeland pitched well in his last start -- 6 1/3 innings, three hits, one run against the Padres -- by forcing quick decisions early in at-bats, which kept his pitch count under control.

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DENVER -- Jake Arrieta offered no excuses for his ineffective outing in Colorado on Tuesday, allowing nine runs (five earned) over 3 2/3 innings in a 10-4 loss to the Rockies to begin a doubleheader. It was his shortest outing in 105 starts with the Cubs, and only the third time in his career he's allowed nine runs in a game.

"I didn't do my job," Arrieta said. "Pretty poor performance on my part."

There may not have been any excuses, but there were clues as to where the 2015 National League Cy Young Award winner was off his game.

"Just too many hittable pitches in the middle of the plate," Arrieta said. "When you pitch [at Coors Field], there's a lot of room. The balls found some space."

Arrieta is now 0-2 at Coors Field with a 14.54 ERA in 8 2/3 innings over two starts. He's given up a combined 22 hits and 18 runs (14 earned) there.

"They've got one of the better offenses in all of baseball, especially at Coors Field," Arrieta said. "I wanted to come into this game and establish strikes with all my pitches. I did it pretty well, almost too well with too many hittable pitches, really. Not necessarily ones they hit for a lot of power, they just were able to find some holes in the outfield grass. It's a big yard. Unless it's hit at somebody, it's going to pose a threat."

Finding too much of the plate can be an issue, especially for a pitcher who has deviated from his habit of lighting up radar guns as a way of avoiding barrels.

"There's something different," manager Joe Maddon said of Arrieta's struggles Tuesday. "They're not missing it as often. Velocity obviously is not the same, just looking at a [radar] gun. The last couple of games, he was a little bit higher velocity than I saw today."

Arrieta's two-seamer has dipped from an average velocity of 95.3 mph in 2015 to 92.1 in '17, according to Statcast™, and he was in the low 90s Tuesday, topping out at 93.6.

His vertical movement is also down more than a full inch this year, averaging 6.73 inches of movement on his two-seamer heading into Thursday, and Statcast™ reports the spin on his curveball was 2,702 rpm for the season, but just 2,596 for the 12 curves he threw Tuesday.

"He sinks the ball, he's got the four-seamer, the cutter, the slider, curveball -- so he's going to throw you everything," Carlos Gonzalez said after walking and singling against Arrieta. "You've just got to stay in the zone, because he's having some issues with throwing strikes."

Arrieta, who entered the day with a 10.5 K/9 mark, notched only three strikeouts in his short outing.

"He just left some pitches up that he's not used to leaving up, and we took advantage," Rockies third baseman Nolan Arenado said. "We got a couple bloopers and a couple lucky hits."

Arrieta admitted he relied too much on his fastball and slider and didn't use his change and curve enough.

"I didn't mix well enough," Arrieta said. "I need to just continue to prepare and refine my pitches and throw them all for strikes, because if I'm doing that, it's going to be tough for teams to score a lot of runs."
DENVER -- Kris Bryant has a National League Rookie of the Year Award and a NL MVP Award on his resume over his first two seasons in part due to the versatility that has kept him in the lineup and contributing on a daily basis. Though he had started every game of the season at third base in 2017, he got a chance to showcase his outfield chops for the first time in Game 1 of Tuesday's twin bill with the Rockies.

In his career, Bryant has played 88 games in the outfield, 10 at first and one at shortstop, in addition to his primary hot-corner duties. Manager Joe Madden called the chance to play right field a "vacation" for Bryant.

"Perfect, I'll take a vacation," Bryant joked before Tuesday's series opener. "It's a change of scenery. I like going to the outfield, just because it changes up my mind a little. I wouldn't say it's relaxing, but you're not involved in every single play."

Coors Field has an expansive outfield, but Bryant was up for the challenge, chasing a DJ LeMahieu fly ball into the right-field corner beside the high out-of-town scoreboard for the second out of the game.

"He's a really good outfielder," Madden said. "I'd even put him in center field, quite frankly. I don't have any reservations. You have this huge expanse out there, but I'm always worried about tall walls. Whether you're going to play along the wall, how you get to the wall, how you jump against the wall, knowing when to get off the wall, all those things are different."

Calling up Cubs

The Cubs called up infielder Jeimer Candelario for the second game of the day-night doubleheader as the 26th man permitted in such scenarios. Candelario is hitting .340 (31-for-97) at Triple-A Iowa with 12 doubles, three triples, four homers and 22 RBIs in 28 games, leading Maddon to identify him as at "the forefront" of the young players still coming from the Cubs' farm system.

"Sometimes guys like that force you to do things," Madden said. "He's tearing up Triple-A. That's what you got to do to be a big leaguer -- tear up Triple-A. Primarily from his perspective, he just needs to keep doing what he's doing and let us make the decisions."

The Cubs had previously called up right-handed reliever Dylan Floro on Monday to take Jason Heyward's spot on the roster and provide immediate pitching help had a game been played Monday, following the 18-inning marathon vs. the Yankees on Sunday night that exhausted the entire bullpen.

"At Spring Training, you could see he's got a very good arm," Maddon said of Floro. "He normally puts the ball on the ground, which could be helpful here. I like his arm. Good guy, bright."

As for Heyward, who sprained a finger on his right hand and went on the 10-day disabled list retroactive to Saturday, Madden expects him back when he's eligible on Monday.

"Speaking with him and talking to the docs and trainers, I expect minimal time on the DL," Maddon said. "I'd be surprised if it's any longer than that."

Fifth man

The double dip will force the Cubs to use a fifth starter in their rotation, which could have initially survived Brett Anderson's trip to the DL because of off-days Thursday and Monday. Jon Lester is likely to be pushed back to Saturday after his 120-pitch outing last time out, meaning the Cubs will need an arm Friday.

"We've discussed alternative plans," Madden said. "We're not ready to divulge all these secret meetings we've been having. The Code of Silence has been in use the last several days."
DENVER -- The Cubs and Rockies got a surprise celebrity visit in the midst of a hailstorm that passed through Denver on Monday, when Peyton Manning strolled through each clubhouse at Coors Field.

Manning, who visited the Cubs ahead of a hitters meeting as the clubhouse was closing to the media, stopped by the team video room first, where he seemingly surprised a wide-grinning Kris Bryant.

"He's a contemporary of sorts. It's not having Terry Bradshaw walk through your clubhouse," Cubs manager Joe Maddon said. "Just the fact that a couple of generations removed, when our guys could identify more recently with ... they want to see Peyton walk through the clubhouse. So, yeah, I think it's great. I'm really grateful that he did it. Believe me, our guys are bright enough to understand what that means and maybe take something away from it."

Manning also popped into the Rockies' underground batting cage, where manager Bud Black offered the two-time Super Bowl winner an opportunity to take a few cuts, though Manning good-naturedly declined.

Known for his meticulous attention to detail, Manning also had a throng of questions for Black and sluggers Nolan Arenado, Carlos Gonzalez and Trevor Story -- about hitting, how the mindset of a football and baseball player differs and about the 2017 Rockies themselves.

"Hey, [he's a] Rockies fan," Black said of Manning.

Manning has been a regular guest at Coors Field for more than a decade, and well before he joined the Denver Broncos in 2012.

Through his longtime friendship with Rockies legend Todd Helton, Manning used the club's facilities to work out during the NFL lockout in 2011, which also coincided with his rehab from neck surgery that sidelined him the entire '11 season. The Rockies even gave Manning his own locker. He said at the time the club was "a big part" of his recovery.

In 2001, Manning hit at least one homer at Coors during batting practice and fielded grounders at shortstop, the position he starred at for Isidore Newman High School in New Orleans, hitting .440 as a junior. Maddon was unsurprised that Manning was a ballplayer of yesteryear.

"Kind of a Ripken-looking dude," Maddon said of Manning.

The only starting quarterback to win a Super Bowl with two teams (the Colts and Broncos), Manning has also been an Opening Day regular at Coors since moving to Denver, where he still resides.

"He loves Denver," Black said. "Hopefully we'll see him out here more often."

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ESPNChicago.com
What's going on with Jake Arrieta?
By Jesse Rogers

DENVER -- He has pitched in less than a quarter of his starts for the season, but Chicago Cubs free-agent-to-be Jake Arrieta isn't exactly creating a big payday for himself -- nor is he helping his team in the standings.
A 10-4 loss to the Colorado Rockies in Game 1 of a doubleheader Tuesday afternoon dropped the Cubs to .500 (16-16) and left Arrieta wondering what is going on. He isn’t the only one.

"There is something different regarding something at the plate," Joe Maddon said postgame. "They're not missing it as often. That's what I'm seeing. Velocity, obviously, is not the same."

There’s a lot to unpack with Arrieta, so let’s start with velocity. It could be the root of all his problems. From Day 1 this season, his numbers have been down, but he was getting batters out. After two starts, he was 2-0 with a 2.08 ERA, but that ERA has risen since.

Perhaps it took a while, but teams are figuring out how to attack Arrieta, considering his average fastball velocity is only 92 mph. On Tuesday, it was a little under 92, and the Rockies took advantage. Arrieta gave up nine hits in 3 2/3 innings.

"His stuff wasn't as crisp as it normally is, and location wasn't there," catcher Miguel Montero stated. "He didn't get many swings-and-misses."

According to ESPN Stats & Information, Arrieta produced just two swing-and-misses with his fastball Tuesday, though he used the pitch much less than usual. In fact, Arrieta threw his fastball fewer times than he had in any start dating to May 2016. Considering that breaking pitches don't get the movement at Coors Field that they do at other stadiums, Arrieta was vulnerable for a bad day.

"I didn't think it was good -- at all," Arrieta said. "Just too many hittable pitches in the middle of the plate ... I wanted to establish strikes with all my pitches. I did it almost too well."

The Rockies jumped on Arrieta the second time through the order, as he reverted to his slider, which he threw more Tuesday than he had in any start since before the 2015 All-Star break. Desperate times call for desperate measures, and Arrieta went to his bread-and-butter pitch, but nothing seemed to work.

"There was not a lot of swing-and-miss," Maddon reiterated. "The ball was in play a lot. Jake usually gets more swing-and-miss."

Maddon said he is concerned only if Arrieta is hurting, but then the converse question applies: If Arrieta isn't hurting, why the continued dip in velocity? Why the extreme measures taken with the game plan? This is not the Arrieta of 2015, and lately he is trending worse than 2016 Arrieta, even if results at Coors Field have to be taken with a grain of salt.

"When he threw a strike, he paid for it," Montero said.

That partly has to do with the ballpark, but no unbiased observer would say Arrieta has been sharp since those first few starts. His velocity did tick back up a couple of outings ago, and the results were better, but with so much at stake for him, it has been a more-than-curious beginning to his season.

If any statistic sums up his first seven appearances of 2017, it's what opponents are hitting off him. Last season, he led qualified starters with a .194 average against. That stat was even better in 2015, when batters hit only .185 off Arrieta. Getting a base knock off Arrieta was as hard as anything in baseball back then. This season, opponents are hitting .290 off the righty, which ranks 76th in the NL among anyone who has started at least one game. This isn’t the Arrieta anyone is used to, no matter where he's pitching.

The former Cy Young winner certainly wasn't making any excuses after his worst start of the season. He wore it. But can he find it again? That's all anyone wants to know.

"Just a tough one today," he said. "I wasn't very good. I just threw one too many with too much plate ... A couple of innings this season have been extended, so that's why everything is inflated more than it should be. [I'll] just continue to prepare and refine my pitches."