



## ***Maddon opens a new Cubs era by proving less is more***

*By George Castle, CBM Historian  
Posted Friday, October 23, 2015*

Amid the sudden gloom of the Mets' four-game NLCS sweep of the Cubs, the light Joe Maddon shined all year that pointed to the Chicagoans' century-long deferred goal dimmed not a watt.

Master manager Maddon provided show-biz sizzle with entertaining trains of thought, magicians and a mini-zoo installed in left field. But the steak he prepped will be long-lasting protein for the Cubs as the iconoclastic Maddon became the first team executive to creatively mitigate the most eccentric playing schedule and ballpark conditions in baseball.

In a City Hall-legislated environment that still prohibits the Cubs from playing a night-oriented schedule in sync with the rest of the game, Maddon provided a counter-measure: lightening the players' daily workload to promote more rest. He canceled many batting-practice sessions in the second half of the season while even ordering the clubhouse locked to prevent players from arriving too early for games.

A positive cause-and-effect took hold. Marginally a contender in the first half, the youngish Cubs took off in the second half like very few of their predecessors.

The Cubs were 4-1 the last week of July after being swept three in a row by NL East cellar-dwelling Phillies, including Cole Hamels' no-hitter, at Wrigley Field. Then they raced downhill with no brakes. A 19-9 August record was followed by a 23-9 September/October that clinched the second wild-card spot and gave the youthful roster a massive shot of confidence.

The 46-19 finishing kick was in stark contrast to scores of collapses in Augusts and Septembers dating back to the 1950s, in which the Cubs would lose up to 20 games in one month and were hard pressed to play .333 baseball over long stretches.



**Joe Maddon hears about Chicago traditions from longtime media stalwart Johnny Reyes at the 2014 winter meetings in San Diego, a month after his hiring. Maddon started his own tradition by changing his Cubs' work schedules to facilitate rest (Photo by Dr. David Fletcher).**

Former Cubs employees who labored under the old day-ball system of spending your body needlessly applauded Maddon.

### **‘A new way of thinking’**

“Absolutely. Absolutely,” onetime trainer Tony Garofalo, now working for Athletico, said of the advantages. “It’s a new way of thinking. You got a younger (spirited), more progressive-thinking type of manager. You don’t have the Herman Frankses and those kinds of people. He understands the pitfalls of playing all these day games and this crazy schedule.”

The all-day schedule at Wrigley Field through 1988 had long been fingered as a culprit in the second-half pratfalls. Initially, hot daytime weather was perceived as the cause of the Cubs’ fatigue. A 1980 Chicago sports magazine cover showed a cartoonish Cubs pitcher, melting down in a pool of sweat on the mound as the merciless sun beat down with the headline, “Are Day Games Killing the Cubs?” But, as the 20<sup>th</sup> century wound down, another medical factor began to enter the picture – Shift Work Disorder.

Physicians identified SWD as a syndrome in which havoc was played with the circadian rhythm, or “body clock,” for workers who shifted from daytime hours to nights to overnights with little transition in between. Those who did not keep the same work hours and sleeping schedules were subject to mounting fatigue, eating disorders and other health problems. Public safety workers, health-care professionals and transportation employees were among the leading professions suffering from SWD.

One group of athletes – the Cubs – seemed prime candidates for SWD. They had a 9-to-5 schedule at home prior to the installation of lights, then would change abruptly to 4-to-midnight on the road, where the majority of the games were played at night. The constant shifting back and forth over six months provided a burden no other team possessed in a sport already stressful, featuring the 162-game grind and tough travel with 4 a.m. hotel arrival times flying to another city after a night game.

As an example of the instant changes in the body clock, Hall of Famer Billy Williams was diligent about getting his rest at home. Williams typically went to bed about 10 p.m. in his South Shore home to handle the day games. But after the Cubs flew to, say, the West Coast on a Sunday night, Williams found himself battling against Sandy Koufax, Don Drysdale and Juan Marichal at 8 p.m. Pacific time on a Monday night – but 10 p.m. by his yet-adjusted body clock. At the time he had been used to retiring for the evening, he now had to display perfect timing at the plate against fellow future Cooperstown enshrines.



**As Cubs trainer in the late 1970s, Tony Garofalo realized the all-day schedule at Wrigley had negative effects on players. But he also knew complaining about it to top brass would go nowhere.**

“I know my body was just going crazy,” said Garofalo, who spent 10 years as Cubs trainer starting in 1977. “It was much easier on the road, where you got used to sleeping in. But at home, you got to be at the ballpark at 8 in the morning. It does play havoc. You do get tired and it takes a lot out of you.”

### **Post-1988 night schedule just a band-aid**

The addition of lights in 1988 was supposed to ease these problems. But it only proved a band-aid. Only 18 night games per season were allowed by city ordinance to protect the Wrigleyville neighborhood. Typically these after-dark contests were massed on Monday or Tuesday nights. Coming off road trips, especially on the West Coast, the Monday night games gave players some extra rest. A handful of night games were reserved for ESPN’s Sunday night telecasts. But the schedule quickly transitioned back to day games for the remainder of homestands.

Fifteen years into the night-game era at Wrigley Field, players still reported trouble with their sleep patterns. First baseman Derrek Lee said he still could not fall asleep until 1:30 a.m. before day games in his first Cubs season in 2004, after playing mostly night games in Miami. Moises Alou said after becoming used to getting up early for day games in Chicago, he found himself still waking up at 7:30 a.m. on the road when a night game was scheduled.

In 2004, the city permitted 30 night games. Ten years later, the base number was increased to 35, with up to 46 permitted for nationally-televised contests. The schedule thus is still a hybrid between days and nights for the 81-game home-game allotment.



**At the Cubs high point at the end of June 1977, Manny Trillo was hitting .340. He finished at .280.**

And as a result, game times are all over the map – 12:05, 1:20, 3:05, 6:05 and 7:05 p.m. In his first year as manager, Maddon looked askance at all the game times. After proving he was everything – and more – Theo Epstein had desired in a big-time manager, he has the clout to jawbone his superiors into cutting down on the different first-pitch times for 2016 and beyond.

Oddly enough, additional night games could tempt a manager to increase the workload on the Cubs. A 7:05 p.m. start permits extra, early batting practice around 2 or 2:30 p.m. that could not be scheduled five hours prior to a 1:20 start. Even if they were not taking extra swings, the players felt almost duty-bound to get to the clubhouse early. They might arrive in the early afternoon for a night game, and too-early by Maddon’s standards for a day game.

For a 3:05 p.m. Saturday game on August 22, Maddon did not open the clubhouse until 11:30 a.m. The *Chicago Tribune*’s Paul Sullivan reported some of the lights were not yet turned on. Maddon himself arrived at 11:34 a.m., contrary to most managers who practically camp out in the clubhouses during the season. Only four Cubs had arrived by 11:38 a.m., according to Sullivan.

Earlier arrivals were necessary by the fact the home team typically takes batting practice first, with pre-practice stretching commencing about three hours before game

time. But Maddon figured the players were expending needless energy continuing a time-honored baseball tradition. And perhaps some were leaving their best swings in the cage. With two hitting coaches on staff, any player needing specialized work could get some one-on-one help in the cage under the right-field bleachers.

### **Batting practice in your sleep**

“When I was there, batting practice was one thing you never missed,” said Garofalo. “If you got in from St. Louis at 1 in the morning, we’d have a 1:30 p.m. game, you’d be out there with batting practice at the same time after 10. Later in the season occasionally you would not do it. That was part of the baseball ritual – taking batting practice.

“Even when you had days off, you had workouts. It was crazy.”

The Cubs also have the added burden several times each season of playing day games at home after playing a night game on the road. A Players Association rule permits such tough scheduling if the actual in-the-air flight time was less than two hours. But that did not take into account total travel time.

“In Cincinnati, we flew out of Covington, and it was a 45-minute ride to the airport,” said Garofalo. “The game was over at 10:30 p.m. (Eastern time), we’d take off at 12:45 a.m. (Eastern time), get back to the house at 2, 3 in the morning (Central time). It’s crazy.”

Garofalo predecessor Gary Nicholson actually assembled some facts and figures by the mid-1970s to prove the all-day-game schedule had a negative impact on the Cubs. Almost all Cubs employees agreed with Nicholson’s findings. But they also knew nothing would happen so long as the Wrigley family owned the Cubs.

Garofalo found himself in the same boat in 1977, when new GM Bob Kennedy hired him. P.K. Wrigley died early in the season after 45 years as principal Cubs owner. Son Bill Wrigley was hardly a progressive in succeeding the gum magnate.

“You’re talking about old-time baseball thinkers (the Wrigleys and Kennedy),” said Garofalo. “Now you’re dealing with tradition and nobody wanted to break tradition.

“I probably could have said something. But how many times can you beat your head against the wall before you stop?”

Nicholson and Garofalo had the numbers to back themselves up. The 1969 collapse was legendary – from 10 games up on the Mets on August 13 to eight games behind at season’s end. On June 29, 1973, the Cubs, an older team, were 47-31, 8 ½ games up in first in the NL East. Six weeks later, they had collapsed to 56-64, 5 ½ games out in fourth place. The Mets eventually won the NL East with a record-worst 82-79 record.



**Despite obvious indications the lack of lights hurt his players and cut down on attendance, Bill Wrigley, last of his family to own the Cubs, would not change his father's odd-ball opposition to night baseball at Wrigley Field.**

## **‘Kiss the .500 mark good-bye’**

The granddaddy second-half nosedive took place in Garofalo's first season in the training room in 1977. On June 28, the Cubs were an amazing 47-22, 8 ½ games in first. Lou Boudreau announced on WGN-Radio the team could “kiss the .500 mark good-bye.” They’d eventually do some heavy smooching. A steady decline began in July, the Cubs fell out of first place in early August, and yet were still 76-64 on September 9. The team still defied the odds, lost their last five in a row and finished 81-81, 20 games behind the Phillies in fourth place.

Some month-long collapses were grandiose. The '79 Cubs had a 9-22 September to finish 80-82. In August 1999, the Cubs went 6-24, sealing good-man Jim Riggleman’s fate as manager after five seasons.

Garofalo was retained by GM Dallas Green after Tribune Co. took over ownership in 1981. Green knew the Cubs needed to change up their schedule by installing lights, but was stymied by Wrigleyville community opposition backed up by local and state politicians. The lights were not installed until 10 months after Green was forced out in 1987.

In cutting the time his players spend at the ballpark, Maddon obviously does not want them eating their three daily meals at Wrigley Field. When new clubhouse kitchen facilities opened in the mid-2000s, clubhouse chief Tom Hellmann and his staff prepared three meals for day games – breakfast, a light lunch and a post-game spread.

At least the nutrition factor has increased. During Garofalo’s day, the players were on their own for clubhouse vittles. They’d get donuts and coffee on the way in from the famed Yum-Yum Donuts on Clark Street. A light lunch? Hellmann predecessor Yosh Kawano once said his Cubs preferred chewing tobacco to munching on sandwiches.

“After batting practice, players sent batboys out for hamburgers at Yum-Yum Donuts,” said Garofalo. “Then, after the game, Yosh would make his infamous soup – two cans of soup and 20 cans of water.”

When the present cramped clubhouse was built in 1984 as an improvement over the high-school locker-room-sized dressing cubbyhole down the left-field line, Garofalo actually set up a “nutrition” station with granola bars. Many of the players laughed, wondering how granola could make them swing the bats better. A decade later, health-



**Yosh Kawano, with Andre Dawson in 2004, offered extremely watered-down soup as post-game nourishment to famished players during his near half-century-long tenure as Cubs clubhouse manager.**

conscious GM Larry Himes banned most non-nutritious foods from the clubhouse kitchen, making the dissension against Himes in the clubhouse even worse.

Flash forward to the 21<sup>st</sup> century's second decade. Advanced thinking like Maddon's finally is making a crack in a game often mired in hide-bound tradition.

“(Traditional) baseball did take over from common sense,” said Garofalo. “That was before free agency. The players were a commodity. If they couldn't do it, they'd get rid of them. It was a time before the MRI. They'd pitch until they were done, and then they got someone else. You did it until you couldn't do it anymore, then we'll find someone to replace you.

“It's great that baseball's trying to change their thinking. We got a big investment here. We're not going to wear these guys out because it's going to cost us in the long run.

“I think Joe's on the right track.”