



## ***Schwarb-O-Meter World Series debut as harrowing as Cubs' comeback***

*By George Castle, CBM Historian  
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*(Second in a two-part series on the astounding comeback of the Cubs' Kyle Schwarber, this time focusing on his most visible rooster .)*

The difference between 1989 and 2016 is 27 years, a huge increase in ticket prices and a dystopian reaction to Dave Cihla's special baseball artwork.

Not so innocent times in '89, to be sure. But the Wrigley Field bleachers admission was just \$5. And the fan reaction when the twentysomething Cihla took his Shawon-O-Meter sign to San Francisco for the '89 NLCS wasn't anywhere close to that of the '16 World Series in Progressive Field for the display of the first Meter's worthy successor – the Schwarb-O-Meter.

Kyle Schwarber's startling comeback that almost overshadowed the Fall Classic itself was boosted by Cihla's low-tech (i.e., hand-made) celebration of the rehabbed DH's slugging percentage, contrasting with the slowly-rising batting average of Shawon Dunston on the original sign in '89. Only this time the Indians fans, realizing the Cubs were starting to snatch the World Series away from their heroes after falling behind 3-1, got rabid at the sight of the Meter.

Cihla, 53, had a standing-room-only ticket for Game 6 in Cleveland, permitting him to roam. So he broke out the Schwarb-O-Meter in the right-field stands. For a few minutes, he might have wished he didn't.

"Game 6 was absolute insanity," said Cihla, proprietor of the Cihla Realty ([CihlaRealty.com](http://CihlaRealty.com)) residential real-estate brokerage two miles northwest of Wrigley Field in the Lincoln Square neighborhood.



**Kyle Schwarber examines the Schwarb-O-Meter for the first time with creator Dave Cihla in Urbana just before spring training. Photo credit Dr. David Fletcher, Chicago Baseball Museum.**

“If we get out of here with our teeth, we’re doing good. It was so scary.

“It was his first or second at-bat. I started doing the Meter. There were some Cubs fans in front of us. All of a sudden this shower of beer comes flying at me. A 24-ounce can bounced off my head or the sign. I turned around and just snapped. I taunted them. They were literally clawing at me.”

A buddy of Cihla in the left-field stands could spot the commotion across the field. Cihla tried to give back as good as he got. A Cubs fan with her two sons asked him to stop swearing. So he decided to move out of the area.

“Right as we were leaving, five cops were coming to the section. We would have been thrown out for sure,” Cihla said.

### **Big Cleveland fan targets Cihla, sign**

“This one big guy was following me out, trying to trip me, trying to grab the sign out of my hands. He shouted, ‘I’m going to beat the (bleep) out of you, tear your glasses off.’ When we found a cop, he gave the big guy some grief. There was this attitude it was not going to happen in our house.”

Cihla found a much more friendly reception for the Schwarb-O-Meter in Game 7, when what could have been (for a few minutes) the greatest loss in Cubs history turned into the franchise’s greatest triumph.

“Game 7 was a totally different vibe,” he said. “It was 50 percent Cubs fans, if not more. Indians fans gave up. It was a complete takeover.”

The Schwarb-O-Meter made its World Series debut on Oct. 26 for Game 2 in Cleveland. Cihla had stayed up 'til 3 a.m. during the wee hours before Game 1 of the World Series crafting the entirely new Meter. He then “raced” in his car to Cleveland, dug deep in his wallet, getting “lucky” to land good seats for Game 2 and displayed the sign on the Fox broadcast thanks to his prime location.

“It was shown one time and our phones blew up,” Cihla said. “It went viral on Twitter. Joe (Buck) and (John) Smoltz kind of chuckled. Buck said that’s the ‘O Meter’ you saw at Wrigley Field through the years.”

Cihla had a much calmer off-season, capped by Schwarber’s first face-to-face introduction to Cihla and the Schwarb-O-Meter at a charity event Jan. 27 in Urbana for Tom Jones Challenger League, which enables kids with special needs to play baseball. Cihla and Schwarber posed with the sign, giving the slugger a chance to hear about Cihla’s historical background documenting a Cub’s rising production.



**The Schwarb-O-Meter gets prime display in Game 7 of the World Series only feet away from Cubs manager Joe Maddon.**

The unassuming native of west suburban Riverside, Cihla is famed for crafting the Shawn-O-Meter. The hand-made sign, updated daily starting in '89, gained tons of exposure on WGN telecasts. The Shawn-O-Meter became an iconic symbol of the Boys of Zimmer surprise National League East champions, celebrating Cubs shortstop Shawon Dunston finally fulfilling some of his offensive promise as his batting average climbed to a “lofty” .278.

Andre Dawson’s remembrance of Dunston’s ’89 relationship with Don Zimmer after the latter’s death in 2014 appeared in this story:

<http://www.chicagobaseballmuseum.org/files/CBM-Don-Zimmer-20140606.pdf>.

Eighteen years after Dunston’s last Cubs contest, Cihla decided to revive the concept after Schwarber lofted a homer atop the Wrigley Field right-field video board in the 2015 NLDS against the Cardinals to propel the Cubs into the NLCS against the Mets.

“Schwarber’ and ‘Shawon’ sound similar,” Cihla said. “They both wore No. 12. He’s one of the top sluggers in baseball, so we decided to use slugging percentage instead of batting average.

“It all comes down to scotch tape and paper.”



**Dave Cihla (left) and buddy David Scacco display the well-worn 1990s-vintage Shawon-O-Meter, with Kyle Schwarber's name taped over Shawon Dunston's, at Game 2 of the 2015 NLCS at Citi Field in New York.**

But at first, Cihla was not creative enough to make an entirely new sign. He brought the Shawon-O-Meter out of longtime mothballs to create the first makeshift Schwarb-O-Meter for Game 1 of the NLCS against the Mets on Oct. 17, 2015 at Citi Field. He simply scribbled Schwarber’s name, placing it over Dunston’s. On the back were the remnants of the “Gwynn-O-Meter,” the flip side marking the late Tony Gwynn’s aborted drive for .400 in the strike-shortened 1994 season.

Although the hybrid “Meter” was displayed in the stands for the rest of the four-game Mets sweep, it got no broadcast play. However, the timing for Cihla was still superb. Lydia

Wahlke, the Cubs’ assistant counsel and in-house historian, had begun casting a wide net for team memorabilia. She knew about the Shawon-O-Meter. As a result, she helped Cihla gain access to Game 1 in New York. That connection also helped Cihla snare a skybox seat at Dodger Stadium for Game 3 of the NLCS in 2016. In that perch, he hobnobbed with Bob Newhart, native Chicagooan and Cubs fan.

“He felt (the movie) ‘Elf’ would be something special,” Cihla said of the master comedian reviewing his career.

But the best for Cihla and the Schwarb-O-Meter was yet to come.

## Schwarber name on 2015 sign preserved in new clubhouse

Wahlke liked the initial 2015 version so much that Schwarber's name from the sign was placed at the end of a historical timeline display in the new Wrigley Field home clubhouse opened for the 2016 season. Meanwhile, the original Shawon-O-Meter was lent to the Cubs for display underneath the left-field bleachers for '16.

"When Kyle saw his name up there when the Cubs first saw their new clubhouse (on Sunday, April 10, 2016), he got 'verklemt,'" Cihla said of Wahlke's relaying of Schwarber's reaction to the name display. At that moment, Schwarber was trying to come to grips with injuries to his ACL and LCL in his left knee in the 2016 campaign's third game in Phoenix on Thursday, April 7.

"He didn't know his future (at that juncture just three days after the injury and hobbling on crutches). He sees his name, and it meant a lot to him."

Then Schwarber got to sample the full sign and a desktop version at breakfast the morning after the Urbana event on Saturday, Jan. 28. That was the closest Cihla could get to Schwarber after all the post-World Series celebrations and jammed Cubs Convention earlier in January.

"When he first came into (the hotel) Friday night, I walked next to him and asked if I could give it to him," Cihla said. "Schwarber said yes. I think he really appreciated it."



The slugger's name from the first Schwarb-O-Meter in 2015 is hung up as part of a historical display in the Cubs clubhouse.

The question now is how often Cihla can display the new sign in Wrigley Field, behind Schwarber's projected position in left field. Cihla is grown up now, not slumming as a recent grad, and bleacher tickets are no longer the cheap seats, often 10 times the price as in 1989.

Cihla has sterling credentials as a Cubs fan to be recognized by Wahlke and the rest of the organization. He recalls asking his father to buy him a full kids Cubs uniform circa 1969.

"I wore it to kindergarten the next day. How messed up is that?" he mused.

Also messed up was Cihla's baseball career. Probably a better swimmer than a ball-sports guy at Riverside-Brookfield High School, he made "like three errors in the first couple of innings" in his first game at third base as a prepster. "What do we do with this Cihla guy?" he recalled of this teammates' reaction. A further baseball career was cut short in college for assorted reasons. Now Cihla "patrols" the outfield in a 35-and-older league. Without Schwarber's sublime offensive skills, he certainly is not fodder for a "Cihl-O-Meter" sign.

Middle-age responsibilities, family life and the bottom line prevent him from full-time duties displaying the sign in the bleachers, as he did for Dunston, when Schwarber takes his position in left field a few feet away. So the hope is the Cubs help him out “to get it in the hands of hundreds of fans.”



**Harry Caray popularized the original Shawon-O-Meter in 1989, then saw it up close and personal on the field.**

History is at stake. After all, the original Shawn-O-Meter is in the Smithsonian Institution, donated by Cihla after he read an article on a plane after the 1989 season about the institution. The Hall of Fame got No. 2 in mid-season 1990. What is now the Chicago History Museum corralled Shawn-O-Meter *tres* at the end of 1990. The recycled 1991-97 version is in the Cubs' hands, waiting for a permanent display at home since the underworld of the bleachers is being converted into bullpens.

If the Cubs win a second consecutive World Series with Schwarber again playing a primo role, looks like the Cooperstown will have some competition for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, but still simple, version of Cihla's celebration of the best of Cubdom.

And if you cannot snare tickets to participate in any displays of the Schwarb-O-Meter, Cihla will gladly sell you a real-sized or desk-top replica, and T-shirts, at Schwarb-O-Meter.com. The very-much Shawon-O-Meter cottage industry of the first year of G. H.W. Bush's regime now is blossoming into real commerce amid the rocky big-league debut of D.J. Trump.

As Cal Coolidge used to say, “The business of America is business.”

For more information about the SchwarboMeter check out:

<https://www.facebook.com/SchwarbOMeter/>

Website: <http://www.schwarb-o-meter.com>

Twitter: [@SchwarbOMeter](https://twitter.com/SchwarbOMeter)