



Lineup switch fixes Cubs

By Matt Beardmore | Daily Herald Correspondent | April 5, 2008

Two hours and 20 minutes before Saturday's first pitch, there was a revolving door of coaches and players walking in and out of the Cubs' workout room. The echoing sounds of Coldplay's "Fix You" escaped into the clubhouse.

How fitting.

After Friday's 4-3 series-opening loss to Houston, Cubs' manager Lou Piniella is looking for ways to fix his team's very cold play.

But would there be a lineup change to jump-start an offense with a .220 batting average? Coach Alan Trammell provided the answer when he taped up Saturday's lineup card. After getting a sixth-inning double in his first Cubs at-bat on Friday, Reed Johnson slid into the 2-hole Saturday behind Alfonso Soriano (.045 through 5 games) with Ryan Theriot (.190) dropping to eighth.

"I've got to play my bench some, I really do," Piniella said. "What's the sense of having people come out of spring training with at-bats and sharp then all of a sudden have them sit there for a couple weeks without playing?"

Johnson hit .281 with 42 home runs and 234 RBI in five seasons with Toronto.

Low-key Lou? When a member of the Japanese media relayed to Piniella that Kosuke Fukudome said he was a "very, very patient manager," a wide grin beamed across the Cubs' skipper face. "That's one way that I've never been described in this country," Piniella said with a laugh. "Maybe the managers in Japan are very, very impatient.

"I'm older -- he should have caught me about 15 years ago. I don't get upset very often, I really don't."

The faster grass: The off-season facelift of the Wrigley Field playing surface was supposed to eliminate the awkward hops and improve the field's drainage ability. But as witnessed by Alfonso Soriano's misplay of Miguel Tejada's eighth-inning triple Friday, the field looks noticeably faster.

"It is, but there's nothing you can do about it," Piniella said. "They laid the new field, the weather's been really, really cold and the grass hasn't grown. In fact, there's still spots where it's frozen underneath. In the next few weeks, that will cease to be a problem."

To err is Cub: Friday it was Mark DeRosa booting a Lance Berkman grounder and Soriano overrunning Tejada's double-turned-triple in the eighth. Saturday was more of the same as Jason Marquis was doubled up at third on a flyball to center and Derrek Lee committed an error on a groundball from Hunter Pence in the sixth. The Astros' right fielder stole second and scored on a Darin Erstad double. The Cubs have committed 5 errors through five games.

Not much of a relief: Bob Howry struggled in the eighth inning, giving up 3 hits and 2 earned runs while facing just four batters in one-third of an inning. "One thing we need to do though is get Howry going," Piniella said. "We need to get him some more work and get him sharp because he's a big part of our bullpen. Once he gets going, he's really, really good."

Friday farm report: Sean Marshall struck out six and tossed 3 innings of perfect baseball Friday as the Iowa Cubs lost 4-2 in their season-opener to Round Rock. Last season with the Cubs, the left-hander posted a 7-8 record and 3.92 ERA in 19 starts.

Cubs 9, Astros 7

At the plate: The legend of Kosuke Fukudome grows with each game as the Cubs' right fielder finished 2-for-4, including a bunt single in the sixth and a 2-run double in the seventh that gave the Cubs a 7-5 lead. Derrek Lee's batting average shot up 144 percentage points with a 4-for-4 effort against Roy Oswalt. Lee's solo shot in the second was his second home run of the season. Reed Johnson went 2-for-5 with 2 RBI in his first start as a Cub. Lou Piniella said Johnson will start again today in the series finale. Jason Marquis slapped an RBI double to right in the second and reached safely on a Ty Wigginton throwing error in the fifth before being thrown out at third.

On the mound: Listening to the chorus of boos serenading him as he left the game in the sixth, you got a good idea of how Jason Marquis' afternoon went. Making his first start of the season, the right-hander walked only one, but allowed 8 hits and 5 runs (4 earned) in 5 1/3 innings. Kevin Hart struck out two and allowed 1 hit in 1 2/3 innings of scoreless relief to pick up his first major-league win. Carlos Marmol retired both batters he faced in the eighth, and Kerry Wood went a perfect ninth to go 2-for-2 in save opportunities.

-- Matt Beardmore