

# The Cubs Way

By Tom Verducci

-Theo Epstein: "I hate it when people blame their environment because especially in a leadership position, you're responsible for how you react to your environment and how you change your environment and being a positive force to change it for the better if you think something is toxic. I wouldn't blame anyone else for it or anyone else.

-Joe Maddon on Kyle Schwarber: "He is what we want to be. How he prioritizes winning, how he cares about his teammates, how hard he plays, how much he loves the game, and how much he wants to win."

-Theo Epstein on Schwarber: "He's a *heartbeat* guy."

-Theo Epstein: "I want to construct a scouting and player development machine. We are going to have the resourcefulness of a small market team and the resources of a big market team."



-On the role of character in Theo's plan: "Then Epstein told them about one of the strongest pillars in his rebuilding plan: He wanted players with strong character. 'We aren't going to compromise character for talent. We're the Cubs. We're going to have both talent and character.'" The idea of so strongly emphasizing character may have struck some as odd, especially coming from a Bill James disciple who built two World Series championships in Boston as an early adopter of analytics. Numbers had been his preeminent guiding principle."

-On the need to change their scouting processes from their days in Boston: "The landscape was flat now. There were so many smart people working for teams. Thinking back to the energy in that room in Boston when we could go after the Millar's, the Mueller's, the Guillen's, and the Hafner's, it was so different now. It was really great all of us were here in Chicago, but we knew we couldn't fall back on the way we used to do it. We had to keep evolving. We realized this was going to be really different."

-On the importance of information in scouting: "The currency in the draft is information. The currency in the draft isn't 'I'm a little bit better scout than you.'

-On sharing evaluation information with players: For years, baseball teams rarely shared player evaluations with the players themselves. Scouts and executives filed reports and the information remained closely-held internally, buried in file cabinets. It had occurred to Epstein that the first time an organization tells a player he's not good enough is when it's too late - when they release him. Why wouldn't a team tell a player about his strengths and weaknesses? He learned that Mike Shapiro had regularly shared player evaluations with players during his time as General Manager of the Cleveland Indians."



-On "That's Cub": "Morale was so high at the 2013 Instructional League in Mesa that an image-changing mantra emerged. Whenever somebody executed a winning type of fundamental play - advancing a baserunner, executing a relay, taking an extra base, anything straight out of the Cubs Way - a coach or instructor would shout, 'That's Cub!' Players picked up shouting the honor themselves."

-Acronym:

- C - Courage to do the right thing (even if it's scary or uncomfortable)
- U - Urgency to do the right thing right now
- B - Belief that we can do it

-Jake Arietta: "When my career first started, I was trying to be the best player I could be for myself. That's how a lot of guys are initially. You want to be the best player you could possibly be on an individual level. That's drastically changed for me based on relationships I've developed, how I've grown (mentally and physically), getting to know teammates' families, and getting to know their kids. I want them to know I will help them anytime."

-Another note Maddon would write on his lineup card: Don't ever permit the pressure to exceed the pleasure.

-Epstein on the addition of Maddon: "Epstein knew the future of the Cubs belonged to the four pillars (Schwarber, Rizzo, Bryant, and Russell), but until they fully matured with the wisdom and experience to be true leaders, Epstein needed a willful manager to establish the environment to allow them such personal growth."

-Maddon to the team after losing in the 2015 Playoffs: "Go ahead and lose heart for 30 minutes, but then let's step back and realize what we accomplished and let's celebrate."

-Maddon on embracing individuality: "One of the things I've stressed since day 1 is to be yourself. I've tried to embrace everyone's individuality."

-Maddon on the importance of spring training: "Spring training isn't about BP or side sessions. The most important thing to get them thinking properly. It's not about how many repetitions. I want us to think well."

-Two stories that impacted how Epstein dealt with players:

- Craig Shipley told him that all players felt lied to by the front office.
- Gary DiSarcina told him that he wished the front office had shared with him the scouting reports on his weaknesses that had instead stayed filed away.

-Joe Maddon on his policy with players: "It sounds really insignificant, but players were never told what administration thought of them. That's the essence of bad coaching. Say me and you are watching Gary DiSarcina play shortstop. This would happen all the time. I would explain this to coaches in meetings. We're watching and I might say, 'Damn, Gary needs to get better at turning the double play.' So many times coaches would say that to each other and never say it to the player. Never. My point is that if you want to badmouth one of these players, you need to tell the player. The moment you say it to someone else, the player needs to hear it to. There are times when you want to keep it to yourself, you can bite your tongue, but once you verbalize it to someone else, you need to tell the player."



-Maddon to the team shortly before the playoffs: "Understand this right now: Something bad is going to happen. It will. When it happens, we have to keep our heads and we have to fight through it. Expect it and ready yourself right now to fight through it."

am picking on you. And it works both ways. If you are really upset with me, I want you to tell me and you are going to know that I'm going to accept the constructive criticism."

- "97% of team meetings aren't necessary. I think a lot of it is for show. A lot of times when a manager gets upset like that and has to have a meeting, it's for his own feelings and also to produce the effect to say, 'I had a meeting and I got suitably angry because the guys aren't winning.' Any time you blow up on your guys publicly, I think it's to protect yourself. I refuse to do that."
- "The more meetings you have to have, it means you're pretty bad."
- "I prefer meetings by players, among each other. I prefer that. I like when players talk to one another more than when coaches address them. I like my coaches meetings when they talk pre-series. It's empowerment too. But I think if there's an issue, when it comes to players talking amongst each other I think it's more impactful."
- Maddon prefers to hold just three team meetings each year: one at the start of spring training, one just before the All-Star break, and one before the start of the postseason. All of them are planned meetings to project a positive message.
- "I read once a really good line, 'Praise publicly, criticize privately.' I love that."

#### 5. Do not have a fine system

- Maddon seemed to have a fine system when he began managing in Tampa Bay, but he chose to consider it as an educational and team-building exercise. Maddon would write the names of certain bottles of wine on slips of paper, fold the slips, and place them in a jar that he kept in his office. If a player violated a principle of the game Maddon thought deserved a fine, he called the player into his office after the game and asked him to pick a piece of paper from the jar. The player would have to buy the bottle listed, and bring it to the clubhouse. "I was trying to make a point and make it fun. Because the wine was going right into the clubhouse kitchen. So after the game I was trying to teach them wine, about a good glass of wine. The group was way too young in the beginning. I had a victory chalice there. A big wine glass with 'Victory' on it. After we won a series, I would take some of the really good stuff"



these young guys in regards to instructions. I don't like when guys get in other guys' heads. A veteran sees a rookie coming at his position and he might want to create doubt in his head. Just because he's a veteran doesn't mean he's going to have good influence. Just because the back of his baseball card reads well doesn't mean he's a leader."

- "As a manager you have to coach the coaches and not permit them to carry a message that's not your message

### 9. Question data with feel

- "All this different stuff that's available is good and I believe in it, but you've heard me say it a lot in the postseason: I've got to feel it. I've got to feel what's going on right now. And that's why I don't sit in the dugout. I've got to get up where I can feel everything because when you get isolated in this little cubicle you don't feel around you. I don't like it. I don't think I'm making as good of a decision. I've got to feel it."

### 10. Pregame work is excessive

- "I think in the 80's it became popular to get extra work in. Work, work, work. I think it can be counter-productive.
- "If you stay off your feet longer, I think it benefits you. It's nothing you ever did when you were kids playing. You didn't go out there and practice 5 hours before you played the game ever."



### 11. Keep signs simple and to a minimum

- "I don't like them to give them signs. I like them to rely on their baseball instincts. I don't want to insult.

### 12. A lineup card is all a manger needs in the dugout

- The problem Maddon sees with this long-held belief is that it encourages a passive mindset on the bases. The entire premise is based on playing it safe before the ball is even hit.
- "It's not about reinvention. It's about trying to stay ahead of things especially when you're managing the Rays. You have the limited payroll. You're playing the Yankees. How do you beat them? If you try to go with the conventional, you're going to get your brains beat in. They have a greater ability to win with tried & true than you do. You've got to figure out different angles or ways to get through all that. I know what I'm doing and why I'm doing it. I'm not trying to impress anyone."





## 7. Empower your coaches

- "Empowering the coaching staff is huge because I had been in a situation where the coaching staff was not empowered. I never felt not empowered myself. I think that's something you feel if you lack self-confidence, the fact that you've not been empowered by somebody. But if you have self-confidence, nobody can ever take that power away from you. But I've been around guys I know who felt a lack of power because the manager would not give them specific things to do or they felt they were not being listened to. And that never bothered me. Never. Because I was always very confident in what I did and my opinions. But I listened. And getting in that position I never wanted to be that guy who made my coaching staff feel like they couldn't say what was on their mind.
- "My thought was, any time anybody shows up to work they need to feel as though they can make an impact. And if they feel like they can make an impact and they feel a part of this thing, then when things don't go well, they can't jump ship and can't do the infamous backstabbing. They can't do that because they've been part of the planning. Now if you exclude them from the planning, and you have these moments when things don't go so well, that's when guys jump ship. So this was all obvious to me coming up. All this stuff I've been doing since '81 and I have strong opinions about how to do it and how not to do it based on people I thought did it well and more importantly people I thought didn't do it well.

## 8. But don't allow your coaches - or veterans - to be harsh on young players

- "I saw it when I first got to the big leagues. I thought some young players' abilities were being negatively impacted by veteran players, managers and coaches. They were kind of subduing the personalities of these young guys, whether by making fun of the way they dressed, being hyper-angry at mistakes, intolerant of mistakes. Definitely young players had a big target on their back. The more veteran players had a smaller target on their back. The way the rookie mistake was treated always bothered me. I saw guys who had been playing for seven years making the same mistake, but when it's a rookie mistake, people think it requires a heavier hand than the guy who's been doing it for seven years. It bothered me. If you want these young guys to play as well as they can quickly, then you've got to change your approach with how you deal with them. You have to permit them to be themselves, and, of course, like everybody else, if they mess up they have to be told about it, but you don't get hyper-angry with them or send them back to the minors or explain it to them in a way that absolutely fractures their self-confidence."
- "You just can't give these guys [the veterans] the free wheel in how they interact with

## Joe Maddon's 13 Core Principles of Managing

1. Make a personal connection first - everything else follows
2. There is only one team rule (Respect 90)
3. Freedom is empowering
4. Never hold a team meeting in your home clubhouse
5. Do not have a fine system
6. Wear whatever you think makes you look hot
7. Empower your coaches
8. But don't allow your coaches - or veterans - to be harsh on young players
9. Question data with feel
10. Pregame work is excessive
11. Keep signs simple and to a minimum
12. A lineup card is all a manager needs in the dugout
13. Forget "The Book." Making the first or third out at third base is okay

### 1. Make a personal connection first - everything else follows

- "The greatest responsibility of the manager is to create a positive environment that promotes growth and success. The key to creating that environment is first making a connecting with the players on a personal level."
- "You want to impart information, knowledge, methods and how-to's. And that's a lot of people's first thought going into a new moment. For me, my first thought is to get to know you. Then we trust each other. And then we can exchange ideas. Then we can go there, but if you try to go there before all this other stuff has been established, a lot of this fertile seasoning lands in bad spots - in infertile areas and all of a sudden, it's going to go away."
- "How do you create that connection? You do that by conversation, by talking. 'How is your family?' or 'What are you thinking?' or 'Where are you from?' All kinds of personal questions. Just get in there a little bit and find some common ground. And as we keep moving along, from that there are going to be these moments in baseball where I've got to be brutally honest with guys. I think over a period of time they know you're being straight up with them because baseball players want straight up. They don't want any kind of sugar-coating. When a player finally understands that, if I tell you the truth you may be upset with me for a week to 10 days. But if I lie to you, you're going to hate me forever."
- "What eventually occurs after that is that we've arrived at this point of trust. Now I can be constructively critical and you are not going to push back. You are not going to think I



-Maddon on an interaction with longtime MLB manager Gene Mauch: "He called me over and told me, 'You've created a great atmosphere here.' I remember going home that night and wondering what he was talking about exactly. Another coach here told me how positive I was. I never knew that, I hadn't thought about myself like that. He made me think about being positive. Gene made me think about creating atmosphere in a good way. My next thought was *What are they talking about?* I had to first understand what Gene was talking about because my concern was *What if I can't do this again next year? What am I doing? How can I do this again?* I thought it started with communication."

-Maddon on his rise up through the coaching ranks: "You talk about learning your craft? All the stuff we can talk about now is about all the stuff I did to prepare myself for these moments, the labor-intensive work, the 10,000 hours."

-On Maddon's managing style: "Maddon's entire managing philosophy begins with those interpersonal relationships. Before you can manage and lead, you first must establish trust. **Before you can establish trust, you first need to establish a personal relationship with your players.** This emphasis on connecting with people is what so attracted Epstein to Maddon. Epstein wanted an organization with a holistic approach to development. Epstein looked for an edge over the rest of baseball in the character of his players. Finding a manager who not only believed in that edge, but also one who could nurture it to its greatest potential was the missing piece."

-When in Tampa, Maddon ordered signs in several languages that read, "Attitude is a Decision." Others included:

- Every Day Counts
- 9 = 8 (9 guys playing hard will get the team into one of the 8 playoff spots)
- Be Present
- Get Loud (strive for hard-hit balls)

-On Maddon's speech to the organization: "He knew the first step to flipping a culture was his golden rule of managing: Connect, Trust, and Lead. 'What you need to understand,' Maddon told the assembled members of the organization. 'We need to get to know each other. We need to start trusting each other and then we need to start bouncing ideas off each other without any push-back. In other words, once you've trusted me and I've trusted you, we can exchange ideas openly without this concern about who's right. That's natural, that's human nature. You've got to get beyond the "Who's right?" moment.' He added that he would have just one rule: Respect 90."

-On Theo's 2012 organization meeting in Mesa, Arizona: "Epstein devoted day 1 to pitching philosophy. He devoted the second day to hitting philosophy. He devoted the third to defense and base-running. The last day was devoted to character. The Cubs, Epstein insisted, would acquire only players with outstanding makeup. Even Epstein realized himself how far he had evolved since he put so much faith in numbers when he began as General Manager with the Red Sox. Now character did not just matter, it was essential to Epstein's blueprint to win the World Series.



-Epstein on the role of character: "I used to scoff at it in Boston. I just felt that we were going to win by getting guys who got on base more than the other team and by getting pitchers who miss bats and get ground balls. Talent wins. But every year I did the job, I developed a greater appreciation for how much the human element matters and how much more you can achieve when you have players who care about winning, care about each other, develop those relationships, have those conversations. It creates an environment where the sum is greater than the parts."

-Epstein on how character became so important: "It was a lot of things. It was living through the Nomar trade and how we played in the aftermath of that...the lesson was that character in the clubhouse mattered - especially in a major market where negative issues get amplified.

-Epstein on the role the draft played for the Cubs: "The key to building a winning culture started in the draft room. That's the one time all year where you decide proactively, affirmatively what type of person, what kind of human being you want to bring into your organization. The entire universe is out there and you choose one of them. Whether you admit it or not, you're kind of saying, 'This is what I want my organization to be. This is what I want my organization to be about. This is a Cub.' Every time you pick, especially in the first round, that's what you're saying."

-On how Epstein has improved as a General Manager: "Epstein made a bet on the importance of the players he acquired. It wasn't to replace the edge in analytics, but to enhance it. He made this bet as baseball front offices were more resembling technology companies with employees boasting degrees from some of the country's best universities."