

Manny

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a team headed to the National League Championship Series.

“It’s awesome, bro,” Ramirez said, sitting the home dugout at Wrigley Field. “It’s unbelievable now that I’m here. It’s crazy.”

Ramirez played his last big league game for the Tampa Bay Rays in 2011. He bounced around the minors with Oakland and Texas and played a stint for the EDA Rhinos in China. Ramirez joined the Cubs at the outset of 2014 as a player-coach at Class AAA Iowa. If Ramirez possesses an official title now, no one can ascertain it.

“I just know he’s Manny,” rookie slugger Kyle Schwarber said.

“Talk to [team president Theo Epstein] on that,” pitching coach Chris Bosio said.

“I just be myself,” Ramirez said.

The Cubs view Ramirez as equal parts sage, hitting instructor and life coach, particularly for the club’s stable of young Latin players. He has been especially crucial for Soler, who does not have access to his family and speaks little English. Players notice Ramirez roaming with the Latin contingent at the ballpark and away from it.

“Manny has done a wonderful job in the background,” Cubs Manager Joe Maddon said. “A lot of it has to do with our young Hispanic players. He does a great job with them. He does a great job in general, but I’ve always been a big believer in the Hispanic culture regarding having a coach specific to that group who they

could really relate to. . . . I watch what he does. I don’t just stare him down, but I know what he’s doing all the time. And it’s been pretty special.”

Ramirez serves in part as an interpreter between Cubs hitting coach John Mallee and the team’s Latin players. Ramirez can chime in with his own advice, and he has the understanding of both language and hitting to translate Mallee’s message.

“Our hitting coach doesn’t speak Spanish,” Schwarber said. “How’s he going to try to get it across to Soler?”

Ramirez said he always believed he’d work in baseball once his playing career ended, which sounds either false or delusional. Yet baseball has welcomed back other admitted PED users. Mark McGwire is the Los Angeles Dodgers’ hitting coach, and Matt Williams managed the Washington Nationals for two seasons. Ramirez drew scorn for other antics. At the end in Boston, he made near-annual trade requests of Epstein, who finally dealt him in 2008 after teammates believed Ramirez faked a knee injury.

And so no baseball franchise appeared likely to ask Ramirez to mentor some their young hitters — especially one headed up by an executive who tolerated Manny being Manny for so many years.

“Theo would have been the last person you would have expected to give Manny a second chance,” one Cubs official said. “But he recognized a changed person.”

“I never thought I was going to get a chance from him,” Ramirez said. “Now, I’m here. We’re best buddies. We always talk about the game and the guys. That’s why I’m here.”

Ramirez contends that finding religion altered his life after his playing career, and that he has dedicated himself to passing wisdom to younger players. He remembers the effect such players as Dave Winfield, Eddie Murray and Roberto Alomar had on him as a young player in Cleveland, and he wants to have the same effect. Ramirez uses his performance-enlating drug use as a cautionary tale with his pupils. He does not like to address the ugliness at the end of his career publicly, at least not during the postseason.

“I look at things like, that’s in the past,” Ramirez said. “I’m not going to go back. I live in the moment. I’m here. I’m helping. We see the results that we’re having as a team. It makes me so happy when you’re working with the young guys and you see the success they’re having. That’s all you can take with you.”

Ramirez spends his time during games in the video room and clubhouse. Hitters wander down the tunnel, and he explains what he has gleaned from the game. “He tells me how the pitcher is going to pitch me,” second baseman Starlin Castro said. He reminds players to be patient, to make the pitcher come to them. He reinforces good hitting habits and reminds players to think about what worked during their best streaks.

“The game is still easy,” Ramirez said. “All you got to do is pay attention to the game, and the game will tell you what the pitcher is trying to do to you. By you just watching the game and watching what he likes to do, that’s all it is.

Even for all his goofball moments and malcontent proclivities as a player, no

one questioned Ramirez’s dedication to craft. He is a savant who used to purposefully take foolish swings so the pitcher would throw him the same pitch later. He arrived at the ballpark at 10 a.m. to watch film and hone his heavenly swing on the day of a 7 p.m. game.

“He was a hitting machine, man,” Cubs catcher Miguel Montero said. “Sometimes, it sounds easy for him to tell you something. But it’s not as easy as it was for him. He gives you that confidence level. He’s amazing. Sometimes, that’s all you need.”

Ramirez operates with relentless positivity. Monday afternoon, the day of Game 3 of the NLDS, Ramirez told Anthony Rizzo over and over, “You’re going deep tonight.” Rizzo had started the postseason 0 for 10. In his third at-bat, Rizzo launched a fastball into the right field bleachers.

Players struggled to describe the precise effect Ramirez has on their clubhouse, but they agreed his aura adds levity and confidence. His message sinks in because of his stature. If Ramirez is telling them something, including how good they are, it must be true.

“He’s really good and positive, too,” Rizzo said. “Manny Ramirez is being positive to me. I grew up watching him do heroics year in, year out. For him to say something to me like that, it’s like, ‘Wow.’”

Schwarber first noticed Ramirez at spring training this season, and he had a double-take moment. “I’m like: ‘That’s Manny! That’s the guy who made Fenway look like Great American Ball Park for years,’ ” Schwarber said. “You get starstruck. Then you get to know him, and he’s just a regular dude.”

Odom

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day stay, Odom had been taking large amounts of “herbal Viagra,” a nonprescription product which can dramatically lower blood pressure and interact with other medications.

Khloe Kardashian, whose whirlwind romance with Odom was captured in “Keeping Up With the Kardashians” and its spin-off, “Khloe and Lamar,” was at his bedside, TMZ and Us Weekly reported.

The couple split in 2013 after four years of marriage and their divorce was finalized in July, though she has remained in close contact with him.

Celtics

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ericks keep it if it’s in the top seven. And the C’s can switch picks with Brooklyn in 2017 while getting its No. 1 unencumbered again in 2018 — but that’s a matter for another season or more.

For this season, Greenhearts will first check the Celtics’ score on any given night. They also will glance at the Nets’ outcome, hoping for different results from each.

But they shouldn’t expect that Celtics players will be checking the Brooklyn scores along with them. The C’s are strikingly oblivious to the fact that Brooklyn’s 2015-16 season could affect their own 2016-17 and beyond.

These guys are taking the concept of living in the moment quite seriously.

“We get the Nets’ first-round pick next year?” Marcus Smart said. “Really? I didn’t know.”

His backcourt partner was of a similar mind.

“I honestly didn’t know that,” Bradley said later. “I

don’t pay attention to that.

“The only thing that I pay attention to is the team that we have next and what I have to do.”

The Celtics would rather not cloud their heads with

Odom publicist Eve Sarkisyan said in a statement that “family and friends are extremely concerned for Lamar” but warned against “false information being circulated unofficially.”

Odom’s hospitalization followed a downturn in a 14-season career with National Basketball Association teams, including the Lakers from 2004-2011.

Former teammates rallied to his support Wednesday.

Lakers player Kobe Bryant left following a preseason game to visit Odom in the hospital. Others took to Twitter.

“I have been praying all morning for my good friend and Laker great, Lamar Odom, that God will bless him to pull through,” former Lakers great Earvin “Magic” Johnson, said in a tweet.

what-ifs and hypotheticals — especially not during training camp when they’re trying to get their offense and defense in place.

There is also the fact some of the Celts might not be Celts next season. Trades can be made. Contracts run out.

Jared Sullinger is in the last guaranteed season of his rookie deal, and while the club has had discussions with his agent about an extension, it’s possible he could play out the year and, if the Celtics give him the qualifying offer, become a restricted free agent next summer — or an unrestricted free agent if they don’t.

But Sullinger isn’t even thinking about his own situation and how it might play out. He’s just looking at the here and now. First-round picks? Not in his line of sight.

“We’re just out here to play basketball, you know?” he said. “If we’re already thinking about the next draft . . . we might as well tank our season if we’re thinking like that. Our main focus is to just win basketball games.”

David Lee, an offseason acquisition from the Golden State Warriors, played the new guy card when asked about the Celts owning the Nets’ pick.

“I didn’t know that,” Lee said. “I just got here. I didn’t know any of that.

MMA

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“In the fifth round when he got me to the ground, the second he got me there, I just kept telling myself, ‘You have to get up, you have to get up.’ I was going to lose this fight if I didn’t get up because all my decision losses were from being held down,” Sanders said.

“My getting up those times against Cruz is what helped me win that fight. I was the one who was coming forward. I was the one who was striking, and he was just trying to hold me down. I was there to fight,” he said.

Sanders, who entered the fight ranked seventh among New England welterweights and ninth among the region’s lightweights, plans to continue campaigning at the lower weight class.

“Fighting at 155 is where I

should have been all along because I feel really good and strong at 155,” he said. “And with Cruz being in the top five and me beating him it’s gotten the momentum rolling and hopefully it will open up doors.”

Sanders said those doors may lead farther away from his home turf.

“Toe2Toe has done a good job of bringing in good guys for me,” he said. “I want to fight the top-five guys, but it’s tough to get guys from Massachusetts and Rhode Island to come to Maine and fight because they lose out on ticket sales and things like that.

“In order for me to continue to grow, I’ll probably have to fight more out of state,” he said.

Boyington bout to be live streamed

Bruce Boyington’s World Series of Fighting debut on Saturday night will be available for viewing at www.WSOF.com.

Boyington, the New England Fights lightweight champion, will take a 10-8 record into his featherweight bout against Rodrigo Almeida as part of WSOF 24 to be held at the Foxwoods Resort Casino in Mashantucket, Connecticut.

Almeida from Woburn, Massachusetts, is 12-2 as a professional entering the bout, one of seven fights on the WSOF undercard. The prelims are scheduled to begin at 7 p.m.

“I have never been more excited in my mixed martial arts career,” said the 36-year-old Boyington, who lives in Brewer, “and I have never taken camp more serious, especially when it comes to my diet and lifestyle so that in itself gives me a lot of excitement for what I’m going to get to do on the national stage Saturday night.”

penalty stroke line (seven yards in front of the goal), stuck out my right foot and was able to get it.”

“Corinne was crazy good today,” said Flag.

“It just wasn’t meant to be, I guess,” said FA coach Stephanie Smith. “We had a lot of opportunities. Our girls played really hard and they played well.”

Besides Saucier, King and Sulinski, Megan Grindle and Lauren Gasaway shone for Old Town while the Bourget twins, Abbi and Alli, Fadley, Becca Anderson and Emily Curtis were constant threats for FA.

Old Town

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The Ponies pressed for an equalizer but Saucier came up with three stellar saves.

First, Mackenzie Beaudry’s powerful shot from the top of the circle found Mariah Poulin at the far post only for Saucier to extend over and stop the bid.

“I got a little bit of (Poulin’s shot) it with my chest,” she said.

Moments later, the dynamic Alli Bourget broke in alone with a nearby defend-

er chasing her but Saucier charged out and smothered the shot as the three players collided.

Her best save came with two minutes left after Bourget made another scintillating run and this time she separated herself from the defender.

“I could tell she had momentum and was going to get past my girls so I prepared myself. I told myself I had to make this save for my team, they’re depending on me,” said Saucier. “At the last second, I saw her drop her head and commit (to the shot), so I came out to the



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