

Ravizza's legacy on Cubs' minds

Team mourning death of psychologist and 'unbelievable listener'



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SAN FRANCISCO — Cubs players had big plans for San Francisco on Monday night, when one of the more popular staffers was due to join the team for the start of the West Coast road trip.

Instead, the trip started on a sad, sobering note with the news that team psychologist Ken Ravizza — a pioneer in sports psychology — had died several days after suffering a heart attack near his home in the Los Angeles area.

"He was always there. He was always happy. He was always smiling," first baseman Anthony Rizzo said. "It's just weird. You see him in L.A. on our last trip, and he was supposed to be here, and we had plans.

"Life happens fast."

Ravizza, 70, built a practice and reputation through the 1980s and '90s during a time of widespread resistance from often-hardscrabble managers and general managers in one of the most old-school cultures in sports: baseball.

Ravizza, who also worked in Olympic sports, football, women's volleyball, Australian rugby and other sports, grew his reputation in baseball through his work with the Cal State-Fullerton program and the Angels' minor-league system — where now-Cubs manager Joe Maddon became a believer, advocate and friend.

"It was quite a shock," said Maddon, who brought Ravizza into the organization when he was hired before the 2015 season, after having taken him with him to Tampa Bay for his first job as a big-league manager. "I just want people to know he was the best at what he did. He left an eternal impact on a lot of us.... There's a tre-



Ken Ravizza (left, with Cubs manager Joe Maddon) was a pioneer in sports psychology whom Maddon brought with him when he came to the Cubs. [TWITTER.COM/CUBS](https://twitter.com/cubs)

mendous amount of Ken's influence that I spew on a daily basis.

"I'm going to miss him. I miss him already."

Shortstop Addison Russell called it a "hard loss" for the Cubs. Ravizza was a widely respected voice in the business who helped Russell feel he belonged in the big leagues as a rookie in 2015 and helped him become an All-Star the next year.

"Something that always stuck with me from Day 1 that I met him was 'Embrace that breath,'" Russell said. "When you embrace your breath, you embrace the presence, where your feet are at today. Just focus on your breath. Take a

deep breath."

Veteran utility player Ben Zobrist worked with Ravizza both in Tampa Bay as a young player and with the Cubs as a veteran.

"Most people in the game don't even realize how much he's brought that [mental side of the] conversation to light," Zobrist said. "He and Joe together really, as a partnership.... [It] was a big-time step forward in the game, to bring that into the mainstream, where it was no longer looked as a weakness but as another way to keep getting better."

Infielder Tommy La Stella's reconciliation with the Cubs after refusing to report to the minors

in 2016 was bridged in large part through Ravizza's efforts.

"He's an amazing person and an even better friend," La Stella said. "He was an unbelievable listener. I just liked to listen to him talk. He has so much knowledge and experience — life experience. Honestly, we never really talked baseball much."

"He knew how to put things that made sense to your mind because he was listening to you talk and he had an incredible knack for that."

Former Cubs catcher John Baker, now in the Cubs' mental skills department, credited Ravizza for bringing Eastern philosophy to

sports — against the grain of the tough-guy culture of American sports — with big success.

"When we're in L.A. he's recommending I go visit the cathedral, not for religious purposes, but just to go experience the vibe in that place," Baker said. "He sent Tommy to the [Self-Realization Fellowship Lake Shrine] in Malibu to walk through the garden, because he thought he'd appreciate it."

Said La Stella: "His mission and everything that he was working to do in professional sports is already well underway."

"He was the first, man. And he was the best."