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Brown, Harrison put in action right away

By Aaron Taube / MLB.com

NEW YORK -- A day after the Pirates placed Steve Pearce and Ryan Doumit on the 15-day disabled list, manager Clint Hurdle decided to put his new callups to use.

Hurdle started Josh Harrison and Dusty Brown on Tuesday against the Mets, with Harrison batting second and playing third base and Brown hitting eighth while catching starter James McDonald.

"I try and get guys in the lineup sooner than later when they join our club," Hurdle said before the Pirates took on Mets knuckleballer R.A. Dickey. "I thought this would be a good opportunity. Both of these guys have pretty short swings."

Though Brown played in 14 games for Boston, Harrison was playing in a Major League game for the very first time.

Harrison said his parents had to return home Tuesday after coming to New York the day before for his first game. His cellphone inbox has been inundated with text messages from friends and family congratulating him and wishing him luck.

"I'm excited to be able to play," Harrison said. "I'm always ready to play, and the fact that I'm up there, I'm just going to stay within myself and try to get on base for the guys behind me."

"I've never dealt with a knuckleball pitcher [Mets starter R.A. Dickey], but it's just one of those things. I take it as a challenge."

Though Brandon Wood has struggled since he began getting starts at third base when Pedro Alvarez got hurt on May 19, Hurdle was non-committal if Harrison had a chance to take over the starting spot while Alvarez heals his right quadriceps.

Wood has a meager .447 OPS for the season and is batting just .053 with a .143 on-base percentage in eight games since Alvarez has been out.

"To take the job, I think that's really being too proactive about it," Hurdle said. "Obviously, there's not a manager in the game who, when a guy plays well, he doesn't try to play him more often. But we're also working on helping Brandon Wood find his rhythm and find the swing that he's had success with at times."

Alvarez rehabbing in Bradenton

NEW YORK -- Pirates third baseman Pedro Alvarez was in Bradenton, Fla., to play an extended Spring Training game, manager Clint Hurdle said earlier on Tuesday.

Alvarez is recovering from tightness in his right quadriceps, which landed him on the 15-day disabled list on May 21. Alvarez was previously scheduled to play in a simulated game, but Hurdle said Alvarez ultimately chose not to because he wasn't comfortable.

Hurdle said that Alvarez did a number of exercises Tuesday, including taking swings and getting out of the box.

"I think we're comfortable with him getting his swing off, running down the line, maybe turning the base, and then once he gets on base, maybe having a pinch-runner and going from there," Hurdle said. "We'll see where that takes us."

Alvarez is eligible to return from the DL on Saturday. He was batting .208 with a .283 on-base percentage, two home runs and 10 RBIs before his injury.

Hanrahan locked in as Pirates' closer

NEW YORK -- If the Pirates are in line to win their first game at Citi Field, they'll look to Joel Hanrahan to close the door and snap their eight-game losing streak at the Mets' new home.

Hanrahan has enjoyed a breakout season since being named the Pirates' closer on Opening Day.

Hanrahan became the team's closer last August, racking up six saves after Octavio Dotel was traded to the Dodgers.

This year, Hanrahan has converted each of his 14 save chances and has posted a career best 1.52 ERA in 23 2/3 innings.

"I just kind of worry about my business the same way," Hanrahan said. "I've really focused on working on my command overall of trying

to throw strikes -- and better located strikes -- and just being more aggressive."

Hanrahan has had success this season in large part by limiting his free passes. Even though he has struck out batters at a lower rate than in his previous five years in the Majors, Hanrahan's 1.9 walks allowed per nine innings this season is by far the best mark of his career, eclipsing last year's 3.4 clip.

Though Hanrahan says he has not changed any of his mechanics this season, he thinks he's done a better job repeating his delivery.

"I haven't changed anything since I first got here in Pittsburgh," said Hanrahan, who came to the Pirates in a trade from Washington during the 2009 season. "The delivery has been the same, I've just been more consistent with it."

This is the second time in Hanrahan's career that he's been named a team's Opening Day closer, having held the role briefly with Washington in 2009 before losing it because of poor performance. While Hanrahan said he likes the security of knowing when manager Clint Hurdle will utilize him, he doesn't know if there's a "closer's mentality" that allows him to perform better in the ninth inning.

"There's definitely an adrenalin rush, but you try to do your best to harness the adrenaline and try to stay even-keeled, no matter what's going on," Hanrahan said. "I try not to get too high or too low and just try to be the same guy out there."

Jones in danger of losing spot in lineup

NEW YORK -- After a scalding-hot start to the season, Pirates right fielder Garrett Jones has struggled mightily in the month of May, and manager Clint Hurdle said Tuesday he doesn't know how much longer he will keep him in the starting lineup.

"You want to get your lineup out that you feel can be the most effective," Hurdle said. "I think an effective bat from Garrett Jones would put our lineup in a much better place, but at the same time, there comes a point in time when you try to find a Plan B or another answer to spark some things for your offense as a whole."

Jones began the season by complementing a robust April slugging percentage of .500 with a .265 batting average and a .375 on-base percentage. But since May 3, he is slugging half that, .232, and batting .161 with a .266 on-base percentage.

Hurdle said he has worked with Jones on taking shorter swings to mitigate his recent habit of swinging under the ball and either popping it up or missing entirely. Still, he said sometimes all it takes is one good night at the plate to get a hitter back on track.

"I've been in that place where it just seems like I can't get a hit and then I throw a night out there," Hurdle said. "Then all of the sudden, you feel there's nobody you can't hit. The mind's a terrible thing to waste."

Aaron Taube is an associate reporter for MLB.com. This story was not subject to the approval of Major League Baseball or its clubs.

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