

 News

Feature News

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Hurdle thankful for support
 By Thomas Harding / MLB.com

DENVER -- If looks were the only way of judging, the verdict on Rockies manager Clint Hurdle would be that the offseason has been good to him.

Earlier this week in his office at Coors Field, Hurdle wore a stylish, expertly tailored suit. The body inside that suit was cut and trimmed as well, thanks to smart eating and a sound workout program. The guy of the body inside radiated a relaxed smile.



"Maddie" is being fed on a schedule and is nearly 13 pounds. (Courtesy of Clint Hurdle)

But Hurdle's happy mood had nothing to do with couture or fitness. It had nothing to do with him.

Wednesday was another chance for Hurdle to smile and laugh as he talked about his daughter, Madison Reilly Hurdle, born Aug. 7. That day, a little more than three months after he became manager, Hurdle agreed to a two-year contract with two option years as the Rockies' manager.

"She's just being a baby right now, which is kind of cool," Hurdle said with a laugh.

When Hurdle first talked at length about Madison with reporters, who

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had gathered around him in the dugout at Coors, he fought tears. Less than a month after the birth of Madison, the first child for Hurdle and his wife, Karla, doctors discovered that Madison was born with Prader-Willi Syndrome, a defect of the 15th chromosome that can cause serious problems with eating and satiation.

When Hurdle announced Madison's struggle publicly, the Hurdles had just learned what can happen with PWS children, mainly that they can become morbidly obese, engage in obsessive-compulsive behavior and become unable to live independently. Not only that, but Madison was experiencing feeding problems at the time.

But now "Maddie," as she is known, is being fed on a schedule. She is nearly 13 pounds. Everytime she outgrows an outfit, Hurdle says it's cause for "high-fiving around the house." Hurdle emphasized that as Maddie grows, other issues such as speech, vision and hand-eye coordination could turn into challenges.

But considering that many PWS children are still being fed through tubes at this stage, Hurdle said he and his wife are thankful.

"She's had an incredible amount of prayer support for the past three months, which we are grateful for and definitely acknowledge is one of the reasons she's having the early successes that she's had," Hurdle said. "We do maintain a guarded optimism. We will through all the stages. This has been obviously a blessing.

"There's a lot of information you get early which prepares you for worst-case scenarios, and a lot of that is unpleasant information."

What Hurdle learned after hearing the initial, shocking words about PWS is that such children have a much better outlook when surrounded by loving families and friends, as well as help from experts. Maddie's progress is well-monitored.

Hurdle said that with family members that include both sets of grandparents, and other family constantly coming by their Highlands Ranch, Colo., home, the baby never has to worry about someone being available to hold her. And those who haven't had their chance to be near her will get theirs when the Hurdles go to their Palm City, Fla., home in December.



Team-by-team holiday features:

AL EAST:	NL EAST:
Blue Jays	Braves
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Red Sox	Mets
Yankees	Phillies

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Indians	Astros
Royals	Brewers
Tigers	Cardinals
Twins	Cubs
White Sox	Pirates
	Reds

AL WEST:	NL WEST:
Angels	Dodgers
Athletics	D-Backs
Mariners	Giants
Rangers	Padres
	Rockies

Hurdle said support comes from unlikely places.

For example, the reason Hurdle was so well-dressed that day in his office had nothing to do with wanting to show off his trim, new look. He had attended a funeral of a child, Ali Meyer. Afterward, Ali's mother, Valerie, stopped him.

"She had a Prader-Willi child in a class she was teaching one year," Hurdle said. "Here is a woman who is grieving the loss of her child, telling me, 'Call if you need a hand. Call if you need support.'"

"I'm just looking at her, going, 'Val, you're unbelievable ...' But that's how people have been here."

Hurdle said the Prader-Willi Syndrome Association Colorado Chapter immediately reached out to the family with invaluable information and support. A local group of families meets monthly near his house. PWSA Colorado is part of a Sarasota, Fla., based national organization that Hurdle says gives his family expert information and practical advice.

"We were visited a month ago by a man who is the treasurer for the national association, and he has a 21-year old daughter -- he was one of the pioneers," Hurdle said. "His daughter wasn't diagnosed until 6 years of age. There were so many things that weren't known then and are known now.

"He was so uplifting. He said, 'My daughter's doing all right. She had to pave a lot of hard ground. But the opportunities for your daughter and daughters and sons after your child, it's unbelievable the accomplishments that have been made. We just all keep helping one another.'"

The whole support system brings Hurdle back full circle to six full seasons ago, when he came to the Rockies as hitting coach. He took advantage of the club's community outreach program and began visiting children in hospitals. He recalled making a lifelong friendship with a young man who is about 14. Two years ago, he'd counsel Hurdle on helping hitters. Now, he offers strategic advice. Hurdle marveled that the youngster speaks to him with the same gusto even when feeling his worst.

"Why for the last six years did I go to Swedish Hospital and visit kids and parents, give them a hug and tell them it will be OK, and this is the right place for him, then go outside and say, 'Whew, thank God I don't have a kid here.' Now to go back inside and go, 'Thank God I know that there's a Children's Hospital here because I have a kid that's in here.'"

"There's continuity in the reasons that it's all happened."

Speaking of continuity, Hurdle set aside part of his Wednesday to pick up his other daughter from a previous marriage, Ashley, 17, at Denver International Airport. Ashley visited the University of Colorado during the summer and now is looking at Colorado State as she narrows her college choices.

"Now, how cool is that?" Hurdle said. "Six months ago, she wasn't considering either school in Colorado. Whether it's been the birth of Maddie or Maddie's diagnosis, it's made her rearrange her furniture a little bit and say, 'Maybe I'll look out in Colorado. Maybe it wouldn't be too bad to stay kind of close to dad and Karla and Maddie."

"You want to talk about a special Thanksgiving no matter what happens."

At first, mentions of Maddie brought tears of concern to Hurdle's eyes.

That was before he knew how many people Maddie would bring together in less than four months.

Thomas Harding is a reporter for MLB.com. This story was not subject to the approval of Major League Baseball or its clubs.

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