

Mets hope strong pitching will return for Game 3

SPORTSDIRECT

The New York Mets were touted as the pitching-rich club heading into the World Series, but it is the Kansas City staff that has the upper hand so far. The Royals will try to ride their pitching to a commanding 3-0 lead when they visit the Mets for Game 3 of the World Series on Friday night.

The New York bullpen could not protect a one-run lead in Game 1 and Jacob deGrom had the same problem in Game 2, breaking down in the fifth inning as Kansas City overcame a 1-0 deficit and went on to a 7-1 victory.

“Look, the Royals have a good team,” Mets manager Terry Collins told reporters. “We’ve got to make better pitches and we’ve got to play better.”

Kansas City outlasted New York in 14 innings in Game 1 as its bullpen put up six straight scoreless frames, and then gave that bullpen a night off thanks to Johnny Cueto’s complete-game two-hitter on Wednesday. “We expected to be here,” Royals manager Ned Yost told reporters. “We expected to compete for a world championship against a tough team, and our confidence hasn’t changed from the first day of spring training to this point right now.”

Shortstop Alcides Escobar hopes he has played his final game in Kauffman Stadium this year.

Escobar would prefer to wrap up the series in New York instead of returning to Kansas City.

“(We) go there for three games, but everybody in this room don’t want to play three games, only two,” Escobar said. “For me, I don’t want it coming back here. I want to finish it there.”

The odds lean heavily in the Royals’ favor to win the World Se-

ries. This is the 54th time a team seized a 2-0 lead in the World Series, and 42 went on to win the Fall Classic. That is 79.2 percent.

However, two of the exceptions to that rule were the 1985 Royals, who rallied to beat the St. Louis Cardinals, and the 1986 Mets, who bounced back to top the Boston Red Sox.

A club jumping out to a 2-0 lead won the last nine occurrences and 15 of the past 16. The only exception in that span was the 1996 Atlanta Braves, who won the first two games in New York but dropped the next four games to the Yankees.

“Our confidence level hasn’t changed since the first day of spring training to today,” Royals manager Ned Yost said. “Our confidence has been high all year long. We expected to be here. We expected to compete for a world championship against a tough team.”

If the Mets should win two of three at Citi Field, they would face Johnny Cueto in Game 6 at Kauffman Stadium. Cueto limited them to one run and two hits in a complete game Wednesday.

“Hopefully, he doesn’t have to pitch for us again this postseason, but if he does, we expect him to go out there and do something similar,” Royals pitching coach Dave Eiland said.

“Most of the games in the World Series seem to be must-win,” Mets second baseman Daniel Murphy said.

Does Friday fall into that must-win category?

“I think we’d really like to win that ballgame,” Murphy said.

The Mets will start hard-throwing right-hander Noah Syndergaard in their first home game of the series.

“I think we’re looking forward to this off day (Thursday),” said Murphy, who went 0-for-2 with two walks and scored New York’s lone



BRAD PENNER | USA TODAY

Kansas City Royals starting pitcher Yordano Ventura (right) speaks as shortstop Christian Colon translates Mets at Citi Field.

run Wednesday. “It will be a nice chance to spend time with our family. I know I’m looking forward to it.

“It’s nice to have Noah going. We’ll get back to New York, and I know the guys will be excited. We’ll see if we can put ourselves in a position to win a ballgame.”

TV: 8:07 p.m., FOX

PITCHING MATCHUP: Royals RH Yordano Ventura (0-1, 5.09 ERA) vs. Mets RH Noah Syndergaard (1-1, 2.77)

Ventura is making his fifth start of the postseason and is still looking for his first win. The Domini-

can Republic native — the third straight Dominican to start for Kansas City — has yet to complete six innings in those four turns but surrendered one run on four hits over 5 1/3 innings against Toronto in the decisive Game 6 of the American League Championship Series. Ventura is facing the Mets for the first time and is 3-3 with a 3.40 ERA in nine career inter-league starts.

Syndergaard dominated the Chicago Cubs over 5 2/3 innings to win Game 2 of the NLCS, striking out nine while allowing one run and three hits. The rookie flame-

thrower recorded 20 strikeouts in 13 innings over the first two rounds of the playoffs. Syndergaard went 0-2 with a 5.86 ERA in his five interleague starts this season but was 7-2 with a 2.46 mark at home.

NOTES: Mets 2B Daniel Murphy is 2-for-9 with four strikeouts and no home runs in the World Series. ... Kansas City 1B Eric Hosmer is up to 15 RBIs in 13 games this postseason, including four in the World Series. ... New York OF Yoenis Cespedes is 6-for-32 with 10 strikeouts in the last eight postseason games.

Marlins hire Mattingly as manager

BY CRAIG DAVIS
SUN SENTINEL

Don Mattingly has worn baseball’s two most iconic uniforms as a player and manager.

Now he will don the colors of the most unorthodox team in the major leagues.

Mattingly, known as Donnie Baseball during a stellar career as first baseman for the New York Yankees, has been hired as Miami Marlins manager, a source close to him confirmed Thursday to the Sun Sentinel.

Manager of the Los Angeles Dodgers the past five years, Mattingly will be the Marlins 10th manager under owner Jeffrey Loria. He is the seventh since 2010, not counting a one-day interim term by Brandon Hyde.

The Marlins declined to comment and an official announcement is expected to be delayed until after the World Series. Mattingly reportedly has agreed to a four-year contract.

Mattingly, 54, guided the Dodgers to a .551 winning percentage (446-363) and

three National League West titles. But even with baseball’s biggest payroll (\$270 million), the Dodgers couldn’t get past the National League Championship Series under Mattingly and exited after the divisional round of the playoffs the last two seasons.

He comes to a team that has not had a winning season since 2009. The Marlins, if they have a tradition, it is turmoil and upheaval.

Nonetheless, their odd history includes two World Series championships, an achievement that has eluded Mattingly as a player, coach and manager.

Mattingly has been known to be the first choice of Loria since before his tenure with the Dodgers ended last week by mutual consent.

Earlier in the week he confirmed in an interview with syndicated radio per-



Mattingly

sonality Dan Patrick that he had met with Marlins officials about the job and was intrigued by the challenge.

Despite a payroll that ranked next to last at \$69 million and is expected to increase marginally in 2016, the Marlins have a wealth of talented young players, including Giancarlo Stanton, Jose Fernandez and NL batting champion Dee Gordon, who played for Mattingly in Los Angeles.

“It’s just an interesting place because of the young talent that they have and the challenges that it brings, with a young roster, with a situation that’s not going to go out and buy players. You have to develop players and you have to be able to work from within,” Mattingly said on the Patrick show.

Mattingly will be working under an owner known for meddling and second-guessing, but then he played for the master of those attributes with the Yankees, George Steinbrenner.

Marlins managers since 2010 (not counting Hyde):

Fredi Gonzalez, Edwin Rodriguez, Jack McKeon, Ozzie Guillen, Mike Redmond and Dan Jennings.

Mattingly was a six-time All-Star and nine-time Gold Glove winner during a 14-year career with the Yankees. He had a career average of .307, was the American League batting champion in 1984 and the league’s Most Valuable Player in 1995.

He succeeds Jennings, who moved from the general manager’s post to the dug-out early last season despite not being a player or coach at the professional level.

Jennings took over from Redmond after the Marlins struggled to a 16-22 start and guided them to a 71-91 finish in third place in the National League East.

Although Marlins officials said Oct. 6 that Jennings would return to his role as GM, his situation with the clubs has since become uncertain. He has not resumed front-office duties, pending a meeting with Loria that has not taken place, according to reports.

Cowboys’ Randle could be suspended

BY MATT BONESTEEL
THE WASHINGTON POST

Dallas Cowboys running back Joseph Randle is facing possible NFL discipline over a domestic violence incident that happened in February in Randle’s hometown of Wichita, Kansas, ESPN’s Todd Archer and Adam Schechter reported Thursday.

The details: Randle was arrested for unlawful possession of marijuana after police received a call for domestic violence with a weapon after an incident with Randle and the mother of his son.

According to the police report, the mother of Randle’s son said Randle broke a car window in an argument and threatened her with a gun with their son nearby. In April the charges were dropped, but while legally clear, Randle faced sanctions from the NFL.

Randle met with NFL investigators over the summer, with the league determining that he violated the league’s personal-conduct policy within the past week. His punishment has yet to

be determined, but Archer and Schechter report that he’s likely to be suspended, “quite possibly for multiple games.”

According to NFL.com’s Conor Orr, Randle is facing a one- or two-game suspension. Orr adds that Wichita police found that the mother of Randle’s son showed no signs of injury.

The NFL has yet to comment.

Four months before the February incident, Randle was arrested for shoplifting underwear and cologne at a Texas shopping mall. He was fined by the Cowboys over the incident and received six months’ probation.

Randle has started all six games for the Cowboys this season but this week lost his starting job to Darren McFadden, who rushed for 152 yards and a touchdown against the Giants last weekend. If Randle is suspended, Christine Michael and Rod Smith would become the team’s top backups behind the oft-injured McFadden.

Randle was expected to meet with the Cowboys’ coaches on Thursday, Archer and Schechter reported.

Evert: Serve like Serena and you too can dominate

REUTERS

SINGAPORE — Tennis legend Chris Evert believes an inability to dominate on serve is preventing the current crop of female players from usurping Serena Williams at the top of the rankings with the American world No. 1 using her main weapon to great effect.

When Williams opted to skip this week’s WTA Finals in Singapore, citing fatigue after a season that saw the 34-year-old increase her grand slam tally to 21, the event not only lost its most dominant player but also its finest server.

Talking to the media in an ambassadorial role for the elite eight-woman event on Thursday, fellow American Evert, herself an 18-times major winner, said the stability at the top of the ATP rankings was due to the leading men’s ability to hold serve.

“To me, a lot of that fluctuation in the women’s rankings has to do with the serve. There is a lot more predictability that men will hold their serve and matches will go to plan,” the 60-year-old told reporters.

“Women can be broken at any minute and their serve isn’t as dominant. It evens the

playing field a little bit. There is that fluctuation in the women’s game right now and I think it’s all about the serve.

“You’re always going to have it. You’re always going to have that fluctuation... but not with Serena because she has the ability to hold serve.”

As if to prove Evert’s point, world number two Simona Halep became the first woman to crash out of the WTA Finals a few hours later when the Romanian dropped her serve four times in a straight sets defeat to Agnieszka Radwanska.

Pinpointing Spanish world number three Garbine Muguruza as “the real deal” in terms of the next player most likely to threaten Williams’ reign at the top, Evert was also quick to highlight that a balance was necessary to maintain consistency.

“I don’t want to say potential because she’s there, arrived already, looking more and more like somebody who has tremendous ability to not only play great tennis, but to have that personality and that leadership that we need,” Evert said of the 22-year-old who has won both her matches so far in Singapore.

Royals

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sounds like he’s seen the light — and it’s dark.

“Again, [the Royals] did exactly what people said, and they put the ball in play,” Collins said. “I told Jake not everything has to be a strike. Move it around, change speeds. If you continue to pound the strike zone, they’re going to...”

Pound you. “They’re really, really good,” Collins said. Then he added, “I don’t make excuses.”

That’s when you know that a manager knows that his team is in big trouble. He’s about to list the excuses — before the Series is over, just so everybody knows.

“It’s easy to make excuses that, hey, it’s the workload, it’s the days off, it’s the youth, on the big stage. I’m not going to say that.”

If you’re Syndergaard, 23, starting Game 3, how’d you like to read that?

The Royals aren’t licking their chops. Syndergaard hits 101 mph. Nickname: Thor. But the Royals probably aren’t worried, either. They’ve already seen two of him.

Some at this Series wonder if the Mets trio will eventually assume a place in the sport similar to Atlanta trio of Greg Maddux, Tom Glavine and John Smoltz. After all, in their first year together look where they’ve taken the Mets.

However, the Mets trio has a peculiarity. They all pitch alike. All are right-handed, stand 6-foot-4 to 6-6, with fastballs at or close to 100 mph., which set up strong secondary breaking pitches or change-ups.

But there’s a flip side. Many Series teams have had a top tough trio. But they are almost never so similar in stuff and style. Maddux, Glavine and Smoltz, as well as almost any other top trio in history — from Baltimore’s Jim Palmer, Dave McNally and Mike Cuellar to the Giants’ of Madison Bumgarner, Tim Lincecum, and Matt Cain — have been a variety of pitching types. If an opponent’s lineup was suited to give one trouble, it was unlikely to be geared to beat the other two.

The Mets trio chewed up the free-swinging Cubs in the NLCS. In the regular season, they consistently baffled their primary rival, the Washington Nationals, who often only had one decent left-handed hitter (Bryce Harper) and also struck out by the 18-wheeler load.

Give these guys a bunch

of right-handed hitting foes with big-arc home-run swings that can’t catch up to 97 mph, but also tend to expand the strike zone to chase sliders low-and-away and they may fan 14 men. Say hello, Nats.

The Royals may be unique. Their entire lineup is made of contact hitters, even more so than last year’s World Series loser. One study, using standard deviation from the norms of various eras, has shown that the Royals may strikeout less than any team ever — certainly back to 1950, where the research ends. This allows them to put balls in play far more often than other teams against high-octane fastballers.

That’s not an unmitigated compliment. The Royals are merely a very good, but nowhere near a great offensive team. They seldom walk — last in the AL. They were next-to-last in the AL in home runs. Put it all together, the Royals were only sixth in runs in the AL in runs scored. Adjusted for the DH, they didn’t score as much as the Nationals. But they tend to score consistently, against every kind of pitcher, including the very best ones, who are often shocked by the experience.

In Game 1, Harvey gave up three runs in six innings. He fanned only two men, equally the lowest total in any of his 68 career starts, including postseason. He walked as many as he fanned, an apostasy to Met fans.

Then in Game 2, deGrom looked exactly like Harvey — to the Royals. He gave up four runs in five innings and fanned only two. In fact, Kansas City had only three swings and misses. Exactly as with Harvey, the Royals began making early solid contact, especially on fast-ball at 95 and above, hitting lots of respectable fly balls the first time through the order.

Intimidation? Discomfort at the plate? Absolutely none. Their body language said, “Just wait. Next time through the order, or the third time, we’ll get to you.”

The Mets see and understand. And that’s not good — for them. “[deGrom] was throwing the ball great and all of a sudden in the fifth inning, the base on balls, and then the base hit to center, and then he gets an out and next thing you know they start single, single, single,” said Collins, as if “single” were a four-letter word.

“We win because we ride our starting pitching,” Collins said. “When they struggle, we’re going to struggle.”

Was that a white flag, or just a hanky to wipe away the tears?