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MLB PLAYOFFS

Hargrove finally getting his due

But some still attribute Cleveland's latest surge in the postseason to fate

By Ken Berger
 The Associated Press

BALTIMORE — This is Mike Hargrove's team, plain and simple.

The Cleveland manager got most of the blame when the Indians and their \$60 million payroll were bumbling and stumbling back in July. Now that they're one win away from the World Series, it is not Hargrove, but magic tricks and destiny that get the credit.

The plaque on his desk says, "Mike Hargrove, Manager." It could easily say, "Critics and doubters, form line here."

"I think what we have seen from Mike Hargrove is a man who knows what moves he wants to make, and makes them," Cleveland general manager John Hart said. "Mike is going to get his due. That's good."

Hart says this during the Indians' unexpected charge in the playoffs. They knocked off the defending World Series champion New York Yankees, then turned Jacobs Field into an emotional torture chamber for the heavily favored Baltimore Orioles in the AL championship series.

The Orioles held off another late rally by Cleveland to win Game 5, save their season and send the series back to Camden Yards for Game 6 Wednesday with the Indians leading 3-2 in the best-of-7 series.

There was talk of fate and fortune, of superstitious socks. Hargrove seemed offended by all of this, as if the real reasons for Cleveland's playoff prowess were being overlooked.

"If you get in the middle of the postseason, it's not time to worry about how things happen," said Hargrove, seated confidently at his desk about an hour before Game 5. "This team puts itself in position to take advantage of breaks. That's just good postseason baseball. If people think it's destiny, if people think it's luck, that's fine. It's my experience that you make your own luck."

If this is the case, then the Indians must have been

making some pretty poor luck for themselves only a few months ago. The team hit bottom with an embarrassing 4-10 homestand in late July that prompted Hart to lash out at the only manager he's had with the Indians.

"I thought the club was making too many mistakes," Hart said. "I said so — to Mike, to the players and the media. Mike didn't disagree."

Reports began swirling that Hargrove, hired at the All-Star break in 1991 to replace his friend John McNamara, was on the way out.

"I finally had to come out in public and say, 'Wait a minute. Grover isn't going anywhere,'" Hart said. "I just signed him to a three-year deal, and he's the only manager I've ever had, for God's sake."

The clubhouse purge that saw the departure of Carlos Baerga, Eddie Murray, Albert Belle and Kenny Lofton seemed to be a vote of confidence in Hargrove. By adding Matt Williams, David Justice and Marquis Grissom, Hart seemed to be building the Indians in Hargrove's image — hard workers who hit the cutoff man, keep their mouths shut and stay out of trouble.

"I have had zero distractions with this club," Hart said, echoing the sentiments of his manager. "Not one incident that has been non-baseball related."

Even as he struggled to contain the volatile personalities of the 1995-96 Indians, Hargrove saw his strategic ability assailed.

Many thought Atlanta's Bobby Cox gave Hargrove the equivalent of a woodshed whipping in the '95 World Series. They point to his decision to let left-handed reliever Jim Poole attempt to sacrifice in Game 6 (he failed) so he could face Justice, then with Atlanta, the next inning. Justice homered for the only run of the deciding game as the Braves won the series.

Hargrove doesn't always play it by the book. Hart says he's become a better tactical manager.

One more win, and they can go to the World Series together for the second time in three years. Even if the Indians don't do it, there appears to be little chance for a parting of the ways.

"This is a good ballclub," Hargrove said, "no matter what happens."

Florida: Marlins are 7-2 in post season

Continued from Page 7

The Marlins, meanwhile, overcame Alex Fernandez's torn rotator cuff and Brown's viral infection. Florida proved its 8-4 record against Atlanta this season was no fluke, winning despite hitting just .199 in the series.

The Marlins, coming off a first-round sweep of San Francisco, is 7-2 in the postseason. Florida has improved its record in each of its five years, but had never been over .500 until owner Wayne Huizenga went on a spending spree.

"This is for you, South Florida," said Huizenga, who announced earlier in the season the team was for sale. "This is for all of Florida. Enjoy the moment."

Bonilla, signed to a \$23.3 million, four-year contract last November, hit a two-run single that keyed a four-run first inning against ineffective Tom Glavine. Bonilla had an RBI single in a three-run sixth that made it 7-3.

"We just did a lot of things right. There's a great deal of emotion now," Bonilla said. "It took a long time for me to the World Series — 12 years in the majors. I'm glad it's with Jim Leyland."

Brown, scratched from starts Saturday and Sunday because of

illness, gave up three runs in the first two innings and little after that. The only player on the field wearing short sleeves on a chilly night, the former Georgia Tech star allowed 11 hits and added another win to his Game 1 victory.

It appeared he would be done after six innings, but Brown and Leyland got into an animated discussion. The pitcher prevailed and Brown retired the side in order the next two innings.

"I said, 'Let me go one hitter at a time,'" Brown said.

With two outs in the ninth, Keith Lockhart's fourth single of the game made it 7-4 and brought Chipper Jones to the plate as the potential tying run. Pitching coach Larry Rothschild visited the mound and Brown remained in, retiring Jones on a grounder.

Glavine, strong in Game 2, looked nothing like the pitcher who blanked St. Louis in Game 7 of the NLCS last year, completing Atlanta's comeback from a 3-1 deficit. He walked a season-high seven, gave up 10 hits and left after 5 2-3 innings trailing 7-3.

Plate umpire Frank Pulli was generous with his strike zone, though not nearly as much as Eric Gregg in Game 5. Pulli left

the game before the fifth inning because of an eye irritation and there was a nine-minute delay while Charlie Williams moved from second base to replace him.

Devon White singled on the game's first pitch, Edgar Renteria walked and Gary Sheffield singled to load the bases.

Bonilla followed with a two-run single, and later Charles Johnson was hit by a pitch for one run and Craig Counsell's RBI grounder made it 4-0.

The Braves bounced back on Ryan Klesko's RBI single in the first, and closed to 4-3 in the second. Lofton and Lockhart singled home run and Johnson, a two-time Gold Glove catcher, made his second error of the series.

Florida broke open the game with three runs in the sixth. Bonilla singled home a run, Moises Alou drove in another with a force play and Counsell's infield single finished Glavine, cheered nonetheless by the record crowd of 50,446 at Turner Field. **Notes:** Bonilla left the game in the eighth after hurting his leg fielding a grounder. ... Gregg received loud boos in pregame introductions. ... The Game 7 matchup would've been John Smoltz against Tony Saunders.

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