

# Furcal's extra-inning home run buries Astros

Braves tie up National League series with Houston at one apiece with a two-run victory in 11 innings

BY PAUL NEWBERRY  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

With plenty of incentive, Rafael Furcal made sure the Atlanta Braves' season lasts at least two more games.

Set to report to jail once the post-season ends, Furcal hit a two-out, two-run homer in the 11th inning that sent the Braves over the Houston Astros 4-2 Thursday and tied their NL playoff series at one game each.

With Houston on the verge of a commanding lead, Atlanta rallied from a late two-run deficit to force extra innings. Both teams went to extraordinary means with the Astros looking to go two-up in the best-of-five series, and the Braves realizing they needed a split before heading to Minute Maid Park, where Houston has won 18 straight games.

Braves rookie Charles Thomas singled with one out in the 11th off Dan Miceli and stole second. Eli Marrero popped out to the catcher, but Furcal golfed a 1-2 pitch deep into the right-field seats, flipping his bat in the air about halfway down to celebrate his first postseason homer.

Furcal was in court just hours before Game 1, where he was sentenced to 21 days in jail and 28 days in a treatment center for violating

probation with his second drunken-driving arrest in four years.

"For me, I come to the ballpark, walk in the stadium and forget about everything," said Furcal, who had three hits and drove in three runs.

His sentence doesn't begin until the Braves' season finishes, and Furcal ensured that won't happen in Saturday's Game 3.

"I think he felt just terrible," Cox said. "Today, things worked out good for him. He got the game-winner, and that's a big boost for him."

Realizing the importance of the game, Atlanta kept closer John Smoltz on the mound for three innings, his longest stint since September 2001. The Braves also let Smoltz bat in the bottom of the ninth, and he responded with his first hit since 1999.

"We needed someone to step up," Smoltz said, "and Raffy did."

Houston brought in closer Brad Lidge in the seventh. He went 2 2/3 innings — his longest outing of the season — but couldn't hold a 2-1 lead, giving up Adam LaRoche's RBI double in the eighth.

"I'm just upset at myself for not getting the job done," Lidge said. "You can't think about how long you're going to be out there. For me, it doesn't matter what inning I come in."

# O'Neil: Ready to practice skills in Chile

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ways engaged at a high level."

## Sights set elsewhere

As a leader on the floor, O'Neil has to be able to communicate to her fellow Ducks. The 21-year-old is double-majoring in English and Spanish and aspires to teach English, possibly as a second language, in high school.

After taking Spanish her first year, O'Neil developed an appreciation for the language and decided to study

abroad. She stayed in Querétaro, Mexico for six weeks the summer after her freshman year, and she is planning on traveling to Chile next year.

"It was a really cool program," O'Neil said. "It made me fall in love with Spanish, the Latin culture and studying abroad. I will be done after this fall with volleyball commitments, so I can go in the spring."

Art and music are also of interest to O'Neil. She played piano for ten years and has sold paintings in the

past. O'Neil said that she would pursue these hobbies if time were more permitting.

Even with her busy student-athlete lifestyle, O'Neil tries to add in some variety. The "white-girl from Po-dunk" clarified that she is not just a one-dimensional jock.

"I just like to be a diverse person. If I were focused on any one thing too much, I'd just go nuts."


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