

Nationals party like it's 1933, reach World Series in sweep of St. Louis

By Howard Fendrich
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — As the Washington Nationals moved a party 86 years in the making from their ballpark’s infield to a booze-filled clubhouse, manager Dave Martinez paused near the dugout and thrust the silver NL Championship Series trophy overhead, to the delight of loud, delirious fans still in the stands.

Who would have thought this was possible five months ago, when the team was flailing, trade talk was swirling around Washington and folks figured Martinez’s job was in jeopardy?

From 19-31 during a mediocre May to the Fall Classic in an outstanding October — and the city’s first World Series appearance since 1933.

Extending their stunning turnaround, the wild-card Nationals got RBIs from middle-of-the-order stars Anthony Rendon and Juan Soto in a seven-run first inning Tuesday night, and Patrick Corbin’s 12-strikeout performance plus a trio of relievers helped hold on to beat the St. Louis Cardinals 7-4 in Game 4 to complete a sweep in the NLCS.

“Often, bumpy roads lead to beautiful places,” said Martinez, who underwent a heart procedure in September, “and this is a beautiful place.”

Right from the first inning Tuesday, most in a sellout crowd of 43,976 rose from their seats to applaud or yell or twirl their red towels, to chant “Let’s go, Nats!” and “M-V-P!” and various players’ names, enjoying every moment of that game-deciding outburst.

And then, a couple of hours and several innings later, as Tanner Rainey, Sean Doolittle and Daniel Hudson were protecting a shrinking lead, those same spectators stood and shouted and reveled some more.

“I just kept counting down: We’re 12 outs from the World Series. We’re nine outs from the World Series,” shortstop Trea Turner said. “Six. Three.”

Now the Nationals get plenty of time to rest and set up their so-far terrific rotation before beginning the last series of the season against the Houston Astros or New York Yankees in a week. Houston leads the best-of-seven AL Championship Series 2-1 after winning Game 3 at New York 4-1 Tuesday.

The Nationals became the fourth team to reach the World Series after being 12 games under .500.

“We think we can compete with any team, any time,” NLCS MVP Howie Kendrick said. “People always get caught up in the things that are on paper, but the reality of it is you have to go out and play. Once we get out on the field, anything can happen.”

The last time the World Series came to the nation’s capital, more than eight decades ago, the Washington Senators lost to the New York Giants in five games. Have to go even further back, to 1924, for the city’s lone baseball championship, when the Senators defeated the Giants.

The Senators eventually left, and the town didn’t have a major league team at all for more than three decades until the Montreal Expos — who were founded in 1969 and never made it to the World Series — moved to Washington in 2005.

The Nationals had never managed to advance in the postseason since arriving, going 0-4 in the NLDS over the last seven years, including three Game 5 losses at home.

First baseman Ryan Zimmerman, the

Nationals’ first draft pick in Washington, was there for all of that heartache.

“Sometimes,” he said, “you got to wait for good things.”

This month alone, the Nationals beat the Milwaukee Brewers in the NL wild-card game after trailing 3-1 heading to the eighth, and eliminated the league-best Los Angeles Dodgers in Game 5 of the NL Division Series after trailing 3-1 heading to the eighth again.

Then came this lopsided dismissal of the NL Central champion Cardinals, who were outscored 20-6 in the series.

“Of course, we could’ve played better,” said St. Louis first baseman Paul Goldschmidt, who was 1 for 16 with nine strikeouts in the NLCS, “but we didn’t.”

Corbin, a left-handed pitcher signed with \$140 million of the money that became available last offseason when Bryce Harper left town to join the Philadelphia Phillies, was not quite the equal of Washington’s other starters in the series.

Still, he did become the first pitcher to strike out 10 batters in the first four innings of a postseason game and earned the win after allowing four runs in five innings.

Then Martinez turned to his NL-worst bullpen, such a problem for so much of this season.

After Rainey got three outs, and Doolittle got five, Hudson came in for his fourth save in four chances this postseason. It wasn’t easy, though: After replacing Doolittle with two outs in the eighth, Hudson hit his first batter and walked his second, bringing pinch-hitter Matt Carpenter to the plate as the go-ahead run with the bases loaded.

Carpenter, a career .481 batter with the bases full, grounded out to second baseman Brian Dozier, a defensive replacement who briefly lost the ball before gathering it and throwing to first to end that inning.

Hudson finished things with a perfect ninth, getting Tommy Edman on a fly ball to center field to end it, and red fireworks went off around the stadium.

Corbin got this evening started with a 1-2-3 top of the first, striking out all three Cardinals with a high, 95 mph fastball, a real contrast to the off-speed stuff Stephen Strasburg used for his own dozen Ks a night earlier.

In the bottom half, Washington put up those seven runs, all charged to rookie Dakota Hudson, who lasted all of 15 pitches — doing to the Cardinals what they did in the previous round, when they scored 10 to open Game 5 of the NLDS against Atlanta.

All the heartache of playoffs past seemed to dissipate during an evening that only briefly was tense for the home team and its supporters: In the fifth, a juggled Cardinals lineup finally awoke, scoring three runs — one more than the team managed to produce in Games 1-3 combined — to get within 7-4.

With a man on second and the tying run in the on-deck circle, Corbin came through, striking out St. Louis’ 3-4 hitters, Paul Goldschmidt and Marcell Ozuna, with sliders.

After becoming comeback specialists, the Nationals never trailed against the Cardinals. And dating to the final week of the regular season, Washington has won 16 of its past 18 games.

“We proved — and this doesn’t require advanced sabermetrics,” Cardinals manager Mike Shildt said, “you have to get a lead to win a game.”



Dick Mason/The Observer

Harry Marra shows Eastern Oregon University sprinter Scout Reagan how to best use her arms when running.

MARRA

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proper techniques to athletes.

“It is all fundamentals. There is no magic with any of this stuff,” said Marra, a member of the Pacific Association of the USA Track and Field and of the San Francisco State University halls of fame.

Marra displayed his uncanny understanding of technique Monday while working with members of EOU’s track team. Watching runners doing 200-meter sprints, he urged all to run as quietly as possible.

“When you run quietly, you are more efficient,” he said.

He also encouraged runners to focus on using their arms.

“You run with your arms, not your legs,” he said.

Marra, who worked one-on-one with many of the EOU athletes, also told the Mountaineer tracksters that this is the time of year to focus on technique, not speed.

“Don’t worry about how fast you are running. Run correctly in the fall,” Marra said.

He said that throughout his career his prime motivation has been to reach out to young people.

“My goal is not to win titles,” he said. “My goal is to help kids.”

Marra said he believes that physical education teachers and coaches are among the most important faculty members at schools. He said PE teachers and coaches play critical roles in the overall mental and physical development of students.

They also often find themselves in the role of counselors.

“When a student has a problem, PE teachers and coaches are often the first people students turn to,” Marra said.

The coach said school officials should keep this in mind when making reductions necessitated by shrinking budgets.

“It saddens me when PE teachers and coaches are

cut. My concern is that the most important parts of schools are being cut,” he said.

Marra was invited to La Grande by Rebecca Rhodes, an EOU assistant track coach and former sprinter for the University of Oregon track team. Rhodes got to know Marra at the University of Oregon even though he was not her coach.

“He’s an icon in the track world and an idol of mine,” Rhodes said.

She said his appearance inspired EOU’s track team at a challenging time of year when there are no meets to compete in unlike in the winter and spring.

Rhodes said Marra showed a sincere interest in Eastern and its athletes, noting that he even attended a 6 a.m. track team weight-lifting session on Monday. She said the athletes were appreciative of Marra’s input.

“The feedback he provided (to the track team) was excellent,” Rhodes said. “He is amazing.”

Cole pitches Astros past NY

By Mike Fitzpatrick
The Associated Press

NEW YORK — Far from his best, Gerrit Cole was still unbeatable. Heck, he didn’t even give up a run.

A gritty Cole held the New York Yankees scoreless without his sharpest stuff, Jose Altuve sparked Houston at the plate and the Astros locked down a 4-1 victory Tuesday to take a 2-1 lead in the AL Championship Series.

Altuve and Josh Reddick homered early off Luis Severino, who labored into the fifth while keeping the Yankees close. But they never broke through against Cole, who grinded through seven innings to win his 19th straight decision despite walking five batters for the second time in his career.

“Just boiled down to making some good pitches under pressure,” he said.

Cole pitched out of a

bases-loaded jam in the first and stranded nine runners through five, improving to 3-0 with a 0.40 ERA in three outings this postseason. Poised to become a prized free agent this fall who could command more than \$200 million, he’s putting together a dominant run that’s beginning to rival some of baseball’s greatest October pitching performances.

The 29-year-old right-hander, unbeaten in 25 starts since his last loss on May 22, allowed four hits and struck out seven. That ended a streak of 11 consecutive games with double-digit strikeouts — the previous big league record was eight. Cole led the majors with 326 Ks this season.

Game 4 in the best-of-seven playoff is scheduled for Wednesday night — but that could change. The gloomy weather forecast calls for a

substantial storm with steady-to-heavy rain and wind all night in New York, potentially forcing a postponement that would likely alter pitching plans for both teams.

Gleyber Torres homered in the eighth off Houston reliever Joe Smith, one batter after replay umpires reversed a call and ruled Edwin Encarnación out at first base. That led to a little trash and a ball being thrown onto the field before public address announcer Paul Olden reminded fans not to toss any objects out of the stands. Roberto Osuna got three quick outs in the ninth for a save.

Cole got away with several pitches in key situations and, other times, flashed the nasty breakings balls and 98-100 mph heat that have made him so unhittable in these playoffs — and unbeatable since May.



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