

From 0-2 to 3-2: Astros win third straight, lead Series

By Ben Walker
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON— Gerrit Cole and the Houston Astros went to Washington, hoping to snap out of their funk and bring the World Series back to Minute Maid Park.

Not only are they heading home with more games to play, now they're just one win from another crown.

Handed the ball for what was supposed to be a high-stakes showdown against Max Scherzer, Cole gave Houston a firm grip on the Series by beating the Nationals 7-1 Sunday night for a 3-2 lead.

Cole looked exactly like the stud who dominated baseball most of this season, bouncing back from a Game 1 clunker to pitch the Astros to their third straight win.

What a turnaround for his teammates, too — outscored 17-7 overall at home, Houston hammered Washington 19-3 at Nationals Park.

“We look like ourselves now,” Astros manager AJ Hinch said.

Something was definitely missing for the Nationals. Namely, Scherzer.

The three-time Cy Young Award winner beat Cole in the opener, and was the Nats’ best hope to slow Houston. But then Scherzer was scratched only 3-1/2 hours before game time because of an irritated nerve near his neck, an injury that could finish him for the Series.

Slumping rookie Yordan Álvarez and Carlos Correa each hit an early two-run homer off emergency starter

Joe Ross. George Springer added another postseason drive for the Astros, who led the majors with a franchise-best 107 wins during the regular season.

“We actually hit some balls hard. We really did,” Washington manager Dave Martinez said. “We just can’t get nothing going these last three days.”

With the road team winning every time so far, Houston heads home with two chances to claim its second title in three years. Justin Verlander gets the first try when he starts against Stephen Strasburg in Game 6 on Tuesday night.

“High level of confidence,” Cole said.

Cole threw three-hit ball for seven innings, nicked only by Juan Soto’s home run in the seventh, and struck out nine — eight on breaking balls.

Cole’s mix of 99 mph heat and sharp secondary pitches induced a bevy of bad swings from the wild-card Nats as he improved to 4-1 with a 1.72 ERA this postseason. It might’ve been his final start for Houston — he’s eligible for free agency and figures to command a steep price.

Standing tall on the mound, Cole was unflappable in the face of 43,910 fans who went from fired up to furious to flat-out frustrated.

“He knew what this game meant to this Series,” Hinch said. “So, nobody better to have on the mound.”

Cole ended his outing by getting Victor Robles on a called third strike, a pitch the TV zone showed to be

off the plate. Robles chucked his bat, helmet and gloves, and the crowd soon began a derisive chant at umpire Lance Barksdale.

“I know there were some choice words but that’s just in the heat of the moment,” Martinez said.

Cole acknowledged he finished his outing “with a break.”

“It’s tough. I think ultimately some of those pitches were off the plate,” he said.

Most fans, meanwhile, stayed to the very end.

“They came to support us and really gave us everything they had all the way to the end, all 27 innings. Hats off to them. We apologize that we didn’t give them more to celebrate,” outfielder Adam Eaton said. “It wasn’t that we didn’t try.”

Cole led the majors in strikeouts this year, was second to Verlander in wins and topped the AL in ERA. He took a 19-game winning streak into the opener but hardly looked like an October star, giving up five runs over seven uneven innings.

In his second shot against the Nationals, he aced the test. Cole escaped a first-and-third, no-out jam in the second, then breezed into the seventh.

With two outs and a full count on Ryan Zimmerman, Cole suddenly stepped off the mound — video that quickly made the rounds showed two women right behind the backstop lifting their top to flash Cole. It wasn’t clear whether he saw them, and he walked Zimmerman before getting Robles.

Last-second kick lifts Ducks over upset-minded Cougars

By Anne M. Petersen
The Associated Press

EUGENE — Freshman kicker Camden Lewis flexed his muscles with a holler as teammates raised him on their shoulders.

He had just nailed a 26-yard field goal as time expired, extending No. 11 Oregon’s winning streak to seven games with a 37-35 victory over Washington State on Saturday night.

He deserved that flex.

CJ Verdell ran for a career-high 257 yards and three touchdowns for the Ducks (7-1, 5-0 Pac-12), who haven’t lost since the season opener against Auburn.

Anthony Gordon’s 5-yard touchdown pass on fourth down to Brandon Arconado with a minute remaining gave Washington State a 35-34 lead. But then Justin Herbert completed four straight passes on the ensuing drive to get the Ducks close for Lewis’ kick.

“I want that kick so bad, that’s just why you do it,” Lewis said about his mindset as he watched Oregon march down the field. “I don’t want them to score, I want to kick it.”

The loss snapped Washington State’s four-game winning streak over Oregon. Gordon threw for 406 yards and three touchdowns for the Cougars (4-4, 1-4), while Arconado caught nine passes for 130 yards and two scores.

Gordon went into the game leading the nation in yards passing (425.9) and completions (35.14) per game. He has 32 touchdowns this season, including the four he threw last week in a 41-10 victory over Colorado.

“Definitely it felt good to get the ball in the end zone in crunch time like that,” Gordon said about the Cougars’ final drive. “Just coming up a little bit short, and in general throughout the four quarters, just got to figure out how to make maybe one more play to give us an opportunity to win.”

Herbert threw for 222 yards but his streak of 35 straight games with a touchdown pass — the longest active run in the nation — was snapped. He threw for 280 yards and four touchdowns last week in a comeback victory over Washington to earn Pac-12 Offensive Player of the Week honors.

“To be able to trade that for a win, I’d do that again,” Herbert said about the streak ending.

The Ducks were without senior linebacker Troy Dye, who broke his thumb last week

against Washington. Dye has 351 career tackles, most among current Power 5 players, and has led the Ducks in tackles for three straight seasons. Dru Mathis started in his place.

The Cougars got to the Oregon 19 on their opening drive, but Gordon twice failed to connect with Rodrick Fisher and the team settled for Blake Mazza’s 36-yard field goal.

The Ducks answered with Lewis’ 40-yard field goal.

Verdell ran untouched for an 89-yard touchdown to put the Ducks up 9-3 midway thought the first half. The extra point attempt by Lewis went wide right.

Gordon was intercepted in the end zone by Verone McKinley III, who snagged the ball when Arconado bobbled it. It was McKinley’s third interception this season. But the Ducks failed to capitalize on the turnover.

Max Borghi’s 1-yard touchdown run pulled Washington State in front 10-9.

Jevon Holland intercepted Gordon and ran it back 19 yards for a touchdown, and the 2-point conversion was good to give the Ducks a 17-10 lead. The Cougars tied it with 47 seconds left before the break when Gordon found Renard Bell with a 15-yard touchdown pass.

Verdell’s 2-yard scoring run put Oregon back in front before Mazza’s 23-yard field goal closed the gap to 24-20 going into the fourth quarter. Verdell added a 1-yard TD early in the period.

The Cougars trimmed the margin with Gordon’s 19-yard pass to Arconado, and the conversion was good to make it 31-28.

Lewis made a 30-yard field goal with 6:29 left to give the Ducks some cushion, but a pass interference call and Gordon’s 48-yard pass play to Tay Martin got the Cougars to the Oregon 12 with less than two minutes to go. On third-and-5, Gordon’s pass to Arconado was incomplete, but Washington State went for it on fourth down and this time Arconado pulled down the TD.

“Football’s a game of inches and it shows out there. Just one play different could change the whole game. But there are some takeaways from that: We played a good game, I thought. We played all four quarters well, probably the best of the season,” Borghi said.

Verdell’s yards rushing were the most by a Pac-12 player in a conference game this season.



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