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Braves beat Mariners in combined shutout

By PAUL NEWBERRY
Associated Press

ATLANTA — Ozzie Albies got caught in a rundown, and it worked out just fine for the Atlanta Braves.

Then two of his teammates also found themselves trapped between bases, a daffy play that overshadowed a dominating start by Lucas Sims.

The rookie right-hander combined with three relievers on a five-hitter Tuesday night to lead the Braves to a 4-0 win over the Seattle Mariners, whose shoddy defense in the interleague series was epitomized by a slapstick sequence that closed out the sixth.

With two outs and two runners aboard, Ender Inciarte grounded sharply up the middle. Shortstop Jean Segura made a stop on his knees, didn't have a play at first but spotted Albies rounding third. Segura threw behind the runner, catching Albies in a rundown. But third baseman Kyle Seager dropped a throw, allowing Albies to race home with a head-first slide.

Seager's error was one of six committed by Mariners in the first two games at SunTrust Park.

"We just haven't played clean baseball," Seattle manager Scott Servais said. "We've got to tighten that up."

But this play wasn't done. Not by a long shot. First baseman Yonder Alonso, who wound up covering home as Albies slid across on his belly, spotted Inciarte lingering between first and second. Alonso ran straight at him before noticing Adams heading toward third. His attention diverted by yet another wayward runner, Alonso made the fifth throw of the play to catcher Mike Zunino — yes, he was now covering third — who tagged out Adams to finally bring it all to an end.

Braves manager Brian Snitker doesn't mind his team being aggressive on the basepaths, but this was ridiculous.

"You can take that to the extreme," he said. "We can't continue to do that. We're lucky we got away with it tonight."

In reality, the nutty play was a mere afterthought.

Sims (2-3) won his second straight start after starting his big league career with three losses in a row. Seattle only got two runners as far as second base against the 23-year-old right-hander, a native of suburban Atlanta who won for the first time in front of the home folks.

BOSTON BOUND



AP Photo/Ron Schwane

Cleveland Cavaliers' Kyrie Irving, right, looks to drive against Boston Celtics' Isaiah Thomas during a game in Cleveland.

Cavs trade Irving to Celtics for Thomas, more

By TOM WITHERS
Associated Press

CLEVELAND — Kyrie Irving was tired of being teammates with LeBron James.

Now he has to figure out how to beat him.

Cleveland's All-Star guard, who asked owner Dan Gilbert to trade him earlier this summer, was dealt Tuesday night to the Boston Celtics for fellow All-Star Isaiah Thomas, forward Jae Crowder, center Ante Zizic and the Brooklyn Nets' unprotected 2018 first-round draft pick.

"It's extremely rare to trade for a 25-year-old player that's done what he's done, the offensive weapon that he is," Celtics president Danny Ainge said. "We feel like his best basketball is still ahead of him."

"We have a player that's proven to be a sure thing. We know how unpredictable the draft can be. You do pay a heavy price for a player of that age and that caliber."

Irving, whose late 3-pointer helped Cleveland win the 2016 NBA championship — and the city's first title since 1964 — is on his way to Boston, where he'll join a Celtics team that lost to the Cavs in last season's conference finals.

And as fate will have it, the Cavs will host the Celtics in their season opener on Oct. 17.

"Of course we know who our competition is, and we know who our biggest threats are each year," Ainge said. "But we feel like this is a trade that can make us better, and that's why we did it."

The blockbuster deal caps a wild summer for the Cavs, who lost their title defense in five games to Golden State in June. Since then, general manager David Griffin left, the team failed to convince Chauncey Billups to join its front office and James has played with fans' emotions with veiled postings on social media about his future.

Irving's trade demand cast a shadow over the entire organization.

But Cleveland may have salvaged its offseason.

"This trade needed to include both players and assets that we felt strongly could help us continue to compete for championships and we believe it does," said new general manager Koby Altman, who pulled off a deal that protects Cleveland's present and future.

In Thomas, they're getting a proven playmaker with a stellar reputation. The 5-foot-9 guard is one of the league's most dynamic backcourt players, with an uncanny ability to get to the basket. Irving may be the only better

finisher among point guards.

The 28-year-old Thomas was taken with the final selection in the 2011 draft — 59 picks after Irving was picked first overall. But he has steadily scaled his way up to elite status.

Thomas' reputation in Boston was cemented when he led the Celtics through the playoffs last season despite the death of his sister on the eve of the postseason. He also had a front tooth knocked out during the second-round series against Washington and a hip injury eventually forced the team to shut him down early in the East finals, won by the Cavaliers in five games.

"Isaiah had just an amazing season this year and entertained us all, the whole city of Boston. And everybody fell in love with him," Ainge said. "He's such an underdog because of his size and his heart and his spirit which he plays."

Thomas is eligible for free agency next summer and believes he is worthy of a maximum contract. He has been quoted saying, "They better bring out the Brinks truck."

Cleveland also is getting Crowder, a solid perimeter defender, and a first-round pick that Boston got from Brooklyn. The package could help the Cavs reload if James opts out of his contract next summer and leaves Cleveland for a second time.

QB Falk ready for final chapter at WSU

By TIM BOOTH
Associated Press

PULLMAN, Wash. — Back when Luke Falk was a freshman walk-on at Washington State, struggling to strike a balance between being a first-year college football player, school and trying to have a few dollars of his own, he picked up a part-time job working for a catering company.

One of his assignments was working a high-end booster event where Falk was asked to serve, of all people, Washington State athletic director Bill Moos.

"Here I am serving our athletic director. He didn't know me at the time, probably. But, he's heard the story now," Falk recalled. "He was one of the only guys that said, 'Thank you, and please, and thank you.'"

Years later, everyone associated with Washington State knows Falk. He's no longer overlooked. He doesn't work with catering companies on the side anymore either. His serving happens on the field, and he's done it quite well, to the tune of nearly 11,000 yards passing already in his career.

For a nightcap, Falk bypassed early entry into the NFL and returned for his senior season with a chance to complete one of the greatest careers in the quarterback-rich Pac-12 Conference.

If all goes to plan, Falk will rewrite



AP Photo/Denis Poroy

Washington State quarterback Luke Falk passes in the Holiday Bowl in San Diego.

the Pac-12 record book by the end of the season, the result of being the distributor in Mike Leach's Air Raid offense. Falk needs just 2,700 yards passing and 28 TD passes to overtake the all-time Pac-12 leaders in those categories — Oregon State's Sean Mannion (13,600 yards passing) and USC's Matt Barkley (116 TD passes).

While the cast around him has improved throughout his career, Falk is a major reason No. 24 Washington State has morphed into a contender.

Not bad for a former walk-on.

"To be perfectly honest, I think he

kind of assumed he was going to be the starter a little before I did," Leach said. "I'd figured it was a battle, and we had a kid that we recruited ahead of him. But I was definitely going to allow it to be and make it a battle. Then he ends up beating the guy out, and off we go, you know?"

Falk has brought Washington State to a place of relevance that's been elusive for the program. The Cougars have gone to two straight bowl games and getting to a third in Falk's senior season would be just the second time Washington State has gone

to three straight bowl games. A year ago, they played in a de facto Pac-12 North championship game, the result of eight straight wins, before losing to rival Washington.

He's the next in a long line of great quarterbacks to make their way through Pullman, a list that includes the names of Thompson, Rypien, Bledsoe, Leaf and Gesser. Yet none of them were asked to run a system as intricate as Leach's, which is why the coach regularly lauds his quarterback for his smarts and comprehension.

"I think he watches more film than anybody else I've ever dealt with," Leach said. "He watches a ton of film. Sometimes, I think, too much. He's about the only quarterback I've considered shutting off the film."

Leach raves about how steady Falk is on the field, believing teammates respond to that. Yet, the quarterback has his quirks. He revamped his diet about a year ago, even if it means eating foods he despises like kale.

During the early stages of his college career, it was Falk's musical sisters — Alexa and Natalee — who were more well-known than their pass-slinging younger brother. "They've got the most talent in the family," Falk said.

And there is his odd timing for jokes, which also speaks to his personality. Last year, the Cougars trailed 24-6 at Oregon State before rallying

for a 35-31 win. Down by more than two scores, Falk was cracking jokes on the sideline, trying to keep his teammates from feeling stressed.

"He was kind of relaxed and poised and I wouldn't call that weird, but it's one of those things you're in a high pressure situation against a Pac-12 team that we're losing to and he's out there making jokes and having fun," teammate Cody O'Connell said. "It was kind of interesting."

Now remember that Falk has accomplished all this because he was willing to take a risk. There was no guarantee of a scholarship or even an opportunity when he arrived at Washington State. At one point in his high school career, Falk seemed destined for Florida State, only to have that opportunity dissolve. In the end, his choices appeared to be Cornell, maybe Idaho and maybe Wyoming.

If not for Leach's arrival in Pullman, Falk likely would have headed for the Ivy League and received limited football exposure. As it stands, Falk is considered one of the top NFL quarterback prospects for the 2018 draft after passing on a chance to leave after his junior season.

"It felt right to come back. Felt like I had some things, growing up to do in life, not football," Falk said. "I felt football-wise, I could. But there's still a lot to learn this year and I really want to finish off with the guys I came in with."