

MLB Astros advance with shutout

By **HOWIE RUMBERG**
AP Baseball Writer

NEW YORK — Dallas Keuchel and the Houston Astros defied expectations all season long. Facing his biggest test yet, the bearded ace beat the odds and the Yankees once again.

Pitching on three days' rest for the first time in his career, Keuchel baffled the Yankees for six innings of three-hit ball, Colby Rasmus and Carlos Gomez homered, and the Astros blanked New York 3-0 Tuesday night in the American League wild-card game.

The orange-clad Astros, who secured their spot in this winner-take-all game on the last day of the regular season, now advance to the AL Division Series. They will face the defending AL champion Royals, starting Thursday night in Kansas City.

"To come to Yankee Stadium and play that well was truly remarkable," said Keuchel, the AL's only 20-game winner.

Aggressive from the start in their first playoff appearance as an American League club and for the first time since being swept by the White Sox in the 2005 World Series, the Astros came out swinging against Masahiro Tanaka in front of a revved-up Yankee Stadium crowd.

Rasmus sent Tanaka's first pitch of the second inning soaring into deep right field. Gomez, who only had five plate appearances after missing nearly two weeks with a strained chest muscled in mid-September, connected on the first offering of the fourth.

American League hits leader Jose Altuve had an RBI single off All-Star reliever Dellin Betances in the seventh.

Reliever Tony Sipp walked one, and Will Harris and Luke Gregerson were each perfect for an inning to finish the three-hitter. The boos from the 50,113 stunned fans in the crowd grew with each out as Gregerson closed for a save.

The Astros raced to an area between first and second after Brian McCann grounded out to end it and jumped up and down in a big scrum. As he was coming off the field, Keuchel pumped his fists as a group of cheering Astros supporters in orange shirts behind the visiting dugout.

It was a celebration a few years in the making — the Astros have averaged 104 losses in their last four seasons.

In a matchup of two teams that surprised many by building big division leads before wasting them late, the upstart Astros, just two years removed from an 111-loss season.



College Football

Parity reigns supreme in surprise-filled Pac-12

By **JOHN MARSHALL**
Associated Press

PHOENIX — Every season, the Pac-12's coaches talk about how much parity there is in the conference. Every season, the same teams seem to end up on top when it's over.

This season has seen a shift. The calls of parity are actually on the mark.

This is a new version of the Pac-12, where new teams are on the rise and the unexpected has become the norm.

"It's the Wild West right now," Stanford coach David Shaw said.

The Pac-12 hierarchy in recent years started with Oregon. The Ducks played for the national title in 2011, again last season and have won five of the past seven Pac-12 championships. They were picked to win the Pac-12 North Division again this season.

But Oregon already has two losses this season, the latest one of the biggest

surprises of the college football season: Utah 62, Oregon 20, in Eugene.

"To the outside world, the Utah-Oregon game was crazy," Shaw said. "But to those of us who know, when Utah is hitting on all cylinders, they're extremely good."

The Utes have been one of the biggest surprises in college football, not just the Pac-12.

Utah struggled after joining the conference in 2011, finishing no higher than tied for third in the Pac-12 South.

The Utes opened the 2015 season with an impressive victory over Michigan in coach Jim Harbaugh's debut and followed with three more victories. The win over Oregon two weeks ago put Utah on the national map and the Utes moved up to No. 5 with seven first-place votes in the latest AP Top 25.

Utah's run has drawn comparisons to the 2004 and 2008 teams, which both finished undefeated and won major bowls.

Pac-12 Standings

North	Conf.	Ovr.
California	2-0	5-0
Stanford	3-0	4-1
Oregon	1-1	3-2
Oregon St.	0-1	2-2
Washington	0-1	2-2
Washington St.	0-1	2-2
South	Conf.	Ovr.
Utah	1-0	4-0
UCLA	1-1	4-1
USC	1-1	3-1
Arizona St.	1-1	3-2
Colorado	0-1	3-2
Arizona	0-2	3-2

"It's still really early. We're still only one third of the way through it," Utes coach Kyle Whittingham said. "There's so much football left that it's really hard to make a comparison yet to either of those teams. There is somewhat of a similar feel with the national attention we've received and that type of thing, but there's so much football left that it's just pointless to talk about anything but Cal Berkeley."

Cal, Utah's next opponent, has been another team on the rise in the Pac-12.

The Bears went 1-11 their first season under Sonny Dykes in 2013 — 0-9 in conference — and improved to 5-7 last season. Cal had some talent coming back, led by quarterback Jared Goff, but was still picked to finish third in the Pac-12 North behind Oregon and Stanford.

The Bears opened with a pair of routs, outlasted Texas in Austin and started conference with victories over Washington and Washington State. Cal moved up to No. 23 in the AP poll after beating the Cougars 34-28 at home last week.

Of course, the Bears were 4-1 at one point last season and faltered down the stretch after the schedule got tougher — just as it is about to do again this season.

"I think this year's team is a lot different," Dykes said. "We're a different team defensively and I think it's going to serve us well."

The entire conference has been tough to predict.

Stanford opened the season with a disheartening loss to

Northwestern, but is now atop the Pac-12 North and up to No. 16 in the AP poll.

UCLA rocketed up to No. 7 in the poll two weeks ago after throttling Arizona on the road, only to fall back 13 places after losing to Arizona State at home.

The Sun Devils won that game on the heels of a blowout loss to USC the week before. Colorado, at 3-2, has already surpassed its win total from last season and the conference still doesn't have a team that's under .500.

The only concern is that the parity could hurt the Pac-12 when the College Football Playoff comes around. With no clear-cut dominant team, the conference could be left out of the playoff party.

"This is an amazing conference, UCLA coach Jim Mora said. "There is not a weak team in this conference. It's also very scary, I think for probably all of us. We don't want to eat each other."

Ducks still face QB questions, Adams won't rush back

By **RYAN THORBURN**
Eugene Register-Guard

EUGENE — The quarterbacks are putting the "OR" in Oregon this season.

As in the depth chart for Saturday's game against Washington State could read Vernon Adams Jr. OR Jeff Lockie OR Taylor Alie.

Perhaps wide receiver Bralon Addison should also be included on the list after throwing a 39-yard touchdown pass to Charles Nelson against Colorado.

"We're all good, we all get along and we all help each other," Lockie said of the unsettled signal-caller situation after Monday's practice. "I think that's kind of how it was when this thing first started and I don't think that will change now."

Adams won the starting job in August despite arriving late to fall camp. The Eastern Washington graduate transfer has struggled since sustaining a broken index finger in the Sept. 5 opener against his former team.

Lockie and Alie shared snaps during Saturday's 41-24 victory in Boulder, combining to complete 12 of 20 passes for 137 yards with one interception (thrown by Lockie in the first quarter) and one touchdown (thrown by Alie in the fourth quarter).

"It took a little bit of getting used to and kind of getting comfortable," Alie said of rotating series with



AP Photo/Brennan Linsley
Oregon quarterback Jeff Lockie (17) throws a pass in the first half of an NCAA college football game against Colorado, in Boulder, Colo., Saturday, Oct. 3, 2015.

Lockie. "You've got to prepare like you're going to go in at any time, so we both prepared as if we were starting, as if we were playing at any moment. Being ready, both mentally and physically, is important in that situation."

Adams, who was benched after a rough start against Utah, doesn't plan to play for the Ducks until he's "100 percent." During his first season at Eastern Washington, the two-time Walter Payton Award runner-up shared time with Kyle Padron behind center.

"It can be good and sometimes you've got to be careful with it, too," Adams said of rotating quarterbacks. "I guess when the quarterback's hot that would be a good time to stay with that QB. These coaches know what they're doing. They know when to put Taylor in, when to put Jeff in. We have trust in coach (Mark) Helfrich, coach (Scott) Frost and we're going to be fine."

Helfrich said he would be comfortable using both Lockie and Alie again against Washington State if necessary.

Beavers getting ready for trip to desert to face Wildcats

Albany Democrat-Herald

CORVALLIS — The Oregon State football team is deep into preparations for Saturday's game at Arizona.

The Beavers began work over the bye week and are continuing during game week.

The Beavers and coach Gary Andersen got a good look at the Wildcats during their 55-17 loss to Stanford.

The Wildcats played without starting quarterback Anu Solomon, who has been out with a concussion and is day-to-day going into the OSU game.

"They're a solid team," Andersen said. "The quarterback situation is up in the air as far as we know at this point but we're prepared for them to be at full strength, which we're anticipating,

obviously."

Andersen said the Beavers were able to get some good information out of the Stanford game tape.

"There's always something that we can grab on offense, defense or special teams to try to gain a little bit of an advantage," Andersen said. "Even though the defenses and offenses are not exactly alike, there's enough similarity to gain some knowledge from the tape for sure from Stanford."

Saulo backing it up: Linebacker Caleb Saulo has put together some strong games in recent weeks.

Saulo led the Beavers with 14 total tackles against Stanford and also forced a fumble.

He moved into second on the team with 32 stops. "Caleb is another

example of a young man who is growing and developing," Andersen said. "I think Rommel (Mageo) really set the pace early for those crew of inside linebackers and outside linebackers, but Caleb has joined in especially the last I would say three or four weeks as far as understanding and spending time outside of our organized meetings and taking care of his body outside of organized lifts."

"And that becomes contagious and I think he's done a nice job of that and it's shown on the field."

UCC decal: The Beavers will wear a helmet decal to recognize the victims of the Umpqua Community College shooting.

The decals will be similar to those worn by the players

in the Oregon at Colorado game on Saturday.

"I think it's a great opportunity for us to just pay respect, No. 1. But No. 2 is it's a horrible, horrible thing and it happens too much. I don't have the answers to the situation, but when I was driving with my wife to the airport and we clicked on the radio and all of a sudden we heard that was going, it ruins your day. More than that, it ruins lives. It ruins everything. It just puts you in such a bad mindset," Andersen said.

"So anything we can do to show respect and get it out there to see if there's something we can do to in those situations to prevent anything from happening. Not that we have the answers. We're proud to do it and it's great that the

university allows us to be able to do it."

Beating the heat: The Beavers are expecting hot weather in Arizona.

The game will kick off at 1 p.m. and the prediction for Saturday is 89 degrees.

"It's going to be hot it sounds like, so we'll definitely hit the pretzels and the water and the Gatorade, starting in the meeting rooms and we'll hit that (Tuesday) with them and we'll keep that going," Andersen said.

"It's starting early is the key. It's not, hey, Friday, Oh, my goodness, tomorrow it's going to be hot. We've got to hydrate tomorrow. That doesn't really help you. So we'll stay in the middle of it, keep the kids hydrated, keep reminding them."

MLB

Postseason features four managers making their playoff debuts

By **MIKE FITZPATRICK**
Associated Press

NEW YORK — Late in the season, as the New York Mets closed in on their NL East championship, one opponent after another sat in the visitors' dugout at Citi Field and commended manager Terry Collins.

"Real happy for T.C.," was the sentiment echoed by Atlanta skipper Fredi Gonzalez and others.

The popular Collins, at 66 the oldest manager in the majors and the consummate baseball lifer, is about to make his playoff managerial debut. He's one of four bench bosses who reached the postseason for the first time this year — each the fulfillment of a unique journey.

"It means a lot to me," Collins said late last week. "We sat up here and we told our fan base and our media that it's going to get better and next year we're going to win. And then to be sitting today and say we told you, it means a lot. It does."

Texas rookie Jeff Banister, Toronto retread John Gibbons and Houston whiz kid A.J. Hinch are the other managers making their initial October moves this month.

In his second stint running the Blue Jays, Gibbons finally guided them to their first playoff berth in 22 years. The AL East champs host Banister and the Rangers on Thursday in the opener of their best-of-five Division Series.

"I was able to exhale a little bit," Gibbons said. "A lot of satisfac-

tion."

Now comes the hard part. Even the first-timers are well aware that being a novice is no picnic in the playoffs, when every pressure-packed decision gets magnified and scrutinized. Plenty of successful managers, from Casey Stengel and Grady Little years ago to Matt Williams and Ned Yost just last season, have been widely criticized — even vilified — for fateful moves gone wrong.

This time of year, fans are not forgiving. "The first thing you have to do is forget about the regular season," said Hall of Fame hockey coach Scotty Bowman, who chatted with Gibbons behind the batting cage Saturday before the Blue Jays faced

Tampa Bay. "The way you played in the season is probably not going to be good enough. You've got to be a little better."

Bowman won a record nine Stanley Cups. Meanwhile, Collins and the rest of this year's playoff neophytes have been working their entire careers to earn one shot at a World Series ring.

"I'm a baseball guy and I'm a baseball development guy," said Collins, who leads the Mets against the Dodgers beginning Friday night in Los Angeles. "This summer, all I did was write the lineup and try to keep the clubhouse a fun place to be, and it worked out. So I was pretty happy the other day when we won that thing."

Hinch got first crack at the

playoffs Tuesday night and came out victorious when his surprising Astros won 3-0 at Yankee Stadium in the AL wild-card game.

Hinch was 34 and by far the youngest manager in the majors when the Stanford graduate took over the Arizona Diamondbacks in 2009.

With no previous experience in that role, his ineffective tenure didn't last long. But he's been a big hit this year in his first season piloting the young Astros.

"Very open door. For us, much a player's manager. For you, that's great. We need a guy like that, that lets us play," Houston ace Dallas Keuchel said. "Kind of a trial by fire, but he has our backs. That's what he's done all year."