

World Series

Astros start fast, top Dodgers for series lead

By BEN WALKER
AP Baseball Writer

HOUSTON — A perfect fit in their own place, the Houston Astros are halfway home.

George Springer and the Astros broke out the bats early this time and kept up their big run at Minute Maid Park in October, beating the Los Angeles Dodgers 5-3 Friday night for a 2-1 lead in the World Series.

The ballpark was booming from the start, with cheers, chants and a loud train whistle echoing beneath the closed roof. A sellout crowd stood much of the evening — deep in the heart of football country, with every Houston batter getting either a hit or walk, the fans enjoyed the Friday Night Sights.

Yuli Gurriel homered to begin a four-run burst in the second inning that sent Yu Darvish to the shortest start of his career. Astros curveballer Lance McCullers wobbled, but protected the lead into the sixth. Brad Peacock rose to the occasion with 3 2/3 innings of hitless relief.

Coming off a dramatic rally to win Game 2 at Dodger Stadium, the Astros improved to 7-0 at home this postseason. Jose Altuve & Co. have dominated, too, outscoring the Red Sox, Yankees and Dodgers 36-10



AP Photo/Matt Slocum
Houston Astros pitcher Brad Peacock celebrates after earning the save in Game 3 of the World Series.

in that span.

Springer lined a leadoff double in the first and the Astros went on to win a home game for the first time in the World Series. They were swept by the White Sox in 2005, and this win put them two victories from a most elusive championship.

Game 4 will be Saturday night when Charlie Morton starts for Houston. Left-hander Alex Wood pitches for the Dodgers, facing a lineup that has put at least one runner



AP Photo/Eric Gay
Houston Astros' Jose Altuve tags out Los Angeles Dodgers' Yasiel Puig after Puig tried to stretch a single into a double during the fourth inning of Game 3 of baseball's World Series Friday in Houston.

on in 14 straight innings.

McCullers left in the sixth as Los Angeles scored twice to cut into a 5-1 deficit. Peacock followed, and shouldered the load for a shaky bullpen by posting his first major league save. Peacock was nearly perfect, walking one and striking out four.

On a night when a lot went right for Houston, also credit third base coach Gary Pettis, who's been having quite a postseason. He boldly sent Josh Reddick careening home on a wild throw by reliever Tony Watson for a two-out run in the fifth.

The Astros rode the

momentum of a thrilling victory Wednesday night in Los Angeles, where Marwin Gonzalez hit a tying homer in the ninth on an 0-2 pitch from closer Kenley Jansen, and Houston hit three homers in extra innings before hanging on to win 7-6 in 11.

This wasn't nearly as dramatic, not that the home crowd minded.

Fans were revved up from the start when injured Houston Texas defensive end J.J. Watt — who has raised more than \$37 million for relief efforts after Hurricane Harvey — wobbled out to the mound on crutches to throw the first ball.

Soon, it was time for the Houston hitters to take over.

Gurriel homered into the Crawford Boxes in left to begin the second — he became the 13th hitter already to homer in this Series. Reddick followed with a double and Evan Gattis, the designated hitter with the game in an American League park, drew a walk.

Marwin Gonzalez launched a drive off the wall in left and wound up with an RBI single when Gattis held at second, seeing if the ball would be caught. Brian McCann singled home another run, and Alex Bregman's sacrifice fly

made it 4-0.

When Altuve doubled, Darvish was done after 1 2/3 innings.

Last month, Darvish and several Dodgers players wore Houston Strong T-shirts to raise money for hurricane relief. The four-time All-Star who previously played in Texas also contributed to the relief efforts.

On Thursday, Darvish kidded that maybe his goodwill would lead to good luck.

"Since I made that donation, maybe I can use a ball that doesn't have much pop in it," he said through a translator.

College Football

Freshman Burmeister set for fourth start for Ducks

By ANNE M. PETERSON
Associated Press

EUGENE — While Justin Herbert's appearance in pads at practice this week was tantalizing, a more pressing matter for Oregon was preparing for Utah.

Herbert started the season at quarterback for the Ducks but fractured his collarbone in a 45-24 victory over California on Sept. 30. Oregon (4-4, 1-4 Pac-12) has lost three straight without him.

The Ducks have turned to freshman Braxton Burmeister, who has had to learn on the job. He threw for 74 yards with an interception last weekend in Oregon's 31-14 loss at UCLA, but ran for two touchdowns. Overall, Burmeister has one touchdown pass with five interceptions.

Coach Willie Taggart hasn't ruled Herbert out for the game but it's more likely that Burmeister will make his fourth straight start against the Utes (4-3, 1-3) as the Ducks try to turn their season around.

Taggart said Burmeister is about where he'd expect an



• Sat., 2:45 p.m. (TV: PAC12)
• at Autzen Stadium

inexperienced freshman to be without a lot of reps.

"Last week I thought he got better," Taggart said. "I thought he did some good things for us but he has to continue to come along and I said this before, and it's so true, but guys around him have to step their game up and help the kid."

Utah has also lost three straight and has also had injury issues at quarterback. Starter Tyler Huntley missed a pair of games with a right arm injury before returning last week — and struggling in a 31-10 loss to Arizona State. He threw four interceptions.

Coach Kyle Whittingham said he's sticking with Huntley while he shakes off the injury.

"Obviously, he was a little rusty," Whittingham said. "I anticipated Tyler to have a



AP Photo/Mark J. Terrill, File
In this Oct. 21, 2017, file photo, Oregon quarterback Braxton Burmeister gets set to pass during the second half of a game against UCLA in Pasadena, Calif.

little more effective game, but he was a little rusty and not 100 percent."

The good news for both teams is there's still time — albeit not a lot of it — to become bowl eligible.

Other things to watch for on Saturday:

CARRINGTON'S RETURN: Utah receiver Darren Carrington is making his first appearance at Autzen Stadium since he was dismissed from the Ducks this summer following his

arrest on a misdemeanor charge of driving under the influence.

Carrington has thrived in the Utes' system, leading the Pac-12 with 92.7 receiving yards per game. He's on pace to post the third-most receptions and receiving yards in a single season in school history.

He insists he has no hard feelings over his dismissal and he's looking forward to seeing old friends.

"It's kind of like a high

school game," Carrington said. "Your boys (from) right down the street or you hung out with them for so long, but they just went to a different school than you. It's just going back to play them."

ROYCE ROLLS: Oregon's Royce Freeman became the school's all-time leading rusher last weekend when he piled up 160 yards in the loss to UCLA. He has 5,103 career yards to rank second on the Pac-12's all-time list. He still needs one more touchdown to break LaMichael James' record for total touchdowns at Oregon, and 57 yards rushing to join James as the only Ducks to have three 1,000-yard seasons.

Following the loss to the Bruins, Freeman was more focused on righting the Ducks than his individual records. "We've just got to keep the fighting mentality," he said.

SEARCHING FOR IDENTITY: Whittingham said that in the past the Utes have been known as a physical "run-the-ball-down-your-throat-with-some-play-action" team.

"Right now, we're still

searching for who we are. Seven games in, you say how can that be? I'm asking the same question," the coach said. "We have to figure out what we do best and hitch our wagon to that."

SECOND HALF WOES: Oregon hasn't scored in the second half in each of the past three games. In fact, the Ducks have been outscored 58-0 over that span.

"We're in our own way, we gotta get out of our own way and not lose focus on what we have to do," Taggart said. "Moving the ball is not the issue, it's again, us getting in our own way whether we make the wrong read, run the wrong route, whatever it is, those things that we just can't do."

FOR KICKS: Kicker Matt Gay, who was a walk-on for the Utes this season, leads the nation in field goals with an average of 2.43 per game and total field goals made with 17. He also leads the Pac-12 in scoring with 10.1 points per game. He made a 56-yard field goal earlier this season, which is tied for the longest of the year nationally.

Pro Soccer

Defending champs start playoffs again without Dempsey

By TIM BOOTH
AP Sports Writer

TUKWILA, Wash. — For the second straight season, the Seattle Sounders will begin the MLS Cup playoffs with Clint Dempsey as a spectator.

Unlike last year's championship run by the Sounders, this absence by Dempsey will last only one game.

Dempsey was suspended for Sunday's first-leg of the Western Conference semifinals against Cascadia rival Vancouver after picking up a red card in the regular-season finale against Colorado. Dempsey was sent off early in the first half of Seattle's 3-0 victory last week that clinched the No. 2 seed in the West for the defending champs.

"We are no longer the underdog," Seattle midfielder Cristian Roldan said. "We've accepted that. We've felt that way throughout the season because of MLS Cup and being champs. It's a big deal and teams are gunning for you."

The other semifinal matchup in the West features No. 1 seed Portland facing Houston. In the East, Supporters' Shield winners Toronto FC will face the New York Red Bulls, while No. 2 seed New York City



AP Photo/Danny Karnik
Columbus Crew forward Adam Jahn and goalkeeper Zack Steffen celebrate the game-winning goal after the shootout of an MLS playoff soccer game against Atlanta United, in Atlanta, Thursday.

FC will take on Columbus. Both the conference semifinals and finals are decided by two-game aggregate scoring.

The loss of Dempsey for the first-leg against the Whitecaps is amplified for Seattle because of the uncer-

tainty surrounding forward Jordan Morris, who has been out since early September with a hamstring injury. Morris has been doing work on the side, but has yet to resume full training.

Vancouver did have success at home this season against Seattle, winning in April and taking a 1-1 draw in August. But the Whitecaps were routed 3-0 in Seattle in late September. Vancouver lost three of its final five regular-season matches prior to Wednesday's 5-0 rout of San Jose in the knockout round.

Portland (1) vs. Houston (4)

• First leg: Monday, Oct. 30, BBVA Compass Stadium
• Second leg: Sunday, Nov. 5, Providence Park

Portland earned the top seed in the West thanks to a 2-1 win over Vancouver in the regular-season finale, capping a six-week run where the Timbers won four of six matches to claim the top spot. Portland has been led all season by MVP-worthy Diego Valeri, who has 21 goals and 11 assists. Key for Portland will be the health of striker Fanendo Adi, who missed the final two months of the regular season with a hamstring injury.

Houston outlasted

Sporting Kansas City 1-0 in extra time in the knockout round. The Dynamo are in the playoffs for the first time since 2013, led by Alberth Elis, Erick Torres, Mauro Manotas and Romell Quioto, who combined for 41 of 57 goals in the regular season. But the Dynamo suffered a big setback losing defender A.J. DeLaGarza in the regular-season finale to a knee injury.

Toronto FC (1) vs. New York Red Bulls (6)

• First leg: Monday, Oct. 30, Red Bull Arena
• Second leg: Sunday, Nov. 5, BMO Field

Toronto was clearly the class of MLS this season, running away with the Supporters' Shield in dominating fashion. Toronto took the disappointment of losing to Seattle in last year's title match and posted the highest point total in league history, finishing the season with 69 points and 20 victories in 34 matches.

The Reds stumbled in late September with consecutive losses to Montreal and New England — both of which missed the playoffs — but recovered with victories in two of their final three matches, including a 4-2 win over the Red Bulls on Sept. 30.

The loss to Toronto was the last time New York stumbled. The Red Bulls won two of their final three to close the regular season then routed Chicago 4-0 in the knockout round on Wednesday.

The Red Bulls have fans on every Western Conference team. The only way a team from the West can host MLS Cup is if the Red Bulls advance to the final.

New York City FC (2) vs. Columbus Crew (5)

• First leg: Tuesday, Oct. 31, Mapfre Stadium
• Second leg: Sunday, Nov. 5, Yankee Stadium

Led by David Villa and emerging youngster Jack Harrison, NYCFC posted its finest season with 57 points and a second-place finish in the East. Villa finished the year with 22 goals and likely will be in the middle of the MVP discussion. But the big difference for NYCFC was its improved defense that allowed 14 fewer goals than last season.

Columbus rode the goal-keeping of Zack Steffen to oust the expansion Atlanta United on penalties in the knockout round. The stunning victory continued the Crew's surge to close out the season. Columbus is now unbeaten in 11 straight matches dating to Aug. 5.