

World Series

Astros, Dodgers set Series home run record

By RONALD BLUM
Associated Press

HOUSTON — Home runs kept flying over the wall at Minute Maid Park, on line drives up toward the train tracks, on fly balls that just dropped over the fence.

Seven more were hit in Game 5, raising the total to a World Series record 22 — with two possible more games to play. Twenty-five runs were scored in a game started by the Dodgers' Clayton Kershaw and the Astros' Dallas Keuchel, Cy Young Award winners regarded as among baseball's best.

After a season when sluggers outpaced even their steroid-era predecessors for home runs, some are convinced that something is amiss with the baseballs.

"The main complaint is that the balls seem a little bit different in the postseason, and even from the postseason to the World Series balls," Justin Verlander said Sunday, two days before he takes the mound in Game 6 and tries to pitch the Astros to their first title. "They're a little slick. You just deal with it. But I don't think it's the case of one pitcher saying, 'Hey, something is different here.' I think as a whole, everybody is saying, 'Whoa, something is a little off here.'"

A record eight home runs

were hit in Game 2, including five in extra innings, and Game 5's seven long balls would have tied the old mark. The 13-12, 10-inning Astros' win Sunday night was the second-highest scoring game in Series history.

Keuchel was quoted as saying after Game 2: "Obviously, the balls are juiced."

Not so obvious to everyone, even amid the power surge.

"I haven't personally noticed anything. I haven't tried to think about it either," Dodgers reliever Brandon Morrow said after giving up two homers in Game 5. "It's not something you want to put in your own head."

Same for Kershaw, even after giving up his record eighth homer of the post-season Sunday.

"I don't really pay attention to it," Kershaw said. "I just assume that both sides are dealing with it, so I'm not going to worry about it."

This year's long ball assault topped the 21 of the 2002 Series. Anaheim hit seven and Barry Bonds and his San Francisco Giants slugged 14 over seven games. That was the year before survey drug testing.

Speculation that something has changed includes a study claiming to have found differences in the size and seam height of balls since the



Houston Astros' Yuli Gurriel watches his three-run home run off Los Angeles Dodgers starting pitcher Clayton Kershaw during the fourth inning of Game 5 of baseball's World Series Sunday, in Houston.

AP Photo/Charlie Riedel

2015 All-Star break.

"I know there was talk about different sizes and some of the baseballs were slightly bigger and some were smaller. Some of the seams were higher, some of the seams were lower. But, no, it's been consistent," said Rich Hill, who will start Game 6 for the Dodgers. "I think that just has to do with conditions — if it's colder it's going to be slicker.

If it's a little bit warmer out or humid, I think you're going to find that you're going to have a little bit more of moisture to the baseballs."

Baseball Commissioner Rob Manfred insists nothing nefarious is going on.

"I'm absolutely confident that the balls that we're using are within our established specifications," he said Friday.

Verlander rejected that assertion.

"I know Mr. Manfred said the balls haven't changed, but I think there's enough information out there to say that's not true," he said.

Verlander also does not think it's an issue of how balls are rubbed up before games.

"I know baseball uses the same mud for every single ball for every single game that's played," he said. "I think there's a broader issue that we're all missing."

On the day he became commissioner in January 2015, Manfred said, "I'm cognizant in the drop in offense over the last five years, and it's become a topic of conversation in the game, and it's something that we're going to have to continue to monitor and study."

Offense started rebounding during the second half of the season, and a record 6,105 home runs were hit this year, 2.4 percent more than the previous mark of 5,963 set in 2000 at the height of the Steroids Era.

"I think it's pretty clear," Verlander said. "I think our commissioner has said publicly that they wanted more offense in the game. I'm pretty sure I'm not fabricating a quote here when I say that. I think it was already All-Star break of '15, or right before, when he said that."

San Francisco's Johnny Cueto and Toronto's Marcus Stroman also think the balls have changed, with Stroman blaming slick balls for a rise in pitcher blisters — an affliction which has struck Hill a few times in the past couple seasons, too.

Houston's Brent Strom and the Dodgers' Rick Honeycutt, the World Series pitching coaches, both were quoted by Sports Illustrated on Sunday as saying the slickness of the ball made throwing sliders difficult.

"Everyone is entitled to their opinion," Astros manager A.J. Hinch said. "I don't see a ton difference, but I'm not going to get in a verbal war with coaches and players who think otherwise."

Dodgers manager Dave Roberts had a similar view but acknowledged the power records got his attention.

"The pitchers talk about it feels different in their hand. The one component is the slickness and guys at different ballparks rub it up differently," he said. "Sort of feels the same to me. But it's hard to argue the numbers. You know there's more velocity. Guys are swinging harder. I know in Los Angeles the air was light. It was hot. The ball was flying, carrying more than typically. But I hesitate to try to give you any insight because I really don't know."

NASCAR



Kyle Busch, center, celebrates under the lights after winning the NASCAR Cup series auto race at Martinsville Speedway in Martinsville, Va., Sunday.

AP Photo/Steve Helber

Kyle Busch to race for title after Martinsville victory

By JENNA FRYER
Associated Press

MARTINSVILLE — There should be no confusion about the intensity of NASCAR's playoffs after Sunday's show at Martinsville Speedway.

Chase Elliott could have won, same for Brad Keselowski, and Denny Hamlin, too.

It was Kyle Busch, though, who punched his ticket into NASCAR's championship race with a victory in overtime of a race that turned wild very, very quickly and ended with a multicausal accident after Busch took the checkered flag.

Busch moved Joe Gibbs Racing teammate Hamlin out of his way to earn a spot in next month's championship race at Homestead-Miami Speedway for the third consecutive year. He won the series title in 2015.

"We weren't the best all day, but we put ourselves in the right spots there at the end," Busch said. "There was kind of chaos ensuing and none of it was our fault, we just came out on the right end of the stick."

Keselowski was in position to win when Joey Logano developed a tire problem with about 10 laps remaining in regulation. Had his Team Penske teammate pitted under green to fix the tire, Keselowski likely would have coasted to the win and earned the spot in the finale.

Instead, Logano spun and brought out a caution.

Keselowski was moved out of the way by Elliott after a restart, and Hamlin then spun Elliott out of the lead with two laps remaining in regulation. Elliott wrecked, chased Hamlin down on the cool-down lap to show his displeasure, and the drivers had a heated exchange after

they climbed from their cars.

It was a tough result for Elliott — from potential race winner to 27th, lowest of the eight remaining playoff drivers.

"My mom always said if you don't have anything nice to say, don't say anything at all," Elliott said. "He's not worth my time. I got punted from behind and wrecked in Turn 3 leading the race. I don't know what his problem was. It was unnecessary and I hadn't raced him dirty all day long."

"We had the best car I've ever had here at Martinsville, and had an opportunity to go straight to Homestead and because of him we don't."

Elliott could repeatedly be seen saying 'You wrecked me,' to Hamlin as the crowd roared its approval over the tension. Hamlin at first defended his actions because of the stakes, but later apologized to Elliott on social media.

"I've raced nearly 10,000 races since I was 7. Today was the first time I ever spun out the leader," Hamlin wrote on Twitter. "I regret the outcome because it was not intentional the way it turned out but I am responsible for my own car and take blame. Nothing I say now can turn back the clock."

Hamlin faded to seventh after Busch bumped him for the win.

"That was our chance to move to Homestead," Busch shrugged.

Keselowski wound up fourth in a race his team believed he had to win.

Instead, he was simply darting his way around a huge pileup on the final lap that ended an emotional opening race of the third round of the playoffs.

"Yeah, everybody is just desperate," Keselowski said.

Martin Truex Jr. wound up second in a 1-2 sweep for

Toyota, which has won six of the seven playoff races. Truex and Busch have won three playoff races each, while Keselowski won in the second round.

The favorite to win the title, Truex said he is confident enough he will make it to next month's finale at Homestead-Miami Speedway without having to bump Busch out of his way to grab the automatic berth.

"I don't know that I would have done anything differently," Truex said. "I think we can get to Homestead without making too many enemies. We'll let everybody else fight and we'll try to do our own thing."

Clint Bowyer, not eligible for the playoffs, finished third.

Kevin Harvick was fifth in a Ford, Ryan Blaney eighth for the Wood Brothers of nearby Stuart, Virginia, and the manufacturer placed six drivers in the top 10.

Dale Earnhardt Jr. was the highest-finishing Chevrolet driver in 11th and was dumbofounded by the last-lap chaos.

"Man, I can't believe how everybody crossed the finish line. I ain't seen nothing like that, I ain't seen it, I don't know if I ever have seen it," Earnhardt said. "There was a wreck one time at Richmond before they ever reconfigured it in the Xfinity race on the front straightaway in like 1982 — that is the only thing I ever seen like it. Crazy finish."

Seven-time NASCAR champion Jimmie Johnson finished 12th.

That was a near victory for Johnson, who spun in Sunday morning qualifying and needed to make repairs to his Chevrolet that forced him to start last. A nine-time Martinsville winner, he used this race last year to vault him toward his record-tying seventh championship.

MLS

Top-seeded Timbers play Dynamo to 0-0 draw in semis

HOUSTON — Jeff Attinella had two saves to help the Portland Timbers to a 0-0 draw with the Houston Dynamo on Monday night in the opener of their Western Conference semifinal.

The second leg of the two-game aggregate series is Sunday in Portland. The fourth-seeded Dynamo had just one road win in the regular season.

Attinella posted his 10th career shutout in his first playoff action — including a sliding 1-on-1 save against Alberth Elis in the 51st minute and a leaping stop of a header by Philippe Senderos in the 56th.

Houston is unbeaten in its last eight matches, including a 1-0 win over Sporting Kansas City in Thursday's single-elimination knockout round.

The Dynamo were awarded a penalty kick in the 30th minute after Larrys Mabiala's sliding tackle of Alberth Elis at the corner of the 6-yard box, but the call was overturned



Portland Timbers goalkeeper Jeff Attinella (1) collides with Houston Dynamo forward Mauro Manotas (19) as he comes out to get the ball away from Manotas during the MLS Western Conference semifinal soccer match Monday in Houston.

Yi-Chin Lee/Houston Chronicle via AP

after a replay review.

Mabiala, a defender, as well as midfielders Darlington Nagbe and Diego Chara — who was taken off on a stretcher — did not return for Portland after injuries midway through the game.

The top-seeded Timbers

were already without Fanendo Adi, Sebastian Blanco and David Guzman. Adi was second on the team with 10 goals despite missing the final 10 regular-season games after he injured a hamstring during a 3-1 win over Los Angeles on Aug. 6.

BRIEFLY

Ione's Neiffer steps foot on international stage as CrossFit coach

The 2017 Reebok CrossFit Invitational will be held Sunday in Melbourne, Australia and a Ione native will be at the helm of Team USA. Adam Neiffer was selected as the coach for the four-person squad made up of some of the most elite athletes in the world.

CrossFit, which was founded in 2000, is a fitness regime that uses high-intensity interval training, plyometrics and powerlifting. Neiffer, who was first introduced to CrossFit in 2005, is the most experienced team athlete there is. He's made nine appearances at the CrossFit Games and the Affiliate Cup, and will now try his hand at coaching.

There is only one returning member of Team USA, which will compete against the Pacific Team, the Europe team, and the Canada Team. The two-hour competition will be streamed live to Games.CrossFit.com.

Three Eastern Oregon Mountaineers earn CCC Player of the Week honors

After the Eastern Oregon women's soccer, men's wrestling and men's basketball teams came out of the weekend unscathed to preserve their undefeated records, three Mounties were named Cascade Collegiate Conference (CCC) Players of the Week.

The three honorees were announced Monday: Senior defender Rosalie Salisbury earned Women's Soccer Defensive Player of the Week, Senior Eric Fan (197 lbs.) was named Wrestler of the Week and Sophomore guard Max McCullough was awarded Men's Basketball Player of the Week.

Salisbury led the Mountaineers to the programs first CCC title in program history after a strong defensive performance in two

shut out victories. EOU is the No. 1 seed entering the CCC Championships on Friday.

Fan went unbeaten (3-0) at the Lassen CC Duals in Susanville, Calif., which helped lead EOU to a 3-0 team record. He is also ranked No. 9 in the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics of the 197-lb weight class.

McCullough had a standout performance to move the Mountaineers to 4-0 on the season. He recorded 25 points with six assists in a 92-81 win against Ottawa and was good for 15 points in just 14 minutes played, making all but one of four 3-pointers, Saturday against Northwest Indian.

Oregon State lands commitment from 3-star outside linebacker

The Oregon State Beavers are busy building their next season's squad. In just a matter of days, they have added a three-star linebacker, Isaiah Tufaga, and extending scholarship offers to a defensive end/tight end of Southridge (Bradley Bickler) and a tight end/offensive lineman out of West Linn (Keishon Dawkins).

On Sunday evening, Oregon State added another three-star recruit: outside linebacker Craig Francois. The 6-foot 2-inch, 210-pound OLB committed to the Beavers despite receiving offers from both Hawaii and Washington State.

Corrections

Pendleton football player Aiden Patterson was misidentified in a photo that ran on Page 1B of Saturday's East Oregonian. The *East Oregonian* works hard to be accurate and sincerely regrets any errors. If you notice a mistake in the paper, please call 541-966-0818.