



CHICAGO CUBS DAILY CLIPS

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October 16, 2017

- Daily Herald, **Cubs down 2-0 in NLCS after Dodgers' walk-off win**
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Daily Herald

Cubs down 2-0 in NLCS after Dodgers' walk-off win

By Bruce Miles

LOS ANGELES -- The National League championship series is hardly the ideal time for a team to need so many fixes.

That's where the Cubs found themselves heading into Game 2 of the NLCS Sunday night at Dodger Stadium.

Where they find themselves now is down two games to none in the best-of-seven series after the Los Angeles Dodgers walked off with a dramatic 4-1 victory in the bottom of the ninth inning.

Justin Turner crushed a pitch from John Lackey over the center-field wall with two outs to send the crowd of 54,479 into a frenzy.

According to the Dodgers and ESPN, Turner hit just the second walk-off homer in Dodgers history. The other was Kirk Gibson's homer off Dennis Eckersley to end Game 1 of the 1988 World Series, exactly 29 years ago Sunday.

"Bad location, probably bad selection," said Lackey, who was summoned in relief of Brian Duensing with a runner on second and two outs. Cubs manager Joe Maddon said closer Wade Davis was available only for a 1-inning save situation.

Duensing began his night in the eighth and started the ninth with a walk to Yasiel Puig. Charlie Culberson bunted Puig to second before Duensing struck out pinch hitter Kyle Farmer. Lackey came in and walked Chris Taylor before giving up the homer on a 1-0 pitch. On the mound, Lackey looked fidgety and he had to communicate with catcher Willson Contreras.

"We had a little trouble getting on the same page," Lackey said. "It happens sometimes."

The Cubs are up against it now, and they're battling on several fronts with Game 3 coming Tuesday night at Wrigley Field. Their bullpen is beat up, although the middle relief was much better Sunday, with Carl Edwards Jr. rebounding with 3 strikeouts in 1½ innings.

Their starting pitchers are running up pitch counts and not turning in quality starts. Jon Lester worked 4½ innings, but he was coming off a 55-pitch relief outing last Wednesday in Game 4 of the division series.

Most troubling for the Cubs is that they're not hitting. It would be easy to point the finger at big guys Kris Bryant (5-for-28 with 13 strikeouts in the postseason) and Anthony Rizzo (4-for-26). They are not trying to shoulder too much of the load, or the blame.

"I think it would be selfish if we did," Rizzo said. "One-through-9, all 25 guys, we've got to get it going. Pitching's doing a heck of a job. You need help from everyone in the lineup, not just one or two guys."

While the Cubs have been trying to make something work with their overworked bullpen, six Dodgers relievers have given up no hits in 8 innings of work.

"We scored 1 run today, that's the issue," Cubs manager Joe Maddon said. "We've scored 11 runs in six games during the playoffs."

The game began as a battle of left-handers with Lester taking on former Cub Rich Hill. Addison Russell touched Hill for a line-drive homer in the fifth to break a scoreless tie. Lester gave up an RBI single to Turner in the fifth.

"At the end of the day, you look up on a groundball that just gets through, and it's tied 1-1," Lester said. "It wasn't great, but it was only 1."

Hill worked 5 innings before Dodgers manager Dave Roberts went to his lights-out bullpen.

"You're essentially counting outs and trying to get the best matchup for your guys," Roberts said. "It goes back to the trust we have in our pen and for each of our starters. It's a matter of giving everything you have for as long as you can."

As for Lester, he bristled at calling this game a "heartbreaker."

"A heartbreaker for who?" he asked. "It's a loss. We're not over. We're not done."

"Guys walked in here upbeat, ready to go for Tuesday. We had some music playing before you guys (media) got in here. We've all lost games before. We've all lost series before. So we'll move on to Tuesday."

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Daily Herald

Chicago Cubs' Maddon again states his case

By Bruce Miles

LOS ANGELES -- Chicago Cubs manager Joe Maddon said Sunday he already had heard from Joe Torre, Major League Baseball's chief baseball officer about the speech Maddon delivered after Saturday's 5-2 loss to the Dodgers.

Maddon was ejected in the seventh inning by umpire Mike Winters but said it was nothing against the umpires. He again was voicing his displeasure over MLB's catcher-collision rule.

"I'm going to visit with Mr. Torre," Maddon said. "We texted, and I talked to him on the phone. We just have to sit down face to face regarding what I had said last night."

Maddon compared the collision rule to the repealed Cook County soda-pop tax, meaning each had bad effects.

The Cubs believed they had Dodgers runner Charlie Culberson out at home on a throw from left fielder Kyle Schwarber to catcher Willson Contreras.

On replay review, however, it was ruled Contreras blocked the plate before he had the ball. The rule was designed to protect catchers from collisions, but it has sown confusion among catchers and runners.

"The more I watch it, it was a tremendous baseball play on our part," Maddon said. "I could not be happier with the technique, and then you could also argue against the bad baserunning on their side. They got rewarded for a wide turn, whatever, we don't get rewarded for perfect footwork in left field and a great catch and tag at home plate.

"That's all I saw."

Fighting the bullpen blues:

It's no secret the Cubs' bullpen has been bad during the postseason. Cubs relievers entered Sunday's Game 2 of the National League championship series with an ERA of 7.08.

Carl Edwards Jr. was at 23.14, and Mike Montgomery was at 22.50.

"They have not been on top of their game, and they'll be the first two guys to tell you that," Joe Maddon said. "But we're not winning eight more games without them. It's just not going to happen.

"You've got to keep working at it, keep talking to them. Anything that they perceive to be flaws has to be worked on. These are our guys. They got us to this point in the year."

Edwards has remained outwardly calm.

"It is nothing that I have not been through before," he said on the field before Sunday's game. "Confidence is still high. We never know until I get out there, but no matter what, I'm still going to be the same guy."

One reliever having a ripple effect on the bullpen is left-hander Justin Wilson, thought to be a key acquisition from the Detroit Tigers in July. Wilson had a poor second half with the Cubs and has been left off the NLCS roster.

"Of course that was counted upon when got him," Maddon said of good performance. "Listen, the guy's got a great arm. That's not to say he's not going to get back to his original form. But for right now we just weren't seeing that. But we did anticipate more, there's no question."

A miraculous recovery?

Dodgers manager Dave Roberts said injured shortstop Corey Seager is feeling "normalish."

Seager is not on the Dodgers' NLCS roster because of a bad back. He cannot return to the roster for this series except for an injury to another player.

Joe Maddon was apprised of the situation by reporters and asked if he thought the Dodgers would try get Seager back this series.

"Did you expect anything different?" Maddon said. "We'll just see how it all plays out. We'll see how it all plays out."

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Daily Herald

3 key questions for Chicago Cubs heading into Game 3 of the NLCS

By Bruce Miles

LOS ANGELES -- The Cubs find themselves down two games to none in the National League championships series after losing in dramatic fashion, 4-1 Sunday night.

The victory was a stunner for the Cubs, who played an overall good game.

Here are three key questions facing them as they get set to play Game 3 Tuesday night at Wrigley Field.

1. How important will a day off be for the Cubs?

It should be very important. Manager Joe Maddon will not have his team workout Monday at Wrigley Field. Instead, they'll take the day off and have just a limited media availability at the ballpark.

The Cubs look gassed -- physically, mentally and emotionally. They had to go to the limit to beat the Washington Nationals in the NLDS. They "lost" Friday's off-day because of a medical issue on their charter flight to L.A. And they've lost two games to the Dodgers. A one-day regrouping can only help.

2. When will the Cubs start hitting?

The sooner the better. It's done them no good to get Dodgers starting pitchers out of the game, only to go hitless against the Dodgers bullpen. They struck out 12 times Sunday night. Kris Bryant and Anthony Rizzo both said it would be "selfish" to try to shoulder the load. And they're right. Javier Baez is 0-for-19 in the postseason. The rest of the lineup needs to get it going, as well, but that will be a tall order against Dodgers pitching.

3. How badly do the Cubs need a quality start?

Very badly, and perhaps Kyle Hendricks is the man to do that in Game 3. The Cubs have not had a quality start since Game 2 of the NLDS on Oct. 7, when Jon Lester went 6 innings. Hendricks pitched 7 scoreless innings in the NLDS opener. The Cubs were 57-20 in the regular season when they got a quality start. The bullpen could also use a much-needed break.

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Daily Herald

Rozner: Chicago Cubs come up empty in search for bullpen answers

By Barry Rozner

The Chicago Cubs are in a tough spot.

But then, you knew that coming in.

They've got a bunch of 5-inning starters and a struggling bullpen, not exactly a recipe for advancing past the Dodgers in the NLCS.

Most playoff series don't hold to form, but this one certainly has through a pair of games and Los Angeles has won them both after getting into the Cubs' bullpen.

The Dodgers' 4-1 victory Sunday sends the series to Wrigley Field with the Cubs needing to win four of the next five, hardly an impossible task for the 2016 Cubs.

But it might be too much for the 2017 version.

The starters either haven't been able to go deep -- or haven't been allowed to go deeper -- this postseason and the bullpen is 0-2 in a pair of games on the West Coast.

"When guys struggle, I know everybody wants you to open up a new can of relief pitchers, but that's not how it works," said Cubs manager Joe Maddon. "I have a lot of faith in our guys. I have to keep putting them out there in the situations they're supposed to be in."

Maddon had no choice but to pull Jon Lester in the fifth at 103 pitches with Lester going on three days' rest. After tossing 55 pitches Wednesday, also on short rest after throwing 86 pitches in Game 2 of the NLDS, Lester was far from sharp, walking a career playoff-high five batters.

Carl Edwards and Pedro Strop were very sharp -- a positive sign moving forward -- but Brian Duensing was again in the Mike Montgomery role, with Maddon having lost confidence in Montgomery following his poor performance against Washington.

Duensing pitched a scoreless eighth but issued a leadoff walk in the ninth to Yasiel Puig, and with two outs Maddon went to John Lackey, who has never pitched on consecutive days in his career.

Is that what Maddon meant by "situations they're supposed to be in," with Lackey coming out of the bullpen in a season-changing situation?

At this point, Maddon lacks options, so he's grasping at straws and drowning in the process.

Closer Wade Davis had warmed earlier and even if he had nothing, or his arm is hurt or falling off, he's the right choice with the game on the line, just as Dodgers manager Dave Roberts had gone to Kenley Jansen for the top of the ninth.

"I really just needed (Davis) for the save," Maddon said. "He had limited pitches. If we had caught the lead, he would have pitched."

Davis had limited pitches because Maddon threw him 44 pitches in Game 5 against Washington, and the Cubs needed to extend the game Sunday night in the ninth.

In any case, Lackey pitching speaks to Maddon's trust in the bullpen in the middle of October.

Lackey threw 27 pitches in relief in Game 1 after not pitching for 13 days, and entered Sunday's game with Puig on second and two outs.

He walked Chris Taylor and served up a batting-practice meatball to Justin Turner on a 1-0 count, and Turner made the Cubs pay with a long home run to center field, breaking the 1-1 tie and walking the Dodgers off with a 2-0 NLCS lead.

The Dodgers' bullpen, meanwhile, has thrown 8 perfect innings in two games, save a single baserunner coming when Jansen hit Anthony Rizzo with a pitch in the ninth.

Kyle Hendricks must go deep for the Cubs in Game 3 and he has to be great.

If not, this could be a very short series.

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Cubs.com

Cubs can't gain LA split; NLCS shifts to Wrigley

By Carrie Muskat and Ken Gurnick

LOS ANGELES -- Even at age 90, Tom Lasorda knows a historic home run when he sees one. The Hall of Fame manager said Justin Turner's walk-off three-run homer that gave the Dodgers a 4-1 win over the Cubs on Sunday night at Dodger Stadium and a two-games-to-none lead in the National League Championship Series reminded him of the one Kirk Gibson hit into immortality in Game 1 of the World Series 29 years ago to the day.

"The difference is that one helped us win the World Series," said Lasorda of the only other walk-off blast in Dodgers postseason history. "This one could put us in it."

The NLCS presented by Camping World shifts to Wrigley Field after Turner's dramatic blast off a 1-0 John Lackey fastball with two outs in the bottom of the ninth inning. Since the LCS expanded to best-of-seven in 1985, only three of the 28 teams that lost the first two games were able to come back to win the series.

"Yeah, I've told this story I don't know how many times since I've been a Dodger," said Turner, who also had an RBI single to drive in all the Dodgers' runs. "One of my earliest baseball memories was being at my grandma's house and watching that game and watching Gibby hit that homer."

Turner hadn't yet turned 4 at the time.

Los Angeles now heads to Chicago needing two wins to secure the franchise's first NL pennant since 1988, when Gibson's Game 1 home run off Dennis Eckersley fueled the Dodgers' five-game World Series win over the A's. NLCS Game 3 will take place Tuesday night at Wrigley Field. The Cubs took two of three from the Dodgers at Wrigley from April 10-13.

"What did you say? 29 years to the day?" said Dodgers manager Dave Roberts. "It was special. Our guys feel it. We feel it."

"That was a great game," said Cubs manager Joe Maddon. "I thought our defense was outstanding. We played great defense all over the field. Really entertaining game. They got us in the end. That just happens sometimes."

Cubs reliever Brian Duensing walked Yasiel Puig on four pitches to lead off the ninth, and Puig was bunted to second by Charlie Culberson. Rookie Kyle Farmer, pinch-hitting, struck out. Lackey relieved and walked Chris Taylor before facing Turner, who has nine RBIs in five postseason games this month.

"I'm not saying [Turner is] David Ortiz, but I played with David, and you're talking about big spots and coming up big," said Roberts. "And J.T.'s that guy for us. Yeah, he just has that pulse where he can just kind of keep his calm and stay within the strike zone. Also just not afraid to fail and just wants to be in that spot. But even that at-bat before, Chris Taylor, that at-bat to grind Lackey and keep the line moving, that was huge as well."

The Dodgers' bullpen that pitched 3 2/3 perfect innings in Game 1 added three hitless innings in Game 2, with closer Kenley Jansen pitching around a hit batter in a scoreless top of the ninth for the victory. Until Jansen hit Anthony Rizzo with a pitch with one out in the ninth, the bullpen had retired 22 consecutive batters, the longest streak by any team's bullpen to begin any postseason series in history, according to Elias.

"They're just executing pitches and they're ready when called upon and they're competing," said Roberts. "It's a close-knit group down there. Josh Bard, our bullpen coach, has done a fantastic job with those guys, along with [pitching coach] Rick Honeycutt. And just the preparation. Those guys know exactly what they want to do, and they're going out there and executing."

Addison Russell homered off Rich Hill into the left-field box seats on a 1-2 fastball leading off the top of the fifth inning, his fourth career postseason homer and Cubs-best 19th career postseason RBI. Russell had six RBIs in Game 6 of last year's World Series and four RBIs in Thursday's Game 5 clincher of the NL Division Series presented by T-Mobile.

The Dodgers tied it in the bottom of the inning off Jon Lester on a leadoff double by Culberson (injured shortstop Corey Seager's replacement) and a two-out RBI single by Turner, who was 1-for-21 in his career against Lester before the at-bat.

Hill was lifted for a pinch-hitter after five innings and 80 pitches. Lester, working on short rest for the first time in his postseason career and third time ever, burned through 103 pitches in 4 2/3 innings.

How big is this loss to the Cubs' chances to repeat as World Series champs?

"It's a loss," Maddon said. "The biggest? I mean, you could always come back to the ninth inning and point out the guy hit a home run. But we have got to do better than one run. We've just got to do better than that. Offensively, we've kind of been stifled."

"We're pretty fortunate to be in this position right now based on the number of runs we've scored over the last week," he said. "We have to do a better job at the plate. We have to get the starter more deeply into the game to really permit the way you want to use your bullpen."

Said Chicago's Jason Heyward: "Let's go to Chicago and see what happens."

MOMENTS THAT MATTERED

Take your walks: Puig led off the winning rally with a four-pitch walk and Taylor, who slugged a tie-breaking homer in Game 1, preceded Turner's blast with a walk on a 3-2 pitch.

"If the situation calls for it, and you're at home in a tie game, it makes sense to give up a run given who is behind the bunter," said Roberts. "But we did a lot of things to execute tonight. It starts with the at-bat quality, and when we needed it, sacrifice or get a guy over, we did that. When we needed to take a walk, we did that."

Duensing survives scare: Brought in to get lefties Cody Bellinger and Joc Pederson in the bottom of the eighth, lefty Duensing got Bellinger to ground to first, but Duensing dropped Rizzo's flip. Pederson bunted Bellinger to second and Logan Forsythe was walked intentionally to set up the double play, which Duensing delivered by getting Austin Barnes to ground into a 6-4-3 DP.

QUOTABLE

"We'll come back. We'll be back in Chicago. I know our fans will be there and they'll be loud and before you know it, the series will be tied." -- Cubs reliever Carl Edwards Jr.

"I got three walks. I would have got four walks but my tongue wasn't working when I licked the bat." -- Puig, who had three walks and a strikeout

WHAT'S NEXT

Cubs: The series shifts to Wrigley Field on Tuesday and Kyle Hendricks will get the start. He's 1-0 with a 3.27 ERA in two postseason starts so far. In Game 1 of the NL Division Series, Hendricks gave up two hits over seven scoreless innings. He's 2-1 with a 3.15 ERA in three career starts against the Dodgers.

Dodgers: Yu Darvish gets the start in Game 3. Darvish turned in five strong innings vs. the D-backs in NLDS Game 3, allowing one run on two hits, walking none and striking out seven. He's faced the Cubs once, allowing two runs over 4 1/3 innings on July 16, 2016, while a member of the Rangers.

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Cubs.com

Russell not intimidated by postseason stage

By Austin Laymance

LOS ANGELES -- Addison Russell knocked in the only run for the Cubs in a 4-1 loss to the Dodgers in Game 2 of the National League Championship Series presented by Camping World on Sunday night, and his home run moved him atop the Cubs' all-time list for postseason RBIs.

Russell's solo shot off Dodgers starter Rich Hill in the fifth inning gave Russell 19 career RBIs in the playoffs, moving him out of a tie with teammate Anthony Rizzo for the most in Cubs history. Russell, 23, also became the ninth player in Major League history with at least four postseason home runs before turning 24.

What is it about the postseason stage that has allowed Russell to elevate his performance?

"It's their guys versus our guys," Russell said. "We're playing to win. I feel like the competition just steps up a little bit because each pitch is more crucial, each swing, each play. An error can be the deciding factor of winning or losing. A bad pitch can be the decision of winning or losing. That's really what I like about it."

Russell's homer to left field gave the Cubs the lead in Game 2 but, unfortunately for Chicago, the Dodgers tied the game in the bottom of the inning and their bullpen shut down the Cubs the rest of the way. It was a similar script to Game 1, when Albert Almora Jr. put the Cubs on the board first with a two-run homer before the Dodgers stormed back to win.

"Those guys are good, man. Those guys are good," said Russell of a Dodgers bullpen that hasn't allowed a hit or a run in eight innings. "Going about our business the same way, but you have to give credit to those guys, they are making their pitches in the right situations."

Leading off the top of the fifth, Russell pounced on a 1-2 fastball from Hill and sent a liner into the seats just inside the left-field foul pole. The ball left the bat at 102 mph with a 25 degree launch angle and traveled a Statcast™ projected 358 feet.

"Rich Hill is a great pitcher," said Russell, who struck out swinging in his first at-bat against the left-hander. "He got me my first at-bat. It was really hard to see my first at-bat. I felt like I was on time with all his pitches. He just left a fastball over the plate, I didn't try to do too much and it went out."

It was the first homer of the 2017 postseason for Russell, who went deep three times during the Cubs' magical ride through the '16 postseason.

Russell joined teammate Kyle Schwarber, Hall of Famers Mickey Mantle and Jimmie Foxx, Evan Longoria, Andruw Jones, Carlos Correa, Bryce Harper and Miguel Cabrera as the only players with at least four postseason home runs before the age of 24.

Informed of Russell's postseason accomplishments, teammate Jason Heyward marveled at the way Russell performs in the sport's most important games.

"He kind of just goes unconscious," Heyward said. "He goes up there and he takes his swings at the plate and tries to be on time and not miss pitches. He's not afraid to fail. I feel like that goes a long way."

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Cubs.com

Cubs counting on reliable Hendricks at Wrigley

By Anthony DiComo

LOS ANGELES -- Of Major League Baseball's four best starting pitchers since midseason, two of them -- Stephen Strasburg and Corey Kluber -- are home for the offseason. The third, Justin Verlander, gave the Astros one of the best games in his life Saturday, putting Houston on a potential collision course with the American League pennant.

Then there is Kyle Hendricks. From the day he returned from a finger injury in mid-July until the end of the regular season, Hendricks posted a 2.19 ERA, better than all but the three aforementioned starters. He almost single-handedly won the Cubs' first postseason game in October, before faltering slightly in their clinching win against the Nationals.

Now, Hendricks will make another critical start in Game 3 of the National League Championship Series presented by Camping World on Tuesday, looking to start the process of bringing the Cubs back from a 2-0 series deficit. The series shifts to Wrigley Field in Chicago for Game 3 after the Cubs dropped Game 2 in walk-off fashion, 4-1.

"I know we'll be fine," Cubs manager Joe Maddon said. "We'll get a good day's rest [Monday]. We'll come out and play our game. On Tuesday, we've got Kyle going, which is good for us. They have a good pitcher also."

That is Dodgers right-hander Yu Darvish, although it won't necessarily matter if Hendricks is at his peak. In addition to ranking fourth in the Majors in ERA since the All-Star break, Hendricks is second in that category since the start of last season, trailing only Clayton Kershaw.

And Hendricks is quickly becoming one of the game's most accomplished postseason pitchers. Since the Cubs began making October an annual thing in 2015, Hendricks leads baseball with nine games started, ranks fourth with 45 innings, and ranks fifth with 43 strikeouts and a 2.60 ERA.

Trailing 2-0 in a series may not be ideal for Hendricks or the Cubs, but he's used to this sort of pressure. Hendricks won the clinching Game 6 of last year's NLCS over the Dodgers, taking a shutout into the eighth. He did not allow a run in Game 3 of the World Series against the Indians, a game the Cubs ultimately lost. Five days later, he started Game 7, departing with a lead.

"All you're focused on is making pitches," Hendricks said recently. "That's my job and it never changes -- no matter regular-season game, postseason game, no matter who you are facing on the other side of the mound. My focus is to go out there, make good pitches, rely on my preparation which I've done all year long. But when it comes down to it, when those lights turn on, you just have to execute pitches better than the other guy."

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Cubs.com

Maddon, Cubs recognize bats need to do more
By Carrie Muskat

LOS ANGELES -- They're batting a combined .166 with one home run between them so far in the postseason. Anthony Rizzo and Kris Bryant aren't the only ones scuffling on the Cubs, but the Dodgers have definitely stymied the pair.

"Everybody in the lineup feels the same way," said Bryant, who went 0-for-4 Sunday in the Cubs' 4-1 loss to the Dodgers in Game 2 of the National League Championship Series presented by Camping World.

"When you don't produce, it's like you let the team down," Bryant said. "That's not the right way to feel, because not one person makes or breaks the team. For me, I put that in perspective all the time and realize it's not what you do in the playoffs, it's what the team does, and obviously, we haven't been getting it done so far."

Bryant has struck out 13 times in 28 postseason at-bats in 2017, and was 5-for-28 in the NL Division Series presented by T-Mobile and NLCS combined, with two RBIs.

In the NLCS, the Dodgers' bullpen has been dominating. The relievers had retired 22 in a row before Rizzo was hit by a pitch with one out in the ninth.

"We have to just keep pushing, make adjustments," Chicago's Jason Heyward said. "When I say that, I don't mean do anything drastic, but pay attention to detail and approach."

When asked for details, Heyward smiled.

"I wouldn't give them to you," he said. "I just feel it works in your favor when you see guys more than once. You can see their approach, see how they attack, make your adjustments, and hope for the best."

The focus is on Bryant and Rizzo -- or Bryzzo, as they're known by Cubs fans. Does Rizzo feel responsible to get the Cubs' offense going? His last hit was an eighth-inning single against the Nationals in Game 3 of the NLDS. He's 0-for-14 since.

"I think that'd be selfish if we did [feel responsible]," Rizzo said. "One through nine, all 25 guys, we've got to get it going. Our pitching is doing a heck of a job. You need help from everyone in the lineup, not just one or two guys."

Manager Joe Maddon agrees.

"We just have to become more offensive," Maddon said.

What are the Dodgers doing?

"They do a good job of their game plan of high fastballs out of the bullpen," Bryant said. "It's nothing out of the ordinary."

It would seem that if the Cubs know what to expect, they could overcome it.

"They're really good at throwing high fastballs in the zone," Bryant said. "A lot of other teams try to and they might hit one out of every four, but this team, it seems like they can really hammer the top of the zone, and they have guys who can hit upper 90s [mph], and when you mix those two, it's tough to catch up to."

The Cubs finally figured out the Nationals' tough pitching staff in the NLDS. But they head home for Games 3 and 4 (and maybe 5) of the NLCS trailing, 2-0, in the best-of-seven series. Since the LCS expanded to seven games in 1985, only three of the 28 teams that lost the first two games have come back to win the series.

"I don't think anybody here is pouting or down on themselves," Bryant said. "It's just a matter of, 'Hey, we have to come together as a team and don't put too much worry in yourself.'"

"We've got to win, that's the bottom line," Rizzo said. "We've got to win four games. They've got to win two. It's best of seven."

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Cubs.com

DYK? Facts, figures about NLCS Game 2

By Matt Kelly and Chad Thornburg

Could this finally be the Dodgers' year?

If one believes in omens, it might not get any better for Dodgers fans than Sunday night, which marked the 29th anniversary of Kirk Gibson's dramatic walk-off home run in Game 1 of the 1988 World Series -- the last World Series Los Angeles won.

Gibson's blast off Dennis Eckersley was also the Dodgers' last walk-off homer in postseason play ... until third baseman Justin Turner clubbed a walk-off, three-run home run off John Lackey at Dodger Stadium to give Los Angeles a 4-1 win over the Cubs and a 2-0 lead in the National League Championship Series presented by Camping World.

Turner's dramatic blast to center gave the Dodgers serious momentum heading to Wrigley Field, and history is on their side, as well. Teams that have gained a 2-0 edge in any best-of-seven postseason series have gone on to lose that series only 13 times in 80 tries, and those teams have lost just three times in 28 tries in any best-of-seven League Championship Series dating back to 1985.

Chicago has a big mountain to climb, but remember: This is essentially the same club that rallied back from a 3-1 deficit in last year's World Series. The Cubs have the experience, and certainly the talent, to close the gap. Before these teams square off again on the North Side of Chicago on Tuesday night, here are the facts and figures you should know from Game 2.

Red comes through again

- If there's one batter the Cubs didn't want to see come up against Lackey -- making his first appearance on no days of rest -- it was Turner. The third baseman's walk-off blast put his career postseason batting average at .377,

which is the third-highest by any player in history with a minimum of 75 postseason plate appearances, behind Lou Brock (.391) and Hanley Ramirez (.380).

Turner also ranks in the top 10 all time in postseason on-base percentage (.478, second behind Lou Gehrig), slugging percentage (.636, 10th) and OPS (1.115, fourth behind Gehrig, Babe Ruth and Troy Glaus) among that same group of players with a minimum 75 postseason plate appearances.

- The Dodgers have tallied 1,628 postseason hits, but Turner's home run marked just their sixth walk-off hit in October -- and their first since Mark Loretta's RBI single in Game 2 of the 2009 NLDS against the Cardinals.
- Turner has been at his best when batting with runners in scoring position. He's 13-for-18 (.722) with RISP through 23 career postseason games, which is the highest average of any hitter with at least 15 postseason at-bats with runners in scoring position, dating back to 1974, according to STATS LLC. That includes a 6-for-8 (.750) performance for Turner with RISP in five games this postseason.
- The Cubs went 0-for-2 with runners in scoring position Sunday and are just 1-for-23 (.043) with RISP dating back to Game 4 of the NL Division Series presented by T-Mobile. They opened the postseason 6-for-16 (.375) in such situations in Games 1-3 vs. the Nationals.
- Turner's fifth-inning RBI single came with two outs and two strikes to tie the game at 1. It was Turner's 16th career two-strike hit in the postseason since his first taste of October baseball in 2014, tying Lorenzo Cain and Kris Bryant for the most two-strike postseason hits of any player in that span.

They had to get to the bottom of the ninth, first

- The Dodgers' middle-inning relievers were seen as perhaps the team's biggest weakness entering the postseason, but they've been lights-out, bridging the gap to closer Kenley Jansen in this series. Los Angeles relievers retired the first 22 batters they faced in this NLCS before Jansen hit Anthony Rizzo with one out in the ninth, and 24 in a row dating back to the ninth inning of their Game 3 NLDS win against Arizona.

That streak of 22 straight batters retired by Dodgers' relievers to begin the NLCS is far and away the longest perfect streak by any team's bullpen to begin a postseason series, according to the Elias Sports Bureau. The previous record was 17 batters in a row retired by Rangers relievers in the 1996 ALDS.

- Brandon Morrow and Jansen have struck out 9 of the 16 batters they have faced, and allowed only one baserunner between them through the first two games of the series.
- Yasiel Puig's leadoff walk in the ninth was his third walk in Sunday's game, raising his on-base percentage to an off-the-charts .571 this postseason. Puig's OBP through his first 27 career postseason games entering 2017 was .325.

Brilliant, but brief

- Lefty starters Rich Hill and Jon Lester were unable to go past the fifth inning, despite each having solid one-run outings. That marked the sixth postseason game in which both starters went five innings or fewer, despite not allowing more than a run. The last instance also involved the Cubs in Game 3 of last year's World Series, when Kyle Hendricks (4 1/3 innings, 0 runs, 6 hits) and Josh Tomlin (4 2/3 innings, 0 runs, 2 hits) traded zeros for four-plus frames, but went no further.
- Lester's 4 2/3 innings marked the shortest postseason start of his career, though his one earned run allowed did lower his career postseason ERA to 2.55. The southpaw's five walks on Sunday also marked the most he'd ever issued in a postseason outing.
- Hill racked up eight strikeouts but got the hook after only five frames. That made him just the third starter in postseason history to tally at least eight strikeouts and allow no more than one run, but still last five innings or

fewer. The others were Sterling Hitchcock for the Padres in Game 6 of the 1998 NLCS and Bob Welch for the Dodgers in Game 3 of the 1988 World Series.

- Hill joined Sandy Koufax (3 times), Clayton Kershaw (2 times) and Tommy John as the only Dodgers left-handed pitchers to record as many as eight strikeouts while allowing one run or less in a postseason start.

The Cubs' kids are still plenty talented

- With the game still scoreless in the fourth, Puig tried to get something going against Lester with an attempted steal of second. But 25-year old Cubs catcher Willson Contreras was having none of it. The second-year backstop rose and fired an 87.3 mph throw, and Javier Baez made another highlight-reel tag to get Puig out. That throw tied for Contreras' hardest on a caught-stealing play this season, per Statcast™, and also tied for the fifth-hardest throw by any catcher on a caught-stealing at second base in 2017.

- Addison Russell put Chicago on the board with a solo home run in the fifth, collecting his fourth career postseason dinger at the age of 23 years, 265 days. That made Russell the ninth player in history to tally as many as four postseason homers before his 24th birthday, with teammate Kyle Schwarber also on that list with five.

Russell's homer also gave him 19 career RBIs in postseason play, already vaulting him past teammate Rizzo to the top of the Cubs' all-time postseason RBI list.

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Cubs.com

Hendricks, Cubs can halve NLCS deficit in G3

By Doug Miller

The Los Angeles Dodgers still haven't lost this postseason, and they now take their two-game lead in the hunt for a pennant on the road, where the Chicago Cubs hope their opportunistic opponent finally runs into a brick wall.

An ivy-covered brick wall, that is.

The best-of-seven National League Championship Series presented by Camping World shifts to the gem of a ballpark on the north side of Chicago, smack dab in a neighborhood filled with history, fervent fans, bleachers on nearby rooftops, and a defending World Series-champion team that knows how to respond to its people.

It's a move from Chavez Ravine to Wrigley Field for Game 3, and it's set for Tuesday night, with a first pitch at 9 p.m. ET (8 CT/6 PT) on TBS.

This matchup pits the Cubs' pitching "Professor," right-hander Kyle Hendricks, against the Dodgers' Trade Deadline acquisition with the brilliant right arm, Yu Darvish.

The Cubs will be hoping that the change of venue changes their fortunes as they try to climb out of a 2-0 hole and gain an advantage on the road to a second consecutive Fall Classic.

The Dodgers prevailed on Sunday, 4-1, on Justin Turner's walk-off three-run home run, moving to within two wins of playing in the franchise's first Fall Classic since 1988.

"We have an opportunity to bring a championship back to L.A.," Turner said. "And like I said, it's been a long time." But these Cubs, as the rest of Major League Baseball knows all too well of late, are ready to rally at any point in a series, game or inning.

"I know we'll be fine," Cubs manager Joe Maddon said after the game Sunday. "We'll get a good day's rest tomorrow. We'll come out and play our game. On Tuesday we've got Kyle going, which is good for us. They have a good pitcher also.

"But, listen, we lost two tough games here, very difficult games. I thought we represented ourselves well."

But so did the Dodgers, who won a MLB-best 104 games during the regular season, earned home-field advantage throughout October, and happen to be loaded with depth, a powerful mix of veteran presence and immensely talented youngsters in the lineup, and a fleet of elite starting pitchers backed by a brilliant bullpen.

And they don't even have one of their best players, shortstop Corey Seager, who is sitting out this NLCS because of back issues.

"The guys on this team that have had success in the past and will continue to ... [they] tell you how hard this game is and it will humble you the next day," Dodgers rookie sensation Cody Bellinger said. "So I try to treat every day like it's my last."

On Tuesday, the Dodgers will look to Darvish to continue that march, and they'll be leaning on a pitcher who might be getting comfortable with his new team at the right time.

Darvish's only postseason start for Los Angeles came in the clinching Game 3 of the NL Division Series presented by T-Mobile on the road vs. Arizona, and he was dastardly, giving up only one run on two hits in five innings while striking out seven, and, perhaps most important, not walking a batter.

"I know that over the course of the last four starts, he's thrown the baseball really well, and I know he's comfortable with the information, with his mechanics, with Rick [Honeycutt] as a pitching coach," Dodgers manager Dave Roberts said. "I know he's comfortable. So all I can speak to is right now, in this moment, he's in as good of a place as I think he's ever been in."

Hendricks has been pretty solid recently, too.

He sparkled in Game 1 of his team's NLDS win over the Nationals, pitching seven shutout innings and giving up two hits while striking out six, before stumbling a bit in Game 5, giving up four runs on nine hits in four innings.

But Hendricks was lights-out vs. the Dodgers in two NLCS starts last year, pitching to an ERA of 0.71 by giving up one run on five hits in 12 2/3 innings.

"These are our guys, and I have a lot of faith in our guys," Maddon said. "I have to keep putting them out there in the situations they're supposed to be in, and you believe it's going to work out right.

"If you believe it, you have a much better chance of it occurring."

Maddon's positive vibes have permeated the Cubs' clubhouse and culture. That's why a two-game deficit doesn't seem anywhere near insurmountable. Not when they've accomplished so much together already, breaking a 108-year drought by winning last year's World Series. Not when they head into a locker room that's united and fun-loving, no matter what happens.

"It's a loose clubhouse," Cubs outfielder Albert Almora Jr. said. "I mean, [Maddon] just lets us go and be ourselves, and I think that's special. There is no pressure added. There are no speeches after losses or anything like that.

"I've heard from other teams that some managers do that, and it might not be a bad thing for those kind of guys. But for the way our clubhouse is structured, win or lose, we're the same guys."

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Cubs.com

Despite plate struggles, Baez contributing

By Carrie Muskat

LOS ANGELES -- Last year, Javier Baez was co-Most Valuable Player in the National League Championship Series against the Dodgers. This postseason has been a different story for the Cubs' second baseman.

Baez is 0-for-19 in the postseason with eight strikeouts in seven games. According to Elias Sports Bureau, only Jimmy Sheckard had a longer hitless streak to open a postseason for the Cubs, going 0-for-21 in 1906. Last fall, Baez tied a Cubs record by opening the playoffs with a six-game hitting streak.

The Dodgers won Game 2, 4-1, on Justin Turner's three-run, walk-off homer off of John Lackey, and took a 2-0 lead in the NLCS presented by Camping World.

"He still can [contribute]," Cubs manager Joe Maddon said Sunday about Baez. "He's still capable. Javy's been that guy throughout his Minor League, and even Major League, career who can be awful for a couple days at the plate and then be spectacular. I always have that in my mind with him."

Baez hasn't let his offensive struggles affect his play in the field and on Sunday, he made an awkward catch of Austin Barnes' popup for the second out in the Dodgers' fourth inning.

"The game in Washington could not have been won without his play at second base," Maddon said of the second baseman. "Of course, we need to hit right now."

"Javy, he loves this time of year. He's good. He's just pulling off everything now. We have to get him back in the middle of the field somehow. He could get just as hot."

Baez is trying to make adjustments in-game.

"These two games, I felt really good at the plate, even though I had three strikeouts in seven [at-bats]," Baez said. "Watching videos and making my adjustments, it's just tough. At this point, everybody's good and everybody's here for a reason. It's tough to make the adjustment when pitchers are throwing this hard."

"I'm not giving up," he said. "I've been in a slump before. I'm just still working on my routine and trying to get back."

Baez was encouraged by his first at-bat in the third inning against the Dodgers' Rich Hill when he drew a walk.

"Today, the three [at-bats] I had, I felt exactly how I wanted to," Baez said. "My first at-bat was good and I didn't chase pitches and I took a 3-2 walk. My timing was there."

What about the Barnes' catch?

"I was worried about [right fielder Jason Heyward] and the wall," Baez said. "Early this season, I crashed with 'J-Hey' and I've been paying more attention to the wall and the other player. I kind of over-ran it a little bit."

His glove work is not an issue. In 2016, Baez batted .318 in the six games in the NLCS against the Dodgers with five RBIs and four doubles. He hasn't looked the same this year.

"That guy has the most confidence that I've seen in a player," Chicago's Albert Almora Jr. said. "It's really special to see. Even now. Even now. He's not where he wants to be, obviously. We all know that. He knows that. But the smile on his face, he comes here to work, and he's ready to go."

"In this game, unfortunately, things happen," Almora said. "You're not going to be perfect. You're going to have your week or two that you're not feeling at your best. I know I went through it. The way he's handling it, he's not bringing anybody down. On the contrary, I actually saw -- one of the first guys I saw when I looked into the dugout when I hit the home run [in Game 1] was him cheering. So he's a winner. He's here for us, and I want him in that starting lineup every day."

Baez isn't the only one scuffling offensively in the postseason. The Cubs collectively are batting .117.

"These are our guys, this is how we got here," Maddon said. "I cannot run away from that."

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ESPNChicago.com

Why wasn't Cubs closer Wade Davis on the mound at the end of the game?

By Jesse Rogers

LOS ANGELES -- Go ahead. Eviscerate Joe Maddon for his end-of-game pitching decisions in the Chicago Cubs' 4-1 loss to the Los Angeles Dodgers in Game 2 of the National League Championship Series on Sunday. But know this, there were extenuating circumstances surrounding closer Wade Davis, who never got into the game after throwing 44 pitches in Game 5 of the National League Division Series on Thursday.

As for Maddon's late-game lineup decisions, there's no ambiguity there. He allowed three righties to bat in the top of the ninth inning -- two with the potential go-ahead run on first base -- against all-world righty closer Kenley Jansen. Maddon even let righty Albert Almora Jr. bat after barely using him against right-handed pitchers all season.

But the lasting image will be Justin Turner sending a pitch over the center-field wall off 38-year-old John Lackey to give the Dodgers a 2-0 series lead. So let's start with the decision to bring in Lackey instead of Davis in the bottom of the ninth with the winning run on second and one out.

"Tonight, I really was waiting for that opportunity to grab a lead and then throw him out there," Maddon said of Davis. "That's what it was all about. There was no way he was pitching more than one [inning], and that was pretty much it."

Maddon made it clear he's not one of those managers who would pitch his closer only in a save situation on the road, and let's face it, if Lackey and Davis both are completely fresh, does anyone really believe Davis isn't in the game at that point?

"You have to understand when you have a guy like that [Davis] coming off the performance that he had [in the NLDS], to warm him up and not use him is equally as bad," Maddon said.

The point is Maddon could have brought in Davis to get one out with the score tied and that would be it for him, or he could have waited until the Cubs got the lead. He chose the latter. Some might have wanted Davis in the game to face Turner after Lackey walked Chris Taylor, but that would have required Davis getting warmed up. If Lackey gets Taylor out, then Maddon has wasted Davis. Again, the Cubs said they weren't going to warm up Davis, sit him down, then warm him up again later and bring him in.

"I knew it was only going to be a one-inning type stint," Davis said. "Lackey's track record in the playoffs has been amazing. I don't think that's anything anyone is second-guessing."

Lackey gave up 36 home runs in the regular season, so it can't come as a shock he gave one up to one of the best hitters in the league. His problem came when he walked Taylor ahead of Turner.

"Bad location," Lackey said of the home run ball. "Put it in a bad spot."

Said Maddon: "Once that walk occurred, all bets were off against Turner. Nobody is a really great matchup against Turner, so it just did not work out. I liked him [Lackey] against the first guy [Taylor]. ... I'm just betting on his experience right there as much as anything. I know that he went out there and tried to make the pitches that he wanted to make. I know that the crowd would not affect him, and it didn't."

In a perfect world, Davis would have been fresh enough to finish the ninth and keep pitching with the hope the Cubs got the lead. It just didn't play out that way, with the bullpen once again seeing its ERA rise in the playoffs, this time with a starter finishing the game rather than a closer.

"I really just needed him [Davis] for the save tonight," Maddon reiterated. "He had limited pitches. It was one inning only, and in these circumstances you don't get him up and then don't get him in. So if we had caught the lead, he would have pitched. That's it."

That lead could have come in the top of the ninth against Jansen -- as foolish as that might sound. The All-Star closer hit Anthony Rizzo with one out, allowing the Cubs their first baserunner against the Dodgers' bullpen over the course of the first two games. Jansen wasn't exactly on the ropes, but it was a start. A gapper or a ball down the line would have given the Cubs the lead.

Due up were righties Willson Contreras and Almora. On the bench were lefties Kyle Schwarber, switch hitter Ian Happ, Tommy La Stella, Alex Avila and Leonys Martin. Those first few names are some good hitters. It's understandable Contreras stayed in the game, but Almora's spot provided a perfect opportunity for a pinch hitter.

"If you dig deeper, our lefties are really not a good matchup, I didn't think, for him [Jansen] at that point," Maddon said. "I thought he [Almora] would have moved the baseball, and he did."

Almora hit a ground ball to shortstop for an easy out to end the inning. "Moving the baseball" sounds good if there is a runner at third base and less than two outs, but Maddon's logic doesn't fly with just a man on first. Not when Jansen has an OPS against left-handers that is 325 points higher than it is against righties this season. 325! La Stella and Schwarber have OPSs of .845 and .814 against righties this season. Anyone hitting off Jansen is very unlikely to come through, but for the game to end without one lefty getting a chance meant the Cubs didn't have much of a chance to win.

"Among a lot of our guys, he's a guy that makes contact," Maddon said of Almora. "It might not be a high average sometimes against a righty, but I thought he had a better chance of making contact."

The irony is Almora has been a lightning rod of criticism for Maddon, as the popular player often gets removed from games when a righty enters. His batting average rose throughout the season against righties, but he ended with just a .291 on-base percentage against them -- and a lower OPS (.711) than some of those lefties on the bench.

"I'm always itching to bat," Schwarber said afterward.

Maybe he'll get the chance next time, though the Cubs are running out of games. Down 2-0 in the series, they'll need to light up the scoreboard a little more, make sure their closer is fresh and not leave any rock unturned in their quest to come back in the series.

"Whenever you're on the bench, your name is going to get called upon at some point," Schwarber said. "You just don't know when."

Not in every game, apparently.

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ESPNChicago.com

Bryant, Rizzo must find their swing on flight back to Chicago

By David Schoenfield

LOS ANGELES -- It's a simple equation, really: Somewhere in the middle of the night, during the 2,000-mile flight from Los Angeles to Chicago, Kris Bryant and Anthony Rizzo will have to find their swings. Maybe it happens over the Rocky Mountains or the plains of Nebraska or the cornfields of Iowa, but it has to happen: The Chicago Cubs need their big boys to start producing.

Bryant went 0-for-4 with two strikeouts in Sunday's 4-1 gut-punch of a loss to the Dodgers and is now 5-for-28 (.179) in the postseason with 13 strikeouts. Rizzo went 0-for-3 with two strikeouts and is 4-for-26 (.154) with nine

strikeouts. In seven playoff games, the Cubs are hitting .162. They've scored 20 runs, but nine of those came in one game. In the other six, they've averaged 1.8 runs per game.

They've run into some good pitching, no doubt. But nobody in a subdued Cubs clubhouse was using that as an excuse. "Obviously, we have to get some baserunners and start stringing some hits together," Bryant said. But he alluded to another issue: The Cubs have hit just four home runs in seven playoff games. They hit 223 in the regular season, third-most in the National League, just 18 behind the majors-leading 241 that the Yankees hit -- and the Cubs did that without benefit of a DH.

"It seems like it's a game of home runs, and that's what happened tonight," Bryant said. "So I guess we have to hit some home runs." He was smiling when he said that, but it wasn't really a joke. That's how the Cubs score runs -- they draw walks and hit the ball over the fence. They were sixth in the NL with a .255 team batting average, but first in on-base percentage thanks to drawing the second-most walks.

That's the strange thing about what Bryant and Rizzo are going through; they're not showing their usual patience at the plate. Bryant saw 16 pitches on Sunday and swung at 11 of them. Rizzo saw 10 pitches in three plate appearances and then was hit by the first pitch Kenley Jansen threw him in the ninth. In the regular season, Bryant's chase rate on pitches out of the strike zone was 26.3 percent; in the postseason, it's at 42.1 percent. Rizzo's chase rate has increased from 28.6 to 43.1 percent. You're not going to produce swinging at balls off the plate.

Before Game 2, Joe Maddon stressed that the biggest thing with the offense is "we still have to stay in our lanes." Meaning, don't swing at bad pitches or expand your normal sweet spot. He talked about when the Cubs are going good, it's because they're going up the middle. "When we get into pull mode, most teams, not just us, when you get guys like [Rich] Hill and you want to get into pull mode, he just lights up." He said if the Cubs were getting two-strike hits and opposite-field line drives, he'll take it.

That all makes sense, but there's Bryant saying more home runs are in order. Guess what? This hitting thing is pretty difficult, especially when he has to face a big curveballing lefty like Hill and then adjust to facing two of the best relievers in the game right now in Brandon Morrow and Jansen, who cruised through their combined three innings on just 31 pitches.

It's all a different story than last postseason, when the Cubs out-homered their opponents 20 to 11. Bryant hit .308/.400/.523, while Rizzo hit .277/.373/.492. Those two were the ring leaders, getting on base and producing some big hits. We also link them together, not just because of the commercials but because they are the heart of the Cubs' offense. They need to feed off each other like they do in the regular season. "It's always good to have that pick-me-up," Bryant said. "Sometimes during the season your brain [turns] to mush, so it's nice having a guy like that hitting behind you."

The Cubs know adversity, after trailing two games to one in the NLCS last year and trailing three games to one in the World Series. "We have to win four games, that's the bottom line," Rizzo said. "Tonight was a tough one, but nothing you can do about it. We have to get on base more. Keep it going. It's contagious, so we have to just keep battling."

That's what you expect them to say and what they should say. It's 2-0 and the Dodgers look tough and that bullpen looks unbeatable. "Sometimes you have to lay your marbles out there and you get beat," Jon Lester said.

The good thing is the Cubs are going back to Wrigley. Bryant hit 18 of his 29 home runs there. Rizzo hit .319 and slugged .571 at home compared to .228 and .445 on the road. Maddon is giving the team a day off on Monday. Let them relax, rest up, watch Monday Night Football and gear up for Tuesday.

The task: Oh, just beat a guy named Yu Darvish, who has some of the nastiest stuff of any starter in the league, and a bullpen that hasn't allowed a hit in two games and just a .123 average over five playoff games so far.

Good luck.

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ESPNChicago.com

It's time to pay attention to Justin Turner's incredible postseason record
By Bradford Doolittle

LOS ANGELES -- After four businesslike wins to begin what the Los Angeles Dodgers hope will be their first championship run in 29 years, the habitués of Hollywood finally needed a hero to plaster on their marquee.

They got one on Sunday, and, as with all great Hollywood heroes, the backstory is pretty good.

The hero in question would be Justin Turner, who hammered a John Lackey pitch over the center-field fence for a three-run, walk-off homer with two outs in the ninth, giving the Dodgers a 4-1 win over the Chicago Cubs on Sunday and a 2-0 lead in the National League Championship Series.

The backstory is this: The blast was just the second walk-off homer in Dodgers postseason history, and you probably remember the other one -- or at least have seen the highlights about 1,000 times. It was Kirk Gibson's pinch-hit blast to win Game 1 of the 1988 World Series against Oakland.

Sunday's game marked the 29th anniversary of that iconic play, which sparked the Dodgers to their last World Series win. The Dodgers are really hoping that bit of history repeats itself.

"It's, what did you say, 29 years to the day?" Dodgers manager Dave Roberts asked rhetorically, adding that he was looking for Turner to replicate Gibson's famous, fist-pumping action as he rounded the bases. "It was special. Our guys feel it. We feel it.

"The Cubs, that's a very good ballclub. Those guys fight every pitch, and there is a reason that they're the world champions. So we feel good with where we're at, and we're going to enjoy tonight."

On top of everything, Turner says the Gibson home run stands out in his earliest memories of being a young Dodgers fan growing up in Southern California.

"I've told this story I don't know how many times since I've been a Dodger," Turner said. "One of my earliest baseball memories was being at my grandma's house and watching that game and watching Gibby hit that homer. I can't even put it into words right now. It's incredible."

Turner's homer, the Dodgers' first walk-off homer of the season, should finally shine a bright, national light on a postseason résumé that has even his manager comparing him to some lofty predecessors.

"I'm not saying he's David Ortiz, but I played with David, and you're talking about big spots and coming up big," Roberts said. "And J.T.'s that guy for us. He just has that pulse where he can just kind of keep his calm and stay within the strike zone, just not afraid to fail and just wants to be in that spot."

For Turner, the walk-off homer was his first -- regular season or postseason -- and was the 50th walk-off homer in MLB playoff history. That Turner came through on such a big stage is really no surprise. He now has 22 career postseason RBIs and 10 in five playoff games this season. He also has 13 hits in 18 postseason at-bats with runners in scoring position, and his .722 batting average is the all-time high among players with at least 10 postseason at-bats with runners in scoring position.

"What's not to enjoy about it?" Turner said. "We have an opportunity to bring a championship back to L.A., and, like I said, it's been a long time. So every day we get to step out on the field and play this game that we all love, and we've all put our entire lives into, it's something that I don't think any of us take for granted."

Turner's home run is the headliner -- game-winning home runs always are, especially in October. But what the Dodgers repeatedly call their "pass the baton" approach had everything to do with setting the stage for Turner's star turn.

Yasiel Puig began the winning rally with a leadoff walk against Brian Duensing, his third free pass of the game. Puig went to second on Charlie Culberson's sacrifice but was stuck there after pinch hitter Kyle Farmer struck out. Then, Cubs manager Joe Maddon went to a familiar name in an unfamiliar role -- longtime starter John Lackey, whom Chris Taylor worked for a walk.

"I wanted to see C.T. finish it," Turner said of Taylor. "I thought he was going to get the big hit. But that's the way our offense has been all year. It's been about putting together tough [at-bats] and passing the baton and getting to the next guy, and tonight it was just my turn."

The Dodgers drew nine walks in the game, maintaining their approach even late, when it became apparent that one big hit might take the contest. L.A. saw 174 pitches in the game. The Cubs saw 118, and you can make the argument that their at-bat quality -- a term Roberts loves to use -- deteriorated as the game progressed.

For L.A., it's the result of months and months, even years, of drilling in an organizational mantra on a daily basis and waiting for that message to resonate when you most need it to.

"There are a lot of conversations that we have as far as at-bat quality and not chasing slug," Roberts said. "Just trying to put a good at-bat together and try to take a good swing on a good pitch. So it's a clear, consistent message, and the players are just following through."

The grinding, disciplined approach set the stage for Turner, who turned around a Lackey fastball on the second pitch he saw. Turner drove in all four Dodger runs.

"Once that walk occurred, all bets were off against Turner," Maddon said. "Nobody is a really great matchup against Turner, so it just did not work out."

Rich Hill was masterful for the most part over five innings, during which he allowed just three hits and one run. Hill's eight strikeouts were a postseason career high, but he made one big mistake that the Cubs capitalized on, a grooved fastball that Addison Russell hooked inside the left-field foul pole for the game's first run.

Hill, like everyone else, was thrilled that Turner was the one who stepped to the plate with the game on the line and, especially, that he chose to re-sign with the Dodgers when he was a sought-after free agent last winter.

"He's been incredible," Hill said. "He's been one of the best players on the team. For me, personally, him coming back here, I was excited to see that he was signing back. He steps up every single time. It's incredible to see and I couldn't be happier for him."

While Hill needed just 79 pitches to traverse his five innings, the Dodgers waited out postseason ace Jon Lester, not doing great damage but making him work for his outs. Lester walked five, a playoff high for him, and was done after two outs in the fifth with 103 pitches on his ticker.

The second inning was a perfect example of the Dodgers' game plan against Lester. They didn't swing until his 10th pitch of the inning, during which he didn't allow a hit but walked two. It wasn't a highlight-reel sequence, but it helped create the footage that was recorded in the ninth.

The Dodgers scratched out a run in the fifth to tie the contest and get Hill off the hook. That set up a battle of the bullpens that, given recent trends, would seem to tilt heavily in the Dodgers' favor.

Indeed, Brandon Morrow came on for Hill and mowed through the Cubs over two perfect innings, throwing just 18 pitches in the process. Josh Fields and Tony Watson were just as effective and efficient in shorter stints.

"Those guys know exactly what they want to do, and they're going out there and executing," Roberts said.

By the time Jansen came on for the ninth, the Cubs' drought against the L.A. bullpen had stretched to 0-for-21 during the NLCS. This time, however, the Cubs' bullpen was matching its counterpart zero for zero, and, when Jansen took over, the game remained deadlocked.

Jansen struck out Kris Bryant to begin his outing, his fifth straight punchout to start this LCS, making the Dodgers' bullpen

22-for-22 in retiring Cubs in the series. However, Jansen plunked Anthony Rizzo, ending the out streak and giving the Cubs their first baserunner since the fifth inning.

All told, going back to the NLDS, L.A. relievers retired 24 straight batters -- the longest such streak in postseason history.

After hitting Rizzo, a clearly rattled Jansen recovered to strike out Willson Contreras and retire Albert Almora Jr. on a grounder, clearing the way for L.A.'s dramatic win.

"The thing is we all care about each other," Jansen said. "It's not about that one guy or this. We all are here helping each other out to get better every day. That's the whole time it happened since spring training, we've been doing that."

By the time the doors to the Dodgers' clubhouse were opened to the media after the game, the bedlam inside had subsided, but there were still a lot of smiles and a lot of back-slapping. Ace lefty Clayton Kershaw was beaming as he strode past the media, and in the efficient manner he usually has, he pretty much summed up the evening.

"That was really cool," he said.

As the Dodgers and Cubs head to Chicago for Tuesday's Game 3, Los Angeles will be riding the momentum of a nice bit of historical serendipity. And along with that comes this: The last time the Dodgers led a seven-game playoff series two games to none? It was the 1988 World Series.

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ESPNChicago.com

Joe Maddon on overturned Game 1 call: A tremendous play on our part

By Jesse Rogers

LOS ANGELES -- Chicago Cubs manager Joe Maddon will meet with MLB chief baseball officer Joe Torre to discuss his comments after being ejected from Game 1 of the NLCS after arguing a replay challenge that went against his team due to the home plate slide rule.

"We talked on the phone. We just have to sit down face-to-face about what I said last night," Maddon said Sunday. "The only thing I'll say about yesterday is it was a tremendous baseball play on our part."

The meeting is expected to take place before Sunday's Game 2. Maddon added that he expects to be fined for his actions.

Maddon's ouster occurred after Dodgers shortstop Charlie Culberson tried to score from second on a single by Justin Turner and was initially called out by umpire Mike Winters for not touching home plate after evading catcher Willson Contreras' tag. The Dodgers challenged the call on the grounds that Contreras broke rule 7.13, which states "unless the catcher is in possession of the ball, the catcher cannot block the pathway of the runner as he is attempting to score. If, in the judgment of the umpire, the catcher without possession of the ball blocks the pathway of the runner, the umpire shall call or signal the runner safe."

After a video review, it was determined that Contreras blocked the plate before he received the ball. After the replay led to the call being overturned, Maddon stormed out of the dugout and began to argue. Mike Winters, the crew chief, let him make a brief case before tossing him.

The overturned call gave the Dodgers a cushion run in their 5-2 victory.

Maddon voiced his displeasure in his postgame conference -- not with the umpires but with the rule itself. He said Contreras "did everything right" and added that there was nothing he could have done differently.

"I could not disagree more with the interpretation of that," Maddon said Saturday night. "I think it's wrong. I think anybody that's played major league or even minor league baseball will agree with me 100 percent on that."

The rule in question was instituted prior to the 2014 season.

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NBC Sports Chicago

Wade Davis won't second-guess the decision that kept him on the sideline

By Patrick Mooney

LOS ANGELES – The Cubs talked a good game on Sunday night, manager Joe Maddon explaining his ninth-inning strategy during a Dodger Stadium press conference and the defending World Series champs standing at their lockers answering positive-slant questions about how they've been through this before and already done the impossible.

But there was no avoiding it in the visiting clubhouse, how much better this Dodger team is now and how much this 4-1 walk-off loss stung, because the Cubs are now down 0-2 in the National League Championship Series without All-Star closer Wade Davis throwing a single pitch.

The year after Maddon took so much heat for how hard he pushed All-Star closer Aroldis Chapman – and three days removed from Davis getting the seven-out save that eliminated the Washington Nationals – all the focus shifted to how John Lackey wound up allowing the three-run homer Justin Turner launched over the center-field wall.

"We got confidence in everybody that goes out there, so there's no disappointment in any of that," Davis said. "Lackey's track record in the playoffs has been amazing. I don't think that's something anybody should be second-guessing."

Davis is a professional who wouldn't subtly criticize a teammate or passive-aggressively criticize his manager. That's what Twitter is for while the Cubs fly home overnight, two losses away from vacation, and talk radio on Monday morning, more than 24 hours to fill before Game 3 at Wrigley Field.

"You have to understand when you have a guy like that coming off the performance that he had, to warm him up and not use him is equally as bad," Maddon said. "Warm him up, not put him in the game, and then ask him to pitch maybe two innings later, that's really not good for him."

"I really was waiting for that opportunity to grab a lead and then throw him out there. That's what it was all about. There was no way he was pitching more than one, and that was pretty much it."

Here's how Davis – who unleashed 44 pitches to finish off the epic Thursday night/Friday morning clincher at Nationals Park – understood his pregame availability: "Help win the game whatever way we can."

"I knew it was only going to be like a one-inning-type stint."

Maddon sent Brian Duensing back out to begin a second inning against the Dodgers and watched the lefty reliever walk Yasiel Puig to lead off the ninth. After a sacrifice bunt and a Duensing strikeout, Maddon bet on Lackey's Big-Boy-Game experience.

Lackey threw 27 pitches the day before and is 38 years old and has made only two regular-season relief appearances in a big-league career that began in 2002. Lackey walked Chris Taylor and watched his second pitch to Turner – a 92-mph fastball – soar out to center field and into the glove of a Dodger fan.

“You want to be in these games,” Lackey said. “It’s not typical the way I’m usually in ‘em, but still got to try to get the job done.”

Look, the Cubs bullpen is already in disorder and has no margin for error when the offense scores only one run and the Dodger relievers throw an eight-inning combined no-hitter in Games 1 and 2. But everything is magnified in October, when relievers become stars and all the decisions are dissected in real time on social media.

Davis never makes excuses and wouldn’t say that he’s still feeling the aftereffects from Washington.

“Everything’s pretty taxing in the playoffs,” Davis said. “It’s just part of it. You take the ball whenever they ask you to take the ball.”

Davis – who so rarely shows emotion – laughed when a reporter asked if he could go longer than three outs again.

“You guys love that question,” Davis said. “Like I said, we’re just trying to win games.”

After talking for 90-plus seconds about a game he didn’t play in, Davis nodded and said: “We’re good.”

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NBC Sports Chicago

Five takeaways from Game 2: While Dodger bullpen dominates, where was Wade Davis?

By Patrick Mooney

LOS ANGELES – You could feel Dodger Stadium shaking on Sunday night once Justin Turner slammed John Lackey’s 92-fastball out toward center field, clearing the wall for a three-run, walk-off homer that landed in a fan’s glove and left the Cubs two losses away from the end of their season.

Randy Newman’s “I Love L.A.” blasted from the sound system once the Dodgers grabbed control of this National League Championship Series, a sellout crowd of 54,479 celebrating a 4-1 victory that left the defending World Series champs down 0-2.

Where was All-Star closer Wade Davis in the ninth inning? That became the first question in Joe Maddon’s postgame press conference. The manager pushed lefty Brian Duensing into an extra inning and went with Lackey, a 38-year-old pitcher working on back-to-back days with almost zero experience as a reliever.

“I really just needed (Wade) for the save tonight,” Maddon said. “He had limited pitches. It was one inning only. And in these circumstances, you don’t get him up and then don’t get him in. So if we had caught the lead, he would have pitched. That’s it.”

· The Cubs still would’ve had to score against a Dodger bullpen that’s now faced 25 hitters in the NLCS and only allowed one base-runner across eight no-hit innings.

The Cubs can’t count on winning a seven-game series filled with 2-1 and 3-2 games. A team that poured so much capital into its offense will need more from Bryzzo Souvenir Co. and the players – Ben Zobrist, Javier Baez, etc. – who delivered so many clutch hits during last year’s World Series run. A good sign: Addison Russell drilling a Rich Hill pitch down the left-field line and into the seats for a fifth-inning homer.

But the Dodgers built a bullpen for October, working backwards from \$80 million closer Kenley Jansen. This lineup went 4-for-30 with a walk in a Game 1 loss – and all that came within the first five innings against Clayton Kershaw. Meaning it got harder once the Cubs knocked out a three-time Cy Young Award winner.

· No doubt, Jon Lester is extremely talented, but he evolved into a three-time World Series champion and a borderline Hall of Famer through the force of his will. Tired? Achy? Under the weather? Who cares?

Lester took the ball four days after throwing 55 pitches as a \$155 million reliever, trying to finish off the Washington Nationals in the divisional round. It takes guts and a feel for pitching to work around five walks and limit the Dodgers to one run in 4.2 innings. Turner did the only damage with a two-out RBI single through the right side of the infield in the fifth inning – and Lester got bailed out when embattled reliever Carl Edwards Jr. struck out Chase Utley swinging at a curveball that left the pinch-hitter hopping in frustration.

The Cubs will need that veteran leadership and stabilizing influence once the NLCS shifts to Wrigley Field. As Lester said: “All we can we do is show up Tuesday ready to play.”

· With Lester maxed out at 103 pitches, the Cubs still needed to cover the next four innings. This isn’t the time for moral victories, but credit Edwards, Pedro Strop and Duensing for at least keeping it a 1-1 game into the ninth inning, and maybe that will be a confidence boost for this bullpen, because the Cubs need those relievers to be viable if they want to keep playing through October.

“You just don’t run away,” Maddon said. “There’s nowhere to run. These guys got to keep playing. And you got to keep putting them out there at what you think is the right time. That’s how you win, because we have eight games to win, not one or two.”

· Maddon worked for Andrew Friedman when the Tampa Bay Rays became known as a cutting-edge organization constantly looking for any advantage that would allow a small-market team to compete in the American League East. That philosophy is now combined with super-team resources in Los Angeles.

So, no, Maddon wasn’t surprised to hear that Dodgers manager Dave Roberts described Corey Seager as feeling “normal-ish,” the day after a back injury forced the All-Star shortstop off the NLCS roster. For now.

“Of course, did you expect anything different?” Maddon said. “We’ll just see how it all plays out.”

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NBC Sports Chicago

Why Cubs won't turn their back on Javier Baez

By Patrick Mooney

LOS ANGELES – Without Javier Baez, the Cubs would still be hearing about 1908 and feeling the suffocating pressure from not winning a World Series.

The Los Angeles Dodgers brought the best out of Baez during last year’s National League Championship Series, when his co-MVP performance showed the rest of the country what the Cubs already knew about his game-changing instincts, highlight-reel defense and unique style.

That’s why manager Joe Maddon will keep giving Baez the benefit of the doubt, even with his second baseman stuck in an 0-for-17 slump to start the playoffs and the Cubs struggling to generate any consistent offense.

“Javy loves this time of the year,” Maddon said before Sunday’s Game 2 at Dodger Stadium. “Javy’s been that guy throughout his minor-league and even major-league career who can be awful for a couple days at the plate, and then all of a sudden be spectacular, so I always have that in my mind with him.”

The Cubs have scored 10 runs combined in five playoffs games, plus nine in the thriller that eliminated the Washington Nationals from the NL Division Series. One of Maddon’s takeaway moments from that epic game: The Baez arm strength beating Trea Turner’s speed to home plate in the first inning.

Maddon believes defense wins championships, likes Ben Zobrist as a left-handed pinch-hitter/defensive replacement off the bench and realizes Ian Happ is still near the end of his rookie learning curve.

"The backup quarterback's always the most popular guy in the building," Maddon said. "Listen, Ian is very valuable in the role that we have him in right now. But among the guys that are on the field today, if you want to argue against Baez just because of his hitting, I'll take it.

"But we're not sitting here right now if (Javy) doesn't make that play in the first inning on that groundball to second. I think he's the only second baseman – or one of the few in all of baseball – that could have thrown Turner out at the plate right there."

This hits on a larger point about the defending World Series champs. There is no NLCS trade deadline to fix the bullpen, or a magical swing adjustment that will rewire Baez as a hitter.

The Cubs invested a first-round pick in Baez, didn't trade him for a frontline pitcher, watched him develop into a breakout playoff star and saw even more progress this season (23 homers, 75 RBI, .796 OPS).

"He could get just as hot," Maddon said. "I've seen guys. I've had guys like that before. Listen, these are our guys. This is how we got here. I do not run away from that."

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NBC Sports Chicago

Joe Maddon explains why Wade Davis didn't pitch in that series-altering 9th inning of Game 2

By Tony Andracki

If it wasn't confirmed before, it is now: Joe Maddon's honeymoon period in Wrigleyville really is over.

The Cubs bullpen held serve with the lights-out Dodgers bullpen for a while, but at the end, all Maddon could do was watch his team lose with Wade Davis sitting in the bullpen, unused, in the ninth inning.

The reigning World Series-winning manager called on John Lackey with two outs in the ninth inning in a tie game against the Dodgers in Game 2 of the NLCS. It was the first time Lackey had ever pitched in back-to-back games in his entire 15-year career.

If you're reading this and didn't just wake up from a coma, you already know what happened: Lackey walked Chris Taylor, then served up a game-winning homer to Justin "Tormund" Turner.

Meanwhile, the Cubs' lone All-Star was sitting in the bullpen watching this all go down.

Why didn't Maddon go to Davis - his best reliever - in the biggest spot in the game?

"Cause I really just needed him for the save tonight; we needed him for the save tonight," Maddon said. "He had limited pitches, was one inning only.

"In these circumstances, you don't get him up and then don't get him in. So if we had caught the lead, he would have pitched. That's it."

The "circumstances" are the fact Davis gave everything he had to even get the Cubs to this point, getting seven outs in Game 5 of the NLDS Thursday night/Friday morning and throwing 44 pitches. It was his longest outing - both by pitches and outs - since 2013 when he was working as a starting pitcher.

Davis had multiple forearm issues last season and he looked weary down the stretch this year at times as Maddon leaned on him hard during a tight pennant race with the rest of the bullpen struggling to find consistency.

Maddon went in depth later in Sunday's postgame press conference, but obviously the save part will drive Cubs fans mad. You can't get a save if you can't get past that bottom of the ninth inning and if you're gonna go down, might as well go down with your best pitchers on the mound against the other team's best hitters.

"I don't necessarily hold off for the save," Maddon said. "In the situation tonight, coming off of his last performance; the other thing you have to consider: understand, when you have a guy like that coming off the performance that he had, to warm him up and to not use him is equally as bad.

"To warm him up not put him in the game and then ask him to pitch maybe 2 innings later, that's really not good form. So today/tonight, I really was waiting for the opportunity to grab a lead and then throw him out there. That's really what it was all about.

"There was no way he was pitching more than one [inning], and that was pretty much it."

Maddon said he liked Lackey against the first guy - Taylor - and was going to have Lackey pitch the next inning too, if it got that far. Maddon pointed out that nobody is a good matchup against Turner, not even Davis, which is true.

But Maddon also isn't the only one to blame for the Cubs' 2-0 hole in the NLCS.

Maddon rightly pointed to the hapless offense - "we've gotta score more than one run" - that looks completely out of sorts this postseason.

They scored nine runs in Game 5 in Washington, but most of those came off outs and Nationals mistakes. In the other six postseason games, the Cubs have scored a grand total of 11 runs.

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Chicago Tribune

9 pivotal moments in Cubs' 4-1 loss to the Dodgers in Game 2 of the NLCS
By Paul Skrbina

Here are nine pivotal moments from the Cubs' 4-1 loss to the Dodgers in Game 2 of the National League Championship Series on Sunday night in Los Angeles.

1. Two nice defensive plays helped the Cubs prevent the Dodgers from taking a lead in the first inning. Albert Almora Jr.'s catch of Justin Turner's fly ball to deep center field was the first, though the Cubs would hear from Turner again in the ninth inning. Kris Bryant then fielded Cody Bellinger's bunt down the third-base line and threw him out by a shoelace to end the inning.
2. Jon Lester escaped trouble in the second inning after he walked Kike Hernandez and Yasiel Puig before Charlie Culberson flew out to right field.
3. The Cubs' first real chance to score went for naught after Javier Baez led off with a walk, stole second and moved to third on a wild pitch. Lester struck out, Jon Jay grounded out and Bryant struck out against Dodgers starter Rich Hill to leave Baez, who is 0-for-19 this postseason, stranded.
4. A stop sign from Dodgers third-base coach Chris Woodward ended with Turner on his butt after he rounded third on Cody Bellinger's double in the third. Hernandez then thought he had walked to load the bases after he took ball three before popping out to Jason Heyward in right to end the inning with the game scoreless.
5. Addison Russell's home run to lead off the fifth was the Cubs' second hit and wound up being their only run.

"We scored one run today," Cubs manager Joe Maddon said. "That's the issue."

6. Turner struck in the fifth when he singled home Culberson, who led off with a double, to tie the score 1-1. After Lester walked Bellinger, Maddon walked to the mound to remove Lester (103 pitches) in favor of Carl Edwards Jr. Edwards struck out pinch-hitter Chase Utley.

7. The Dodgers loaded the bases in the eighth, but Brian Duensing got Austin Barnes to hit into an inning-ending double play.

8. Anthony Rizzo became the first Cub in 24 tries to reach base against a Dodgers reliever this series when he was hit by a pitch on the right hand to start the ninth. But the Cubs left him at first.

9. Duensing stayed in the game in the ninth to face Puig, who hit .183 against left-handers this season. But he walked him and Culberson moved him to second on a sacrifice bunt. Duensing then struck out pinch-hitter Kyle Farmer.

But rather than turn to closer Wade Davis, who Maddon said was available only in a save situation, John Lackey was summoned from the bullpen. The move marked the first time in Lackey's career that he pitched on consecutive days.

He walked Chris Taylor, then allowed a walkoff home run to Turner, who drove in all four runs and is 13-for-18 with runners in scoring position this postseason.

It was the second walkoff home run in Dodgers postseason history and came 29 years to the day after Kirk Gibson hit one in Game 1 of the 1988 World Series.

It also left the Cubs down 2-0 in the series, which moves to Wrigley Field beginning Tuesday.

"One of my earliest baseball memories was being at my grandma's house and watching 'Gibby' hit that homer," Turner said.

"Every pitch I throw is on me," Lackey said.

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Chicago Tribune

It's a smash ending as three-run homer gives Dodgers victory over Cubs in NLCS Game 2

By Mark Gonzales

Kris Bryant sported a T-shirt Sunday night with the words "better days."

For the Cubs, that slogan came with a major sense of urgency after Justin Turner smacked a three-run homer with two outs in the ninth inning off John Lackey to give the Dodgers a stunning 4-1 victory and 2-0 lead in this best-of-seven National League Championship Series.

The Cubs bullpen had rebounded nicely with 32/3 scoreless innings before Turner's blast, working hard to offset the tourniquet the Dodgers bullpen had placed on the Cubs offense.

The Cubs haven't collected a hit off the Dodgers' relievers in eight innings, and their only baserunner during that span came with one out in the ninth when closer Kenley Jansen hit Anthony Rizzo with a pitch.

"The game has definitely changed," said Jon Lester, who was working on a shutout until Turner's two-out RBI single in the fourth precipitated his being pulled one batter later after throwing 103 pitches.

He was referring to early hooks in the postseason.

"I would have thought (Dodgers starter) Rich Hill would have had a couple more innings, but the game has definitely changed in that aspect. They have a good bullpen."

Hill gave up one run on three hits with eight strikeouts when he was lifted after five innings.

Despite the lack of offense, the Cubs' confidence hasn't wavered.

That includes Carl Edwards Jr., who rebounded from some rough relief outings in the NL Division Series to pitch 11/3 scoreless innings. He bailed Lester out of a jam in the fifth when he struck out pinch-hitter Chase Utley with the go-ahead run at second.

"We'll be back to Chicago," Edwards said. "We know our fans will be loud. ... Before you know it, the series is going to be tied."

What makes Edwards so confident?

"I was born with power of the tongue. And that's what we're going to go with for now. We have a lot of confidence. We've been like this before."

But the Dodgers bullpen is more formidable than it was in last season's NLCS, when the Cubs ousted them in six games.

Javier Baez is 0-for-19 in the postseason, and Bryant is 1-for-8 in the series with three strikeouts as the Dodgers attacked him and his teammates with high fastballs — a tactic they used to sweep the Cubs in a three-game series in late May.

Bryant pointed out the Cubs' resilience.

"We've done it before," Bryant said referring to their rallying from a 2-1 deficit to eliminate the Dodgers in 2016. "Hopefully we can learn from this and more motivation for our next game."

Nevertheless, he admitted, "They do a good job with their game plan of high fastballs."

The Cubs also are dealing with the residual effects of winning a draining five-game series from the Nationals to advance to the NLCS.

Manager Joe Maddon said closer Wade Davis, who threw 21/3 innings and 43 pitches Thursday, was available only in a save situation on Sunday.

That left Maddon to call on Lackey after left-hander Brian Duensing was lifted with a runner at second and two outs in the ninth.

Lackey walked Chris Taylor before Turner launched his shot over the center field fence.

"Bad location, bad selection," said Lackey, a starter who was pitching in consecutive games for the first time in his 15-year career. "You want to be in those games. It's not typical, but you still have to try to get the job done."

Addison Russell, whose home run in the fifth accounted for the Cubs' lone run, didn't downplay the significance of the loss.

"We have to turn the page and figure out what we're going to do for next game, what our approach is," Russell said. "But a loss in the postseason always stinks."

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Chicago Tribune

Bats betray Cubs again, Dodgers win another battle of the bullpens in NLCS Game 2

By Paul Sullivan

Whenever a Dodger struck out a Cub during Game 2 of the National League Championship Series, the four-note opening motif of Beethoven's Fifth rang out at Dodger Stadium.

By the end of the night, the classical composition was little more than an earworm to the Cubs, who continued their postseason hitting slump with 12 strikeouts in a 4-1 loss Sunday night that gave the Dodgers a 2-0 series lead.

They managed three hits in five innings against Rich Hill and none in the final four innings against the Dodgers bullpen, which now has pitched eight no-hit innings in the first two games of the series.

"They're just good," Cubs first baseman Anthony Rizzo said. "They've got good pitchers, good hitters. They're just getting us out."

The Cubs have been in this situation before, as recently as last year's World Series, when they trailed the Indians 3-1 before winning in seven games. But this roadblock seems a little bigger, with Yu Darvish pitching Game 3 at Wrigley Field on Tuesday and Clayton Kershaw lurking in Game 5, if it gets that far.

Despite the offensive no-show, the story of the night was Joe Maddon's decision to go with John Lackey in relief in the ninth inning instead of closer Wade Davis.

Lackey, who pitched for the second straight day after not being used in the NL Division Series against the Nationals, served up a three-run, walk-off home run to Justin Turner that turned the stadium upside down.

"You want to be in those games," Lackey said. "Typically I'm not usually in 'em, but try to get the job done."

Lackey didn't get the job done, and said afterward it was "nobody's fault but mine."

"I feel bad for our guys," Cubs starter Jon Lester said. "You never want to be that guy that's left out there. I'm sure it's a bad feeling. I'm fortunate enough I haven't been that guy, but he's a competitor and hopefully we get that opportunity again."

When someone called it a "heartbreaker," Lester shot back: "A heartbreaker for who? It's a loss. We're not over. We're not done. Guys walked in here upbeat and ready to go for (Game 3). We had some music playing in here before (the media arrived).

"We've all lost games before. We've all lost series before, so we'll move on to Tuesday. That's all we can do, show up and be ready to go."

Davis, whose 2 1/3-inning performance in Game 5 of the NLDS was his longest of the season, was out of sight. Maddon said he planned on using Davis in a save situation only.

Davis said he was ready to go an inning if asked.

"Everything is pretty taxing in the playoffs," he said. "You take the ball when your manager asks you to take the ball."

Asked if he was disappointed not to get the ball, Davis replied: "No, we've got confidence in everybody that goes out there. There's no (disappointment) in any of that. Lackey's track record in the playoffs has been amazing. I don't think that's something that (deserves) second-guessing."

Davis said he knew it would only be a "one-inning type of stint," but didn't engage in the question of when he would be used.

Lester and Hill engaged in a pitching duel for the first five innings, if it's possible to have a duel that only goes five. It shows where postseason baseball is these days. Starters with nine-figure salaries come out of games early, and semi-anonymous relievers decide who wins.

Lester battled without his best stuff, allowing one run, three hits and five walks in 4 2/3 innings, throwing 103 pitches. He was lifted by Maddon with two outs in the fifth after Justin Turner's tying single and a walk to Cody Bellinger.

"I didn't really have much, so I tried to figure it out as I went," he said. "It was a grind from Pitch 1, and we were able to get semi-deep into the game. But at the end of the day, you look up on a ground ball (by Turner) that just gets through and it's tied 1-1. It wasn't great, but it's only one."

Lester was aided by Albert Almora Jr.'s leaping catch in deep center field in the first and Willson Contreras throwing out Yasiel Puig attempting to steal second in the third.

He noted Hill was "cruising" and only pitched five innings, leaving after 79 pitches.

"The game has definitely changed," Lester said. "I would've thought Rich would have a couple more innings there, but the game has definitely changed on that aspect of it."

Dodgers manager Dave Roberts knows he has a fresh bullpen after their three-game sweep of the Diamondbacks in the NLDS. Maddon has to manage his bullpen like he's juggling flaming chainsaws, with Davis and Brian Duensing the only ones that have been consistent since September.

At least Carl Edwards Jr., Pedro Strop and Duensing all stepped up in Game 2, albeit in a losing effort.

"Sometimes you've got to lay your marbles out there you get beat," Lester said. "We did that and it was a well-played game on both sides."

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Chicago Tribune

Lack of dependable arms in bullpen causing problems for Joe Maddon, Cubs
By David Haugh

In the ninth inning of a tie playoff game that represented a must-win situation Sunday night, the Cubs turned to a 38-year-old starting pitcher throwing for the second day in a row for the first time in his career.

You can pin the Cubs' crushing 4-1 loss to the Dodgers in Game 2 of the National League Championship Series on right-hander John Lackey if you wish. But this one falls on the Cubs front office as much as any player for giving manager Joe Maddon such limited options. Once again this postseason, the Cubs bullpen contributed to their demise when Dodgers third baseman Justin Turner smacked a three-run homer to center field to give his team a dramatic walk-off win and a 2-0 series lead.

Turner's heroics came on the day the franchise celebrated the 29th anniversary of Kirk Gibson's epic home run in the 1988 World Series, the latest sign that this is the year of the happy ending in La-La Land.

"One of my earliest baseball memories was being at my grandma's house and watching that home run, so I can't even put it into words right now," said Turner, 32.

Cubs fans could relate to the speechlessness.

Here we went again into the late innings of a Cubs playoff game, with the margin for error thinner than Carl Edwards Jr.'s waist and the stakes higher than the mountains within view of Dodger Stadium. The Cubs and Dodgers took a 1-1 tie into the ninth, with every hitter a possible hero, every pitcher a potential goat and every one of the 54,479 fans on the edge of their seats. Then Turner stepped forward and turned on a Lackey fastball in a moment that could turn the series, and the place went nuts.

Lackey took the mound because closer Wade Davis was available for one inning only. The toll of Davis getting seven outs on 44 pitches Thursday in Game 5 of the NLDS clincher cost the Cubs their best shot at beating the Dodgers in a crucial game.

"Wade had limited pitches," Maddon said. "We needed him to save the game."

Davis never got a chance because the bullpen lacked an arm dependable enough to count on in his absence. That's harder to accept than the Cubs trying to preserve Davis' weary right arm. So, without an obvious alternative, Maddon gave the ball to Lackey and asked him to cowboy up. Using Edwards in the fifth reduced the options in a bullpen that already had used Pedro Strop and Brian Duensing. Nobody would say Maddon was spoiled for choice.

"I was just betting on his experience more than anything," Maddon said.

Maddon's gambles this postseason rarely have paid off. This one even surprised Dodgers manager Dave Roberts.

"We certainly liked the matchup," Roberts said.

Unlike Maddon, Roberts brought closer Kenley Jansen into a tie game to start the ninth, when baseball's most dominant reliever killed hope against the heart of the Cubs batting order. Two games into the NLCS, that heart is barely beating. In two games, the Cubs have managed three runs and seven hits.

"We scored one run today," Maddon said. "That's the issue."

What happened to the offense? The game-time temperature reached a sizzling 92 degrees yet the Cubs hit like they stored their bats in a freezer, continuing a cold spell killing their playoff buzz. With a runner on third and two outs in the third, Kris Bryant struck out on Rich Hill's 91-mph fastball over the center of the plate. In ordinary times, Bryant would have drilled that pitch, but a guy who has struck out 13 times in 28 postseason at-bats finds himself mired in an extraordinary slump. Rizzo, hitless since his blooper won Game 3 of the NLDS, feels just as stymied. When Rizzo struck out in the fourth, he screamed something loudly in disgust — and it wasn't "Respect me!"

The Cubs aren't the Cubs unless business is booming for Bryzzo. Nobody besides Addison Russell, who homered, stepped forward with a big hit. Maddon tried to avoid calling Game 2 a must-win scenario beforehand, but returning to Wrigley Field having to beat the Dodgers four of the next five poses a daunting task for a team struggling so mightily at the plate. As much as Maddon hoped to see Cubs hitters improve their two-strike approach and use the opposite field more, nothing worked.

Credit Dodgers starter Rich Hill, who outpitched Jon Lester. Hill made one mistake and Russell jumped on the 1-2 fastball and drove it 358 feet over the short left-field porch. But the Cubs touched Hill for only three hits and tipped their cap when Roberts replaced him after five innings.

Meanwhile, Lester labored, walking five and failing to get out of the fifth inning after 103 pitches — the shortest postseason start of his storied career. And yet Lester competed well enough that the Dodgers didn't get on the board until Turner punched a two-out, two-strike ground ball into right field, scoring Charlie Culberson.

Maddon lauded the Cubs defense and praised his team's effort in SoCal, but the stadium organist playing "Closing Time," drowned out his optimism. A day that ended with the Cubs' backs to the wall began with Maddon accepting a league-imposed fine after a meeting with Major League Baseball chief Joe Torre about Saturday's scathing postgame comments concerning his Game 1 ejection. All Maddon wanted was an audience to hear his objection to baseball's slide rule.

"If you remember back in the days with the Rays, I had a T-shirt that said, 'Tell me what you think, not what you've heard,'" Maddon said. "So for me to be disingenuous, I just couldn't have slept last night."

Another restless night loomed, courtesy of Justin Turner.

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Chicago Tribune

NLCS Game 2 turning point: Justin Turner's three-run homer

By Chris Kuc

The situation: With the game tied 1-1 entering the bottom of the ninth inning, Cubs reliever Brian Duensing walked lead-off hitter Yasiel Puig on four pitches. Charlie Culberson bunted to sacrifice Puig to second and Dodgers manager Dave Roberts called on Kyle Farmer to pinch hit for reliever Kenley Jansen. Duensing struck Farmer out on a 3-2 changeup for the second out. Cubs manager Joe Maddon brought John Lackey in to face Chris Taylor and the veteran walked him to bring up Justin Turner.

What happened next: With closer Wade Davis still in the Cubs' bullpen, Lester's first pitch was a cut fastball in the dirt that catcher Willson Contreras made a nice play on to keep the runners on first and second. Lackey then grooved a 92-mph fastball that Turner belted over the wall in center to give the Dodgers the victory.

The aftermath: With the crowd in a frenzy, Turner raised both arms in celebration as he rounded the basis before joyous teammates greeted him at home plate. The Dodgers had a 2-0 lead in the best-of-seven series with Game 3 scheduled for Tuesday night at Wrigley Field.

The reaction: "I liked (Lackey) a lot on the first guy, Taylor. Once that walk occurred, all bets were off against Turner. Nobody is a really great matchup against Turner, so it just did not work out." — Cubs manager Joe Maddon

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Chicago Tribune

Cubs have no second thoughts about second baseman Javier Baez

By Paul Skrbina

Playing tag with Javier Baez usually is a losing proposition.

Yasiel Puig was the latest to be "it" in El Mago's game when he tried to steal second base Sunday during Game 2 of the National League Championship Series.

Puig got a face full of helmet after it was introduced to Baez's glove during the fourth inning of the Cubs' 4-1 loss to the Dodgers. Baez, on the receiving end of Willson Contreras' throw, high-stepped off the field after the final out of the inning.

The play demonstrated why Baez's name has become cemented into the Cubs lineup despite the second baseman being 0-for-the-postseason at the plate.

Baez walked to lead off the third inning, stole second and moved to third on a wild pitch.

But he was left there after he reached base for just the second time in 16 postseason plate appearances.

Cubs manager Joe Maddon described Baez as the kind of player capable of changing course for the better in one at-bat.

Baez is far from the only Cub struggling at the plate. But he's pretty much in a class by himself when it comes to his value on defense.

"We would not be sitting here right now if it wasn't for his play in the first inning against Washington with the drawn-in infield and (Trea) Turner running at third," Maddon said of when Baez threw out Turner at home for the second out of the first inning of Game 5 of the division series.

"Don't ever overlook those things. A lot of our success is based on defense, and Javy is so important to that."

And that, Maddon said, is not lost on him.

Baez, remember, also filled in admirably at shortstop during Addison Russell's extended stay on the disabled list.

That wasn't lost on Cubs general manager Jed Hoyer.

"Javy's answered the challenge of playing every day," Hoyer said in August. "He's going to be out there. I think we're seeing aspects to his game we haven't seen in the past."

But his postseason struggles at the plate might seem all-too-familiar.

Baez struck out in his second plate appearance Sunday, for the eighth time in the playoffs, and flew out to center in his third to run his hitless streak to 19 at-bats. His 0-for-19 to begin a postseason is the second-longest run in franchise history to Jimmy Sheppard, who was 0-for-21 in 1906, according to Elias Sports.

"I'm not giving up. I've been in that slump before," Baez said after Sunday night's game. "Today I felt exactly how I wanted to."

Cubs outfielder Albert Almora Jr. resisted speaking for his teammate when asked about his struggles, but he did acknowledge the obvious.

"He's not where he wants to be, we all know that," Almora said. "But the smile on his face ... the way he's handling it, he's not bringing anybody down."

"You're not going to be perfect. He comes here to work. He's ready to go."

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Chicago Tribune

Joe Maddon expects fine for tirade after overturned call in Game 1 of NLCS

By Mark Gonzales

Joe Maddon will find out soon how much his rant from Saturday night will cost him.

The Cubs manager expects to be fined by Major League Baseball for his tirade after an out at home plate was overturned in the seventh inning of Game 1 of the National League Championship Series. It was ruled that Cubs catcher Willson Contreras did not allow a path to home plate for Dodgers base runner Charlie Culberson.

The play accounted for the final run in the Dodgers' 5-2 win.

"I expect it," Maddon said Sunday, before he was scheduled to meet with Joe Torre, MLB's Chief Baseball Officer prior to Game 2.

Maddon, however, reminded media members that he wore a T-shirt while managing the Rays that said, "Tell me what you think, not what you've heard."

"I really like people that tell me what they think, and then I can deal with that after that."

Maddon said he'll accept the consequences, adding that he has no problems with the money going to MLB charities.

Justin case: Maddon acknowledged that he altered his bullpen script because of the struggles of left-hander Justin Wilson, who was left off the NLCS roster.

"That was counted upon when we got him," Maddon said. "The guy has a great arm, and that's not just to say he won't get back to his original form to what he had been pitching."

"But for right now, we're just not seeing that. But we anticipated more, no question."

The bullpen had a 7.08 ERA through its first six playoff games compared with the starting rotation's 1.99 mark. In the regular season, the Cubs relievers' 3.80 ERA ranked third in the National League.

"We've been good all year," Maddon said. "There's nowhere to run. We just got to keep playing, and you got to keep putting them out there at what you think is the right time. And that's how you win. Because we have eight games to win, not one or two."

Fountain of youth? John Lackey, 38, threw 1 2/3 scoreless innings in a rare relief appearance Saturday, and Maddon was encouraged.

"I need to find out how he feels," Maddon said of Lackey, who has made only two regular-season relief appearances during his 15-year career. "He'll tell me he feels great.

"He can be very valuable. If those guys are having a (rough) moment, Johnny can be very important."

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Chicago Tribune

Cubs' World Series ring taken off auction site, scout no longer with organization
By Phil Thompson

An authentic Cubs World Series ring has been removed from an online auction, and the scout who tried to sell it is no longer with the team.

The Sun-Times first reported that auction site Lelands.com cooperated with the Cubs in taking the ring down about two weeks before bidding was set to close.

Team spokesman Julian Green told the Tribune via email Sunday night, "We appreciate Lelands' cooperation in removing a ring that was not authorized for sale per the contract with associates."

Cubs employees who are not players or coaches were required to sign an agreement to offer the ring back to the team for \$1 before trying to sell it elsewhere.

Green added, "We have identified the scout who no longer works for the ballclub." He said legally he's not at liberty to discuss why the team and the scout parted ways.

The 2016 championship ring had an opening bid set at \$1,908 — an homage to the team's previous World Series victory — and had eclipsed the \$65,000 mark before the lot was withdrawn by Lelands, according to the Sun-Times report.

Memorabilia expert Michael Osacky of Baseball In The Attic said the ring would've fetched at least \$100,000 and added that the scout chose the "peak" time to sell. "My sources tell me the Cubs knew somebody would sell a ring sooner or later, but they didn't expect it to be this quick," he said.

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Chicago Sun-Times

TELANDER: Turner, Puig causing headaches for Maddon's Cubs
By Rick Telander

LOS ANGELES — Delirious teammates dumped a bucket of orange Gatorade over the head of Justin Turner, the star of Game 2, but it hardly made a change in the third baseman's appearance.

His flaming orange-red hair and Viking beard either absorbed the liquid or shed it like water off a red roof.

Turner, who wore "RedTurn2" on the back of his jersey during Players Weekend in August (when players could "express themselves in a unique manner," per the MLB Players Association), had mashed a three-run home run

with two outs in the ninth inning to win the game 4-1. He helped the Dodgers take a 2-0 series lead over the Cubs, which means the Cubs have to win four of the possible five games left.

That's what you call a daunting task.

And it has been the Dodgers' great pitching, the Cubs' lousy hitting and this guy named Turner that have made the road so tough. Oh, and the muscleman loose cannon named Yasiel Puig. He's the Dodgers right fielder who does things such as lick his bat as he walks to the plate, dance backward (or forward) like a puppet when a pitch is inside or too far outside and celebrate his apparent home runs even when he's shocked to see the ball hasn't flown over the wall.

It was Puig's crushing bat that delivered two key RBI in the Dodgers' Game 1 win. And it was the Cubs' fear of him that had them walking him three times in Game 2, the final time being a virtual intentional walk from Brian Duensing — on four pitches — even though the score was tied at 1 and Puig was the first batter of the ninth inning. Nobody wants to put the winning run on base with no outs, right?

Puig scored on Turner's homer, as did Chris Taylor. But you just had the feeling beforehand that the two big hitters were going to beat the Cubs somehow.

Turner had an RBI single in the fifth, giving him all of the Dodgers' RBI for the night. He also was walked once. Imagine, he and Puig gained first base four times without even putting the ball in play.

"What's not to enjoy about it?" Turner said of the moment. "We have an opportunity to bring a championship back to L.A. And it's been a long time."

Twenty-nine years, to be exact. Not long, in Cubs time, before last year's crown. But fairly long for a proud organization that bleeds royal blue.

Puig is a character the likes of which the Dodgers have not often seen on their roster. A free spirit who calls himself "Wild Horse," Puig had to ratchet his act down several ticks on the crazy dial or he might have found himself out of baseball.

A Cuban defector, Puig was caught going 97 mph in a 50 mph zone in Tennessee and another time going 110 mph in a 70 mph zone in Florida. He made an obscene gesture to an Indians fan in Cleveland after a home run this season and had to make a donation to a charity as penance.

But he's more on cruise control now, and as Dodgers manager Dave Roberts said after the game, "He's as focused as I've ever seen him."

As for Turner, he's a guy in his fourth organization, but he has absolutely blossomed in his four years with the Dodgers. In the last two seasons, he has collected 300 hits. And he has made the craft of fouling off low-and-away pitches into such a refined art that he can drive a pitcher mad with frustration and crank up the pitch count on anybody.

The Cubs won't ever beat the Dodgers if they can't figure out how to hit. But even if they do, guys such as Puig and Turner will be there to bedevil them. Uh-oh.

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Chicago Sun-Times

Justin Turner stuns Cubs with walk-off homer off John Lackey in Game 2

By Gordon Wittenmyer

LOS ANGELES — They talk about their playoff experience and coming from behind in October series to win it all.

"We've done it before," Cubs third baseman Kris Bryant said. "This is nothing new to us."

No, they haven't done it before – not if doing it means coming back from a two-games-to-none deficit to win in the postseason.

When Justin Turner's three-run homer off John Lackey cleared the center-field wall with two out in the bottom of the ninth inning Sunday at Dodger Stadium, it gave the Dodgers a 4-1 victory and commanding lead in the best-of-seven series.

And it sent the Cubs home wondering if they'll find even two hits to rub together by Game 3 on Tuesday against the top pitching staff in the majors.

"Hopefully, we can learn from this and [use it for] more motivation for the next game," Bryant said. "We still have a long way to go."

Not like this. Not the way they're hitting.

A meager performance in the first round against Stephen Strasburg, Max Scherzer and the rest of the Nationals has only gotten worse against Clayton Kershaw, Rich Hill and the nastiest bullpen they've seen all year.

The have only seven hits over two games – none against a bullpen that has pitched eight nearly flawless innings (allowing only a hit batter in Sunday's ninth). Their only runs have scored on Albert Almora Jr.'s two-run homer against Kershaw on Saturday and Addison Russell's solo homer against Hill on Sunday.

"I feel like all of us are still confident," said Russell, whose homer leading off the fifth gave the Cubs a brief lead. "Of course, it stings. But we're looking forward to winning in Chicago."

Big-game starter Jon Lester, who labored through 4 2/3 innings to keep the game close, said the Cubs were "upbeat and ready to go for Tuesday" by the time they reached the clubhouse after Turner's dramatic game-ender.

They even had their music playing before the media arrived, he said.

"Heartbreaker for who?" he said when the word was used in a question to him. "It's a loss. We're not over. We're not done.

"We've got a long ways to go. That wasn't the clinching game."

No, but history has a sobering story for the Cubs: Since the LCS expanded to seven games in 1985, only three of the 28 teams that lost the first two games came back to win the series. And two of those happened in that first year of the expanded format.

The Cubs, in fact, were one of those 25 who didn't get it done, just two years ago, when they were swept by the Mets.

But they also came back from a 3-1 deficit in the World Series to beat the Indians last year, and from a 2-1 deficit against these Dodgers in the NLCS.

"We've got a lot of experience in this room," said Lackey, who pitched in back-to-back games for the first time in his career. "It's not ideal being down 2-0, but we've got a chance. We're going home."

Lackey only became a late-inning option for manager Joe Maddon when his bullpen faltered in the first round and then was needed for a heavy load in a Game 5 clincher in Washington on Thursday night.

Lackey, who leads all active pitchers in postseason starts, was effective for five outs Saturday night. On Sunday, Maddon went to him with two outs, the go-ahead run on second base and the top of the order up.

After a walk to leadoff man Chris Taylor, Lackey threw a first-pitch ball to Turner and a second-pitch game-changer.

“Just bad location,” he said. “But bad selection as well.”

Maddon said before the game he would consider using Lackey again in a hot spot late in the game.

“I’m just betting on his experience right there as much as anything,” Maddon said. “I know the crowd would not affect him, and it didn’t.”

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Chicago Sun-Times

Dodgers’ bullpen, Jansen continue domination of Cubs

By Daryl Van Schouwen

LOS ANGELES – Kenta Maeda was next in line in the Dodgers’ stellar bullpen, warmed up and ready to follow Kenley Jansen’s latest dominant performance and pitch the 10th inning in Game 2 of the National League Championship Series against the Cubs.

“I was hoping for a walk-off,” he said through a translator.

Maeda’s wish, as everyone in southern California might have known hearing the thunderous roar and rumble coming from delirious Dodger Stadium, was granted with Justin Turner’s home run.

The three-run blast against John Lackey, a starter turned reliever like Maeda, scored another win for a bullpen that might just carry the Dodgers to the World Series from the sixth inning to the back end where Jansen looms.

A night after three-time Cy Young winner Clayton Kershaw was required to pitch only five innings, fellow left-hander Rich Hill was done after five even though he only allowed one run on three hits.

This is the way the Dodgers, whose starters probably aren’t as good as the Cubs’ but whose relievers are superior, are going to do it.

“Those guys know exactly what they want to do, and they’re going out there and executing pitches,” Dodgers manager Dave Roberts said.

Everybody is pitching in. While Lackey’s somewhat clumsy transition to relief was done on short notice and probably out of necessity for the Cubs, Maeda’s shift to the pen where he has excelled stacked just one more primo piece on a stellar unit.

“It takes a lot of people to get to where we want to get to,” Robert said. “A lot of guys — everyone feels included, relevant and a part of this.”

The Dodgers have depth and Jansen, their \$80 million closer who on Sunday night pitched a hitless inning featuring strikeouts of the struggling Kris Bryant and cleanup man Willson Contreras. Hitting Anthony Rizzo on the hand made things only wee bit tense for the right-hander who saved Game 1 by striking out all four batters he faced and got the win by entering a tie game and pretty much buzzing through the heart of the Cubs order.

In Game 1, the five relievers combined to pitch four perfect innings with Maeda getting the win.

There isn’t a weak link in the bunch. Tony Cingrani and Tony Watson were added before the trade deadline, Maeda started most of the year and Morrow opened the season in the minors. They also have Josh Fields.

“They are really executing quality pitches in big situations,” catcher Austin Barnes said.

Morrow retired all six batters he faced in Game 2 and floored TBS analyst Ron Darling.

"I knew he was good," Darling, a former pitcher, said. "I didn't know he was this good."

"You see his stuff," Barnes said. "It's 98-100 and it's coming at you. He's been an unsung here for us, really. What he's done for us can't go unnoticed."

Not so with Jansen, the leader of the pack.

"We know how short we felt last year," he said. "And the Cubs deserved it last year. The fact that we see how close we got, and we know it's unfinished business, and we have that goal. We've been talking about it in January. When we got to Spring Training we had that mindset. And we've been talking about it the whole year."

And doing it the Dodger way, a trending thing in baseball.

"Rich was pretty much cruising, gave up the one hard hit ball, and go through five and you look at the bullpen," Cubs starter Jon Lester said. "You're dealing with them."

"I would have thought that Rich would have had a couple more innings there. The game's definitely changed on that aspect of it."

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Chicago Sun-Times

Is John Lackey with two outs in the ninth really how Cubs drew it up?

By Steve Greenberg

LOS ANGELES — There is no right place to start with a guy who just gave up a walk-off home run with two outs in the ninth inning of a National League Championship Series game. Especially when that man is one John Derran Lackey.

Say, John, what happened on that fateful pitch to Dodgers hitting machine Justin Turner? Were you trying to keep the ball away from him? Or run it in on his hands? Because it sure caught a lot of the plate.

Uh, John?

"Yeah, I'll talk to the pitching coach about it," Lackey grumbled after the Cubs' 4-1 defeat in Game 2.

Lackey didn't offer much in the way of illumination on a night that had to be beyond strange for the 38-year-old. Here's a pitcher with the most career postseason starts in all of baseball, yet suddenly he has been used in relief in back-to-back games. Back-to-back playoff losses, to boot. Man, bullpen life is no joke.

How's the team holding up?

"It's not ideal to be down 2-0," he said.

Why so many between-pitches conversations with catcher Willson Contreras?

"We had a little trouble getting on the same page."

Is it harder on the pitchers when nobody's hitting?

"Yeah, I'll stay in my lane on that one."

What now?

"Try to win a ballgame. It isn't too complicated."

A lot of sort-of answers to, frankly, a lot of sort-of questions. But then, the Cubs sort of look doomed right now. The bullpen is sort of an epic disaster, not that it's the only problem spot with this team.

Why, Joe Maddon? Why send Lackey into a tie game with two outs in the ninth and a runner in scoring position? Isn't that the sort of situation where we might expect to see an elite closer such as Wade Davis emerge from the bullpen?

"Because I really just needed [Davis] for the save tonight," Maddon said. "He had limited pitches."

Maddon made the interesting point that warming up Davis — who was taxed to the max in a two-plus-inning save Thursday night in Washington — would've taken an equal toll to using him in the game, and it was better to keep his arm quiet altogether unless there was no question his services would be needed. Which, um, they weren't?

Of course, Maddon could've called on former closer Hector Rondon, who has lots of experience getting the call to pitch amid late-inning nuttiness.

"I'm just betting on [Lackey's] experience right there as much as anything," Maddon said. "I know that he went out there and tried to make the pitches that he wanted to make."

It could've been a much-needed good night — no, a great night — for the bullpen. Carl Edwards Jr. was electric for 1½ innings. Pedro Strop put in an inning of admirable work. Brian Duensing, although he was tagged with the loss, gave the Cubs a clutch 1⅔ innings.

The bullpen was so close to being able to tell all the doubters — and there's an army of them — to take a hike.

"We really don't care who doubts us," Edwards said. "They're not doing our jobs. We're doing it ourselves."

Lackey clearly hasn't done his job thus far as a reliever. Then again, it's not all that easy to see why he would. To go from the rhythms of the starting rotation to the unpredictability of the bullpen is an extreme change, especially for someone who has started games his whole life. It would be like sticking a night-owl sports writer in an office cubicle at 8 a.m. and expecting him to hit the ground bright-eyed and bushy-tailed.

Or something like that.

"We're just trying to win games," Davis said.

The Cubs are running out of chances.

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Chicago Sun-Times

MORRISSEY: Cubs' bats have been brrrrrutally cold in postseason

By Rick Morrissey

LOS ANGELES — The Cubs' bats have been cryonically frozen for that day, far in the future, when a cure is discovered for whatever caused their death, at which time they can be revived.

That's all I can come up with.

There is no good explanation for why the Cubs have forgotten how to hit, only that they have. One division series and two games of the National League Championship Series is certainly a small sample size. Players go into mini-slumps. It happens. You hope it doesn't happen in bulk.

It's happening in bulk.

The Cubs are down 2-0 in their best-of-seven series with the Dodgers partly because of Justin Turner's ninth-inning home run Sunday night but mostly because of their aversion to hits and getting on base.

They have scored a combined 11 runs in six of their postseason games and nine in another. They managed only one run in their 4-1 loss Sunday night. They had three hits, and one of them was by pitcher Jon "Babe" Lester.

Cubs hitters have had to face Stephen Strasburg, Max Scherzer and Clayton Kershaw this postseason, and if you want to say that's the reason they haven't hit, have it. But two things about that explanation: One, the Cubs are the defending World Series champions, and they should be able to hit the best of the best. Two, they've also been awful against relief pitchers in the postseason. The Dodgers' bullpen hasn't given up a hit in eight innings.

"I think we're doing a great job," said Addison Russell, whose fifth-inning homer gave the Cubs a brief 1-0 lead Sunday. "We just need to stick with our approach and not chase out of the zone."

Either Russell has trouble processing the truth or feel-good manager Joe Maddon has gotten to him. The Cubs are not doing a great job at the plate. They are doing a great deal of swinging and missing. Dodgers pitchers combined for 12 strikeouts in Game 2, eight by starter Rich Hill. Hill is good. He's not that good.

Anthony Rizzo got hit by a Kenley Jansen pitch in the ninth, which isn't a hit, but beggars can't be choosers. It didn't lead to anything for the Cubs, unless you count the bruise. In the clubhouse after the game, it was clear that players were trying to make sense of what happened and how to proceed heading into Game 3 Tuesday at Wrigley Field.

"Get on base more," Rizzo said. "Just keep it going. It's contagious. Just keep grinding."

Can they win a series hitting like this? Not this one. Not against the Dodgers' bullpen. They beat the Nationals in the NLDS with a .172 team average. You only get to go to that shallow well once.

Before Sunday's game, Maddon said the lack of runs made for "kind of an awkward postseason." Afterward, he said, "We just have to become more offensive." I'll leave that one alone.

"Those guys are good, man," Russell said of the Dodgers. "We're going about our business the same way, but you've got to give credit to those guys. They're making pitches in the right situation. As far as being selective, I think as a team we can do a little better."

The Cubs want to give credit to the other team, and they should. But they have a say in whether they hit the ball. They're not victims here. They've been active participants in their 2-0 series deficit. What to do about it?

"Just make adjustments," right fielder Jason Heyward said. "When I say that, I don't mean doing anything drastic. Just pay attention to some detail and see how they're approaching us and attacking us and go from there."

A TV reporter asked Heyward if any details stood out.

"I wouldn't give them to you," Heyward said.

Fine, but make sure you share them with Rizzo (hitting .154 in seven postseason games), Kris Bryant (.179) and yourself (.133). And, whatever you do, please share with Javy Baez, who is 0-for-19. His bat is cold to the touch.

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Chicago Sun-Times

Cubs fans want Albert Almora Jr.? This series, anyway, they've got him

By Steve Greenberg

LOS ANGELES — If you're ever on Twitter — or am I the only one? — perhaps you've taken note of a certain disposition among Cubs fans when it comes to young outfielder Albert Almora Jr.

They love the guy.

They love his confidence and swagger. They love the way Almora goes after fly balls like a big cat running down its prey. They love his knack for the big play, such as his diving ninth-inning catch in last year's National League Division Series in San Francisco or the winning run he scored a few weeks later in Game 7 of the World Series.

They certainly love his .298 regular-season average in 2017, his .341 mark as a pinch hitter and the .433 tear he went on — which included seven extra-base hits in 30 at-bats — down the stretch as the Cubs iced the Central division.

They had to at least really like the two-run homer Almora smacked off Clayton Kershaw in Saturday's Game 1, the only damage the Cubs did in a 5-2 defeat. At 23, he became the fifth-youngest Cub to homer in a postseason game. Addison Russell, Javy Baez and Kyle Schwarber all did it at 22. Frank Demaree also did it at 22 in 1932 (but you knew that already).

Almora — starting again with another lefty, Rich Hill, on the mound for the Dodgers — brought more good stuff to the early going of Game 2. He raced back and fought the sun to snare a deep smash off the bat of Jason Turner in the first inning, and saved a run in the third by sprinting on a perfect path to cut off a Cody Bellinger double in the gap, forcing Turner to hold up at third base.

It turns out the Cubs' 2012 first-round draft pick is pretty good at this whole baseball thing.

"I'm a pretty confident player," he said. "I trust my abilities. I trust what I can do on the baseball field. Whenever I'm given a chance to play, I'm really not trying to do too much. I'm just trying to help the team."

And that brings us to what many Cubs fans don't love when it comes to Almora. It's that he isn't given a chance to play often enough. It's that he isn't helping the team as much as he could be if only manager Joe Maddon viewed him as an everyday player — or at least as someone who's too good to be in the lineup only against left-handed pitchers.

Almora was asked about the Cubs' seeming ability to shrug off difficult losses. His take: They don't see themselves as perfect — "we're human, not robots," he said — so they don't beat themselves up too much when they have a bad day.

"You go 0-for-4, you go 4-for-4, it doesn't matter what happened — the day's over," he said. "You have to come back the next day and be prepared, be ready to go."

He's a key figure in this series, with three lefties in the Dodgers' rotation, but Almora has spent so much time watching from the bench this season, I'll believe he's more of an everyday guy in 2018 when I see it. It's the 0-for-0s that a lot of Cubs fans are tired of seeing.

"This is what I strive to be," he said. "I want to be a big part of this organization, hopefully for a long time."

Meantime, he's just doing his thing.

"I don't usually feel pressure or anything like that," he said. "It's the same whether it's June or October. Now it's just on national television every night."

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Chicago Sun-Times

Motivated Dodgers bent on ringing in a new year

By Daryl Van Schouwen

LOS ANGELES — Losing to the Cubs in the 2016 National League Championship Series is a source of motivation for the Los Angeles Dodgers.

Getting past the team that stopped them from going to the World Series added a little something extra.

Watching the Cubs get their World Series rings at a Wrigley Field ceremony in April when the Dodgers happened to be in town to play them? Now that could really give someone the gears, but most of the Dodgers didn't see it.

Not that it wasn't an annoyance.

"I was in the locker room, yes," Dodgers left fielder and Game 2 cleanup hitter Kike Hernandez said. "I didn't see it. Nobody cared about that. It was cold. And it was an unnecessarily long ceremony, so. We were inside chilling, staying warm."

"You tell me, was it fun?" Hernandez asked a Chicago reporter.

Wasn't there.

"OK, well I wasn't, either."

Manager Dave Roberts said at the time it didn't do much for him.

"Is it good to see, inspiring? No," Roberts said.

In any event, getting clocked by the Cubs four games to two after leading the series two games to one left a bad taste in Hernandez' mouth.

"Being two wins away from the World Series and tasting how close we were," Hernandez said. "I don't know if we sat back and relaxed and felt like we were in the World Series but we didn't take care of business. To taste how close we were and failing again, it hurt.

"We were two wins away from getting to the World Series and they just manhandled us in the next three games."

Hernandez had to blush a little in Game 2 when, batting with runners on second and third and two outs, he trotted all the way to first base thinking he had walked against Jon Lester. Problem was, the count was 3 and 2. He returned to the plate and flied out to right, leaving the game scoreless.

Hernandez didn't know the count but he is sure the 104-win Dodgers are better than last year.

"That means we should get to the World Series and we should win it," he said.

There's still much work to be done to bring LA its first title since Kirk Gibson's 1988 Dodgers.

"We only had the best record in baseball and we won the division series," Hernandez said. "Either one doesn't mean anything. We came to spring training thinking about winning the World Series. Nothing has changed yet."

The Dodgers will have to get past the Cubs without All-Star shortstop Corey Seager, who is out with a back injury, although "he says he feels considerably better," Roberts said. "He says he feels "normalish." That's, I think, a good thing to hear."

No one is totally ruling out Seager in the series, although the Dodgers would have to put a player on the DL and the player they put on the DL would not be eligible for the World Series. If Seager tries playing and has to be replaced on the roster because of injury, he'd be ineligible for the World Series. Dodgers president Andrew Friedman, the Rays general manager when Joe Maddon was manager there, is known to be as shrewd as they come tip-toeing around roster maneuvers.

"Did you expect anything different?" Maddon said Sunday, cutting off a question about Seager's updated status.

Asked if he expects the Dodgers to find a way to get him on the roster, Maddon, smiling broadly, said, "We'll just see how that plays out ... We'll see how it all plays out."

Seager's replacement at shortstop, meanwhile, continued to more than hold his own. Charlie Culberson doubled leading off the fifth inning against Jon Lester and scored the Dodgers first run and tying on Justin Turner's single through the right side in the fifth inning. Culberson had a sacrifice fly, double and run scored in the Dodgers' 5-2 win in Game 1.

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Chicago Sun-Times

Cubs reliever Edwards has confidence in himself, team

By Gordon Wittenmyer

LOS ANGELES — Reliever Carl Edwards Jr. sounded as confident and upbeat as anyone in the Cubs' clubhouse after their stunning walk-off loss Sunday night to the Dodgers in Game 2 of the National League Championship Series.

Then again, he might have more cause to feel confident than anyone else in the room after his four-up, four-down performance, which included three strikeouts, in relief of starter Jon Lester.

It preserved the 1-1 standoff into the seventh inning and answered some of the questions about Edwards after he struggled with command in the five-game first-round series against the Nationals.

His confidence level?

"Riding high," he said. "It's a new series, a new start. It's like a new season all over again."

That was before the game.

Afterward: "It's always tough to lose by one," he said. "But as a group, we'll come back.

"We'll be back in Chicago. Our fans will be there. They'll be loud, and we'll have a lot of support and before you know it, this series will be tied."

Talk about confidence.

"We have a lot of confidence," he said.

They'll need a lot more than that. They'll need more relief innings like Edwards' and Pedro Strop's and Brian Duensing's on Sunday.

And fewer of the kind they had in the first round or that John Lackey had in the ninth.

Whether Lackey will have to continue to play a relief role the rest of the series for the Cubs to have a chance shows how rough the bullpen had been pitching heading into the game.

"He can be very valuable," manager Joe Maddon said before the game. "If the other guys are having a moment, Johnny could be very important."

A moment?

The Cubs' 7.08 bullpen ERA through Saturday was one of the worst postseason team relief performances in franchise history. Only three-game efforts in 1932 (9.00) and 1998 (12.79) were worse.

The two struggling the most are two of Maddon's four most-trusted relievers: Mike Montgomery and Edwards.

“They have not been on top of their game, and they’ll be the first two guys to tell you that,” Maddon said. “But we’re not winning eight more games without them. It’s just not going to happen.”

This and that

Maddon was contacted by Major League Baseball discipline czar Joe Torre after he was ejected for his on-field diatribe over the rule on blocking home plate, which wound up giving the Dodgers a run in their 5-2 victory in Game 1 on Saturday. He expected to meet face-to-face with Torre and faces a possible fine.

◆ The Cubs say they identified the former team scout who attempted to auction his World Series ring through Leland’s Auctions, but they won’t disclose his identity. The bidding reached \$65,000 before the ring was pulled from the auction site after the team contacted Leland’s.

◆ Maddon on a growing number of Twitter advocates for rookie Ian Happ starting in place of one of the Cubs’ struggling starters: “The backup quarterback’s always the most popular guy in the building.”

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