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Seeking sweep, LA tabs Darvish for Game 3

By AJ Cassavell

LOS ANGELES -- Forget the nine starts Yu Darvish has already made for Los Angeles. This is the reason the Dodgers' front office went down to the wire at the non-waiver Trade Deadline to acquire him.

Darvish takes the ball opposite Arizona ace Zack Greinke tonight with a chance to deliver a series-clinching victory for the Dodgers in Game 3 of the National League Division Series presented by T-Mobile. L.A. leads 2-0, after a pair of convincing wins at Dodger Stadium.

"Just control what I can," said Darvish, when asked for his approach to his third career playoff start. "Because I worked hard today or do something different today, that doesn't necessarily mean I'm going to throw a 110-mile-an-hour fastball."

There are similarities everywhere between this Dodgers roster and those of the past four postseasons. Darvish, arguably, represents the starkest difference.

"You're building to win 11 games in October," Dodgers manager Dave Roberts said. "So to have that front-line guy to win a playoff game, certainly that's why you acquire a guy like Yu."

Since 2013, Los Angeles has thrown Kenta Maeda, Brett Anderson and Hyun-Jin Ryu (twice) in Game 3 of the NLDS. That trio has combined for an ERA of 9.00 and a 1.80 WHIP. The Dodgers lost each of the last three and only beat Atlanta in 2013 when they put up 13 runs in a slugfest.

Those poor starts forced the hand of Dodgers decision-makers. Clayton Kershaw has started Game 4 on short rest four years in a row, in large part because the club needed it from him.

This year, Roberts is adamant that won't be the case. Darvish's presence is the driving force behind that decision.

Dodgers general manager Farhan Zaidi put it succinctly on July 31 when he landed Darvish from the Rangers for a trio of prospects.

"Having four [starters in October] is better than having three," Zaidi said.

Upon his arrival in Los Angeles, Darvish slumped, posting a 5.34 ERA in his first six outings. Those results were almost beside the point. The Dodgers spent their first month with Darvish tinkering with his arm slot, his delivery and his pitch mix. On Sunday he was asked if there was anything the club didn't want him to change.

"They told me, hey, you should not change your good-looking face," Darvish quipped.
It was a light-hearted joke, sure. But the response was also indicative of just how open Darvish was to those changes.

"When we first got him, he was a guy with a bunch of different toys and didn't really know what to do with them," Roberts said. "So with [pitching coach] Rick [Honeycutt] and the information we've given him, he's found a nice little rhythm."

Darvish came to Los Angeles with a reputation for throwing a half-dozen pitches in virtually all counts. The Dodgers' front office asked him to simplify things, paring down his mix to highlight a couple of go-to offspeed offerings.

"I want to pitch to my strengths," Darvish said. "They gave me information so I [can] pitch basically with my strengths."

Darvish was fully on board with the plan. In starts against the Giants, Phillies and Padres to finish the year, he allowed one earned run on nine hits over 19 1/3 innings. Arizona will present a much greater offensive challenge. But Roberts is convinced Darvish is up for it.

"It starts with his confidence," Roberts said of the recent improvements. "I think he's comfortable now with the guys. I think he's comfortable here in the city of Los Angeles. That's a big deal. You've got to appreciate the cultural [aspect], the family moving, the adjustment, riding to the ballpark and knowing where to go to eat, trying to assimilate with guys on the team too.

"Now, you have to go out there and pitch and meet those expectations that a guy like him has to meet, as a Trade Deadline acquisition. There are a lot of things I know I can't [fully] appreciate. But I know that over the last few starts, he's been very good."

The perfect timing isn't exactly a coincidence.

Bellinger feels right at home at Chase Field

By AJ Cassavell

PHOENIX -- Cody Bellinger is right at home for the most important games of his life.

Or -- if he has it his way -- it'll be the most important game of his life, singular.

A native of nearby Chandler, Dodgers rookie Bellinger is in familiar territory at Chase Field, as L.A. and the D-backs are set for tonight's Game 3 of the National League Division Series presented by T-Mobile. He first played there in a tournament game during his senior year in at Hamilton High.

"The way we're playing right now, it's good to be going there with a 2-0 lead," said Bellinger, who has gotten off to a slow start this series. "I watched the D-backs on TV when I was growing up, so it should be a pretty exciting atmosphere."
Long before Bellinger set the National League rookie home run record with 39 this season, he made his mark locally. He moved to the area in 2005, and two years later propelled Chandler to the Little League World Series, reaching the national semifinals.

Bellinger was a Perfect Game All-American in high school, when he made his Chase Field debut. The lights will be a bit brighter tonight.

"It's definitely good to be going back at this time of year," Bellinger said.

Forgive Bellinger, however, for not being a D-backs fan growing up. His father, Clay, spent five seasons in the Yankees organization.

Clay and the rest of Cody's family attended Games 1 and 2 in Los Angeles. They'll be on hand tonight, as well. After all, Chase Field is only a short drive from Clay's day job as a firefighter in Gilbert.

Perhaps a trip to Arizona is what Bellinger needs to reignite his swing. Through two playoff games, the 22-year-old first baseman is 1-for-10 with six strikeouts.

During Sunday's workout, Bellinger took some cuts against lefty reliever Luis Avilan in live batting practice. Manager Dave Roberts came away impressed.

"It just boils down to Cody trying to stay bullish in the strike zone," said Roberts. "It's not like he's trying to swing at balls out of the strike zone, and that's obvious. He worked on some things today, batting practice was good, took some at-bats off Luis Avilan, and I think he looked good."

Tonight's task comes in the form of D-backs ace Zack Greinke. Bellinger has actually had some success against the veteran right-hander, with a single, a double and a homer in nine at-bats.

"Obviously Zack's very aware of [Bellinger's] aggressiveness outside of the strike zone," Roberts said. "To expect him to challenge him in the strike zone is unrealistic."

Despite the early struggles, Bellinger insists he's taken time to enjoy his first taste of postseason.

"It's been fun, playing in front of 50,000 every night," Bellinger said. "They've got the rally towels going. It's loud, fans are into it. ... I'm expecting the same [in Arizona]. I'm sure they're ready."

Seager, Bellinger grateful for hit guru Wooten

By Ken Gurnick

PHOENIX -- After each at-bat in a Thursday night simulated game, Corey Seager retreated to the Dodgers' dugout to watch an instant replay of his swing on Shawn Wooten's smartphone. With Cody Bellinger 1-for-10 with six strikeouts in the National League Division Series presented by T-Mobile, the likely NL Rookie of the Year surely is working long and hard with Wooten.

So who is this Shawn Wooten and why is he the hit doctor to some of the Dodgers' best young boppers?
Wooten is one of three Dodgers hitting coaches. Yasiel Puig ends every home run trot with a kiss on the cheek of main man Turner Ward, the former D-backs hitting coach who has connected with the Wild Horse in ways no other coach has. Assistant Tim Hyers is lower profile than Ward -- or at least the kisses are more discreet -- as he's assigned most days to the indoor batting cage.

Officially, the 45-year-old Wooten isn't even a big league coach, listed instead as the Triple-A batting coach. But he tends to resurface with the Dodgers whenever the young All-Stars stop hitting like All-Stars. He's been around a lot lately.

Wooten, who as a player spent two full seasons with the Angels and three more bouncing between the Majors and Minors for seven organizations, is the one that reconfigured Bellinger's swing near the end of a rough Spring Training. By the end of April, Bellinger was in the big leagues, where he figures to stay for a decade or so.

"You're talking about two elite players," Wooten said. "These guys are hitter-ish, they understand what their bodies are doing. They know how to play."

Generally, the only time you hear about a hitting coach is when he is fired. Bellinger explained why Wooten succeeds.

"He's gifted at looking at video and noticing a centimeter if your foot is tilting this way or that way," Bellinger said. "That can make a world of difference in your swing. He'll put the videos side by side, and it's just an easier way to learn for the younger generation. He's really good at that, he's very good at explaining what it is, what it's causing and how to fix it."

Seager became a disciple the last month of the 2014 season at Double-A.

"I kind of got to know him a little bit then," he said. "Knew I had some stuff to make adjustments on. And the next Spring Training was a really big Spring Training for me. He made some adjustments and we got to where I thought I needed to be, and ever since then it's been a constant dialogue, constant video sent to him pretty much every night. The relationship has grown over the years."

Through the video, the pair dusted off an old, awkward batting stance with a front-foot toe-in that Seager said helped him out of his September megafunk. Although he made little contact during the Thursday night sim game, he's 3-for-8 with a triple and two RBIs in the NLDS.

"Those simulated games really helped," Seager said. "I wasn't really worried about results. Wasn't really worried about hitting the ball. Was just trying to get in the spots I wanted to be at the right times, and it paid off."

If Wooten doesn't energize Seager's bat for tonight, maybe the sight of Zack Greinke on the mound for Arizona will. In 16 plate appearances, Seager is 6-for-11 with two homers and five walks against Greinke, for a slash line of .545/.688/1.182.
Roberts: Chase pool no part of LA celebration

By Ken Gurnick

PHOENIX -- In news welcomed by the Chase Field security detail, Dodgers manager Dave Roberts said on Sunday that his club would not throw a pool party if it clinched the National League Division Series presented by T-Mobile, as Don Mattingly's Dodgers did in 2013 when they clinched the NL West Division.

"Yeah, that won't happen. That won't happen," said Roberts. "This is a completely different team, and I think we have bigger goals than to jump into a swimming pool."

Roberts said he was certain he didn't even need to warn his club against that type of celebration.

"No, there's no point," he said. "Our guys clearly understand what this team is about, and we have no interest in jumping in a pool in right field."

That wasn't the case in 2013, a year in which bad blood between the two franchises boiled over in a June beanbrawl at Dodger Stadium, triggered when Zack Greinke, then a Dodger and now a D-back, was hit by an Ian Kennedy pitch, the third player hit that game. Suspensions or fines were issued to 12 players and coaches as a result.

When the Dodgers clinched the division against the D-backs in September, many players fitted with goggles made a breakout from the clubhouse and stormed the unique swimming pool. The only current Dodgers that were on that club are Andre Ethier, Clayton Kershaw, Kenley Jansen and Yasiel Puig. D-backs management was reportedly livid over the breach in etiquette and several Arizona players criticized the Dodgers for disrespecting their opponents.

Puig having a blast in postseason

Through two games, Puig has been arguably the Dodgers' top offensive contributor this postseason. If it looks like he's having more fun on the diamond than in past playoff runs -- well, that's because he is. Two postseasons ago, Puig was coming back from a hamstring injury in October and was limited to six at-bats. Last year, he served mostly in a platoon role.

With five hits in nine at-bats this postseason, Puig already has more hits than he did in the Dodgers' last two playoff runs combined. And during the course of his hot streak, he's been as demonstrative as ever. He tripled and wagged his tongue at the Dodgers' dugout in Game 1. Then he bat-flipped an RBI single in Game 2.

Worth noting
• The D-backs held their traditional off-day workout at Chase Field. The Dodgers, however, held a closed workout at Dodger Stadium before flying to Phoenix.

In the Dodgers workout, left-handed reliever Luis Avilan continued his recovery from shoulder inflammation by throwing batting practice. Roberts said Avilan is on track with his recovery to be available for the next round of the postseason if the Dodgers advance.
• Although reliever Brandon Morrow allowed a three-run homer in the seventh inning Saturday night, Roberts still had no misgivings about removing Kenta Maeda in the sixth inning after he retired right-handed hitters A.J. Pollock, Paul Goldschmidt and J.D. Martinez.

"When you’re constructing a postseason roster and trying to account for different parts of the order, different hitters, and he just really makes sense for us," Roberts said of Maeda, who has been primarily a starting pitcher throughout a career in Japan and MLB. "Yesterday he got three big outs for us. To be able to have the off-day to come back against a very good lineup in Arizona to deploy him then, it makes sense."

Maeda was awarded the win by striking out Pollock on three sliders, inducing a groundout from Goldschmidt on a 95-mph 0-1 fastball and striking out Martinez on a 94-mph 1-2 fastball. Roberts noted that Maeda’s velocity is several miles an hour faster pitching out of the bullpen.

Oct. 8 Yu Darvish workout day interview

By MLB.com

Q. If the Dodgers win, that means you’re going to go win the Division Series, but mentally how are you prepared for tomorrow’s outing?

YU DARVISH: I don’t want to think about it too much. I try to take it as a regular outing. Hopefully that I go deep in the game like I normally do and just prepare as much as I can and just be ready to go.

Q. You mentioned to us before that in any kind of situation, any type of game that you try to act like it’s a normal game and take it game by game, but is it something like more pressure this time since you’re here to pitch for the playoffs?

YU DARVISH: My focus is to just control what I can and do what I can do. Just because I worked hard today or do something different today, that doesn’t necessarily mean I’m going to throw a 110-mile-an-hour fastball. It’s not going to change that much.

So just try to take it, like I said before, try to take it as a normal game, same thing tomorrow.

Q. After the start in New York, your first one with the Dodgers, you said that Farhan, the GM, had given you a lot of information about game planning, how to use your pitch arsenal. Dave just mentioned again that they’ve thrown a lot of data at you over the weeks. What have you learned from this process? Has it been really enlightening, stuff that you hadn’t thought of or seen before?

YU DARVISH: I mean, I got information, but I’ve been pitching really well, and right now I’m trying to focus on what I do and not to worry about what they do. So basically I want to pitch to my strengths. Of course they gave me information, so I’m going to pitch basically with my strength. And with that little bit of information that they gave to me, I think I can use it, and I think it’s going to be very helpful for tomorrow’s outing.

Q. Last time you pitched in Arizona you mentioned about the dry weather and the certain pitches move and certain pitches move differently, like cutter, sinker and then slider and two-seam. But how would
you like to apply the experience, pitched here in Arizona before, and then now that you've changed your mechanics and all that stuff going towards tomorrow's outing?

YU DARVISH: Right now I cannot say much about it because you don't know unless you go on the mound and you start throwing it. Like you mentioned, I changed my mechanics and all that, so that may move differently. But, like I said, you never know until you get on the mound and see how you move.

So I want to go out there, and if I see something, I'll make my adjustments.

Q. Since you're pitching in the playoffs, there is probably going to be more nervousness and pressure, you're pitching in the playoffs compared to a regular season outing. But you mentioned changing the mechanics and your pitch selection, the approach has been changed. Do you think that's going to benefit going into the high-intensity game?

YU DARVISH: I think it will benefit me because they haven't seen me pitch like I do now, like the last time we faced them, and then now how I pitch is different. So I think that's going to benefit me. Of course the pitches, like certain pitches were different, and then my approach is different too. So I think that's going to benefit going towards tomorrow.

Q. Since you joined the Dodgers, they've asked you to work on changing your arm slot, the timing in your delivery and your pitch selection. What do they not want you to change?

YU DARVISH: It was especially from Andrew Friedman and Farhan, they told me, like, hey, you should not change your good-looking face.

Oct. 8 Dave Roberts workout day interview

By MLB.com

Q. Welcome back. What can you say about the way your team is hitting the ball right now, the kind of scoring you're able to do?

DAVE ROBERTS: I think the results are good. I think I can speak to the at-bat quality and each time our guys step in the box there is an intent to put forth a quality at-bat and stay in the strike zone.

You know, we're not sluugging, but we're taking walks, we're getting hits when we need to and keeping the line moving, so that's something we expect to do tomorrow as well.

Q. How difficult is that against somebody like Greinke whose location is always the big thing?

DAVE ROBERTS: I think that's the only way you can approach him. If you try to go out there and slug him, you're going to have a tough time. He's just a heck of a pitcher, and works all quadrants. So I think he doesn't make a whole lot of mistakes, but you have to try to get that pitch count up and trust to go deep in the count and take advantage of a potential mistake.

So I think using the big part of the field and just continue to grind him. I think that's the best approach.
Q. A couple years ago the Dodgers clinched one of their division titles here and went for a swim. Didn't go over well with the home team. Is this something that you would discourage if your guys win one of the next two games?

DAVE ROBERTS: Yeah, that won't happen. That won't happen. This is a completely different team, and I think we have bigger goals than to jump into a swimming pool.

Q. And you don't feel the need to even talk about it to them?

DAVE ROBERTS: No, there's no point. Our guys clearly understand what this team is about, and we have no interest in jumping in a pool in right field.

Q. What do you guys need to do to get Cody Bellinger going?

DAVE ROBERTS: I think with Cody it's a little bit mechanics, it's a little bit approach. Obviously Zack's very aware of his aggressiveness outside of the strike zone, and to expect him to challenge him in the strike zone is unrealistic.

So it just boils down to Cody trying to stay bullish in the strike zone. I think it's not like he's trying to swing at balls out of the strike zone, and that's obvious.

But I think that he worked on some things today. Batting practice was good, took some at-bats off Luis Avilan, and I think he looked good in the batter's box.

So hopefully something -- I think he's taken some good swings against Zack in the past and had some good at-bats, so hopefully that carries over.

Q. How have you noticed him adjusting to the postseason environment?

DAVE ROBERTS: From the defensive side, he's really been plus, plus for us. Base running he's been very good. I think just in the box he's a little -- he needs to be a little bit more patient, and I think that he's a little overaggressive.

Q. That last night of the workout you gave an opportunity to some of your veterans to speak to the rest of the team. Do you feel like that kind of impacted the reset and them getting their swagger back and the way that they're swinging and being aggressive in the zone, and just everything that's happened in the first two games? It seems like it resembles the way you guys were going good in the summer.

DAVE ROBERTS: I think so. It's the players' team. It's their team. For those guys to take ownership and voice their opinions to one another, I think it's very important, carries a lot of weight.

I was just basically there to facilitate that. I think it was received well by all the players. I think the message was clear, but it still boils down to playing the game of baseball. I think that we've done some good things on the mound, and defensively I think we've played well, and in the box.

The story has been on the offense, the team offense. So I'm sure that the message kind of bled in a little bit, but our guys have been waiting for this moment all year.
Q. How important do you think those last few starts were for you just to get him back, kind of rolling again, going into October?

DAVE ROBERTS: Huge. Huge. I don’t know exactly, but I think it's those last two, potentially three starts that have been really, really good. And just that comfort, that rhythm that he's in right now, the confidence, and knowing these guys a little bit I think helps him too. So he's in a great place mentally, physically.

Yeah, if he didn't pitch well leading up to tomorrow, I think it would be a different story, I think, in his mind. But he's in a good place.

Q. Since Darvish came over, you guys have asked him to adjust his delivery, adjust his arm slot, adjust his pitch arsenal a little bit. That seems like a lot of changes for an established pitcher. How has he handled it both mentally and physically?

DAVE ROBERTS: I think on both ends he's handled it really well. I think that for him it was more of coming over here and trying to figure out why he can't be consistent. He's a guy that came off surgery a couple years ago, and so to get that consistency back and a lot of the data that we had that we kind of dug into made things pretty clear for us, and to present it to him was very clear.

So I think that buy-in was huge for him and allowed for him -- you look at the small sample of three starts or whatever, but I think progressively it's continued to get better.

Yeah, it’s a lot to take in, but he's just so athletic, he's so intelligent, and he competes. So now you take the information part and you take kind of the biomechanics part and just working on his bullpens and trying to have success in a Major League game, which is tough. But he's been really diligent about trying to figure it out.

I think that he's right -- he's as good as he's been in a long time, and those are his words.

Q. Kenta has been incredible out of the bullpen. Did you see that out of him at the beginning of the year?

DAVE ROBERTS: No, in the beginning of the year we just clearly saw him as a starter. He's certainly a Major League starter. The left-right splits, obviously, he fares much better against right-handed hitting, and that 80- to 85-pitch mark there seems to be a dip in his stuff throughout starts.

Then we had a chance to see him out of the pen, the stuff played up. The velocity ticked up two, three miles an hour. The slider's still sharp. And when you're constructing a postseason roster and trying to account for different parts of the order, different hitters, and he just really makes sense for us.

Yesterday or -- yeah, yesterday he got three big outs for us. To be able to have the off-day to come back against a very good lineup in Arizona to deploy him then, it makes sense.

So, yeah, it's really exciting for us.

Q. Most good teams obviously play well at home, but what is the biggest difference in Arizona's lineup in this ballpark as compared to how they look on the road?
DAVE ROBERTS: Yeah, I mean, the splits are -- I mean, it's sort of the old Rockies kind of thing where the home and road. I know that most players tend to like the comforts of their home, and I understand this is a hitter's ballpark, but the big splits, I really can't put a finger on it. Obviously since J.D. has come over and being able to hit the ball to right centerfield and hit it out of the ballpark I think has really helped those guys.

But, yeah, they're comfortable. They kind swarm you. When momentum starts going their way, they get really aggressive, and they're tough. They can do a lot of things well, and there is no reason -- I mean, it's very clear why they play well at home.

Tomorrow night it's going to be loud, it's going to be exciting, and there is going to be -- they're fighting for their lives.

Q. The other night you said that Darvish is probably the most normal of your starting pitchers. Have you seen anything out of the norm maybe today or in the past few days?

DAVE ROBERTS: As far as his?

Q. For his start tomorrow.

DAVE ROBERTS: As far as his durability?

Q. No, I mean like --

DAVE ROBERTS: The craziness?

Q. Exactly.

DAVE ROBERTS: Oh, geez (laughter). No, I think that just the last couple days he's been very subdued. I think he's just really taking in the moment, taking in, just watching the approach of the hitters, being a good teammate.

So he hasn't done anything crazy. Yu's really focused on pitching well tomorrow night.

Q. You mentioned Luis Avilan pitched today. How is his shoulder progressing, and is he on track for potential next round?

DAVE ROBERTS: He is. He threw 18 to 20 pitches today and he'll throw again on Wednesday. So he's on track. He feels good. The ball was coming out. So when we get to that point, he's definitely will be in the mix.
Dodgers hope to sweep Diamondbacks — but no plans for a pool party

By Andy McCullough

The pool resides beyond the right-field fence at Chase Field, surrounded by deck chairs like an oasis in this desert. Fountains burble fresh streams of chlorinated water. A hot tub sits nearby. The water only goes four feet deep, which would explain the signs ringing the area.

"Danger," the signs read. "No Jumping. Violators Will Be Ejected."

On Monday night, in Game 3 of a National League division series against Arizona, the Dodgers will have a chance to breach stadium policy as they try to finish off a first-round sweep. Four years ago, when the Dodgers clinched the NL West title in the ballpark, the players celebrated by splashing about in the pool, a decision that drew the ire of the Diamondbacks.

As the Dodgers came to town Sunday evening, manager Dave Roberts issued a proclamation about the possibility of a reprise.

"That won't happen," Roberts said. "This is a completely different team. I think we have bigger goals than to jump into a swimming pool. Our guys clearly understand what this is about. We have no interest in jumping into a pool in right field."

For weeks leading up to the playoffs, the Dodgers fixated on the concept of winning 11 postseason games, the necessary number to secure the organization’s first World Series championship since 1988. The first two victories did not come easy, as Arizona hit six home runs at Dodger Stadium, but the Dodgers responded by bullying the Diamondbacks pitching staff for 17 runs in 18 innings.

The performance heartened Roberts and his superiors, who had watched the Dodgers stumble through late August and early September. The first two games of this series felt like a rerun from the summer, when the team ran away with its fifth consecutive division title and created enough cushion to clinch home-field advantage throughout the playoffs.

"We’re doing what we were doing when we were doing really well, being the best team in baseball," outfielder Enrique Hernandez said. "We’re starting rallies, not relying on the long ball."

They intend to deploy a similar strategy Monday against former teammate Zack Greinke. The performance of Greinke in the NL wild-card game last week may have tipped the scales of this series toward the Dodgers.

Because Greinke could not finish the fourth inning against the Colorado Rockies, the Diamondbacks used Robbie Ray as a reliever. Ray threw 34 pitches and became unavailable for Game 1 against the Dodgers, who battered starter Taijuan Walker. Walker lasted only one inning and "may have had an out-of-body experience,” Arizona manager Torey Lovullo said.
A day later, Ray lacked much command and fell victim to the Dodgers' patience. Ray pitched into the fifth inning, but gave up four runs and was credited with the loss. Greinke can atone Monday, but even then, the Dodgers hold a sizable advantage.

"The pressure's on them," closer Kenley Jansen said. "We've just got to keep putting that pressure on them."

Yu Darvish can close out the series. Darvish had a 2.44 earned-run average on the road this season. If the Diamondbacks win, Alex Wood is scheduled to face Arizona left-hander Patrick Corbin in Game 4. The Dodgers remain committed to saving Clayton Kershaw for a potential Game 5, when he would face Ray.

The Dodgers worked out at Dodger Stadium on Sunday before hopping a late-afternoon flight to Phoenix. There was little reason to get reacquainted with Chase Field, where the Dodgers played nine times this season. That experience offers some insight into why Arizona can be so dynamic at home.

The Diamondbacks ranked second in the major leagues with an .842 on-base-plus-slugging percentage. Only Colorado, who plays in the thin air of Denver's Coors Field, posted better numbers at home. If the Dodgers can counteract that in the next two games, they will draw closer to their goal of 11 victories — and put the concept of a pool party in the rearview mirror.

Roberts acknowledged the task would not be easy, not in Chase Field.

"They swarm you," Roberts said. "When momentum starts going their way, they get really aggressive. They're tough. They can do a lot of things. It's very clear why they play well at home.

"Tomorrow night, it's going to be loud. It's going to be exciting. They're fighting for their lives."

**Zack Greinke eyes third elimination-game start against Dodgers**

By Pedro Moura

Arizona right-hander Zack Greinke will take the Chase Field mound Monday for the third elimination-game start of his major league career.

The first, he made as a Dodger, in Game 5 of the 2015 National League Division Series, a loss to the New York Mets. The second was Wednesday, in the National League wild-card game. He later admitted he was nervous.

"But, I felt it helped, if anything," Greinke said. "As long as you're not, like, overly nervous, it just gets you locked, like you're more focused and more locked in sometimes, and that's how I felt last game."

Ignoring feelings, he did not pitch well. He surrendered six hits and four runs in 3 2/3 innings, a failed fourth inning forcing the Diamondbacks to empty their bullpen and hamper their chances in the next round. In recalling the events of that inning, Greinke felt he had mostly executed as intended. Only the results were off.
That would be insufficient Monday. From the first two games of this NLDS, as the Dodgers pounded his teammates for 24 hits and 17 runs, Greinke gleaned that his Game 3 opponents are collectively unwilling to chase.

The statistics bear that out. In the regular season, the Dodgers swung at only 26% of pitches outside the strike zone, the lowest rate in the major leagues. That's a 15% improvement from their chase rate in 2014, Greinke's penultimate year as a Dodger.

"It's an ideal way of hitting," he said Sunday at Chase Field. "You just look for a pitch to hit. If you get it, you hit it as hard as you can. If it's not a pitch to hit, they take it.

"I mean, it's pretty simple, but it's harder to do than it sounds like."

He said it would be "kind of silly" to explain his game plan to combat the Dodgers' patience. The Dodgers were more forthcoming. They have not hit for much power in this series, and their stated plan against Greinke is to continue to amass singles.

"I think that's the only way you can approach him," manager Dave Roberts said. "If you try to go up there and slug him, you're gonna have a tough time."

The Dodgers' Game 3 starter, Yu Darvish, has made one elimination-game start in the majors, in the 2012 American League wild-card game. He took the loss, and his limited playoff record has not improved since. In his only other start, he allowed four home runs in another loss.

So it will be Greinke against Darvish, two of the sport's most talented pitchers, yet two who have not yet produced in the postseason. Darvish said he is trying not to think about what a Dodgers win would mean. Greinke is embracing the nerves.

"I know he loves challenges like this," Diamondbacks manager Torey Lovullo said of Greinke. "Nobody prepares better. Nobody is going to work more to make sure that on that day when he takes the mound that he's going to be comfortable, confident and ready.

"So, if you've got to pick one guy to stop this situation that we're in, I think we've found the right guy in Zack Greinke."

In his often-awkward fashion, Greinke declined to comment when asked what Lovullo's support meant to him.

"First I've heard of it," Greinke said. "So, I haven't had time to think about any of it. It's tough for me to answer something off the top of my head ... without giving it some thought."

Short hops
Lovullo said he sensed no nerves from his players during a clubhouse walk-through Sunday afternoon. He also said he had not had in-depth conversations with some of those players, notably Taijuan Walker, the 25-year-old right-hander who needed 48 pitches to finish his one and only inning in the Diamondbacks' Game 1 loss at Dodger Stadium. “He may have had an out-of-body experience,” Lovullo said. “But I haven't had a chance to talk to him about it.” ... Monday's Game 3 will start at 7:08 p.m., and the Chase Field roof will be open, the Diamondbacks say. If there is a fourth game, it will start at 6:08
p.m. Tuesday. A potential fifth game at Dodger Stadium could be played at 5 or 6 p.m. Thursday, depending on whether the Washington Nationals and Chicago Cubs are also playing a fifth game in their NLDS.

OC REGISTER

Dave Roberts doesn’t expect his team to make a splash at Chase Field this week

By Bill Plunkett

PHOENIX – Everybody out of the pool.

Four years ago the Dodgers clinched the first of their five consecutive NL West titles at Chase Field. After celebrating in the visitors’ clubhouse for awhile, a group of Dodgers took the party onto the field, over the right-field fence and into the pool there. Photos and video caught several Dodgers frolicking in the pool.

The pool party did not go over well with the home team. The Diamondbacks found it disrespectful and let their feelings be known.

With a victory in one of the next two NL Division Series games at Chase Field, the Dodgers could have reason to celebrate here again. If they do, there will be no cannonballs involved, Dodgers manager Dave Roberts said.

“Yeah, that won’t happen,” he said Sunday after arriving at Chase Field. “That won’t happen. This is a completely different team and I think we have bigger goals than to jump into a swimming pool.”

Four players from that 2013 team are on the Dodgers’ active roster for this NLDS — Yasiel Puig, Andre Ethier, Clayton Kershaw and Kenley Jansen. But the team’s personality has changed drastically from the former group which revolved around since-discarded stars Hanley Ramirez and Matt Kemp.

Roberts said he has not said anything to this year’s team about how to celebrate if they advance from the NLDS with a victory in Arizona.

“No. There’s no point,” he said. “Our guys clearly understand what this team is about and we have no interest in jumping in a pool in right field.”
Roberts' return to L.A. "was meant to be"

By Steve Wulf

"All men are created equal", in one sense, but all men have different characteristics and qualities. The good leader knows how to handle each individual player. -- The Dodger Way To Play Baseball, 1954, by Al Campanis.

Here and now seems like a good time and place to look back on how Dave "Doc" Roberts came to be the manager of a storied franchise in the midst of an epic season.

Here is the Roberto Clemente Bridge in Pittsburgh, and now, Aug. 22, a sudden downpour is soaking Roberts' walk to the ballpark and driving the autograph-seekers away.

It's fitting. Roberts is the skipper of the Dodgers, and Clemente started his pro career with their farm club in Montreal in 1954, the same year that Brooklyn player personnel director Al Campanis put "The Dodger Way" into book form.

The bridge crosses the Allegheny River, which passes through New York State just below Jamestown, which is where Roberts got his professional start in 1994.

"We were a Detroit farm team," he says, "but that's where I first learned the Dodger Way. Our manager was Dave Anderson, the former Dodger shortstop. God, I loved that year. I found out I could actually play professional baseball."

As for the drenching, well, what's a little rain when you've defied the odds, the doubters, cancer, subtle prejudice and the vicissitudes of baseball. The Dodgers came into Pittsburgh riding the best 64-game stretch in franchise history, and surely they will win their fifth straight NL West title. But no team can stay this hot.

The Dodgers have been winning because of time-honored fundamentals, hard work and a team-first mentality, but also because of a cutting edge emphasis on analytics, video study and clubhouse dynamics -- a blend of the old school with the new age. They're not afraid to look to the fresh faces at the top of the order -- Chris Taylor, Corey Seager and Cody Bellinger -- and they appreciate the value of veterans such as Justin Turner, Chase Utley, Adrian Gonzalez and Rich Hill.

Bridging the generation gap is a 45-year-old father of two who is married to his high school sweetheart, a history major at the alma mater of Jackie Robinson, a small but speedy outfielder who came up memorably big for another storied franchise 13 years ago, a part-time vintner (Red Stitch Wines) and full-time inspiration, as well as the first minority (Japanese-African-American) manager for the team that fielded the first black player exactly 70 years ago. Yeah, all the same guy.

And if Roberts is a little tired after the marathon start to a four-game series the night before -- 4 hours, 35 minutes of baseball and a couple of postgame hours spent at a wine bar with Dodgers owner Mark Walter -- he's not showing it. "It's a grind. But it's a grind that I love. Plus, we found out a little bit more about ourselves last night."
But there's another reason the previous night's win means a little bit extra to Roberts.

"Last night would've been my dad's 69th birthday."

Win or lose, Roberts is there for his players -- but he enjoys the wins more. AP Photo/John Bazemore

Be daring! Be aggressive in your attack! Take chances! -- The Dodger Way

The rain has stopped now, and Roberts is drip-drying himself on some stationary seats in the plaza outside PNC Park.

"You know what I love about being a Dodger? The family thing. Even though the O'Malleys don't own the team any more, there's still this sense of being part of a large family. So I do miss not sharing this season with my father."

Waymon Roberts passed away on March 17, two weeks shy of Opening Day. A retired master gunnery sergeant in the Marines, he followed the Dodgers religiously. "We didn't talk every day, but I knew he was watching. There's been so much this season that I could have told him about."

There was the April call-up of rookie Cody Bellinger that jump-started the offense. There was the scuffle in San Diego on June 30, when Roberts shoved Padres manager Andy Green as the umpires tried to separate them. "Hey, I was out there defending my guys. My father would've approved."

Roberts especially missed having his father around July 6 at Dodger Stadium. That was Dave Roberts Bobblehead Night -- 13 years after the first Dave Roberts Bobblehead Day at Dodger Stadium had to be cancelled because he had just been traded to the Boston Red Sox.

But that July evening wasn't just about the figurine. Singing the national anthem was his daughter, 12-year-old Emme Roberts, and throwing out the first ball was his son, 15-year-old Cole. As his wife Tricia recalls, "The Dodgers' front office was at Waymon's funeral and heard Emme sing there -- all day long I kept thinking that my father-in-law would have gotten such a kick out of her getting 'discovered' at his funeral."

Well, Emme nailed it with a soaring "land of the free" as Dave beamed and raised his arms in celebration. Then the right-handed Cole, who has baseball dreams of his own, went out to the mound and threw a perfect strike to his left-handed father/catcher. As for the game itself, the Dodgers staged a four-run rally in the ninth to beat the Diamondbacks 5-4 and take a 5½-game lead in the NL West. "It was a perfect day," Roberts said afterward.

Watching the proceedings was Dave's mother Eiko. "This season has been a real blessing for all of us, but especially for my mom," Roberts says. "She says she doesn't know what she'd do if it weren't for the Dodgers."

Eiko and Waymon Roberts met when he was stationed in Japan -- Naha, Okinawa, to be precise. That's where Dave was born in 1972. Their family of four, including Dave and his sister Melissa, went base to base -- California, Hawaii, North Carolina, back to Japan -- until they settled in San Diego when Dave was 12.
Just a few minutes with Roberts is all you need to know he was raised well. He is friendly, communicative and considerate. He's about you as much as he is about himself.

"He's probably the best human being I've ever met," says his friend and reserve first baseman Adrian Gonzalez.

Or, as Rich Aurilia, his former Giant teammate and current partner in Red Stitch Wines, says, "If you don't like Dave Roberts, you'd better go look in the mirror."

Growing up in a military family taught him manners and discipline; living in an interracial household broadened his worldview. And his parents encouraged him to make his own choices.

Roberts made two important ones at Rancho Buena Vista High. That's where he started courting Tricia. "I used to waitress at a restaurant," she says, "and Dave would come in to eat so that we could spend some time together. He'd save his money so that he could leave me a big tip."

And because Dave was also an option quarterback, a point guard and an outfielder in San Diego's very competitive sports environment, he had to choose a sport after college. Even though the Air Force Academy recruited him to be their QB, baseball won out. He opted to go to UCLA as a recruited walk-on despite other scholarship offers.

"I often think of how that one epiphany led me to where I am today," a fully dried Roberts is now saying in his office. "I go to UCLA because Jackie Robinson went there. I end up playing for the Dodgers, the team that opened the door not only to him and other African-Americans, but to Japanese players, as well. I learn how to steal bases from Maury Wills, and now I'm wearing his No. 30, talking baseball with Sandy Koufax and trying to bring the first World Series trophy to Dodger Stadium since 1988.

"I guess that you could say that it was meant to be."

Confidence tides players through adversity. -- The Dodger Way

It hasn't all come easy for Dave Roberts.

After three years as a starter at UCLA, he ended his career as the school's all-time leader in stolen bases and signed with the Tigers, who drafted him in the less-than-glamorous 28th round after his senior year. They sent him to Jamestown to play for Anderson. "That was my first year as a manager," says Anderson, who's now an infield instructor in the Orioles' system. "I pretty much had to rely on everything the Dodgers had taught me.

"And all of it had come out of that Al Campanis book that Tommy Lasorda preached from. Not only how to play -- how you had to take on 3-0, how you had to lay down a bunt -- but also how to dress for BP and how to represent the team.

"My main job with Dave was to turn him into a major league outfielder. He didn't need much help on offense, but he couldn't throw very well, so we spent a lot of that summer long-tossing.

"Even then, he had great people skills. The other players gravitated toward him. There was one time, though, that I had to fine him. I caught him eating on the bench during a game. That was not the the
Dodger Way. I felt bad about it, though. 'Dave,' I told him, 'the other guys look up to you. You have to set an example.'"

It was in those early years in the Tigers' farm system that Roberts acquired the nickname Doc. The reason had nothing to do with his mental acumen, though he did have that. It was just an offshoot of his initials: DR. And that led to Hit Doctor, which was shortened to Doc.

He made the 1995 Florida State League All-Star team playing for Anderson at Class A Lakeland, but the next season, the Tigers sent him to another Class A team, the Visalia Oaks, a co-op team in the California League for marginal prospects. He thought about quitting.

Fortunately, Waymon convinced him to stick with it. "My dad said, 'Keep trying to play.' The main reason I decided to continue was because I was going to be close to home... I stole a bunch of bases and got to Double-A. That was a pivotal year for me."

But the Tigers still didn't consider him much of a prospect. They made him an afterthought in a 1998 midseason trade that sent pitcher Tim Worrell to the Indians for outfielder Geronimo Berroa.

Over the next three seasons, the Indians would occasionally call him up from Triple-A Buffalo for his legs, but they never saw him as more than a fifth outfielder. He did get the opportunity, though, to play for Charlie Manuel, who played for Walter Alston, who began managing the Dodgers in 1954.

By the time the millennium arrived, the Dodgers had fallen on hard times. Lasorda was gone, and so was Campanis, who had resigned as GM in '87 after suggesting on ABC's Nightline that the reason there were no black managers was because "they may not have some of the necessities.". There was one area, though, in which the Dodgers were always good: scouting players. They lost Clemente back in '54 not because they underestimated him, but because of a loophole in the rules governing what were then called "bonus babies," and because Branch Rickey had moved to the Pirates and taken some of the Dodger scouts with him.

That was a big loss for the Dodgers. But 47 years later, around Christmas 2001, they made a steal of their own by acquiring another 175-pound outfielder for two pitchers who would never make the majors: Christian Bridenbaugh and Nial Hughes.

That's how Dave Roberts first became a Dodger.

The steal of any base is dependent upon a good lead, a quick start and a good slide. -- The Dodger Way

At the invitation of a visitor, Roberts is leafing through the 2003 Baseball Preview Issue of ESPN The Magazine. On page 74 is a photo act entitled "Let There Be Light" about players who suddenly came to light in 2002 after years in the shadows. There's Raul Ibanez, Joey Eischen, Mark Bellhorn -- and Dave Roberts.

When Roberts gets to his portrait, he laughs and says," Look how young I am. Wait 'til I show this to Cole."

At the time, Roberts was coming off a year in which he hit .277 with 45 stolen bases to help the Dodgers win a surprising 92 games under manager Jim Tracy. Next to the artful photo is a blurb written by Ed
McGregor: "Roberts, who studied history at UCLA, learned how the past impacts the present when he met his doppelganger in Dodgers legend Maury Wills. 'He taught me a little guy can dominate a game, even with no homers.'"

After eight years trying to make the majors, the 29-year-old Roberts had made a name for himself. He became such a fan favorite in Los Angeles that the Dodgers had him on their bobblehead schedule for 2004. As of July 31 that year, he had stolen 33 of 34 bases.

Tricia was eight months pregnant with Emme. But just as the 1 p.m. PT trading deadline had passed, Roberts got a call. In one of a string of moves, general manager Paul DePodesta traded him to the Red Sox for an outfield prospect named Henri Stanley.

Roberts flew to Tampa to join the team there, and Tricia packed up their houses in Los Angeles and San Diego. "I had to do it in three days," she says. "Otherwise, the doctor wouldn't let me travel and have the baby in Boston. In the end, it was probably the best thing that could have happened to us, but at the time, it felt like the worst."

Both the Dodgers and Red Sox made the playoffs that year. The Sox, however, made history.

Cut to the bottom of the ninth inning of Game 4 of the 2004 American League Championship Series, Fenway Park. The Red Sox are about to be swept by the Yankees, because they're trailing 4-3 in the game, and the great closer Mariano Rivera is on the mound. But he walks Kevin Millar on five pitches to lead off the inning, and Red Sox manager Terry Francona turns to Roberts, winks and says, "You know what to do."

Looking back on the moment, Roberts has said, "Wills once told me that there will come a point in my career when everyone in the ballpark will know that I have to steal a base, and I will steal that base. When I got out there, I knew that was what Maury Wills was talking about."

Take a look again.

Roberts, who had been studying Rivera on video, is tested by three pickoff attempts. He resumes a crooked-leg lead of 3½ steps, then gets a great jump on Rivera's first pitch to left-handed hitter Bill Mueller. Catcher Jorge Posada quickly rifles the ball to shortstop Derek Jeter, who puts down a beautiful swipe tag as Roberts slides head-first into the MLB logo on the side of the bag. Second-base umpire Joe West waves Roberts safe.

Doc pumps his fist, and then, on a 1-1 pitch, Mueller singles to center field, and Roberts races home with the tying run. Three innings later, David Ortiz homers -- and the Red Sox go on to win the series and their first World Series since 1918.

Roberts made only one more appearance in that series, and none in the World Series. When the season was over, the Red Sox traded him to the Padres. He played for Bruce Bochy in San Diego for two years before following the manager to San Francisco, where he played out his improbable 10-year major league career. It was there that he befriended Aurilia.

"He actually didn't think I liked him because I never said anything to him when he stood on second base when he was with the Dodgers," Aurilia says. "But once we started playing together, I found him to be
the nicest guy in the world, and we became close friends. We were also wine connoisseurs, so together with another friend, John Micek, and our wives, we teamed up with winemaker Rolando Herrera and started the Red Stitch label."

The winery's products -- pinot noirs, a cabernet sauvignon and a chardonnay -- are all distinctive. Esther Mobley of the San Francisco Chronicle calls them "wines for the box seats, not the bleachers."

Aurilia, who does the Giants pregame and postgame shows for CSN Bay Area, hopes they'll be served in another place. "The Dodger clubhouse at the end of October would be nice."

"We hired him because he was the best man for the job," GM Farhan Zaidi says. AP Photo/Nick Ut

"Getting back into baseball saved my life," says the manager. "Literally."

Roberts was so personable, and such a folk hero in Boston, that when he finally called it quits after the '08 season, he was hired by NESN to do their Red Sox pregame and postgame shows. He liked it, and he was good at it, but ... "I missed the uniform. I missed being a member of the team."

Fortunately, baseball is a small world sewn together by interpersonal relationships -- like the 108 double red stitches that keep the two pieces of cowhide on a baseball together. When Dave Roberts reported to the Buffalo Bisons back in '98, their pitching coach was Buddy Black.

Twelve years later, Black was starting his fourth season as manager of the Padres. He asked Roberts to join the Padres as a special assistant to coach baserunning, outfield defense and bunting.

And that job led to Roberts getting a physical at the Padres' spring training camp in Peoria, a routine that proved fateful. Tests showed that Roberts had Hodgkin's lymphoma. "Stage 2," he says. "But the good thing about it is that it's treatable if you go after it."

At the time, the Roberts family was sharing spring quarters with the families of two friends, Padres first baseman Adrian Gonzalez and pitcher Chris Young. "We had this big old mansion house," Gonzalez recalls. "Spring training is supposed to be a happy time, but suddenly life hit us hard. Doc gets his cancer diagnosis. Betsy and I were trying to have a baby and found out our efforts hadn't worked. Chris came down with a sore arm.

"Despite all that, I look back now on that spring and realize how important it was that we were all there for each other. You can get through adversity when other people care about you."

Roberts spent the summer juggling his new responsibilities with his chemo and radiation treatments. He lost his hair but not his heart. "He carried himself with great dignity throughout that whole ordeal," says Black, now the Rockies manager.

The Gonzalezes now have two daughters. After several lost seasons, Young won the 2014 AL Comeback Player of the Year with the Mariners and got a World Series ring with the 2015 Royals.
After six months of treatments, Roberts was given a clean bill of health. He was also given new responsibilities by Black: first-base coach for three seasons and then bench coach. "He was a natural," Black says. "I relied on him for his intelligence, his friendship, his leadership.

"I remember one time, one of our players stole a base in a game in which we already had a big lead. It just wasn't appropriate, and I got hot. Dave turned to me and said, 'I got this,' and he did. You knew he was going to be a manager one day."

One day is all the Padres gave him. They fired Black on June 15, 2015, let Roberts manage in his stead for a single game (a 9-1 loss to Oakland), and then named Pat Murphy the manager for the rest of the season. At the end of the 2015 season, the club chose to hire Diamondbacks third-base coach Andy Green as the new manager.

Two weeks earlier, the Dodgers and their manager, Don Mattingly, agreed to part ways after five seasons and three straight first-place finishes. Mattingly was old school, the front office was new school, and it was time to move on. They had a few candidates for the job, but Gabe Kapler, their director of player development, was considered the front-runner.

When three managerial openings were filled by white males on a single day, Oct. 29, leaving only the one vacancy at Dodger Stadium and no African-American managers anywhere else, it was hard not to draw conclusions. But then the Washington Nationals decided to go with Dusty Baker after their deal with Bud Black fell through. And Dodgers general manager Farhan Zaidi talked with Seattle GM Jerry Dipoto about the candidate who lost out to Scott Servais for the manager job there: Dave Roberts.

"Jerry had great things to say about Dave," Zaidi says. "But it was a lot more than his recommendation. We were looking for someone who could fit into our culture, who could manage a game and a clubhouse, who could keep an open mind and think on his feet."

"I was a little nervous," Roberts says. "I mean, I'm being interviewed to be the manager of the Dodgers. Tricia told me, 'Just be yourself. You'll be fine.'"

"Our interview process is actually fairly grueling," says the MIT-educated Zaidi, who came over to the Dodgers in 2015 after 10 years in the A's front office. "We brought him in to meet with various groups over the course of a few weeks, asked him about analytics, presented him with different scenarios, even took him through some game video situations.

"In every session, I noticed the same, funny thing. I would look around at the other people in the room while Dave was talking, and they were all nodding their heads."

It also helped that some of the veterans had quietly gone to management to endorse Roberts. They knew his character from having played with and against him. They now wanted to play for him.

On Nov. 23, 2015, Dave Roberts was named the 28th manager of the Dodgers, and the first minority manager in franchise history. "I'm very proud of that fact," Roberts says. "But I also don't think that's why I was chosen."

Says Zaidi, "We hired him because he was the best man for the job."
Teachers, coaches and managers, TAKE NOTHING FOR GRANTED. -- The Dodger Way.

It's Roberts' clubhouse now.

But he did weather a small crisis early in his first season. After a crushing 3-2 loss in San Francisco on a 10th-inning homer by Brandon Crawford on April 8, he hosted an impromptu postgame symposium with the veterans that delayed the team bus for 90 minutes. The next night, they turned the tide with a 3-2 victory in 10 innings.

He went on to win Manager of the Year honors by embracing both the old Dodger way of using players in multiple roles -- Campanis called it "coconut snatching" -- and a new-age use of the bullpen. In fact, Roberts set a major league record for pitching changes in a season with 606.

In the National League Division Series against the Nationals, he used six different pitchers to wangle a 4-3 win in Game 5 -- Clayton Kershaw got the save. In the NL Championship Series, the Dodgers ran into the Cubs -- and destiny. Even in defeat, Roberts left on a graceful note by embracing Joe Maddon in a Wrigley hallway after Game 6.

When the Dodgers arrived for spring training this year, Roberts greeted them with a reminder that they had work to do: T-shirts that read Grit To Great.

He has made sure to speak to each and every player on the roster every day. If you want to know just how invested he is in the team, take a look at this video after a game on July 30 at Dodger Stadium when catcher Kyle Farmer hit a two-run game-winning double in his major league debut to beat the Giants 3-2 in the 11th.

"He brings such energy and passion to the game," says third baseman Justin Turner. "It's like having a teammate for a manager, and a manager for a teammate. He'll hold you accountable, but he'll also fight for you."

The clubhouse is very much a reflection of Roberts' character. His diligence is embodied by the players poring over game videos on their laptops. The roster is as diverse as he is -- it includes Kenta Maeda and Yu Darvish (Japan), Hyun-Jin Ryu (South Korea), Kenley Jansen (Curacao), Yasiel Puig (Cuba) and Austin Barnes (2011 Jamestown Jammers). And Roberts' refusal to quit is echoed in the stories of the late-blooming Turner, the overlooked Taylor, the cast-off Rich Hill ...

"I can't tell you how happy I am to be here," Curtis Granderson says. "Nothing against the Mets, but I was ecstatic when I found out I had the chance to play in the postseason for Dave Roberts. He made me feel at home right away."

There is one misconception about Roberts that he himself would like to correct. "I'm not that nice. I like to think I have a little bit of an edge. I'm nice until you cross me. I do not like to lose."

In the second game of the August Pirates series, the Dodgers had an 8-5 lead in the ninth, not to mention a 20½-game lead in the standings, when Roberts decided to bring in Jansen to shut the door -- which he did by striking out the side.
When an outside writer asked him after the game about the wisdom of such a move, Roberts politely explained his reasoning -- his bullpen was taxed and Jansen is, after all, his closer.

Then, after the writer left, Roberts looked at the beat reporters and said, "What the hell was that question?"

The next night, the crowd of 19,859, as well as the people in the press box and both dugouts, sat mesmerized as Hill skillfully worked his way through the Pirate order. He lost a perfect game on an error in the ninth, but he still had a no-hitter as the 0-0 game went into extra innings. Roberts decided to leave him in because his pitch count was still low and a fairy tale was within reach.

But then Josh Harrison led off the 10th with a home run just over the leaping Granderson in left. Everyone in the park was still in a state of disbelief as Hill walked off the field and into the dugout. There was Roberts waiting for him at the bottom of the steps, to tell him how proud he was of him.

"That's my job," he said later. "To be there for them."

The next afternoon, on getaway day, the Dodgers beat the Pirates 5-2. Granderson got things started with a solo blast beyond right field that plopped into the Allegheny, downriver from the Clemente Bridge. It seemed kind of fitting since Granderson was the 2016 winner of baseball's Roberto Clemente Award.

Our doubts are traitors, and make us lose the good we oft might win by fearing to attempt. -- The Dodger Way, quoting from William Shakespeare's "Measure for Measure."

Rivers take all sorts or twists and turns, and they tend to pick up momentum. Just as the Allegheny becomes the Ohio, which becomes the Mississippi, there was no stopping the flow of Dodger losses in September.

After returning home from Pittsburgh, the Dodgers won the opener of a series with the Brewers, then proceeded to drop 16 of their next 17 games -- their worst 17-game stretch since 1944, when Campanis was a chief petty officer in the Navy.

As the streak grew longer, the anxiety built, and the Los Angeles Times had to ask, "How Did The Dodgers Go From Possibly The Best Of All Time To, Right Now, The Worst Team In The Majors?" But Roberts remained calm -- too calm, thought some of the faithful. Say something. Do something. Throw something.

First-base coach George Lombard, who has known Roberts since their minor league days, says, "That would not have been Doc. Look, it wasn't his fault we were losing. And it wasn't as if the players weren't trying hard. Trying too hard is more like it. What good would it have done if he had yelled?"

Even Tricia was amazed at his positive calm. "I kept waiting for him to waver," she says, "but he never did. Being down or negative is not who he is as a person. It's one of the things I admire most about him."

That, too, is the Dodger Way. Back in 1954, Campanis wrote, "It is a Dodger policy not to criticize a player on the day that a game is lost." (And besides, the Dodgers were still comfortably in front despite the bad stretch and headed toward 100 victories.)
So Roberts smiled as the team tried a variety of slump-busters: Darvish threw salt in the dugout, and the clubhouse attendants took the places of the bat boys. As a former member of the Indians, Roberts welcomed the presence of Jobu, the voodoo doll from "Major League," in the bat rack.

After they finally snapped the 11-game losing streak with a 5-3 victory over the host Giants on Sept. 12, Aurilia texted Roberts: "That's over. Now start playing like it's the postseason." Doc texted back: "Good advice, buddy."

The Dodgers then went on a four-game winning streak that included taking the first two games of their three-game set in Washington -- a possible precursor to an NLCS matchup.

A week later, back at home on Sept. 22, the Dodgers celebrated Tommy Lasorda's 90th birthday before the game, and then went out and beat the Giants 4-2 to clinch the NL West title. But not before Tricia won a race of her own: "Emme's 13th birthday party finished in San Diego at 8:30 p.m., and we jumped in the car and made it to L.A. in time for the celebration. It was funny how that night went from 12 girls in poodle skirts for a 1950s party to Emme hopping around in the clubhouse, covered in champagne."

Also in the middle of the celebration, wearing protective goggles, was Lasorda, who played with Jackie Robinson in '54 and managed the franchise to its last World Series in '88. Asked if this might be the year, he said, "I feel like that every year."

Lasorda and Roberts know better. For all the talk of destiny, there's no sense in getting carried away. "We have a lot of work to do," Roberts said afterward. "This is only the beginning."

But if they do go all the way, they can take pride that they did it the Dodger Way.

They kept it in the family.

**J.D. Martinez vs. Yu Darvish showdown should determine true trade deadline winner**

By Bradford Doolittle

PHOENIX -- During the course of Monday's National League Division Series Game 3 between the Los Angeles Dodgers and Arizona Diamondbacks, there will be a batter-pitcher matchup that signifies a little more than you might think.

During the bottom of the first or the second, Diamondbacks slugger J.D. Martinez will step to the plate at Chase Field against Dodgers right-hander Yu Darvish. They've squared off against each other for their current teams before. On Aug. 10, Martinez homered off Darvish during an 8-6 L.A. win in Phoenix.

Before that, Martinez had done nothing against Darvish, having managed a lone single in 10 at-bats and striking out six times. Martinez had three at-bats against Darvish on May 21, striking out twice and flying out to the wall in center. Martinez played for the Detroit Tigers then, while Darvish was toiling for the Texas Rangers.
It's funny how things criss-cross and intersect over the course of the long baseball season. The Tigers and Rangers both ended up as sellers at the deadline, though with the Rangers hanging in the American League wild-card race until late in the season, maybe they shouldn't have been.

The Tigers dealt Martinez to Arizona on July 18 for prospects Dawel Lugo, Jose King and Sergio Alcantara. The deal puzzled analysts, including ESPN's Keith Law, who had ranked the Diamondbacks' system last in his organizational ratings over the winter. While many were critical of the Tigers' haul for Martinez, especially because it came nearly two weeks before the trade deadline, it was reflective of one thing: There wasn't a great in-season market for rental position players.

"We had isolated out a number of players that we were going to go scout and do work on," Diamondback GM Mike Hazen said last week. "It came together over the course of about a week with Detroit. We set the lineup up how we had envisioned. I think he's protected [Paul Goldschmidt] quite a bit."

Meanwhile, the Dodgers landed Darvish very near the non-waiver trade deadline at the end of July. The prospects going to Texas were more alluring: Willie Calhoun, A.J. Alexy and Brendon Davis. Calhoun went on to hit .310/.345/.566 for Texas' Triple-A affiliate and finished the season in the major leagues.

These two deals were microcosms of what seems to always be the case of what we see around the deadline, which is that teams are just more aggressive when it comes to adding pitching. The question here when you look at what Martinez did for the Diamondbacks: Are we getting the trade deadline wrong?

Granted, what Martinez did was so off the charts, no team can reasonably expect his kind of impact from a deadline deal. Martinez hit 29 homers and posted a ridiculous 1.107 OPS in 62 games for the Diamondbacks, posting 2.6 WAR after the trade. Still, he had an OPS over 1.000 for Detroit too, and in hindsight, it's amazing that teams weren't blowing up Detroit GM Al Avila's phone.

"He's had a phenomenal run with us, and we're happy he's here," Hazen said. "He's definitely added a different element both for right-handed and left-handed pitching."

As for Darvish, his time in Los Angeles has gone well. He went 4-3 with a 3.44 ERA after his trade, though he spent time on the DL with back trouble. And his trend line is pointing up. Darvish has allowed just one earned run over his past 19⅓ innings entering the postseason.

Darvish's uptick may be another case of the Dodgers helping a veteran player improve on the fly. After a stretch in which Darvish struggled -- back-to-back games when he gave up five runs and failed to reach the fifth -- he began to see results from new tweaks to pitch sequences, arm slots and delivery -- all based on advice from his new team.

"When we first got him, he was a guy with a bunch of different toys and didn't really know what to do with them," Dodgers manager Dave Roberts said. "So with [pitching coach Rick Honeycutt] and the information that we've given him, I think that he's found a nice little rhythm, and how to attack guys. It starts with his confidence. I think he's comfortable now with the guys."
Still, at the bottom line, Darvish put up 0.6 WAR as a Dodger, a full two wins shy of what Arizona got from Martinez. That's not to say definitely that Arizona won the deadline in comparison to their arch rival. In many ways, that will be determined Monday.

For one thing, the respective aims of the teams were different. The Diamondbacks got Martinez to plug a hole and aid their push for inclusion in a playoff derby the Dodgers already knew they would be a part of. Darvish was brought in for October. The final evaluation on him begins in earnest on Monday.

"In talks with our guys and knowing baseball and building to win 11 games in October," Roberts said. "To have that front-line guy to win a playoff game, certainly that's why you acquire a guy like Yu."

Don't tell that to Darvish. When asked Sunday about his thoughts on the gravity of Monday's game, he said, "I don't want to think about it too much. I try to take it as a regular outing. Hopefully that I go deep in the game like I normally do and just prepare as much as I can and just be ready to go."

When we get to the offseason and do our forensic review of the season just completed, it may be time to rethink how teams approach in-season acquisitions. After all, a run is a run is a run, whether you give it up or allow it. Most good teams have good players across the roster and, unless they are trying to patch a major hole opened up by an injury, a lot of these upgrades are more marginal than we like to admit.

Perhaps instead of overpaying for every free-agent-pitcher-to-be on the market, teams needs to be more open-minded about simply targeting the best players available, with obvious exceptions where a player wouldn't have a lineup spot on the new team.

Hazen was certainly targeting a need -- Arizona needed help against lefty pitching -- but adding Martinez for that micro-reason is kind of like hiring Albert Einstein to help you with your arithmetic homework.

Of course, if you can get Einstein to do the job -- you get him. Hazen added another foundation player to a team that was winning anyway, and it sent a jolt through the organization. Martinez fit right in, on and off the field.

"I kind of heard it from the guys on the Tigers, but definitely [Martinez] just shows up every day and every single pitch of every at-bat, taking it like it could be his last," Diamondbacks cornerstone Goldschmidt said. "I think it's motivated me and probably every one of our teammates as well. You see a guy who is going to give it 100 percent every day no matter what. If we're winning, if we're losing, tie game, doesn't matter."

The paths of Darvish and Martinez have run parallel course for much of this season. With both in contract years, they were featured in countless rumors that eventually led to actual trades. Their paths took them both to the same division in the National League. After the season, those paths will lead them into high-level free agency, where they may be the best pitcher and hitter available, respectively.

On Monday, those paths will intersect in Phoenix. When it does, we can ask the question -- the slugger or the stopper? -- that a lot of teams should have asked a couple of months ago.
Your guide to Monday’s LDS games: Can Red Sox, Yankees and D-backs extend their postseasons?

By David Schoenfield

Is Columbus Day one of those official holidays in which you don't have to go to work? If you're a baseball fan, it doesn't matter: You're finding a way to skip work or leave early. Quadruple-header, baby!

The big story of the 2017 postseason has been the dismal starting pitching, at least until Sunday night's duel between Masahiro Tanaka and Carlos Carrasco. Through 12 games, eight of the 24 starting pitchers failed to finish even three innings and half failed to go at least five. It's not just that managers are going quickly to the bullpens; starting pitchers have combined for a 5.68 ERA. What will we see Monday?

The most important thing of the day: Max Scherzer makes his playoff debut for the Nationals after suffering a minor hamstring injury at the end of the regular season. Is he 100 percent, and if not, how will it affect his performance and how deep into the game Dusty Baker trusts him to go?

If you're going to watch only one game, tune in for: Indians at Yankees. The past two games of this series have been so good that you hate that it's a best-of-five instead of a best-of-seven. If not for the controversial failure of Joe Girardi to challenge that hit batsman call in Game 2, the Yankees could be on the brink of a stunning upset over the 102-win Indians.

NLDS Game 3: Nationals at Cubs (series tied 1-1)

Max Scherzer (16-6, 2.51) vs. Jose Quintana (7-3, 3.74), 4 p.m. ET (TBS)

The stakes: The Cubs held the Nationals to one run through the first 16 innings of the series before the Nationals erupted for five runs in the eighth inning of Game 2 to rally from a 3-1 deficit and even the series. Now they have to face the likely Cy Young winner in Scherzer, who will be pitching on eight days of rest after tweaking his hamstring in his final regular-season start and getting pushed back to this game.

If the Cubs win: You never want to have to win a clinching game on the road. A victory sets up the Cubs to win the series at Wrigley Field with Jake Arrieta starting Game 4.

If the Nationals win: Dusty Baker announced Tanner Roark would be his Game 4 starter, so no Stephen Strasburg on short rest. Roark is the weakest of the Nats’ four starters, so they would obviously be a little more comfortable knowing they could lose Game 4 and have Strasburg in their back pocket.

One key stat to know: Scherzer had 10 or more strikeouts in 15 of his 31 starts, including nine of 10 starts during one stretch from late May through mid-July. His ERA peaked on July 2 at 1.94, however; and in September he had a 4.05 ERA with just one 10-strikeout game. His swing-and-miss rate was 33.3 percent through the end of August, then 27.4 percent in September. So it seems there was a slight loss of stuff or command down the stretch, and that's not even factoring in the potential effects of the injury. Of course, maybe eight days of rest will be a good thing in this case.

The matchup that matters most: Quintana (and the lefty relievers) versus Bryce Harper and Daniel Murphy. Quintana held lefties to a .584 OPS compared to .732 versus righties. As mentioned here before, Harper had a sizable platoon split this season, with a much worse strikeout-to-walk ratio against
southpaws. Yet in the eighth inning of Game 2, Joe Maddon let Carl Edwards Jr. face Harper (who represented the tying run) instead of bringing in Mike Montgomery. Boom. Game tied. With three lefties in the pen -- Montgomery, Brian Duensing and Justin Wilson -- Harper shouldn't see a right-hander in a tight game unless it's closer Wade Davis.

The prediction: The Nationals hit a lot better at home this season (.287/.352/.471 versus .245/.312/.428), so that may favor the Cubs. Quintana has been very good of late, with a 45-to-4 strikeout-to-walk ratio over his final six starts. Scherzer's health is a wild card, but it seems he may have to pitch a gem. Here's saying he does. Nationals win 4-2.

NLDS Game 3: Dodgers at Diamondbacks (Dodgers lead 2-0)

Yu Darvish (4-3, 3.44) vs. Zack Greinke (17-7, 3.20), 10 p.m. ET (TBS)

The stakes: The Dodgers won the first two games, scoring 17 runs while hitting .333. You know they'd love to clinch against former teammate Greinke.

If the D-backs win: Who starts Game 4? Game 1 starter Taijuan Walker lasted just one inning after giving up four runs. Zack Godley relieved him and threw 100 pitches in relief over five innings. So that would likely point to Patrick Corbin, since Walker's start may still be too fresh in Torey Lovullo's mind. Corbin had a weird year, pitching much better at home even though Chase Field is a good hitters' park. He had a 3.15 ERA there and allowed just seven of his 26 home runs at home. One-year home/road splits are tricky, but Lovullo probably goes with Corbin if the D-backs remain alive.

If the Dodgers win: They sweep and head to their fifth National League Championship Series in 10 years. They'll get to line up Clayton Kershaw in Game 1, which wasn't the case in either 2013 or 2016 (he started Game 2 both years).

One key stat to know: Greinke is 2-5 in seven starts against the Dodgers since signing with Arizona in 2016 (including a five-homer game in September 2016). But he faced the Dodgers three times the final two months of 2017 and allowed just five runs over 19.2 innings.

The matchup that matters most: Diamondbacks versus fastballs and cutters early in the count against Darvish. Because his breaking stuff is so nasty, Darvish has one of the biggest splits among pitchers for when they get ahead versus when they don't. He doesn't seem to have a lot of confidence in his fastball, which is why he'll nibble too much on the corners at times. Anyway, check out the batter results on various counts:

2-0: 1.250 OPS
2-1: .801 OPS
1-0: 1.013 OPS
0-0: 1.044 OPS
1-1: .829 OPS
2-2: .389 OPS
0-1: .970 OPS
1-2: .376 OPS
0-2: .304 OPS

Overall, batters slugged .450 against Darvish’s fastball and .511 against his cutter. The way to beat him is to jump on those pitches early in the count.

The prediction: Arizona is coming off a terrible Game 2. It's not just the fact that they lost, but they played poorly, with Robbie Ray walking too many guys, J.D. Martinez making an ill-advised throw to third that allowed a runner to move up to second, a key error by Ketel Marte, and even Lovullo’s decision to bring in rookie Jimmie Sherfy -- he of 10.2 career innings -- in a key situation. Lovullo is probably counting on three pitchers in this game: Greinke, Archie Bradley and Fernando Rodney. Let's say that works and the Diamondbacks get to Darvish. They win 6-3 and we go to Game 4.

ALDS Game 4: Astros at Red Sox (Astros lead 2-1)

Charlie Morton (14-7, 3.62) vs. Rick Porcello (11-17, 4.65), 1 p.m. ET (Fox Sports)

The stakes: You have to love how the narrative can change so quickly. It went from the "Red Sox are dead," to "Man, the Astros' bullpen is kind of crappy and if the Red Sox can steal Game 4, they have Chris Sale going in Game 5." This has been the blowout series so far: For the first time, the first three games of a playoff series were all decided by five or more runs. The Astros won 101 games, but they're one loss away from having to beat a guy who struck out 308 batters to keep their season alive.

If the Astros win: They move on to the American League Championship Series and avoid the same fate as 2015, when they led the division series against the Royals but lost Games 4 and 5.

If the Red Sox win: Then we get a Game 5 matchup between Sale and Justin Verlander, which is about as good a pairing as you'll ever see in an ultimate game (Game 5 or Game 7). After throwing four shutout innings and 57 pitches in Game 3, David Price will certainly be unavailable for Game 4, but with two days of rest, he should be ready for Game 5. So John Farrell has to have a plan in place that doesn't involve Price in case Porcello doesn't hold down the Astros in the early innings. He could go again to Joe Kelly, who threw 22 pitches on Sunday, or maybe even Game 2 starter Drew Pomeranz, who threw 47 pitches that game. He should also be prepared to use Craig Kimbrel for at least two innings -- and not necessarily the final two, if he needs to stop a rally.

One key stat to know: This is a different Morton than the one who pitched for the Pirates. He had a career strikeout rate of 16 percent before 2017, but suddenly fanned 26.4 percent of batters faced in 2017. Morton used to rely heavily on his sinker, but he's throwing more four-seamers and throwing a lot harder. His fastball averaged 95.5 mph compared to 91.6 in 2015 (he was injured most of 2016). His sinker is even harder, averaging 95 mph. His curveball turned into his wipeout pitch, holding batters to a .119 average with a 44 percent K rate. So here's your key stat: The curveball was especially dominant against lefties, a key reason he had a big reverse platoon split (.561 OPS compared to .805 for righties).
The matchup that matters most: Porcello versus the top of the Houston lineup. In Game 1, Alex Bregman and Jose Altuve homered off Sale in the first. In Game 2, Carlos Correa hit a two-run homer in the first. In Game 3, the Astros scored three runs in the first, including Correa's two-run homer. Is this a bad time to mention Porcello led the majors in home runs allowed?

The prediction: We should get the first close game of the series, with Houston's ability to hit the long ball off Porcello an obvious advantage. Astros win 6-4.

ALDS Game 4: Indians at Yankees (Indians lead 2-1)

Trevor Bauer (17-9, 4.19) vs. Luis Severino (14-6, 2.98), 7 p.m. ET (Fox Sports)

The stakes: The Indians haven't lost two in a row since Aug. 23. The Yankees have to beat them for a second straight game to stay alive. Good news for the Indians: Teams up 2-1 in a best-of-five series go on to win 72 percent of the time (59-22). As suspected when the Indians chose to initially start Bauer over Corey Kluber in Game 1, the Indians decided to bring Bauer back in Game 4 on short rest instead of Josh Tomlin, in part because Tomlin did warm up at one point in Game 3. Good news for the Yankees: They have their best starting pitcher going in Severino (we'll pretend that wild-card game never happened).

If the Yankees win: Then we get a Game 5 matchup between Kluber and Sonny Gray. Because Tanaka went seven innings on Sunday and there was an off day on Saturday, the Yankees' bullpen is in great shape. Only David Robertson (nine pitches) and Aroldis Chapman (34 pitches) were used on Sunday, which leaves Chad Green, Adam Warren, Dellin Betances and Tommy Kahnle all rested and ready to go. The only concern is Chapman's 34 pitches might make Girardi hesitant to use him for more than one inning.

If the Indians win: They move on to the ALCS for the second year in a row, with Kluber then set to start Game 1. If he does have to start Game 5, that means he wouldn't be ready to start until Game 3 of the ALCS, if the Indians advance.

One key stat to know: Bauer had that amazing start in Game 1, when he allowed just two hits in 6⅓ innings. He had a great curveball going -- not so much getting misses on it (just three misses out of 14 swings), but inducing weak contact and getting eight called strikes. That made his fastball more effective -- the Yankees put just five fastballs in play out of 21 swings, while hitting 13 foul balls. That was Bauer's third-lowest rate of balls in play off his fastball all season. Batters slugged .500 off Bauer's fastball, so that's his goal: Limit damage on his fastball.

The matchup that matters most: Yankees pitchers versus Francisco Lindor and Jose Ramirez. Aside from Lindor's grand slam off Green, the two switch-hitters haven't done much in the series. Lindor is 1-for-11 and Ramirez is 2-for-13 with two singles -- an infield hit and a slow grounder through the infield. With Edwin Encarnacion likely out again with his sprained right ankle, the Indians need those two to do some damage.

The prediction: Severino bounces back from his wild-card debacle with five strong innings. Aaron Judge (0-for-10 with eight strikeouts and four walks) blasts a long one off Bauer. We go five. Yankees win 5-3.
TRUE BLUE LA

Dodgers NLDS notes: Kenta Maeda in relief, Luis Avilan on the mend, no pool party

By Eric Stephen

PHOENIX — The Dodgers held a workout at Dodger Stadium on Sunday afternoon before flying to Phoenix in preparation for Game 3 of their NLDS against the Diamondbacks.

Among those participating in the workout was relief pitcher Luis Avilan, who was left off the NLDS roster with left shoulder inflammation. After throwing twice last week, Avilan pitched another simulated inning on Sunday, roughly 20 pitches.

Avilan, who posted a 2.93 ERA in 61 games and held left-handed batters to just .195/.290/.280 in 2017, will throw again on Wednesday, and could be activated for the NLCS should the Dodgers advance, giving them a third left-handed relief pitcher to join Tony Cingrani and Tony Watson.

“He's on track, he feels good. The ball was coming out well,” Roberts said. “So when we get to that point, he definitely will be in the mix.”

Pen is mightier
Kenta Maeda was impressive in his Game 2 relief appearance, retiring A.J. Pollock, Paul Godlschmidt and J.D. Martinez in order, with two strikeouts. Maeda is emerging as a weapon for the Dodgers in high-leverage situations against right-handed batters, hitting just .214/.258/.389 against him in 2017.

“We had a chance to see him out of the pen, the stuff played up. The velocity ticked up two, three miles an hour. The slider’s still sharp,” Roberts said Sunday. “When you’re constructing a postseason roster and trying to account for different parts of the order, different hitters, and he just really makes sense for us.”

Counting the postseason, Maeda has a 2.00 ERA in five relief appearances, with 12 strikeouts and one walk in nine innings. His strikeout rate is 34.3%, compared with 24.8% in his 25 starts in 2017.

According to Brooks Baseball, Maeda averaged 92.26 mph on his four-seam fastball as a starter. In his five relief appearances, that pitch has averaged 93.32 mph.

“To be able to have the off day to come back against a very good lineup in Arizona to deploy him then, it makes sense,” Roberts said. “So, yeah, it’s really exciting for us.”

No splash zone
Should the Dodgers win on Monday or Tuesday, don’t expect them to repeat their celebration tactic from 2013, when they clinched the NL West with a win at Chase Field, then jumped in the pool beyond the right field wall.

“That won’t happen,” Roberts said. “This is a completely different team, and I think we have bigger goals than to jump into a swimming pool.”

Looking ahead
Should the Diamondbacks stave off elimination on Monday, they will start left-hander Patrick Corbin in Game 4 on Tuesday night. Corbin was 0-2 with a 5.06 ERA in two starts against the Dodgers in 2017.

LA TIMES

Dodgers Dugout: Where did this Yasiel Puig guy come from?

By Houston Mitchell

Hi, and welcome to another edition of Dodgers Dugout. My name is Houston Mitchell. This team is looking a lot more like the one that went 81-24 than the one that went 1-16.

Game 2

Well, that was interesting. When Rich Hill gave up that mammoth two-run homer to Paul Goldschmidt, I thought "Uh, oh." But then Hill did an amazing thing: He pitched like a No. 2 starter. He escaped jams, changed speeds and kept Arizona off balance for four innings. Sure, I'd love for him to go six or seven, but after that first inning, all I am going to say is "Thank you, Rich Hill."

Then the Dodgers offense took over. Sure, they were helped that Arizona starter Robbie Ray had an off night, but that’s what good offenses do. They take advantage of a pitcher’s weakness. They laid off bad pitches, worked the count, scored their first run without a hit and pounced when he threw a pitch in the zone. Then they got to the weak middle relief of the Diamondbacks and took advantage of them.

I know that Jimmie Sherfy is a longtime friend of Arizona manager Torey Lovullo's family, but if I'm Lovullo, I'm not sure if I'm going to call on him again. He has an ERA of 36.00 this postseason. This must be what it feels like for fans of other teams when Pedro Baez comes in to pitch.

Can Austin Barnes start every game? Pretty please?

Yasiel Puig is five for nine. Logan Forsythe is four for eight. When I said someone besides the big four needed to step up, this is what I was talking about.

I want to talk about Puig for a second. Sure, I called for him to be sent down to the minors last season, but I have always liked him. He plays with a passion that is fun to watch. Just look at him this series. Licking bats, wagging his tongue, sliding into third on a triple, pounding his chest on a single, flipping his bat.

Most people who watch baseball games wish they were playing. Because we think it would be the best job in the world. So when we see a guy like Puig, who takes such joy in everything, it makes us happy. There's a guy who gets it. This is supposed to be fun. Sure, we know the constant travel and not seeing your family is a drag. But playing the game for a living? Fun. So many players approach the game with no emotion. Puig reminds us of what it was like to play the game when you were a kid.

And look at this new Puig since coming back from the minors. Sure, he has his knucklehead moments at times. But he is a much better player. He should win the Gold Glove this year. He lays off pitches out of the zone that he would swing at in past seasons. He goes into plate protection mode when he gets two
strikes on him. He seems focused on every at bat. In short, he has become a player the Dodgers can rely on instead of worrying about. Good for him. I hope it’s the beginning of a long postseason run for Puig with the Dodgers, stretching on for many seasons.

Kenta Maeda looked like a different pitcher in his short relief stint in Game 2. One inning, two strikeouts, one victory. The batters he faced seem to have no clue. If I had to criticize one thing about Game 2, it was that I thought Dave Roberts took him out too early. He looked dominant. I would have left him at least until he gave up a hit. In the back of my mind I was thinking, "Have the Dodgers found their setup man of the future?"

Cody Bellinger is 1 for 10 with six strikeouts, and it looks like he starts his swing before the pitcher lets go of the ball. Relax, Cody. Fans aren’t expecting you to hit a home run every time up. Just go back to that swing that got you here.

Curtis Granderson got a hit in Game 2. What happened?

Only Dennis Eckersley of the TBS announcing crew of Brian Anderson, Joe Simpson and Eckersley seems to know anything about the Dodgers. The other two talk like they have never seen them play and say things about players that are incorrect. They either haven’t done their homework or have been supplied with some bad info. My favorite was when Simpson said teams can run on Puig because he has a tendency to throw the ball all over the place. That may have been true a couple of seasons ago, but he apparently hasn’t watched a Dodgers game since 2014.

The Dodgers are up 2-0, but Arizona won’t go quietly.

Game 3

Yu Darvish vs. Zack Greinke

Arizona batters vs. Darvish

Iannetta, .125/.222/.125

Martinez, .182/.250/.455

Goldschmidt, .000/.000/.000

Pollock, .167/.167/.167

No other Diamondback has more than four at-bats against Darvish.

Dodger batters against Greinke

Granderson, .217/.260/.406 (Granderson has 69 at-bats against Greinke, the most of any player in the majors)

Grandal, .250/.276/.500
Utley, .231/.259/.462
Turner, .318/.348/.682
Seager, .545/.688/1.182
Forsythe, .167/.231/.167
Ethier, .222/.364/.222
Bellinger, .333/.333/.778
Puig, .167/.333/.167
Taylor, .000/.222/.000

This is why the Dodgers traded for Darvish, for the postseason. Now we will start to see if that trade paid off.

The series
Game 3: Monday, 7 p.m. PT, Dodgers (Yu Darvish) at Arizona (Zack Greinke), TBS
Game 4*: Tuesday, 6 p.m. PT, Dodgers (TBA) at Arizona (TBA), TBS
Game 5*: Thursday, 6 p.m. PT, Arizona (TBA) at Dodgers (TBA), TBS
* -if necessary

USA TODAY

Dodgers’ 6-7-8 hitters lead star-studded postseason roster

By Jorge L. Ortiz

PHOENIX – The Los Angeles Dodgers’ Game 2 victory included some curious trivia: Austin Barnes had a postseason RBI for the first time in his career. So did Logan Forsythe. So did Chris Taylor.

These were the guys driving the Dodgers offense as they beat the Arizona Diamondbacks 8-5?

Why, yes, along with Yasiel Puig, who batted eighth.

In a city known to fawn over stars, bit players helped Los Angeles claim a 2-0 edge in the National League Division Series before it shifted to Phoenix for Monday’s Game 3. Starting with the intriguing matchup of Diamondbacks ace and former Dodger Zack Greinke against Yu Darvish, L.A. will have three chances to reach the NL Championship Series for the third time in five years.

Game 2: Five takeaways from Dodgers’ win

Bryce Harper: Delivers the home run of a lifetime
The Dodgers don’t lack for headliners like Corey Seager, Justin Turner and rookie of the year shoo-in Cody Bellinger in their lineup, but lesser lights were also a major reason they posted the best record in baseball at 104-58, and they’ll be counted on for the playoffs as well.

When Rich Hill threw the first pitch of Saturday’s game, teammates Chase Utley, Curtis Granderson, Andre Ethier and Yasmani Grandal – who have combined for 12 All-Star Game invites – sat on the bench. If injured first baseman Adrian Gonzalez had been available, he likely would have been out of the lineup as well.

Those decisions reflect the Dodgers’ desire to set up the best matchups against Diamondbacks left-hander Robbie Ray, but they’re also testament to their depth. The 6-7-8 hitters – Forsythe, Barnes and Puig – accounted for eight of the club’s 12 hits while scoring five runs and driving in five.

“You have to put the best players out there for that particular day,” said Granderson, who singled as a pinch-hitter in the fifth and scored a run. “Sometimes it’s going to be what you saw today, sometimes it’s going to be a little flip. It just all depends on what Doc (manager Dave Roberts) and the scouting staff and the front office decide is the best opportunity for us to win.”

The Dodgers brass has emphasized depth and versatility in building the roster, valuing multi-position players like Forsythe (second and third), Bellinger (first and the outfield), Taylor and Kike Hernandez (both all over the infield and outfield) for the flexibility they afford in seeking statistical advantages.

“They have some good left-right matchups and they do a good job of structuring their roster for this series,” Arizona manager Torey Lovullo said. “It presents some unique challenges for bullpen usage.”

The concept of platooning is nearly as old as the game itself. The notion of players accepting it, especially those with distinguished resumes, is a bit more novel. Besides swallowing their egos, players have to put in extra work to stay ready in case they’re called on. Not getting a starting assignment doesn’t equate taking the day off.

The whole plan goes over much better when a team is winning, which tends to minimize dissent. Not a peep was heard when the Dodgers were on pace to tie the record for most wins ever as they went 91-36 through Aug. 25. The subsequent 1-16 slide brought plenty of questions about the team’s penchant for resting regulars and inflating the roster to 39 players in September. Puig was the only player to appear in more than 145 games.

However, closer Kenley Jansen said the years of failing to achieve their championship aspirations – the Dodgers have won five consecutive NL West crowns but haven’t reached the World Series since 1988 – have forged a more selfless approach, a mentality of everyone doing their part, however big or small.

“Last year we saw how close we got. It hurts that we didn’t make it,” Jansen said. “We know how good we are and we know we fell short. We’ve been talking about it the whole year, since me and JT (Turner) re-signed. When we got to spring training we talked about trying to win a championship. That’s what it’s all about.”

The Dodgers are convinced they’ll have a better chance by spreading the duties instead of relying on a few outstanding players like staff ace Clayton Kershaw, who has carried much of the pitching burden in the past.
That’s one of the constant messages delivered by Roberts, who keeps his backups apprised of when they can expect to play, and it reverberates among the players.

“The communication with us in that clubhouse, I haven't really been a part of that for 25 guys,” said Forsythe, who joined the team in an offseason trade. “The big thing for us is the guys that aren't in there are wanting to prove something, and I think that gives them a little added edge. They come out with a chip on their shoulder, and they want to get the job done. They're not scared to do it. They want to do it.”