

ALCS Game 3: Masterpiece Theatre – by Mark Pattison

Sunday was Boston's comeback day. The NFL's New England Patriots, playing at home, knocked off the previously unbeaten New Orleans Saints with a Tom Brady touchdown pass with only five seconds left on the clock to win by three points. And, of course, we remember what happened in ALCS Game 2 at Fenway Park. Those were moments of high drama.

But perhaps a new act was unfolding the next day with Boston on the short end of the stick. The NHL's Red Wings smacked down the Bruins in Beantown 3-2 on Monday evening with a backup goalie in the starring role. This might have presaged some continued dominance by a certain other Mike Ilitch-owned team on Tuesday.

Alas, poor Yorick, if it was a question of "to be or not to be," it was not to be. Despite all the star power on the Detroit roster, led by starter Justin Verlander, the Tigers offense could not muster a single run. Of course, all the Red Sox offense could must was a single run, but in baseball, one beats zero every time, as Boston beat Detroit 1-0.

It's not exactly a Detroit-specific problem. At this writing, three of the five League Championship Series games so far across both leagues have been shutouts. Remember that this was the second 1-0 game in the ALCS, with Detroit on the top side of the ledger Saturday. (And, as I write this, the Dodgers were being blanked 3-0 by St. Louis, so it could be four out of six games, but I'm not planning on staying up late enough to verify this.)

I was questioning Red Sox manager John Farrell's strategy of pitching John Lackey in Game 3, when so much was made of his starting Game 2 of the AL Division Series at home against Tampa Bay – which the Red Sox won. Lackey has some of the worst home-road splits this season of any starter. The most telling is that he has the worst ERA home-road differential of any AL starter this season.

But Game 3 was The Night the Lights Went Out in Motown. In the middle of the second inning, the overhead lights cut out at Comerica Park. They snapped back on, but it takes time for them to warm up to full luminosity. So the umpires ordered a delay of game lasting 17 minutes. Lackey escaped a mild first-inning jam with Hunter and Fielder singling. After the game, Bosox catcher Jarrod Saltalamacchia told ESPN Radio that Lackey was "a little amped up" during the first inning, but the delay allowed him to get some of that adrenalin out of his system. Without a doubt, he looked far more effective for the rest of his 6.2-inning start, giving up just a pair of hits – and no runs. For the record, DTE Energy ("Detroit Edison" for all you Detroit exiles) chalked it up to a cable failure in the area near the stadium, which caused a voltage reduction, which tripped the lights in the stadium. "The momentary sag in voltage was an isolated incident," their statement said. Note: DTE Energy is not responsible for the Tigers' lineup.

Verlander was his typical ace-like self: eight innings pitched, 10 strikeouts as opposed to just one walk, and surrendering four hits. It was the third of those hits that spelled the difference in the game: a home run to left field by Mike Napoli. The good folks at Fox just happened to unearth video of Napoli's first career home run – off Verlander, to left field, at Comerica Park. Prior to that at-bat, Napoli had gone 0-for-6 in the ALCS, with one walk and six strikeouts. (Perhaps someone tacked up my song parody, "That's a Strikeout," on the Red Sox clubhouse wall.)

Napoli's round-tripper snapped Verlander's postseason string of 21.1 consecutive scoreless innings in postseason play, and 34.1 straight innings in this postseason and the regular season, dating back to Sept. 18. So, if you're counting, the last time Verlander surrendered a run, the federal government was still open. (The all-time record holder for consecutive postseason scoreless innings remains Christy Mathewson, who pitched 27 scoreless frames in the 1905 World Series against the Philadelphia A's, hurling shutouts every other game.)

But we should have known something was up with JV. After all, in Game 1, Tigers pitchers held Boston

hitless for 8.1 innings. In Game 2, Max Scherzer held the Crimson Hose hitless for 5.2 innings. And Verlander can go only 4.2 innings? That piker!

Another pair of streaks snapped had to do with Miguel Cabrera. He's still the all-time leader with a 19-game LCS hitting streak, and a 31-game postseason on-base streak. But they're no longer active streaks, as he went 0-for-4. Perhaps the most discouraging of these was his eighth-inning swinging strikeout against Red Sox reliever Junichi Tazawa with one out and two men on base.

So now we go to Wednesday night's game: Doug Fister vs. Jake Peavy. It should be another good game, but if the Tigers want to win this series, they're going to have to go back to Boston and win at least one.

Short Stripes

How do we like Justin Verlander? Let us count the ways. He is one of only four pitchers to have multiple wins in postseason winner-take-all games. That would be last year's and this year's ALDS. He and Sandy Koufax in 1965 are the only two pitchers to record two games in the same postseason with zero runs allowed and at least 10 strikeouts. And Verlander is the only postseason pitcher who has to his credit five 10-strikeout games. Whoops, make that six with Tuesday's 10-K effort. And, thanks to Tuesday, he's also the all-time record-holder for consecutive strikeouts in the postseason, whiffing seven Red Sox in a row after a leadoff walk in the second inning to David Ortiz.

Here's a little more on Detroit pitching. In the first two games of this year's ALCS, Tigers starters faced 41 batters, and struck out 25 of them. Through three games, the Detroit pitchers have whiffed 43 Red Sox. And, of the 44 teams since 2009 that made it to the postseason, this year's Detroit squad is one of just four whose bullpen chalked up a losing record.

OK, here's still more on Detroit pitching. Anibal Sanchez was second with 25, and Verlander third with 21, in the American League in the number of runners who stole bases off them. As a result, catcher Alex Avila threw out only 12 percent of would-be base stealers. But as Bill Freehan once said after the Twins stole home twice in a game with lefty Mickey Lolich pitching, "You can't do anything until you have the ball." And despite the speedy slants of the Detroit mound staff, they don't focus much on keeping runners close to the bag.

Do you think Torii Hunter likes chasing after fly balls launched by his onetime Minnesota Twins teammate David Ortiz? We all recall the half-gainer Hunter did over the wall in trying to corral Ortiz' grand slam on Sunday. Well, on July 29, 2005, Hunter was roaming center field at Fenway and Ortiz blasted a ball in Hunter's direction. Hunter tried a Ken Griffey Jr.-like walk up the wall padding, but a cleat got stuck and Hunter broke his ankle, ending his season. The bad news: It was a home run. The good news: Hunter's only injury was the ankle; there was no muscular or ligament/tendon damage.

It's official: Saturday's ALCS Game 1, at 3:56, was the longest nine-inning 1-0 game ever, regular season or postseason. The only 1-0 contest longer was a 24-inning duel between Houston and the Mets that took 6:04 to play.

And, in case you were wondering, the matchup between Al Alburquerque and Jarrod Saltalamacchia is a postseason record for the total number letters in the batters' last names, at 26. In the regular season, there were 25 confrontations between William Van Landingham and Todd Hollandsworth, another 26-letter battle.

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