

ALCS Game 4: Order Restored to the Universe – by Mark Pattison

And whoda think that all it would take to restore order to the universe was for manager Jim Leyland to realign the stars in a new constellation – er, lineup.

This episode of “Extreme Makeover—Lineup Edition” wasn’t radical in one sense, but wholly radical in another. All Leyland did, in essence, was drop the underperforming Austin Jackson from leadoff to eighth in the lineup, and moved everyone else up a notch. But it’s not as if he expected Miguel Cabrera, his new second-slot hitter, to move Torii Hunter ahead with a sacrifice should Hunter get on base somehow.

But the Tigers reacted with near-glee as they raked the quite-hittable Boston starter Jake Peavy over the coals for five runs in the second inning, and a pair more in the fourth as they cruised to a 7-3 win and evened the American League Championship Series at two games apiece. He might not have been the game’s first star, but being shifted to the eighth spot was a tonic for Jackson as he went 2-for-2 with a pair of walks, two runs batted in, a run scored and a stolen base. He was not retired once Wednesday night.

The aforementioned Cabrera was looking even more like his old self again, as he seemed ready to start brand new ALCS hitting streaks and postseason on-base streaks. Even defensively, Cabrera was looking like his old self – or, more appropriately, his young self. He leapt high to try and snare a Mike Napoli double before it could skitter down the left field line. He made a barehanded grab of a slow, slow Dustin Pedroia grounder and fired the ball to Prince Fielder at first base to retire Pedroia and end the Red Sox fifth inning. In the seventh, Cabrera foiled Pedroia again, checking Boston baserunner Jacoby Ellsbury at second base before whistling a throw to Fielder to nab Pedroia. At the plate, Cabrera got the final RBI of Detroit’s five-run second inning with a single to center field that scored Hunter, and Detroit’s final RBI with a first-pitch single to center that scored Jackson with two out in the fifth inning.

The Tigers were unusually efficient. They scored seven runs on only nine hits (granted, Peavy walked three batters in the second inning alone, but still), compared to the 12 hits garnered by the Bosox which netted them but three tallies. So let’s reply that second inning. Prior to this inning, Detroit was 0-for-8 with runners in scoring position. Victor Martinez singled to left field. Jhonny Peralta got a four-pitch walk, moving Martinez to second. Alex Avila also walked, this time on a full count, to load the bases. Omar Infante flied out to short center field, which did not allow any runners to advance. Austin Jackson, with the weight of the whole world either on or off his shoulders, also drew a walk to force in the inning’s first run. Jose Iglesias hit a grounder to second that could have been a double-play ball, but Pedroia couldn’t find the handle and barely got the “phantom out” with his toss to Stephen Drew at second base to retire Jackson. Iglesias beat the relay to first to score Peralta and move Avila to third. Hunter’s double down the left field line scored Avila and Iglesias. Then Cabrera’s single to center scored Hunter.

And none of this describes the pitching. Doug Fister got the no-hitter nonsense out of people’s minds early – as in, with two out in the first inning. In fact, Fister gave up a hit in each of the six innings he worked, but he walked only one batter while striking out seven, and the only run he gave up was in his last inning of work. That means that, with Fister’s start, Tigers starters have gone at least five innings without allowing any runs in their last eight ALCS games dating back to last year. And that, you can believe, is another record.

Now, even though order has been restored in the universe, that doesn’t mean there’s no space junk floating around there. Prince Fielder and Peralta, who had gotten base hits in every Tigers postseason game thus far this October, went hitless. Phil Coke did his best Phil Coke circa 2013 imitation, giving up a single to the only batter he faced before Leyland yanked him, and Joaquin Benoit continues to show signs of leakage as Detroit’s closer, as he gave up a run in the ninth inning – but got his Game 2 nemesis, David Ortiz, to loft a lazy fly to Hunter in right field to end the game. Now the ALCS becomes a best-of-three series, and despite the rotten luck suffered by Detroit in Games 2 and 3, the prospect of Boston lighting Anibal Sanchez AND Max

Scherzer AND Justin Verlander in consecutive games is really quite remote.

And, wouldn't you know it, but order was restored in a parallel universe, when both the House and the Senate approved a bill that would strengthen the Treasury Dept., extend the debt limit, and get furloughed federal workers back on the job. It's our policy in the Society to not comment on such things, some were quite happy to hear the news, even if it means that every day is Casual Friday at the office – at least until the air conditioning kicks back on again.

Short Stripes

“How ironic is it,” notes Society member Andy Brogowicz, “that Gillette's manufacturing center, known also as the Gillette World Shaving Headquarters, is located in South Boston.” Especially since most Red Sox players seem to be growing their facial hair in anticipation of an audition for ZZ Top.

Game 3's 1-0 loss to the Red was the fourth 1-0 game of this postseason, tying the all-time record for the most in any postseason (1991). There were only three 1-0 postseason games from 2002 to 2012 combined. Game 3 was the first time the Tigers have lost a home postseason game by a 1-0 score. It was also the first time Detroit was shut out at home in a non-World Series postseason game.

If you're a pitcher with Verlander's pitching line – 8 innings pitched, four hits, one run, one earned run, one walk and 10 strikeouts – you'd expect to win. In Verlander's case, though, of the 26 pitchers with a similar pitching line, only two others had gotten tagged with the loss.

Remember the pitching lines from the Game 2 box score? Each reliever was responsible for one run in the grand slam hit by David Ortiz. Sounds unique, eh? Ah, but verily, it's happened seven times before.

Entering Game 4, Boston was hitting just .133 (12/90), which is a new MLB record for the lowest team batting average in the first three games of any League Championship Series, breaking the mark the Cardinals had just set in the first three games of the 2013 NLCS (.134). Boston hit .286 in the ALDS versus the Tampa Bay Rays.

Fister had five consecutive quality starts in postseason play, the longest active such streak in the majors, and extended that to six with Wednesday's Game 3 win.

How hittable was Jake Peavy? When he wasn't walking batters, that is. He was 0-3 with a 8.22 (14 ER/15.1 IP) ERA in three career LDS starts, although he allowed just one run in 5.2 innings against the Rays in Game 4 of the 2013 ALDS. Peavy also struggled in his last two outings in Detroit, going 0-2 with a 6.92 ERA.

Before their hitting streaks were snapped, Peralta and Fielder both had at least one hit in each of his last six postseason games. They were tied for the second-longest active postseason hit streak by any player on any of the four remaining clubs in the postseason (Carl Crawford, LAD -- 8).

Commercial break: While recovering from a broken ankle in 2011, I watched a lot of video, including the final game at Tiger Stadium. And when I heard a pitchwoman's voice this season on XM Radio during a Detroit home game, I felt sure I had recognized that voice before. I was right: The “Belle Tire Girl” who had a great run for the Detroit tire-store chain from 1997 to 2004, was brought back to star in a new series of ads.

Justin Verlander, during in-game chatter with the guys in the Fox broadcast booth, talked about how holding runners on base is important. He said a good elapsed time for pitchers to release the ball is 1.3 seconds. Verlander, with his quick footwork, said he can get the ball released in 1.1 seconds. And Verlander has timed Fister as making the pitch in 1.0 seconds.

Let there be light: Tuesday's 17-minute light delay recalled for me (albeit too late for e-Mayo Flash #106) a time I was at a ballgame and we were slippin' into darkness. It was the last full week of June 1990. I was at Yankee Stadium as part of a party of six to see the Yanks take on the still-in-the-AL-then Milwaukee Brewers. Sometime during the middle of the game, all the stadium lights went out. A majority were reactivated quickly, but it took time for them to get to full power – about 46 minutes as I recall. The Yanks showed a Bugs Bunny cartoon to help keep the crowd in check