

Beltran's HR keys Cards' rout of Pirates in Game 1

Written by Associated Press
Friday, October 04, 2013 12:13 AM -

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ST. LOUIS — Carlos Beltran, Adam Wainwright and the St. Louis Cardinals gave Pittsburgh a quick reality jolt.

Beltran's 3-run homer sparked a 7-run third inning Thursday and the Cardinals got seven stingy innings from Wainwright to open their NL division series with a 9-1 rout of the Pirates.

"To be able to get out on a good first step and play well today I think is big for our guys confidence-wise," St. Louis manager Mike Matheny said. "Gives us an opportunity to just take some momentum and momentum is big right now when you talk about a 5-game series."

The first eight Cardinals reached safely in the third to chase A.J. Burnett, saddling the right-hander with the second-shortest outing of his career and putting Game 1 out of reach early.

A sellout crowd roared and then settled in for an easy victory by the NL Central champions, making their third consecutive trip to the postseason.

"Game 164 was rough," Pirates manager Clint Hurdle said. "One of the things we've been good at is we don't overcook things."

Lance Lynn (15-10) faces Pittsburgh rookie Gerrit Cole (10-7) in Game 2 today.

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After a record 20 straight losing seasons, the Pirates are back in the playoffs for the first time since 1992. They entered their first best-of-5 division series with plenty of momentum after beating Cincinnati in the wild-card game Tuesday but Pittsburgh never threatened to rally against Wainwright and finished with only four hits.

Pittsburgh also was sloppy in the field, committing three errors. St. Louis was sharp on defense, with reliever Carlos Martinez turning in the top play by slinging an off-balance throw to first to nip Russell Martin in the eighth.

Third baseman David Freese prevented extra bases in the third with a diving catch on Clint Barmes' low liner.

Wainwright remained unbeaten in the postseason, going to 3-0 with a 2.27 ERA in 14 games, five of them starts.

He allowed a run on three hits in seven innings, striking out nine without a walk. The only damage came on a homer by Pedro Alvarez to start the fifth.

The right-hander tied for the NL lead with 19 wins this year and was 4-0 in his last five starts. He thrives on expectations.

"I'd love to be that guy," Wainwright said. "It's important to have somebody go out there that you can count on for sure."

Wainwright also started the Cardinals' big burst with a leadoff, full-count walk.

Beltran, who has never reached the World Series, reprised his role as one of the game's greatest playoff sluggers. His 443-foot drive to the distant second deck in right field put St. Louis ahead and was the second-longest shot by a left-handed batter at 8-year-old Busch Stadium.

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"I almost got caught up in the moment," added Wainwright, who had a perfect view from second base. "I threw my hands up in the air as soon as he hit it, I knew it was gone.

"Then I realized I had to run."

Beltran has 15 home runs, 10 doubles and 28 RBIs in 35 postseason games. He also has scored 40 runs and stolen 11 bases.

Leadoff man Matt Carpenter called Beltran "Mr. October."

"He's like our secret weapon when it comes to the postseason. He steps up every time," Carpenter said. "Some guys just have a knack for a big game and he's one of them."

Beltran's 13 career RBIs against Burnett are the most of any player.

Beltran's homer got the Cardinals going, and Jon Jay later walked with the bases loaded. Freese added a 2-run single that cleared the bases when rightfielder Marlon Byrd's throw to the plate deflected off Freese's leg for an error.

Burnett was 3-1 against the Cardinals this season but has gotten rocked in his last two visits to St. Louis, also giving up five runs in three innings in early September. In five outings at Busch Stadium the last two seasons he has a 15.50 ERA.

"Hopefully, we can turn it around and give me a chance to get that ball again," Burnett said. "I was not able to repeat a single delivery all day, that's the bottom line."

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Hurdle was non-committal on whether Burnett would get the ball if the Pirates make it to Game 5, again in St. Louis.

"I do believe that he's capable of going out and throwing a gem the next time he's out there, wherever that may be," Hurdle added.

While the Pirates may have had trouble at the plate and in the field with the shadows, the late-afternoon start didn't seem to bother the Cardinals.

NOTES: Cardinals broadcaster Mike Shannon threw the first pitch in the dirt, with reserve Shane Robinson making a nice scoop. ... St. Louis OF Matt Holliday walked and doubled his first two trips and had reached base safely in nine straight plate appearances before grounding out to start the fourth. ... The Cardinals claimed OF Joey Butler on waivers, three days after he was designated for assignment by the Rangers. Butler spent most of the year at Triple-A Round Rock, batting .291 with 12 homers and 51 RBIs.

Ugla 'upset' to be left off Braves roster

ATLANTA — Braves second baseman Dan Ugla, a 3-time All-Star, was "disappointed and upset" to be left off the NL division series roster.

Ugla hit only .179 with 22 homers and ranked third in the NL with 171 strikeouts this season. His struggles continued following laser eye surgery in August. He hit .083 in August and .112 in September.

He said Thursday "it hurts" that the Braves "don't think I can help the team win.

"I'm not blind to my numbers but at the same time I know what I've done my whole career and I still know what I'm capable of doing, so I was kind of blindsided by it."

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Ugla's career batting average is .246. He hit more than 30 homers in five straight seasons, beginning in 2007 with the Marlins and continuing with a career-high 36 homers in 2011, his first season in Atlanta. He hit only .220 with 19 homers and 78 RBIs in 2012.

Braves manager Fredi Gonzalez said he hopes Ugla travels with the team to Los Angeles after Game 2 of the series on Friday night.

"Yeah, he's part of the team," Gonzalez added. "I would love for him to, yeah."

Ugla explained his "first inclination" is to say "I'm going home. But I know that's not the right thing to do."

Gonzalez told Ugla of his roster decision Tuesday.

"When something bad happens to you, your first reaction is anger," Ugla said. "Once that calms down, you can start thinking rationally."

Ugla didn't speak to reporters on Wednesday, when the roster was announced, noting he didn't want to attend Wednesday's workout.

"But I knew it was the right thing to do," he remarked. "You don't feel part of the group. But once you get past that, calm down and realize your teammates still love you, it's whatever."

Despite the support of his teammates and even Dodgers players, who approached him and gave him hugs during batting practice Thursday, Ugla said "it's brutal" to be left off the roster.

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The decision also was difficult for Gonzalez, who was Uggla's manager with the Marlins as well. Gonzalez said finalizing the roster and the tough decision regarding Uggla made for "one of the hardest days I've ever had to experience as a major league manager."

Despite his disappointment, Uggla participated in batting practice Thursday.

"It (stinks) for me but this is bigger than me," Uggla added. "This is about the team."