

Kelly, Greinke set for Game 1 of NLCS

Written by Associated Press
Friday, October 11, 2013 12:23 AM -

By R.B. FALLSTROM

Associated Press

ST. LOUIS — Carpets were still drying out from a champagne bath and a few players looked bleary eyed after a workout at Busch Stadium. A day after advancing, there wasn't much time to rest for the St. Louis Cardinals.

"Obviously, it was a great celebration and a lot of fun," reliever John Axford said Thursday. "The clubhouse guys, I don't know if they even went home."

The Los Angeles Dodgers don't have home-field advantage in the NL championship series, but they got a few extra days to savor early postseason success. Zack Greinke was getting ready to go in Game 5, then went on stand-by, and now he guards against feeling too good in the opener Friday night.

"Once we won it, it was just kind of make the best adjustments possible," Greinke said. "I mean, there's not much you can really do."

No telling which side will benefit, the team on a roll or the team coming off a break. Joe Kelly, who flourished as a replacement starter with St. Louis and gets the call for Game 1, was elevated to the fifth starting spot and then waited almost two weeks before actually getting on the mound.

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"You could be laid off for eight days and come out and play absolutely the best baseball you've ever done," Kelly said. "You could come out and play the next day and not have a good game. This is all about execution."

As a youth, Kelly was a budding skateboard star with a sponsor. Like other Cardinals youngsters, he's seemed oblivious to the pressure.

"It's Game 1 of the NLCS, but me being me, I'm going to go out there and just pitch like it's another game," he said.

The staff aces won't go until later in the best-of-seven series, with the Dodgers' Clayton Kershaw set for Game 2 and the Cardinals' Adam Wainwright ready for Game 3.

Rookie Michael Wacha, who has flirted with a no-hitter his last two starts, goes in Game 2 for St. Louis. Dodgers manager Don Mattingly said he'd probably announce the rest of the starting assignments on game day.

The series matches a largely homegrown team seeking its second World Series appearance in three years against one that's been among the biggest spenders trying to get there for the first time in a quarter-century. The Dodgers spent well over \$200 million to put together their team.

"I think the payroll gets thrown out there in general, and then it becomes an expectation," Mattingly said. "You've got these high-profile guys, you've got big names, guys making big money, you're supposed to win."

They won the NL West for the first time in four years, then eliminated the Braves in four games in the NLDS.

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Greinke is among a half-dozen Dodgers making \$15 million or more and Mattingly said it's like having a pair of aces.

"So it's nice to start a series with a guy of his caliber," Mattingly said. "In this environment, it's nice to have those two right on top."

St. Louis led the National League with 97 wins, including a major league-high 33 by rookie pitchers. The Cardinals' payroll is at about \$119 million outlay, a large chunk going to players like Chris Carpenter, Jason Motte and Rafael Furcal who didn't make it to opening day and another, Jaime Garcia, who was sidelined for the year in mid-May.

The Dodgers won three of four in St. Louis in August, notably limiting rookie Shelby Miller to just two pitches in one start after taking a liner by Carl Crawford off his elbow.

This is the third straight NLCS appearance for the Cardinals, who'll try to keep winning without their cleanup man. Allen Craig met with foot specialist Dr. Robert Anderson in Charlotte, N.C., Thursday for a second opinion on a left mid-foot sprain that's sidelined him since early September.

General manager John Mozeliak said the team expected to learn about therapy options "if we're going to try to get him ready for the next series." Craig's .454 average with runners in scoring position led the majors.

"It's a tough injury and one you can't be aggressive with," the GM said.

Replacement starter Matt Adams' two-run homer helped the Cardinals finish off the Pirates with a 6-1 victory in Game 5.

Mozeliak said the Cardinals would likely not make any roster changes for a series matching their largely homegrown roster against the free-spending Dodgers.

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Mattingly isn't optimistic that outfielder Andre Ethier, limited to three at-bats in the division series by a left ankle injury, will be ready for regular duty in the series after getting pushed in a workout Wednesday.

"Honestly, for me, it didn't look that great out in center field," Mattingly said. "This is the playoffs and you've got to be able to play 100 percent or pretty much full speed."