CUBS WORLD SERIES QUEST

'Alphonse and Gaston act' in outfield takes starch out of Indians, forces Game 7

By George Castle, CBM Historian Posted Tuesday, November 1, 2016

Could history be repeating itself – only this time inversing the outcome in favor of the Cubs?

Wherever Jack Brickhouse is, he would have called the first-inning outfield misplay between Tyler Naquin and Lonnie Chisenhall an "Alphonse and Gaston act." The blooper of falling outfielders and a falling baseball, resulting in two runs, definitely was a momentum-changer in the Cubs' 9-3 victory in Game 6 to force a winner-take-all showdown Wednesday night.

The Cubs may be owed one in the outfield. On Oct. 12, 1929, Hack Wilson misplayed two fly balls in the afternoon glare in Shibe



Tyler Naquin (left) and Lonnie Chisenhall pulled off a classic Jack Brickhouse "Alphonse-and-Gaston act" to give the Cubs momentum in Game 6.

Park in Philadelphia. An 8-0 Cubs lead going into the bottom of the seventh that promised to tie the World Series 2-2 against the Athletics melted away via a shocking Philly 10-run inning. The A's won the game, and clinched the Fall Classic two days later, the powerful Cubs enduring a quick exit and making the ground under manager Joe McCarthy shaky.

Still another World Series turned on an outfield misplay. Considered the best center fielder this side of Willie Mays, the Cardinals' Curt Flood turned the wrong way on a Jim Northrup drive in Game 7 of the 1968 Fall Classic at Busch Stadium II. The goof, resulting in a triple, enabled the Tigers to complete a comeback from a 3-1 deficit, a feat the Cubs are trying to duplicate.

Outfield follies are obviously game crushers. The Naquin-Chisenhall affair took the expectant Progressive Field crowd out of the game. They were quieted further on Addison Russell's grand-slam two innings leader.

But they will raise their decibel level again in the climactic Game 7 as casual fans tune in nationwide, in the most-watched World Series since the Red Sox's drought-buster in 2004.

At stake is the end of one of the two longest championship droughts in baseball history. And the crucible for the Cubs is Cleveland ace Corey Kluber, who has already beaten them twice in the World Series with 15 strikeouts in 12 innings. Once again, Kluber will work on three days' rest.

Kluber, the 2014 Cy Young Award winner vs. Kyle Hendricks, the majors' ERA leader. What more can any fan ask? What more will make a Cubs follower nervous than Game 7 to end the "1908 syndrome?"

They'll be less skittish if Kris Bryant continues catching his second wind against Kluber and the inevitable Cleveland relievers. Appearing gassed earlier in the World Series with a power outage, Bryant lowered the boom with four hits in Game 6, including a home run for the second consecutive contest.

Kyle Schwarber's return to DH'ing after enforced inactivity in the three Wrigley Field games was another success. He walked and scored on Russell's grand slam, then later singled off reliever Zach McAllister of downstate Chillicothe.

Schwarber's placement in the No. 2 lineup slot was a brainstorm by Cubs manager Joe Maddon. He is an on-base percentage maven.



Kris Bryant (left) had a memorable night with four hits, including a homer, while Kyle Schwarber (right) was a perfect choice to bat second.

Schwarber's presence up top enabled the Cubs to field left-handed hitters in four of the first five positions in the batting order. Maddon also proved mentally he was not wedded to his regular-season order of Bryant hitting second and Anthony Rizzo third with so much at stake and so little time left. Each moved down one spotl.

While the lineup made sense, Maddon's summons of Aroldis Chapman with two outs in the seventh with a five-run lead carried too much risk. Chapman entered in the seventh for the second straight game.

Seeking to lock down Game 6, leaving nothing to chance, Maddon likely burned up Chapman for Game 7 in a move Fox broadcaster Joe Buck said had an "odd feel." He also showed a lack of confidence at this juncture in Pedro Strop and Hector Rondon to bridge the seventh- and eighth-inning gap with a big lead. Now, Maddon may be forced to use Strop and Rondon, along with starters Jon Lester and John Lackey, if Chapman is unavailable for the grand finale.

Conversely, Maddon pulling Jake Arrieta with two out in the sixth was the correct move. Pitching decently but not at his sharpest, Arrieta seemed on the verge of losing it with his third walk of the game.

Both Arrieta and Cubs hitters had to be especially on their toes with "Country Joe" West working the plate. West, always drawing attention to himself, has a by-the-book

strike zone. No exceptions, no breaks for superstars either at the plate or on the mound.

West has history with both Chicago teams, angering Andre Dawson to the point he emptied the bat rack at Wrigley Field in 1991, and jawing with Ozzie Guillen during his Sox managing days. Late in the regular season, he quickly ejected Maddon for supposedly stalling for time to warm up Chapman.

At least West won't have the key umpire posting for the game that decides if all Cubs phobias and obsessions with curses are retired to the dustbin of history.