DODGERS.COM
Wild Horse spurs Dodgers to 80th win— Jarrid Denney and Ken Gurnick
Nicknames, crazy gear part of Players Weekend—Ken Gurnick
Dodgers on top thanks to bottom of order—Ken Gurnick
Banda to face Dodgers, Darvish in 3rd start- Jarrid Denney
Wood, Greinke set for showdown in Phoenix- Ken Gurnick
Urias feeling 'really good' after shoulder surgery- Ken Gurnick

LA TIMES
In possible playoff preview, Dodgers' Alex Wood outduels Zack Greinke—Pedro Moura
Dodgers pitcher Julio Urias is improving physically and mentally after surgery- Pedro Moura
MLB players get to wear nicknames on their jerseys for one weekend: So which Dodger is ‘Dizzy’? Or ‘Sam’?- Chuck Schilken

OC REGISTER
Dodgers rally against Zack Greinke, hand Diamondbacks another one-run loss, 3-2- Bill Plunkett
Miller: ‘Who We Are Dodgers’ haven’t forged their identity yet- Jeff Miller
Dodgers Notes: Julio Urias makes peace with long rehab road ahead- Bill Plunkett

ESPN
Real or not? Dodgers back to winning, Cardinals are team to beat in NL Central- David Schoenfield
Dodgers win 80th game of season, rallying over Diamondbacks- Associated Press

TRUE BLUE LA
Alex Verdugo ends slump with 11th inning blast—David Hood
Cody Bellinger scores twice in Dodger 3-2 comeback win—Craig Minami
Nearly the same Dodgers take the field tonight versus Diamondbacks- David Young
Dodgers unveil Players Weekend Uniforms- Ryan Walton
Slugging milestones in sight for Dodgers- Eric Stephen

DODGER INSIDER
Pederson, Puig power Dodgers to another comeback win—Rowan Kavner
Kershaw feeling healthy, bullpen session expected Friday- Rowan Kavner
“Players Weekend” to include nicknames on players’ jerseys- Rowan Kavner

CSUN TODAY
CSUN Shows Dodgers RBI Participants That College is a Possibility- Jorge Martin

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL
The New Moneyball, With Lots and Lots of Money—Jared Diamond

THE RINGER
How to Beat the Best Team in Baseball- Michael Baumann

NBC LA
Dodgers Rally Against Zack Greinke to Defeat Diamondbacks, 3-2- Michael Duarte
Wild Horse spurs Dodgers to 80th win

By Jarrid Denney and Ken Gurnick

PHOENIX -- Joc Pederson and Yasiel Puig (the latter to be known as "Wild Horse" on Players Weekend) drove in runs with two out in the seventh inning against former teammate Zack Greinke, and Alex Wood ran his record to 14-1 as the Dodgers rallied Wednesday night for a 3-2 win over the D-backs at Chase Field. Los Angeles (80-33) is the sixth team since 1913 to hit the 80-win mark in its first 113 games.

Wood, who complained of fatigue in his last start when his velocity dropped, made a mechanical adjustment during a Sunday bullpen session, and his velocity returned for much of his six innings.

"I thought my stuff was back to where I wanted it to be," said Wood, 6-0 on the road. "Usually not that easy of a fix, but it was an easy fix this time and life came back to the fastball. I was getting 2 or 3 inches closed off in my hips and not reaching full potential, and we opened it a little bit and the life came back and my stuff was better."

Pederson's two-out double cashed in a leadoff double by rookie sensation Cody Bellinger, who earlier slugged his 33rd home run. Puig followed by punching a single to right field that scored Pederson and chased Greinke, who suffered his first loss at home this year after a franchise record 10 consecutive home wins and is 13-5 overall.

"The pitch to Joc was the worst one," said Greinke, whose D-backs fell a half-game behind Colorado for the first National League Wild Card berth as the Rockies won Wednesday. "He did what he was supposed to do with it. It was a bad pitch and he hit it hard, so I made a big mistake there."

Bellinger, who will wear the nickname "Codylove" on the back of his jersey for Players Weekend, homered to lead off the second inning for the Dodgers, then Paul Goldschmidt tied it with a Statcast™-projected 443-foot blast off the batter's eye in center field with one out in the fourth inning. Arizona took the lead in the sixth inning on a one-out ground-rule double by A.J. Pollock and a two-out RBI single by J.D. Martinez.

Greinke went 6 2/3 innings and struck out eight while allowing three runs and walking four.

"I thought Zack threw the ball very, very well," Arizona manager Torey Lovullo said. "He got a number of early-count outs that allowed him to work deep into the game and he told me he felt great and he wanted to go out there and finish [the seventh] inning. Unfortunately it didn't happen."

Wood was charged with two runs on six hits in six innings with four strikeouts and one walk. He joined Zach Davies and Jose Urena as the only pitchers to remain unbeaten on the road this season (minimum
of eight starts). He joined teammate Clayton Kershaw and Chris Sale as the only pitchers in MLB with at least 14 victories.

"That's more a testament to the guys on the team," said Wood. "Literally, a different guy every night."

MOMENTS THAT MATTERED
Friendly (?) rivalry: Greinke and Puig, who have a history, had a game within a game after Puig led off the third inning with a walk. With one out and Chris Taylor up, Greinke attempted seven pickoffs. Although Puig, aka "Wild Horse," was safe each time, Greinke's attention had its secondary intent of cutting into Puig's lead and he was eventually thrown out by catcher Jeff Mathis trying to steal second base while Taylor struck out for an inning-ending double-play. Corey Seager was on deck.

Nice hold: Josh Fields began warming up with the Dodgers trailing by a run in the seventh, but by the time he entered the game he had a one-run lead, which he protected by pitching a scoreless seventh and eighth innings to set up Kenley Jansen's 29th save.

QUOTABLE
"He was the Alex we've seen all year." -- Roberts, on Wood

SOUND SMART WITH YOUR FRIENDS
Aaron Judge and Bellinger are the first pair each with at least 33 home runs in their rookie season since Walt Dropo and Al Rosen in 1950. Bellinger has 33 home runs through 93 games, tied with Gary Sanchez and Rudy York, and only Mark McGwire had more (37) in his first 100 games.

WHAT'S NEXT
Dodgers: Yu Darvish makes his second start as a Dodger in the series finale Thursday night at 6:40 p.m. PT. He'll have a tough act to follow, as he debuted in blue with seven scoreless innings against the Mets.

D-backs: Anthony Banda will make his third Major League start on his 24th birthday when the D-backs close out their series with the Dodgers at 6:40 p.m. MST on Thursday. Banda picked up his first big league win against the Giants on Friday when he threw six innings and surrendered one run.

Nicknames, crazy gear part of Players Weekend

By Ken Gurnick

PHOENIX -- Justin Turner and Cody Bellinger will be among the Dodgers' participants when MLB and the MLB Players Association hold their inaugural Players Weekend on Aug. 25-27.

Players will wear colorful, non-traditional uniforms featuring alternate designs. And instead of last names on the back of their jerseys, both players will have their nicknames -- Redturn2 for Turner, Codylove for Bellinger.

Players also will wear a special sleeve patch showing the progression of a child evolving into a Major Leaguer. Under that logo, each player will put the name of a person who helped advance their career. Turner will have the name of his Grandpa Bates, Bellinger will have his mother and father.
As for the nickname, Turner said his originated as his first social-media tag when he came up with the Mets in 2011.

"My nickname was always Red growing up. I played second base, and with the Mets I wore No. 2," he said. "On the sleeve, it's Grandpa Frank Bates. He never missed a game. He'd take me on vacation to the lake, but he'd make me catch 50 tennis balls before we ate dinner."

Bellinger's nickname is a little more complicated. Teammates gave it to him two Spring Trainings back in a nod to Joclove, teammate Joc Pederson's signature for a flurry of Valentine's Day social-media postings. It was manager Dave Roberts who suggested that Bellinger needed a nickname to boost his social-media followers, which at the time numbered fewer than 1,000.

"I tried doing #Codylove for the jersey, but they don't allow hashtags," Bellinger said. "My name in the clubhouse is always Belly, but I went with Codylove."

The sleeve patch salutes his parents, father Clay, the former Yankees player, and mother Jennifer, "because they supported me through club-ball days and travel-ball days."

In addition to the nicknames and sleeve patches, players will have uniquely colored and designed spikes, batting gloves, wristbands, compression sleeves and bats to use in the games. New Era will provide specially designed caps, Stance will provide socks. Players will wear T-shirts during pregame workouts highlight a charity of their choice.

Game-worn Players Weekend jerseys will be auctioned at MLB.com/auctions with 100 percent of net proceeds donated to the MLB-MLBPA Youth Development Foundation, a joint effort established in July 2015 by MLB and the MLBPA with an initial commitment of $30 million focused on improving the caliber, effectiveness and availability of amateur baseball and softball programs across the U.S. and Canada.

The uniforms will first be worn by the Pirates and Cardinals during the MLB Little League Classic to be played in Williamsport, Pa., on Aug. 20 during the 2017 Little League World Series. That game will take place at Bowman Field, home of the Williamsport Crosscutters, a Phillies affiliate in the short-season Class A New York-Penn League.

Here's a list of nicknames that some Dodgers are expected to sport on the back of their jerseys on Players Weekend:

- Cody Bellinger: "CODYLOVE"
- Kenley Jansen: "MA'MONTRO"
- Justin Turner: "REDTURN2"
- Yu Darvish: "YU-SAN"
- Chase Utley: "SILVER FOX"
- Yasiel Puig: "WILD HORSE"
- Rich Hill: "BRICE"
- Joc Pederson: "DIZZY"
- Yasmani Grandal: "YRG JR"
- Enrique Hernandez: "KIKÉ"
Dodgers on top thanks to bottom of order

By Ken Gurnick

PHOENIX -- After a rare loss Tuesday night, the Dodgers returned to their comebacking ways Wednesday night, with the bottom of the batting order rallying to beat the D-backs, 3-2.

No. 7 batter Joc Pederson (who will wear the nickname "Dizzy" on the back of his jersey for Players Weekend) snapped an 0-for-23 drought with a tying double off former teammate Zack Greinke in the seventh inning, and No. 8 hitter Yasiel Puig (who will sport the nickname "Wild Horse" on his Players Weekend jersey) followed with a soft RBI single that scored Pederson with what proved the winning run.

"You could see the exhale when he got to first base and the boyish smile," manager Dave Roberts said of Pederson. "He's a big part of what we're trying to do. For him to get that big hit, obviously, it was a big lift for all of us."

Pederson said working with organizational hitting instructor Shawn Wooten the previous two days had a lot to do with his clutch hit, which followed strikeouts in his first two at-bats against Greinke.

"It was really nice. First hit in a long time," said Pederson. "To have it come up big and help the team win a ballgame is a nice feeling. What's really big is to get away from the results and sticking to the process. Wooten's here and I was able to come to the field the past two days and work on a consistent routine no matter what the results are. I have a bad habit of changing stuff and getting away from the process and chasing hits, and it's not a line for success."

Puig followed and continued to deliver, taking a Greinke slider the other way to bring home Pederson, and Puig celebrated all the way down to first base.

"He was pitching a lot of sliders, I was thinking to wait," said Puig. "I was thinking of going opposite field. They went heavy to the pull side, so I waited to swing and that obligated me to going to the opposite field. I don't have that many opportunities to push runs in to win the game. Usually the animal [Cody] Bellinger and C.T. [Chris Taylor] have been doing that. I'm happy to have the opportunity tonight."

The win left the Dodgers 16 games in front of Arizona, which is in a duel with Colorado for Wild Card berths while the Dodgers are almost assured of winning the division. That could set up an interesting first-round divisional clash in the postseason, as the Dodgers lead the season series with Arizona, 7-5, with four of the last five games decided by one run.

"They're tough, they can pitch," Roberts said of the D-backs. "They grind at-bats, run the bases and catch the ball. It's fun to play those guys. We're familiar, they're familiar."

Starter Alex Wood said it's still too early to get caught up in potential postseason matchups.

"Not really, not at this point," he said. "We know we have a good chance to see the D-backs or Colorado, if everything stays the same. We're not thinking too much about that. One goal at a time, win the division, get ready for the postseason and go from there."
Banda to face Dodgers, Darvish in 3rd start

By Jarrid Denney

In Anthony Banda's most recent outing last Friday, he registered a major milestone: his first career big league win. The left-hander will try to double his career win total Thursday but will face a steep challenge when he and the D-backs take on the Dodgers at Chase Field.

Banda, who held the Giants to three hits and one run over six innings Friday, will match up with a Dodgers team that entered Wednesday having scored the fifth-most runs in the Majors. He has relied heavily on his fastball in his first two starts with the D-backs and has thrown his heater 65.52 percent of the time, according to Statcast.

The D-backs will face newly acquired Dodgers righty Yu Darvish, who tossed seven dominant innings in his debut with Los Angeles. In that game, Darvish threw his four-seam fastball to his arm side 17 times, according to Statcast, which is his second-highest total of four-seamers thrown there in a game this season.

Things to know about this game

• Banda will turn 24 on Thursday. He is the youngest pitcher to start for the D-backs this season.

• Banda was 7-6 with a 5.13 ERA in 19 starts at Triple-A Reno before being recalled by the D-backs.

• Darvish last pitched against the D-backs as a member of the Rangers on Aug. 1, 2013. He struck out 14 Arizona batters without issuing a walk in seven scoreless innings.

Urias feeling 'really good' after shoulder surgery

By Ken Gurnick

PHOENIX -- One of the reasons the Dodgers traded for starting pitcher Yu Darvish last week walked into the clubhouse at Chase Field on Wednesday.

Julio Urias came by to see the team he can't help in October, speaking with the media for the first time about his season-ending anterior shoulder capsule surgery.

"It was hard. No baseball player wants to have a surgery like that," said Urias, who underwent the reconstructive surgery June 27, with an estimated return time of 12 to 14 months. "I had a lot of emotions. You feel sadness, you feel angry, everything goes through your head. You think about your career and everything you've done to get to that point. I tried to get out of that stage as quickly as I could and now I feel motivated to work every day."

Urias said Dr. Neal ElAttrache told him the damage was minimal. He said there's no timetable on his return -- "When God wants to and when I'm ready" -- but he's confident he will be at least as good as before the surgery, when he was ranked by MLBpipeline.com as the No. 4 prospect in MLB coming into the season.
"I'm not scared," he said. "I'm thinking positively 100 percent. I'm thinking about coming back, maybe even better if I put in the work. I'm not worried about being the same player. After a month and a couple days, I feel really good."

The Dodgers experimented with Urias early in the season, hoping to have him fresh late in the season, as they did a year ago when he went 5-2 with a 3.39 ERA and started in the postseason. They throttled him back as Spring Training neared an end, even though he pitched well enough to be in the season-opening rotation, and then sent him to the Minor Leagues.

But in a June 10 start for Triple-A Oklahoma City, Urias felt a "tugging" on a specific pitch. He pitched two more innings, hitting 96 and 97 mph, but was stiff the next morning. An MRI revealed the damage.

Urias said fellow Mexican pitchers have been supportive and offered suggestions on rehabbing, specifically good friend Oliver Perez of the Washington Nationals.

"Sometimes when your fellow countryman reaches out, it sends the message even clearer and brings a positive attitude," he said. "I'm really close to Perez -- we train in the offseason -- and he reached out and he's helped me be positive."

In other rehab news, Clayton Kershaw (lower back strain) will throw his first bullpen session Friday at Dodger Stadium. Andre Ethier will begin a rehab assignment with Class A Advanced Rancho Cucamonga on Saturday, but won't be activated until Sept. 1, when rosters expand.

The Dodgers also learned pitcher Luke Farrell was claimed by Cincinnati.

LA TIMES
In possible playoff preview, Dodgers' Alex Wood outduels Zack Greinke
By Pedro Moura

Two months from Wednesday, the Dodgers most likely will play Game 3 of the National League division series on the road. Most likely, they will start Alex Wood, their 26-year-old All-Star left-hander. Most likely, they will play either Arizona or Colorado, whichever team wins the National League wild-card game.

If it is Arizona, the Diamondbacks will most likely start ex-Dodger Zack Greinke on Oct. 9 at Chase Field, making Wednesday’s game quite the postseason preview.

“Obviously, you can look at the standings and understand what’s possible,” Dodgers manager Dave Roberts said. “If that does happen, it’ll be fun.”

In Wood vs. Greinke at Chase Field Part 1, the Dodgers surpassed the Diamondbacks, 3-2, spurred by a seventh-inning rally against a tiring Greinke. Wood, improving to 14-1, regained the velocity he had lost in his last start by employing a hip adjustment made Sunday in New York, and both starting pitchers held their opponents to a solo shot through five innings.
Cody Bellinger struck first to begin the second.

Greinke threw the rookie a fastball up and in, grazing the edge of the strike zone. Bellinger whipped his bat and generated enough torque to propel the ball out to right field.

That was the Dodgers’ lone hit until the seventh, though they drew four walks up to that point, including a disputed one in the sixth by Chris Taylor. For the ninth pitch of their battle, Greinke fired a fastball along the apparent black of home plate. Taylor laid off, home-plate umpire Alfonso Marquez called it a ball, and Greinke crouched in disbelief, displaying more emotion than he typically did as a Dodger.

Wood permitted his first hit in the second, a double by J.D. Martinez, and a solo shot to Paul Goldschmidt in the fourth. He left a fastball over the middle of plate, and Goldschmidt banged it off of the batter’s eye.

Then, in the sixth, Yasiel Puig cursed himself when he could not catch A.J. Pollock’s ground-rule double to right. That proved consequential when Martinez dug up a low changeup and stroked it to center field for the go-ahead single.

The Dodgers’ rejoinder was a seventh-inning rally. With the count 3-and-2, Greinke (13-5) threw Bellinger another up-and-in fastball, a little lower than earlier. Bellinger again anticipated it and lined a double to right field. With two outs, Greinke missed with a 1-and-0 changeup and Joc Pederson hit a tying double to right to snap an 0-for-23 streak.

“You could see the exhale and the boyish smile,” Roberts said.

Two pitches later, Puig snuck a grounder into right field. As he neared first base, he happily motioned for Pederson to run home.

As an explanation for his demonstrations, Puig said he has not been receiving many opportunities to drive in key runs because of the likes of Bellinger and Taylor.

After Wood was pulled after six innings, Roberts deployed Josh Fields in the seventh. When Fields set down the Diamondbacks in seven pitches, Roberts stuck with the right-hander for the eighth and earned another quick inning thanks to Goldschmidt hitting into a double play.

After beginning to warm up with a man on in the eighth, Kenley Jansen waited out the Dodgers’ challenge for insurance runs in the top of the ninth. He secured his 29th save, his lone misstep a hit batsman.

It was the Dodgers’ 80th victory, and their 12th consecutive in games decided by one run, dating to June 28. Their players were left to fend off questions about how much they are thinking about the playoffs.

Puig said he’d prefer to face Colorado over Arizona because of how the Diamondbacks have played the Dodgers this season — close. But, when pressed, he said it did not much matter.
Dodgers pitcher Julio Urias is improving physically and mentally after surgery

By Pedro Moura

Julio Urias visited Chase Field to meet with Dodgers officials Wednesday. They planned to delineate how he would proceed in his recovery from surgery for the torn anterior capsule in his left shoulder.

Tuesday marked six weeks since Urias’ season-ending surgery, performed by Dr. Neal ElAttrache. In the days surrounding the operation, the Dodgers did not make Urias available to speak to reporters. Others spoke for him, including Scott Boras, his agent, and Andrew Friedman, the Dodgers’ president of baseball operations. Friedman cited his frustration and despair upon learning what awaited the top pitching prospect.

Speaking for the first time since the surgery, Urias said he had trouble processing the reality that his career would be set back so significantly.

“I had a lot of emotions,” Urias said through interpreter Jesus Quinonez. “You feel sadness. You feel angry. Everything goes to your head. You think about your career, everything you’ve done to get to that point.

“I tried to get out of that stage as fast as I could. Now I feel very motivated and ready for everything.”

Manager Dave Roberts said he sensed from conversation that Urias had recently adjusted his perspective.

“He had clarity,” Roberts said. “And, in recent weeks, he hadn’t really had that.”

Urias will turn 21 on Saturday. After debuting at 19 a year ago and succeeding, the precocious left-hander walked more men than he struck out in an early-season stint with the Dodgers. Three weeks after he was sent down to triple-A Oklahoma City, he tore the capsule amid an eight-strikeout start.

Pain precipitated more than a week of inaction, which prompted several tests, and, eventually, the diagnosis, considered one of the most severe a pitcher can receive. When major leaguers have had the surgery Urias underwent, they have often been unable to reclaim their peak form.

“I’m not scared,” Urias said of that possibility. “I’m thinking positively, 100%. I’m thinking about coming back and thinking I may be even better if I put in the work. I’m not worried about being the same player, coming back the same way. I’m just being positive and getting my work in.”

Urias said he was encouraged by ElAttrache’s cheery post-operation report, which stated that “everything was better than expected.” Unlike most similar tears, Urias’ lacked scar tissue in the area because it had torn in an acute fashion. Typically, overuse is at fault.

“He obviously can’t guarantee anything,” Urias said of ElAttrache. “That depends on my rehab and how much work I put in, but after a month and a couple days, I feel really good.”

Friedman has expressed hope Urias could pitch in 2018. Urias was unsure when he could return.
“When God wants me to,” he said, “and when I’m ready.”

Urias said he had received an enormous quantity of encouraging messages from fellow ballplayers. He particularly prized the note he received from Washington reliever Oliver Perez, who like him hails from Culiacan, Mexico.

“I appreciate the advice from everyone,” Urias said. “But sometimes when your countryman reaches out, it helps send the message even clearer.”

Short hops

Clayton Kershaw’s first bullpen session since his July 23 back injury is scheduled for Friday at Dodger Stadium. … Roberts reiterated his expectation that outfielder Andre Ethier will soon begin a rehab assignment with Class-A Rancho Cucamonga. He said Sept. 1 remains a realistic activation date for the 35-year-old outfielder, who has batted only 26 times since 2015. Ethier, a Phoenix native, took batting practice at Chase Field on Wednesday.

**MLB players get to wear nicknames on their jerseys for one weekend: So which Dodger is ‘Dizzy’? Or ‘Sam’?**

By Chuck Schilken

Guess which Dodger player is nicknamed “Silver Fox.” How about “Wild Horse” or “Dizzy”? Here’s a tricky one — “Sam,” since there is no one by that name on the team’s roster.

And some not-so-tricky ones — “Kersh,” “Kiké” and “Seager.”

They’re all going to be easy to identify during Major League Baseball’s Players Weekend, Aug. 25-27, when players around the league will wear special uniforms inspired by those worn by youth league players featuring their personally selected nicknames on the back where their last names usually would be (with the exception of Dodgers shortstop Corey Seager, whose last is apparently also his nickname).

Also during that weekend, players will allowed to wear unique spikes, batting gloves, wristbands, compression sleeves, catcher’s masks and bats, as well as special caps and socks. Players will be able to write in the name of a person or organization they would like to honor, and they also can wear T-shirts highlighting a charity or cause during pregame workouts and postgame interviews.

"The collective desire to express their diverse interests and backgrounds is what motivated players to lobby for the creation of Players Weekend,” MLB Players Assn. Executive Director Tony Clark said in a statement. “This will be an exciting and unique opportunity for the players to literally wear their passions on their sleeves, and equipment, too, as they embrace this chance to let their true identities shine."

Here’s the list of the nicknames Dodger members will wear on their jerseys:

Luis Avilan — Avi
Pedro Baez — La Mula
Austin Barnes — Sam
Cody Bellinger — Codylove
Tony Cingrani — Grani
Yu Darvish — Yu-San
Andre Ethier — Daddy
Logan Forsythe — Logie Bear
Adrian Gonzalez — El Titán
Yasmani Grandal — YRG JR
Enrique Hernandez — Kiké
Rich Hill — Brice
Kenley Jansen — M’Montro
Clayton Kershaw — Kersh
Kenta Maeda — Maeken
Brandon McCarthy — BMac
Brandon Morrow — B Mo
Joc Pederson — Dizzy
Yasiel Puig — Wild Horse
Corey Seager — Seager
Ross Stripling — Chicken Strip
Chris Taylor — CT3
Justin Turner — Redturn2;
Chase Utley — Silver Fox
Tony Watson — Watty
Alex Wood — Woodman

Other notable nicknames coming to the back of an MLB jersey near you: “Kiiiiid” (Angels’ Mike Trout), “All Rise” (Yankees’ Aaron Judge), “Corey’s Brother” (Seattle’s Kyle Seager), “El Koja” (Texas’ Adrian Beltre), “Wawindaji” (San Francisco’s Hunter Pence) and “Bringer of Rain” (Toronto’s Josh Donaldson).

OC REGISTER

Dodgers rally against Zack Greinke, hand Diamondbacks another one-run loss, 3-2

By Bill Plunkett

PHOENIX – If the Arizona Diamondbacks wanted to make the Dodgers sweat, they would have done better to leave the roof of Chase Field open to the 110-degree heat.

But maybe they have at least given the Dodgers something to think about.

Held to one hit – a solo home run by Cody Bellinger – through six innings by right-hander Zack Greinke, the Dodgers broke through for two runs in the seventh and handed the Diamondbacks a 3-2 loss Wednesday night at Chase Field.

It does little but take another day off the baseball calendar (and end Greinke’s run of 10 consecutive wins at home this season).

The Dodgers’ lead in the NL West is a robust 15½ games over the Colorado Rockies with the Diamondbacks 16 games back now. The NL order is all but set. The Diamondbacks and Rockies have strong holds on the wild-card spots (the Cardinals and Brewers are seven games back) and the winner of the wild-card play-in game will face the Dodgers in a best-of-5 NL Division Series (assuming the Dodgers maintain their status as the NL’s top dog).

“We’re in first place so we don’t really care who we play,” Yasiel Puig said of potential playoff matchups. “If it’s the Diamondbacks, that’s fine or if it’s Colorado even better.

“I just know throughout the season, the Diamondbacks seem to play us better. But it doesn’t matter.”

Puig is right.

The Dodgers have matching 7-5 records against the Diamondbacks and Rockies this season. But the Diamondbacks have played them tougher. The Dodgers’ past four wins over the Diamondbacks have all been one-run games.

The Diamondbacks have actually outscored the Dodgers head-to-head 53-50 in the season series and have had the upper hand at Chase Field, where they have won three of the five meetings and outscored the Dodgers, 34-22.
“They’re tough,” Dodgers manager Dave Roberts said. “They can pitch. They grind at-bats. They run the bases. They catch the ball. It’s fun to play those guys. We’re familiar. They’re familiar when you play each other 18 games. Each one of those (one-run) games could have gone either way.

“But I think our guys do a good job of focusing on August 9 and win tonight. When you forecast (playoff matchups), it’s a possibility. If that does happen, it’ll be fun.”

The Dodgers weren’t having much fun as Greinke kept them in check for six innings Wednesday.

Paul Goldschmidt homered in the fourth inning – as he typically does whenever the Dodgers and Diamondbacks meet.

And in the sixth inning, J.D. Martinez – obtained from the Detroit Tigers before last week’s non-waiver trade deadline to fortify the Diamondbacks’ weak attack against left-handed pitching – gave Greinke the lead with a two-out RBI single against Dodgers left-hander Alex Wood.

But Bellinger led off the seventh with his second hit off Greinke, a double to right field. The former Dodgers right-hander was poised to slip away from danger after getting Yasmani Grandal to fly out and Chase Utley to ground out.

That brought up Joc Pederson, who was hitless in his previous 23 at-bats, including strikeouts in his first two at-bats against Greinke on Wednesday night. But Greinke left a fat changeup over the plate and Pederson lashed it for an RBI double to tie the score.

“First hit in a long, long time,” Pederson said. “To have it come up big and help the ballclub was really nice.

“Other at-bats, he made really good pitches. ... I didn’t really get anything to hit. He made a mistake and I was able to take advantage.”

Greinke made another mistake, leaving a hittable slider over the plate to Puig, who drove Pederson in with the go-ahead run by dropping a single into right field.

“He was throwing a lot of sliders,” Puig said through an interpreter. “That’s obviously one of his best pitches and he was throwing a lot of them to everybody. I was just trying to wait and make contact with the ball.”

The Dodgers’ bullpen has not fared well at Chase Field this season. They were charged with 19 runs in 11-1/3 innings over the Dodgers’ first four games here. But Josh Fields and Kenley Jansen held the Diamondbacks to one hit in three scoreless innings Wednesday.

Miller: ‘Who We Are Dodgers’ haven’t forged their identity yet

By Jeff Miller

If the 2017 Dodgers don’t win the World Series, their historic season will be remembered as a failure.
And if this is such a profound statement, how come that’s already the third time I’ve made some version of it?

Folks, any chance I had of ever being considered profound ended years ago, on the occasion of making, in print, career joke No. 100 that used the word wiener.

Please. The Dodgers, more than any of us, realize they have to win the final game of this baseball season or they’ll lose everything else they’ve accumulated along the way.

That reality is undeniably true and remarkably unfair, and no one really cares if it’s fair or not because the Dodgers brought this on themselves by being so darned dominant in the first place. They could have avoided these stark circumstances by losing at a pace more heady than Sports Illustrated publishes a magazine. Once-a-week is ridiculous in baseball, a game where even the winning team typically makes at least 24 outs.

Yet, the Dodgers of late have insisted on eluding defeat at a level dating to the sport’s very origins.

They could stumble now and still easily win more than 110 times, which wouldn’t break any big-league records, even though their winning has come to sound precisely like a broken record.

Still, what happens from April to September in baseball assures nothing once October arrives. If anyone understands that, it’s Clayton Kershaw, right?

So, as much as the Dodgers have demolished everyone in their path – their lead for the sport’s best record entering Wednesday was eight games – they eventually will face an opponent that’s undefeated in the postseason: fate.

And fate can have entirely different ideas about what’s required to be a champion.

“Our goal is to win 11 games in October,” Manager Dave Roberts said during the team’s most recent homestand, repeating something he has uttered frequently and knowingly all summer. “We’re far from that right now."

No, this isn’t the NBA, where an individual player can so influence the outcome of games that everyone today expects Golden State to win the title again in 10 months.

Baseball’s playoffs can be much more fickle, of course, to the extreme point of one injured player, performing on one healthy leg, greatly determining everything with one gargantuan swing.

Hey, there’s a reason Kirk Gibson is a storybook legend around here.

Since that 1988 championship – the Dodgers’ most recent – six wild-card teams have won the World Series, including the 2002 Angels. Six others have reached the World Series before finally losing.

Not one of those 12 teams entered the playoffs favored to win anything, never mind everything.

Only two of the past 20 teams to win at least 100 regular-season games went on to claim the World Series, numbers that seem almost as unlikely as the statistics of Cody Bellinger.
That’s 2 for 20 or a batting average of .100, much too close to what Brandon McCarthy is hitting this year and proof that, in a series as short as a homestand, simple luck matters like raw skill.

The Chicago Cubs had the best regular-season mark in 2016 and rode that success to a title that ended a century-plus worth of disappointment.

Two years earlier, the Angels entered the postseason with a baseball-best 98 victories. That team didn’t win again, losing the division series to Kansas City in a sweep.

In fact, over the past decade, only four teams that finished with the best record or tied for the best record won the World Series.

That history says the Dodgers, if they do end up leading baseball in victories, still have a better chance of not being champions.

All of which means nothing at the moment other than the truth that the Dodgers face much more uncertainty as it relates to winning the 2017 World Series than their success today suggests.

Sorry, I’m not trying to be a downer, just a realist, one taking a realistic look at the unpredictable future of a team performing at an unreal clip.

Want something uplifting? OK, what do the Dodgers have in common with the Cleveland Cavaliers?

Both teams have had one three-game losing streak since the beginning of June, and the Cavs stopped playing more than eight weeks ago.

During that past homestand, I asked Roberts about the possibility of the Dodgers being too good too soon.

“I think people who feel like they’re peaking too soon aren’t confident fundamentally or in the foundation of what (they) have,” he said. “The foundation of where we’re at and the talent that we have, this is who we are.”

That, too, has become a regular response from Roberts. The “Who We Are Dodgers.” Maybe it’s not as catchy as the “Ya Gotta Believe Mets,” the “We Are Family Pirates” or the “Cowboy Up Red Sox.”

But the “Who We Are Dodgers” does fit them. All this winning stopped being fluky long ago. This is who the deep, talented Dodgers are in the second week of August.

What remains to be seen is who they’ll be in the fourth week of October, understanding that those two teams won’t necessarily be one.

**Dodgers Notes: Julio Urias makes peace with long rehab road ahead**

By Bill Plunkett

PHOENIX – Julio Urias went through all of the stages of grief.
“I had a lot of emotions,” the 20-year-old left-hander said of his reaction to the news that he would need season-ending shoulder surgery. “You feel sadness. You feel angry. Everything goes through your head. You think about your career. You think about everything that you’ve done to get to that point. I tried to get out of that stage as fast as I could. Now I feel very motivated and ready to work every day.

“It was hard. No baseball player wants to have a surgery like that. But we didn’t really have an option. I’m glad that we did it. Everything is good.”

Urias underwent surgery on June 27 to repair a tear in the anterior capsule of his left shoulder. The recovery is estimated to take 12-14 months, forcing Urias to miss most if not all of the 2018 season as well.

But the Dodgers are optimistic about his chances to regain his status as one of the top young pitching prospects in the game because of his youth and the fact that Dr. Neal ElAttrache found no damage to Urias’ rotator cuff or labrum. Most surgeries similar to Urias’ have been complicated by the age of the pitcher involved and accompanying damage in the joint.

“After the surgery, he (ElAttrache) greeted me with a smile and said everything was better than he had expected,” Urias said through an interpreter. “He obviously can’t guarantee anything. That also depends on my rehab and how much work I put in. After a month and a couple days, I feel really good.”

Urias has begun his rehab at Camelback Ranch. With the Dodgers in Arizona, he was in the clubhouse at Chase Field, re-acquainting himself with his teammates. Urias said he anticipated a meeting with the Dodgers’ front office and medical staff to provide the outlines of the long year of rehab ahead. Mundane details like when he will be able to pick up a baseball and start a throwing program are red-letter events in Urias’ life now.

“I’m not scared,” Urias said of regaining his former skills. “I’m thinking positively about coming back 100 percent and maybe even better if I put in the work.”

Dodgers manager Dave Roberts said he was glad to see Urias had reached the acceptance stage and had a positive attitude about the challenge he faces.

“It was just good to put eyes on him, get him around his teammates. As a young player going through this injury, you don’t want him to feel ostracized or alienated,” Roberts said.

“I’m sure there was the initial disappointment, frustration, anger and all that stuff that are natural things for a young player to go through. But for him to take a step back and get over that and now try to move forward in his rehab … he has clarity. In recent weeks, he really hadn’t had that. I think he feels good about things.”

ETHIER COMEBACK

Out all season with a herniated disc in his back, outfielder Andre Ethier is ready to start a minor-league injury-rehabilitation assignment.
Ethier went through a simulated game at Camelback Ranch on Tuesday, joined the Dodgers for batting practice at Chase Field on Wednesday and will go through another simulated game on Thursday. He is scheduled to join Class-A Rancho Cucamonga and start his rehab assignment on Saturday.

“He hasn’t played for quite some time so, for me, it’s going to be a Sept. 1 activation,” Roberts said. “And get as many at-bats as he can while the minor-league season is still going.”

That is similar to Ethier’s 2016 season when he missed five months with a spiral fracture in his leg suffered when he fouled a ball off his leg in spring training. He played nine games with the Quakes then 16 games with the Dodgers down the stretch. Ethier was on the playoff roster last season but is a very long shot to make it this year. This time, however, the 35-year-old faces free agency in the offseason and could use the final month of the season to re-establish his viability on the open market this winter.

ALSO

Roberts said left-hander Clayton Kershaw is scheduled to throw off a mound Friday in Los Angeles. It will be Kershaw’s first time on a mound since he suffered a lower back strain on July 23. Kershaw is progressing toward a return in early September.

Right-hander Yu Darvish is scheduled to start against the Arizona Diamondbacks on Thursday then make his first home start as a Dodger next Wednesday against the Chicago White Sox. That happens to be Darvish’s 31st birthday. Rich Hill, Hyun-Jin Ryu and Kenta Maeda are lined up to start this weekend’s series against the San Diego Padres.

**ESPN**

**Real or not? Dodgers back to winning, Cardinals are team to beat in NL Central**

By David Schoenfield

It had been a horrid stretch for the Los Angeles Dodgers, that one-game losing streak. Fans were questioning the amount of time they had devoted to the team. According to some reports, Corey Seager and Cody Bellinger were so tired of losing they contemplated just giving up the game and heading to college to study computer science, or maybe hospitality. Talk radio wanted Dave Roberts fired ... now.

Luckily, Alex Wood came to the rescue with six solid innings against the Arizona Diamondbacks. Bellinger then started a seventh-inning rally with a double -- he had homered earlier -- and Joc Pederson and Yasiel Puig delivered two-out RBI hits off Zack Greinke for a 3-2 lead. Roberts didn't mess around with any of his crummy left-handed relievers and let Josh Fields pitch two scoreless innings. And Kenley Jansen, of course, finished it off because he's Kenley Jansen and nobody is going to beat him this year.

It was a good game. You can question whether Torey Lovullo should have brought in a lefty to face Pederson, though Greinke had thrown fewer than 100 pitches and if Lovullo brings in, say, Andrew Chafin, his best lefty, Roberts probably counters with Kike Hernandez. Greinke versus Pederson or Chafin versus Hernandez (or even Archie Bradley versus Pederson)? The catch is that Greinke hasn't fared as well when he gets deeper into games this season. His numbers heading into this game:
Pitches 1-25: .439 OPS allowed

Pitches 26-50: .727 OPS allowed

Pitches 51-75: .557 OPS allowed

Pitches 76-100: .881 OPS allowed

I get wanting to leave in your ace and let him escape the inning, but Greinke nosedives after 75 pitches. To be fair, he didn't have this problem last season or in 2015, but it's also not last season or 2015. Chalk it up as a valuable lesson for Lovullo: manage with your brain and not your heart. The Diamondbacks have a good bullpen, sixth in the majors in ERA. Lovullo should use it when the numbers say to use it.

By the way, the Dodgers are on track for 114 wins:

The Dodgers got back to winning with their victory over the Diamondbacks on Wednesday night. These Dodgers are now on pace for a run differential of +289, which would match their franchise record, set by the 1889 Brooklyn Bridegrooms (yes, that was their nickname).

None of this matters anyway, because we have Rally Cat. Yep, we might as well consider the season over. The Dodgers have been great, maybe historic. Sorry, Houston Astros fans, you're not going to win your first World Series. The Cleveland Indians just acquired Jay Bruce to help them win their first World Series since 1948, but that's obviously going to be a pointless trade.

The St. Louis Cardinals have a kitty, and it's clear the baseball gods have spoken. Maybe they're just tired of hearing all the whining from Cardinals fans about what about a miserable season it has been in St. Louis. Maybe this is the gods just getting back at Chicago Cubs fans after finally granting them a reprieve from their sins last season. Whatever the reason, the season turned Wednesday night: The Cardinals are going to win the World Series.

I'll set the stage. The Royals were ahead 5-4 in the bottom of the sixth, bases loaded for the Cardinals, Yadier Molina at the plate, 1-0 count with two outs and Peter Moylan pitching. Cue the videos:

Then on the very next pitch, Molina does this:

The Cardinals win 8-5. They've won the first three games of the I-70 home-and-home with the Kansas City Royals and five in a row overall. Combined with another Cubs loss, they're now just 1½ games behind the Cubs in the National League Central. You might also remember what happened in 2011, when a squirrel interrupted play during Game 3 of the National League Division Series against the Philadelphia Phillies. The squirrel -- or maybe a different one, it's kind of hard to tell squirrels apart -- then ran across home plate in Game 4. A legend was born. The Cardinals went on to win the World Series, and the Rally Squirrel became a thing.

Mike Matheny after the game: "I'm not a cat person, but I sure like that one."

Molina: "You expect people to jump on the field, but you never expect animals. It was fun."

Cubs fans who remember 1969: "I hate cats."
But what happened to the cat? Cardinals writer Derrick Goold reports it vanished, kind of like Stephen Piscotty or maybe Matheny if the Cardinals don't make the playoffs:

If you're still not buying into all of this, well ...

Indians acquire Jay Bruce. I wrote about the trade here. It's still surprising that nobody wanted a guy who has hit 29 home runs -- Indians outfielders have combined to hit only 37 -- but much like Arizona getting J.D. Martinez without giving up much, nobody really wanted Bruce, and the Indians made this deal only after Michael Brantley landed on the disabled list because of a sprained ankle.

At the minimum, it gives Terry Francona a lot more depth and flexibility. Remember, the World Series ended last year with light-hitting Michael Martinez batting with the tying run on first. Assuming Brantley returns in good health, Francona can pick and choose between offense, defense and platoons in the outfield and DH.

Eight in a row for the Boston Red Sox. This is pretty amazing: 2016 Cy Young winner Rick Porcello won consecutive starts for the first time all season as Boston beat the Tampa Bay Rays 8-2. He also became the eighth pitcher this season to throw an immaculate inning, striking out Trevor Plouffe, Wilson Ramos and Mallex Smith in the fifth on nine pitches.

Tampa played a sloppy game, making two errors plus a couple of other miscues in the field, two wild pitches, a passed ball and two intentional walks that helped the Red Sox to a five-run fifth inning.

An intentional walk also backfired before the Molina grand slam, as Ned Yost put on Dexter Fowler to load the bases. That one I can sort of understand, as Moylan as a sidearmer with a huge platoon split. Still, it's always good to see intentional walks backfire.

Around the league. Good win for the Colorado Rockies after losing in the ninth inning on Sunday and Tuesday when Greg Holland blew back-to-back leads. Against the Indians, they tied the score in the ninth, then won the game on Charlie Blackmon's home run in the 12th. The bullpen tossed seven scoreless innings, with Tyler Chatwood getting the save instead of Holland (who had thrown 31 pitches Tuesday). Indians closer Cody Allen continues to be shaky in close games. It was only his third blown save, but he's also 0-6.

Nelson Cruz slammed two long home runs as the Seattle Mariners beat the Oakland Athletics to finish a 6-3 road trip. They head home now with a one-game lead for the second wild card -- and, yes, it's way too early to be obsessing about the wild card. Unless you're a Mariners fan and your team hasn't made the playoffs since 2001. Seattle plays the Angels and Orioles, two teams now looking up at them in the wild-card race, before heading out on a 12-game road trip.

Justin Verlander did this: 8 IP, 1 H, 0 R, 3 BB, 6 SO. He has given up 11 runs over his past seven starts. I still think a trade is unlikely, but this surge maybe gives the Tigers a window to make a deal.

Oh, and Bartolo Colon did this: 7 IP, 5 H, 0 R, 1 BB, 5 SO. You can't predict baseball!
Dodgers win 80th game of season, rallying over Diamondbacks

By Associated Press

PHOENIX -- Hitless in 23 previous at-bats, the Los Angeles Dodgers' Joc Pederson faced Arizona Diamondbacks ace Zack Greinke with two outs in the seventh inning and a man on second base.

Pederson, who'd struck out in his first two at-bats against Greinke, delivered a game-tying double, then came around to score the go-ahead run on Yasiel Puig's single in the Dodgers' 3-2 victory on Wednesday night.

"To have it come up big and help the team win a ballgame is a nice feeling," Pederson said. "Just trying to look for a good pitch to hit. He made a mistake and I capitalized on it."

The Dodgers became the sixth team since 1913 to reach 80 wins in their first 113 games.

"You could see the exhale when he got to first base, and that boyish smile," Dodgers manager Dave Roberts said of Pederson. "He's a big part of what we need to do. For him to get that big hit was a boost to all of us."

Puig's hit was the third off Greinke in the seventh, after Greinke had allowed only one hit through six innings. Cody Bellingham homered, doubled and scored twice for the Dodgers.

Greinke (13-5) lost for the first time in 13 starts at home this season and is 10-1 at Chase Field. He allowed three runs on four hits in 6 2/3 innings, struck out eight and walked four.

"I threw a terrible pitch to Joc and he hit it good. Threw a pitch where I wanted to with Puig but he hit it all right and found a good spot," Greinke said. "The pitch to Joc was the worse one and he did what he was supposed to with it."

Dodgers starter Alex Wood (14-1) allowed two runs on six hits with four strikeouts and a walk in six innings, and improved to 6-0 with a 1.72 ERA on the road this season.

Wood made a minor adjustment to his delivery to get the velocity back after it was lacking in his last start.

"I felt really great coming out of New York and that bullpen session, so I'm looking forward to the stretch for sure," Wood said.

J.D. Martinez's two-out single in the sixth off Wood gave the Diamondbacks a 2-1 lead, but it didn't last long. Paul Goldschmidt had homered high off the center field batter's eye in the fourth to tie the game at 1.

Bellinger, a native of nearby Chandler, Arizona, connected for his 33rd home run in the second inning. The ball sailed well into the right-field seats above the Dodgers bullpen.

The Dodgers are on a 53-game streak with at least two extra-base hits, the most in the majors since 1913.
The Dodgers got strong relief from Josh Fields, who pitched two scoreless innings and got Goldschmidt to ground into an inning-ending double play in the eighth. All-Star closer Kenley Jansen, who hadn't pitched since Sunday in New York, closed out the game for his 29th save.

IT RAINES IN ARIZONA

Recent Hall of Fame inductee Tim Raines threw out the ceremonial first pitch, a strike down the middle.

TRAINER'S ROOM

Dodgers: LHP Clayton Kershaw (lower back strain) is scheduled for a bullpen session on Friday. ... OF Andre Ethier (back) took batting practice before Wednesday's game. He's been on the disabled list since before the season started but will begin a rehab assignment on Saturday at Class A Rancho Cucamonga. Roberts is aiming for a Sept. 1 activation for Ethier. ... LHP Julio Urias was in the clubhouse Wednesday. The top pitching prospect had season-ending left shoulder surgery in June after being sent back down to the minors, and Roberts said the team remains optimistic Urias will make a full recovery though there is no timetable for his return.

Diamondbacks: LHP Robbie Ray, who is on the concussion disabled list, threw a 33-pitch bullpen session on Wednesday, and manager Torey Lovullo called it "fantastic." His return date has yet to be determined.

UP NEXT

Dodgers: Recently acquired RHP Yu Darvish (7-9) makes his second start for the Dodgers on Thursday against Arizona.

Diamondbacks: LHP Anthony Banda (1-1) will face the Dodgers on his 24th birthday, his third career start.

TRUE BLUE LA

Alex Verdugo ends slump with 11th inning blast

By David Hood

The Tulsa Drillers and Oklahoma City Dodgers watched a barrage of runs in the late innings, though only one came out on top.

Player of the day
Alex Verdugo had been hitless in four games and had just one hit in the month of August before breaking out with a game winning home run Wednesday. Verdugo went two for four with a walk, but it was his three run home run in the eleventh inning that proved the difference for the Dodgers. The home run was his fifth of the season, and his slash line bumped up to .314/.385/.433 on the year.

Triple-A Oklahoma City
As mentioned, a three run home run by Alex Verdugo in the eleventh inning led the Dodgers past the Salt Lake Bees (Angels) 6-3. Tim Locastro had four hits, including a pair of doubles, from the lead off spot and is now hitting .385 since being called up to Triple A. Adrian Gonzalez also went one for two in a rehab appearance.

Eddie Gamboa lasted just four and two-thirds innings and allowed all three runs. The relievers combined for six and a third scoreless innings, highlighted by a pair of innings from Walker Buehler. Josh Ravin also went two scoreless with three strikeouts.

Double-A Tulsa
A six run ninth inning meltdown erased a late three run lead, as the Drillers fell to the Corpus Christi Hooks (Astros) 10-7. Shea Spitzbarth took the loss in allowing five runs in the ninth, including the eventual walk off home run. Andrew Sopko went seven innings, striking out five while allowing four runs.

Yusniel Diaz led the offense with three hits in four at bats, including a double and run scored. Drew Jackson also had a pair of hits and steals from the leadoff spot.

Class-A Rancho Cucamonga
The Quakes could not overcome a four run sixth inning, falling to the Modesto Nuts (Mariners) 6-4. Zach Reks went three for five and is now hitting over .500 in High A. Omar Estevez also went two for four with a double to extend his hitting streak to five games, while Darien Tubbs homered out of the leadoff spot.

Jordan Sheffield struggled in his high A debut, surrendering five runs in four innings, walking six and striking out just two. Tony Gonsolin pitched a pair of scoreless innings, striking out three.

Class-A Great Lakes
The Loons were off on Wednesday and will travel to play West Michigan on Thursday.

Rookie Ogden
The Raptors broke a four-four tie with two runs in the ninth to defeat the Great Falls Voyagers (White Sox) 6-4. Luis Paz went two for four with a home run and a double that produced the game winning RBI. Rylan Bannon, Romer Cuadrado, Gersel Pitre, Kevin Lachance, and Mason Hope each had a pair of hits for the winning cause.

Miguel Urena took the win in relief, allowing no runs in one and a two-thirds innings of work, striking out three. Zach Hartman earned the save by striking out the side in the ninth inning.

Arizona League Dodgers
The Dodgers scored a pair of runs in both the seventh and eighth inning to power past the AZL White Sox 7-3. Kevin Aponte went three for three and scored three runs, while Shakir Albert went two four for with a run scored.

James Marinan allowed his first professional runs, surrendering three in just an inning and a third. Marinan walked four and allowed two hits, striking out none. Confesor Inoa took his first win of the season despite walking three in two scoreless innings of relief.

Dominican League DSL Dodgers
The DSL Dodgers One blanked the DSL Athletics 4-0. Jose Hernandez went five scoreless innings, striking out five.

The DSL Dodgers Two defeated the DSL Rangers One 7-2. Albert Suarez hit his first home run of the season.

Transactions

Double-A: The Drillers swapped players on the disabled list, activating RHP Andrew Sopko while disabling C Shawn Zarraga.

Short-Season: The Raptors had to place SS Ronny Brito on the 60 day disabled list. To take his place, the Raptors called up 2B Eric Peterson from the AZL Dodgers. C Jonah Jarrard was activated to take Peterson’s place on the AZL roster.

Wednesday scores
Oklahoma City 6, Salt Lake 3 in 11 innings

Corpus Christi 10, Tulsa 7

Modesto 6, Rancho Cucamonga 4

Ogden 6, Great Falls 4

AZL Dodgers 7, AZL White Sox 3

DSL Dodgers One 4, DSL Athletics 0

DSL Dodgers Two 7, DSL Rangers One 2

Thursday schedule
4:00 p.m.: Great Lakes (Alfredo Tavarez) at West Michigan (Tom De Blok)

5:05 p.m.: Tulsa (Mitchell White) at Corpus Christi (Franklin Perez)

6:05 p.m.: Oklahoma City (Justin Marks) at Salt Lake (Luis Diaz)

7:05 p.m.: Rancho Cucamonga (Michael Boyle) at Modesto (Reggie McClain)

**Cody Bellinger scores twice in Dodger 3-2 comeback win**

By Craig Minami

The Dodgers got good starting pitching, excellent relief and some clutch two-out hits and all that led to a 3-2 win over the Arizona Diamondbacks. Alex Wood won the game and Kenley Jansen picked up his 29th save.
Wood pitched six innings, gave up two runs on six hits and one walk while striking out four. Josh Fields would pitch two scoreless innings, getting Paul Goldschmidt to ground into an inning ending double play in the eighth. Jansen hit Ketel Marte but otherwise had no problems setting down the Diamondbacks.

After Wood gave up the go-ahead run in the sixth inning, Cody Bellinger doubled to right. With two out, Zack Greinke was still in the game to face a slumping Joc Pederson.

Pederson was 0-for-23, having gone hitless since July 28th, until he doubled home Bellinger to tie the game. Yasiel Puig followed with a single to score Pederson and give the Dodgers the lead.

The Dodgers scored first when Bellinger hit a solo home run in the second inning. Goldschmidt would tie the game with his own solo home run in the fourth inning.

Alex Wood nearing best single season winning pct.
Wood now has a .9333 winning pct. (14-1, 13-1 as a starter and 1-0 in relief). The single-season record is held by Roy Face who in 1959 at .9474 (18-1 all in relief). Johnny Allen is second at .9375 (15-1, as a starter) in 1937.

Phil Regan was also 14-1 for the 1966 Dodgers but he did not have enough decisions (17) to qualify for the full single-season record.

Up next
Yu Darvish makes his second start wearing a Dodger uniform as he will try to lead the team to another series win. Darvish will face left-hander Anthony Banda, who will hope to make his third major-league start a special one as he will be celebrating his 24th birthday. First pitch will be at 6:40 p.m.

Wednesday’s particulars
Home runs: Cody Bellinger (33), Paul Goldschmidt (26)

W: Alex Wood (14-1): 6 innings, 2 runs, 6 hits, 1 walk, 4 strikeouts

L: Zack Greinke (13-5): 6⅔ innings, 3 runs, 4 hits, 4 walks, 8 strikeouts

Save: Kenley Jansen (29): 1 inning, 1 hit batter, 2 strikeouts

**Nearly the same Dodgers take the field tonight versus Diamondbacks**

By David Young

The Los Angeles Dodgers send out nearly the same lineup as last night to face the Arizona Diamondbacks and Zack Greinke tonight at Chase Field in Phoenix. The Dodgers are in the recently unusual circumstance of returning after a loss, last night being only their fourth loss since July 3.

Besides starting pitcher Alex Wood, Chase Utley gets the call at second base tonight instead of Logan Forsythe. Utley last started Friday in New York against the Mets.
The five active Dodgers that have faced Greinke more than ten times each - Utley, Yasmani Grandal, Justin Turner, Corey Seager and Joc Pederson - have combined to hit .342/.400/.740 against him with 16 extra-base hits in 80 plate appearances.

Starting lineups

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<th>Pos</th>
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<th>Pos</th>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>P</td>
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<td>Greinke</td>
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Time: 6:40 p.m. PT | TV: SportsNet LA

Utley has the most experience against Arizona’s ace, and in his 23 plate appearances the left-hand hitter has struck three doubles and one homer run against Greinke.

Turner has a career cycle versus Greinke, in only 14 PA.

On the other side of scorecard, Paul Goldschmidt has faced Wood 21 times and hit .294/.429/.647 against him with two home runs.

A.J. Pollack is 6-for-13 with two round-trippers and a double versus the portsider. It’s also no surprise that Jeff Mathis is doing the catching tonight. He is 4-for-14 against Wood with a double and homer.

In each of their last five losses the Dodgers have scored exactly three runs. Working Greinke for more than that is not an easy assignment.

Injury updates:

According to several reporters in Arizona, Clayton Kershaw will a bullpen session for the first time in his rehabilitation process on Friday.

Also, Andre Ethier has a rehab game scheduled:

**Dodgers unveil Players Weekend Uniforms**

By Ryan Walton

Major League Baseball on Wednesday announced the Players’ Weekend event, in which they’ll allow players to don their nicknames on the backs of their jerseys. The event will take place starting on August 25th and conclude on August 27th.

The jerseys the teams will be wearing won’t be the traditional looks as each team has their own unique apparel.
Also, on the player’s sleeve, there will be a blank square sewn in for the player to fill with the name of a teammate, coach, or someone special in their life that was important to his development.

The weekend is a chance for players to let a little bit of their personalities come to the surface and have fun in a different way.

Among the Dodgers’ nicknames, Corey Seager is the one that will simply have his last name across the back. I guess the team leader in WAR gets a pass.

Corey’s older brother, Kyle, gets the best nickname with this beauty.

Here is a list of all the Dodger nicknames:

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<th>First Name</th>
<th>Nickname</th>
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Easily the best jerseys will be Hyun-jin Ryu with “Monster” and Ross Stripling with “Chicken Strip.” Chase Utley going with “Silver Fox” is only surprising because he is the type to be the boring one instead of Seager.
Rich Hill (Brice) and Austin Barnes (Sam) are the most obscure of the bunch.

It should be a fun weekend seeing some of the characters around the game.

Slugging milestones in sight for Dodgers

By Eric Stephen

Even though the win every day pattern was disrupted on Tuesday night, the Dodgers’ power was on display in their loss to the Diamondbacks, which gives us a chance to look at some potential franchise milestones in play for the 2017 club.

The Dodgers hit two home runs and two doubles on Tuesday, giving them a whopping 52 straight games with at least two extra-base hits, the longest streak in MLB dating back to at least 1913, per STATS LLC.

We have talked often about how the club is on pace for franchise records in both home runs and doubles. The current pace is 323 doubles and 243 home runs, with team records of 307 and 211, respectively.

The Dodgers are slugging .457 as a team*, the second-highest in club history, behind only the juggernaut 1953 Brooklyn team (.474).

*Among the many reasons why a Dodgers-Astros would be a fun World Series matchup is getting to face that Houston offense. The Astros are slugging an absurd .503 while averaging 5.90 runs per game.

The highest slugging percentage by a Dodgers team since moving to Los Angeles is .432, in 2006.

Justin Turner is heating up again, with two more home runs on Tuesday, and four in his last three games. He has 15 on the season, and with 50 games remaining is a good bet to reach 20.

The Dodgers have had three infielders hit 20 home runs just once, in 1979, when first baseman Steve Garvey, second baseman Davey Lopes and third baseman Ron Cey all finished with 28 long balls. This season, Cody Bellinger has 32 — including 23 at first base — with Corey Seager at 19 and Turner at 15.

Turner is chasing the Dodgers’ first batting (average) title since Tommy Davis in 1963, hitting .351/.443/.566 at the moment. Daniel Murphy of the Nationals ranks second at .332. Turner also has a narrow on-base percentage lead over extraordinary first basemen Joey Votto (.439) and Paul Goldschmidt (.437), trying to become the first Dodgers OBP leader since Pedro Guerrero (.422) in 1985.

Seager, who has already passed his 2016 walk total, is at .307/.398/.530. The club hasn’t had two qualified players with a .400 on-base percentage and .500 slugging percentage since 1953, when Duke Snider (.336/.419/.627) and Jackie Robinson (.329/.425/.502) turned the trick.

The Dodgers haven’t had a single .400/.500 player since Gary Sheffield hit .311/.417/.583 in 2001.
Seager is sitting on 29 doubles, on pace for 43 after hitting 40 doubles as a rookie in 2016. Only five Dodgers ever have multiple 40-double seasons -- Babe Herman (three times), Zack Wheat, Johnny Frederick, Raul Mondesi and Shawn Green.

In addition to Turner and Seager, the Dodgers also have Bellinger (.607) and Chris Taylor (.546) slugging over .500.

The club hasn’t had four qualified players slug .500 in a season since 1955. The most since moving to Los Angeles is three players, most recently in 2001, when Sheffield, Green, and Paul Lo Duca did the deed.

The franchise record is five players with a .500 slugging percentage, back to that 1953 Brooklyn team again. This season, Yasiel Puig with his career high in home runs is also lurking with a .476 slugging percentage. Yasmani Grandal is also at .473, though with 342 plate appearances is on the borderline for qualifying.

If Bellinger can keep up his slugging pace, he’s in line for the first Dodgers .600 slugging percentage since Adrian Beltre in 2004 (.629). That was also the last 40-homer season by a Dodger, and Bellinger is eight away.

**DODGER INSIDER**

Pederson, Puig power Dodgers to another comeback win

By Rowan Kavner

Only two National League pitchers have at least 14 wins this year. Both are All-Stars.

And both are Dodgers.

In a battle of 13-game winners Wednesday night between Alex Wood and Zack Greinke, it was the former moving to 14 wins (14–1) and joining teammate Clayton Kershaw (15–2) as the only NL 14-game winners after a 3–2 comeback victory to even the series against the Diamondbacks.

“I think it’s more a testament to the guys on our team,” Wood said. “It’s literally been a different guy every night.”

On Wednesday, it was Wood, the bullpen and the No. 7 and No. 8 hitters in the Dodger lineup leading them to their 33rd comeback win of the year and moving them to 68–0 when leading after eight innings.

“It just shows we can come back and get teams late, and our bullpen’s good enough to shut them down late,” said Joc Pederson, whose RBI double tied the game at 2 before scoring the go-ahead run.

The Dodgers only had one hit prior to the seventh inning, and it came off the bat of Cody Bellinger, who belted his 33rd home run of the year in the second inning on an inside fastball from Greinke in Bellinger’s first ever at-bat against him.
Bellinger’s now homered against 15 different teams this year, but he wasn’t done there. In the seventh, Bellinger began the inning with his 18th double of the year, giving him seven extra-base hits in eight August games.

Then, more of his Dodger teammates started getting to Greinke.

The Dodgers trailed 2–1 after Wood allowed two runs in six innings, marking Wood’s 10th quality start of the season. But the Dodgers, who moved to 43–6 when their pitcher makes a quality start, would need more offensively to get Wood his 14th win.

They got it first from Pederson, who snapped an 0-for-23 skid by knocking in Bellinger with an RBI double for his first hit of the month in the seventh inning.

“You could see the exhale when he got to first base and that boyish smile,” said manager Dave Roberts. “He’s a big part of what we’re trying to do.”

The next hitter was Puig, who knocked Pederson in with an RBI single that ended Greinke’s night and put the Dodgers ahead for good.

Puig also walked twice and now has six walks in his last six games. He’s hitting .308 with a .438 OBP in August, leading all Dodger players with at least 20 at-bats in OBP this month.

“He’s been great all year,” Wood said. “The defense, the offense the way he’s swinging the bat, it’s been fun to watch.”

The Dodgers needed it against the Diamondbacks, a team the Dodgers know they could see again in October. It didn’t feel like the typical Aug. 9 contest.

“There was a little bit more,” Roberts said. “Each day we try to approach it the same, but when you’ve got one of the best in Zack Greinke out there and one of our best in Alex Wood taking the mound, it’s something our players look forward to.”

Early on, Wood’s fastball was around 92–94 mph consistently, back up to normal following some fatigue after his last start. While he started to rely more on his offspeed pitches the later the game went, Wood still provided plenty to give the Dodgers a chance to win.

And Kenley Jansen made sure it ended that way.

Four of the last five matchups between the Dodgers and Diamondbacks have been decided by a run. All four of those one-run games have gone the Dodgers’ way, with plenty of help from Jansen, who earned his 29th save Wednesday night and hasn’t allowed a hit in August.

The Dodgers are now 56–10 when allowing three runs or fewer. They’re also the first team in baseball to 80 wins. No other NL team has more than 67 wins.

Arizona’s not far behind at 64 victories, and the Dodgers have one more game against the Diamondbacks this series with Yu Darvish on the mound Thursday to try to ensure they don’t drop their first series since June 5–7.
“Diamondbacks not going to go anywhere,” Jansen said.

**Kershaw feeling healthy, bullpen session expected Friday**

By Rowan Kavner

08/09 Dodgers at Diamondbacks, 6:40 p.m. PT:

Chris Taylor LF
Corey Seager SS
Justin Turner 3B
Cody Bellinger 1B
Yasmani Grandal C
Chase Utley 2B
Joc Pederson CF
Yasiel Puig RF
Alex Wood P

They’re the three words Dodger fans want to hear more than anything from their ace.

“I feel healthy,” Clayton Kershaw said Tuesday to reporters, as he recovers from his lower back strain.

“Now, it’s just a matter of build back up at a good pace, understanding where we’re at and the timeline.”

Within a week of going on the disabled list, Kershaw was already starting to play catch. Because he’s kept his arm active, he doesn’t feel like he’s lost much.

“But still, being a starter, you’ve got to build your innings back up,” Kershaw said. “It’s going to take a little bit of time to do that.”

Kershaw hasn’t pitched in a game since July 23, when he went two innings before he was unable to continue with the back strain. But it didn’t take much time for him to be able to throw again.

Manager Dave Roberts said a bullpen session will likely happen Friday for Kershaw, when the team returns home for its weekend series against the Padres. Kershaw said he expects a bullpen session, simulated game and rehab assignment are all likely before he returns to action.

Exactly when Kershaw will return remains to be seen, but his continued ramp up shows he’s not far away.

“I feel healthy right now, so that’s good,” Kershaw said.

Roberts said the Dodgers will err on the side of caution making sure Kershaw gets back healthy, but he expects Kershaw will be able to get in at least four or five starts before the postseason.

Other Notes:
· Roberts said Andre Ethier (back) feels good after going through a simulated game Tuesday. The plan is for Ethier to start a rehab assignment with Single-A Rancho Cucamonga on Aug. 12 and look for a Sept. 1 activation.

· Julio Urías, who’s out for the season after shoulder surgery, was with the team Wednesday. Roberts said the rehab is going well, and the Dodgers are optimistic he’ll make a full recovery. Urías said there were a lot of emotions when the injury occurred and immediately following the surgery, but he’s feeling motivated and trying to think positive now.

· The Dodgers plan to stay on rotation against San Diego and Chicago when they return home this weekend. That means Rich Hill, Hyun-Jin Ryu and Kenta Maeda, respectively, against the Padres, before Alex Wood pitches Tuesday and Yu Darvish makes his home debut Wednesday against the White Sox on his 31st birthday.

· After snapping a four-game winning streak Monday, the Dodgers are trying to make sure they don’t lose a series for the first time since June 5–7, with two 13-win starters facing off in Alex Wood and Zack Greinke in Arizona. The Dodgers have won 44 of their last 52 games overall and 10 of their last 12 on the road. Wood’s been particularly good on the road, holding a 1.55 ERA as a visiting pitcher this year.

“Players Weekend” to include nicknames on players’ jerseys

By Rowan Kavner

Throughout the course of a professional career, particularly in baseball, nicknames for players tend to stick. In late August, they will literally stick on the backs of player jerseys.

Major League Baseball and the Major League Baseball Players Association announced the newly created “Players Weekend” for all games Aug. 25–27, letting players’ personalities shine by allowing players to put a nickname on the back of their jerseys, as well as wear and use uniquely colored and designed spikes, batting gloves, wristbands, compression sleeves, catcher’s masks and bats.

In addition, the player-focused event will include players wearing colorful, non-traditional uniforms featuring alternate designs inspired by youth league uniforms.

The players will wear specially designed caps and socks, and players can wear T-shirts highlighting a charity or cause of their choice during pregame workouts and postgame interviews.

Here’s a look at what each team’s jersey and cap will look like:

Additionally, the right sleeve of each player’s jersey will feature a patch with a blank space for him to write the name of a person or organization that was instrumental to his development. The patch features a new logo that shows a progression of five players increasing in size to demonstrate the process of a player’s path from Little League and youth leagues to Major League Baseball. The new “Evolution” logo, which symbolizes solidarity with local youth baseball and softball organizations, will also appear on the back of each club’s cap and jerseys in place of the MLB silhouetted batter.
“The journey from youth leagues to Major League Baseball is one that players don’t take alone,” baseball commissioner Robert D. Manfred, Jr., said in a release. “Major League players have been supported by family members, coaches, and organizations that helped them develop their unique skills and overcome challenges to reach the highest level of the sport. These games will allow the players to thank those who were important in their lives while showcasing their personality in a fun way that fits baseball’s community-driven focus.”

Bats ready for #PlayersWeekend

Game-worn Players Weekend jerseys will be auctioned at MLB.com/auctions, with 100 percent of net proceeds donated to the MLB-MLBPA Youth Development Foundation, a joint effort established in July 2015 by MLB and the MLBPA with an initial commitment of $30 million focused on improving the caliber, effectiveness and availability of amateur baseball and softball programs across the United States and Canada.

CSUN TODAY

CSUN Shows Dodgers RBI Participants That College is a Possibility

By Jorge Martin

When Justin Gonzalez stepped on the campus of California State University, Northridge the morning of July 27, he was openly wondering about his future.

A 16-year-old attending Los Angeles Leadership Academy, he’s a first baseman/center fielder on his high school’s baseball team. He is also a participant in Dodgers RBI (Reviving Baseball in Inner Cities), a program within the Los Angeles Dodgers Foundation. Dodgers RBI is a baseball/softball youth development program for ages 5-18 that simultaneously aims to: increase participation in the sport and use sports participation as an engagement tool to increase access to education, literacy, health, wellness, and recreational resources in some of Los Angeles’ most underserved communities.

That’s what brought Gonzalez to CSUN on this warm summer day, the second day in 2017 that saw more than 100 young people participate in college tours tailored to them. As he walked the campus and learned about the university, then sat for informational sessions that lifted the veil on what it took to go to college and work toward a degree, Gonzalez started to see his future take form.

“Before I came here, I didn’t really want to go to college, but the mentors, the questions that they answered for me made me really want to go to college,” said Gonzalez, who visited CSUN through Montecito Heights Recreation Center. “It’s a big part of my dream. My mom wants me to do it. I want to make her proud.”

Making college seem more attainable was the goal for the Dodgers RBI days at CSUN. Representatives from CSUN worked with counterparts from the Dodgers Foundation to prepare a day that would be informational and impactful for the young people. The goal was to have these young people see that college could be a reality for them.
“Education is such an important aspect of our Dodgers RBI program,” said Nichol Whiteman, executive director of the Los Angeles Dodgers Foundation. “We want all participants to see college as accessible. We want to expose them to campuses like CSUN, which not only have excellent academic programs but are leaders in inclusivity. Our partnership means more youth can and will see themselves in a place that they thought was not possible.”

Vanessa Guzman, 17, was another student touched by the program. Guzman is entering her senior year at Academia Avance Charter High School in Highland Park, where she’s a catcher on her high school softball team. She said she wanted to learn more about the college majors available to her, specifically nursing.

While on the CSUN campus tour, many of the participants like Guzman admired the Delmar T. Oviatt Library, the Matador Bookstore and several academic buildings. She was one of many students fascinated and visibly impressed as they walked into the state-of-the-art Student Recreation Center.

The students also learned about financial aid and scholarship opportunities that could be available to help offset the cost of their education. Many of the students said they were pleasantly surprised that this aid was more accessible than they had guessed prior to the visit.

“It’s a big part of my dream, going to college and being the first one to graduate in my family,” Guzman said, adding that it was important to be on campus with young people from the Dodgers RBI program because she was “around the kids who all want to achieve better.”

Walking around CSUN was an important part of the day, to make college seem more tangible. Tour guides from CSUN’s Student Outreach and Recruitment Department and the administrators who chaperoned the young people shared about their own college journeys to show how higher education was a possibility for the students.

Christian Oliva, a recreation coordinator at Montecito Heights Recreation Center, shared his own experiences as a California State University, Los Angeles alumnus. Oliva stressed the difference a college education can make in a young person’s life.

“Listening about scholarships, financial aid and loans, it’s become more possible than it was a week ago, because of this partnership with the Dodgers, CSUN and the RBI program,” Oliva said.

One person mixing Matador Pride into her work on this day was Brittany Polk ’15 (Theatre). Bringing young people to her alma mater was especially important to her because she is now the recreation leader at Roosevelt Park, which also brought a contingent of Dodgers RBI participants. Polk wanted to show the youngsters she’s working with that she was a “living example” of someone who came from their same circumstances, worked hard and was now back in her old community helping the next generation do the same through the Dodgers RBI program.

“The majority of them, this is their first time on a college campus,” Polk said. “We talk about going to college just to further their possibilities. By them coming on the actual tour and seeing it in action, and to see me and how far I’ve come, the college tour is very important with the Dodgers RBI program because it gives the kids a visual of their dreams right here in person.”
THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

The New Moneyball, With Lots and Lots of Money

By Jared Diamond

Andrew Friedman and Farhan Zaidi took over the Los Angeles Dodgers’ front office before the 2015 season and quickly drew the ire of a city built on the power of stardom.

Inheriting a record payroll and massive expectations, they began running the Dodgers less like baseball’s wealthiest organization and more like the small-market teams they came from: They shunned the most expensive free agents and headline-grabbing trades in favor of protecting the farm system and adding complementary pieces of the puzzle.

“One of the things the front office has gotten a hard time for is making tons and tons and tons of small moves and until this year not making that big sexy move for the big name,” third baseman Justin Turner said. “The byproduct of that is what you’re seeing right now.”

Three seasons later, the Dodgers still spend more than anybody else. They shelled out $240 million to construct their opening-day roster, about 20% more than their next-closest competitor, according to Baseball Prospectus.

But by spending their money differently—think of it as Moneyball, with the luxury of a whole lot of money—this year’s Dodgers could make history. They entered Wednesday on pace for 114 wins this season, in striking distance of the all-time mark of 116 held by the 1906 Chicago Cubs and 2001 Seattle Mariners.

These Dodgers didn’t simply load up on stars. They assembled a powerhouse by focusing on the fringes of the roster, stocking their cupboards with high-quality insurance policies for every contingency. The Dodgers don’t have more elite players than everybody else, but they do have more good players than everybody else, brimming with more useful assets than any of their peers.

“It wasn’t trying to raise the top,” Turner said. “It was trying to bring the bottom up.”

The Dodgers’ financial might—derived from a deep-pocketed ownership group, Guggenheim Baseball Management, and an enormous local television deal—still matters. They can withstand unproductive contracts; they’re paying Carl Crawford $21 million not to play this year.

And they can sustain injuries thanks to a practically unending array of viable replacements. The Dodgers’ currently have about $110 million in player contracts idle on the disabled list—more than the payroll of nearly a third of major-league teams—but haven’t slipped off their pace.

Even with 60% of their projected rotation sidelined—Clayton Kershaw, Scott Kazmir and Brandon McCarthy—they still have arguably MLB’s best staff, led by Alex Wood, Rich Hill and Yu Darvish, a splashy trade-deadline acquisition. The Dodgers’ team ERA leads the majors by almost half a run.

“It certainly creates a little more margin for error,” said Zaidi, the general manager.
Considering their backgrounds, it makes sense that Friedman and Zaidi would follow such a methodical approach.

Friedman, the president of baseball operations, transformed the Tampa Bay Rays from a laughingstock into a perennial contender. Zaidi cut his teeth with the Oakland Athletics under Billy Beane, Mr. Moneyball himself. The Dodgers offered an opportunity to apply the principles that worked with those franchises, but with triple the budget.

Under their stewardship, the Dodgers have avoided long-term contracts; hoarded prospects like Cody Bellinger, a breakout star of the 2017 team, rather than trade them for short-term gain; and stockpiled undervalued assets by prioritizing depth and versatility.

“That’s been the model: have a lot of good players—and some great players,” Zaidi said. “Having resources creates a broader opportunity set. We can cast a wider net.”

Friedman and Zaidi inherited a sizable portion of their gigantic payroll, which ballooned in the wake of the $8.35 billion dollar broadcasting agreement between the Dodgers and Time Warner Cable in 2013. When they took over, the Dodgers owed five players—Kershaw, Crawford, Adrian Gonzalez, Matt Kemp and Andre Ethier—more than $400 million through 2020.

Outside of Kershaw, their dominating ace currently out with a back issue, those players have hardly contributed to the Dodgers’ success. They traded Kemp in December 2014—agreeing to pay $32 million of the $107 million remaining on his contract—and released Crawford in June 2016. Ethier has missed the entire season, and Gonzalez, a five-time All-Star, has appeared in just 49 games due to injury.

The team has thrived without them thanks to a vast collection of talent accumulated with the benefit of patience, effective scouting and good fortune. They have nine hitters with at least 250 plate appearances and an on-base-plus-slugging percentage of .750 or better. They also have 14 pitchers with at least 20 innings and an ERA under 3.90. Both lead the majors.

“Some of the players making the most impact for us this year weren’t necessarily brought in on blockbuster, headline-making deals,” Zaidi said. “They were brought in on baseball trades that we made a little bit under the radar.”

Turner, the Dodgers’ leader in OPS and batting average, initially signed a minor-league contract in 2014, and he developed into one of the game’s premier sluggers. Chris Taylor arrived in a seemingly minor trade with Seattle in 2016, and he has magically turned into one of their best hitters, boasting an OPS over .900. Wood, a top starting pitcher, and key reliever Luis Avilan came over essentially as secondary parts in a three-team deal in 2015.

Meanwhile, much of the Dodgers’ greatest production originated from their own farm system. Perhaps their best overall player, 23-year-old shortstop Corey Seager, will make $575,000 this season, while Bellinger, their rookie sensation who leads the team in home runs and RBIs, will earn less than $500,000. They also have two prospects, pitcher Walker Buehler and outfielder Alex Verdugo, ranked in the top 30 in baseball by MLB.com.

“We had a lot of teams demand Cody Bellinger in trades,” Zaidi said. “He’s better than all those players we could have traded for already.”
The Dodgers have also used their financial muscle to absorb problems that would cripple other teams. Most teams must rely on replacement-level call-ups when they spring a leak. The Dodgers patched all their holes with quadruple-strength duct tape.

Here, too, money helped the Dodgers. When they traded second baseman Dee Gordon and pitcher Dan Haren to the Miami Marlins in December 2014, they agreed to pick up $12.5 million to cover their salaries. In return, they received Austin Barnes, their backup catcher hitting .285, and Enrique Hernandez, a crucial utility man who has played seven defensive positions this year.

The Dodgers point out that their payroll has actually decreased after topping out at around $291 million in 2015. It will likely continue to fall to what Zaidi described as a “more sustainable level” as some large holdover contracts expire.

Their payroll hasn’t helped them reach the ultimate goal, either. Despite four straight division crowns, they’ve yet to advance past the National League Championship Series. Their remarkable depth doesn’t matter nearly as much in the sprint of the playoffs as it does in the marathon of the regular season.

This season, however, could be different. And if doesn’t work out, the front office will spare no expense to try again—a fact not lost on the players.

“They show you how much they want to win,” All-Star closer Kenley Jansen said. “They show you also that they understand how tough it is to win.”

THE RINGER

How to Beat the Best Team in Baseball

By Michael Baumann

The Dodgers are overwhelming World Series favorites, which is saying something.

In any other year, we’d say the same about the Astros, who are on pace for 103 wins. Or perhaps the Cubs, who won 103 games last year, got the band back together, added José Quintana, and after a slow start have returned to first place, thanks to a 16-8 run since the All-Star break. Or the Nationals, who have four players with legitimate MVP cases. Or the Red Sox, who added Chris Sale to a 93-win team from last year and are, somewhat unusually, flying under the radar a little this year.

The Dodgers are not actually invincible—you only need to lose three times in five games to get knocked out in the first round, and the Dodgers have already lost three in a row three times this year. They’re on pace for the fourth season of 114 or more wins in MLB history, but two of the three historical teams they’re chasing (the 2001 Mariners and 1906 Cubs) didn’t win the World Series. The Dodgers can be beaten.

Dig far enough into the question of how it can be done, though, and the answer becomes intimidatingly unclear.
The Astros are on pace for 103 wins? The Dodgers are on pace for 114. The Cubs are 16-8 since the break? The Dodgers are 18-4. The Nationals have Max Scherzer and the Red Sox have Sale? The Dodgers have Clayton Kershaw and Yu Darvish.

They have the best team ERA+ (136) and, despite having a pitcher in their lineup, the second-best team OPS+ (108). Despite playing in a pitchers’ park in the National League, they’re second in OBP and fifth in runs scored per game. They’re 47-13 at home, 32-20 on the road. They’re 19-10 in one-run games and 25-5 in blowouts. They’ve played 19 teams this year and are undefeated against seven, with a losing record against only the Nationals. They’re 50-14 against teams with a sub-.500 record and 29-19 against teams with a record of .500 or better.

Baseball Reference’s splits page includes a stat called sOPS+, which is like OPS+, only it’s adjusted for league average within the stat, not league average overall. Dodgers pitchers have faced at least one batter in 276 different situations, split out by date, opponent, game situation, ballpark, leverage, and other factors—sometimes in combination. Dodgers pitchers have allowed a league-average OPS+ or lower in 253 of those situations, most of which are either infinitesimally small splits—a couple dozen plate appearances at most—or are themselves components of larger splits.

For instance, Dodgers pitchers are worse than average in retractable-roof stadiums (102 sOPS+) and at Chase Field (156 sOPS+), and their left-handed pitchers (155 sOPS+) and right-handed pitchers (156 sOPS+) are worse than league average at Chase. That’s four categories swung by a three-game series in Phoenix back in April, in which the Dodgers allowed 26 runs and lost two of three. Nine of those runs came in one inning—if Luis Avilán and Sergio Romo wouldn’t have allowed seven runs while retiring one batter in that inning, the Dodgers would probably swing those four categories. It would also probably put their opponent sOPS+ in the eighth inning (currently 101) back below league average.

B-Ref also splits out data for 238 hitting categories, and the Dodgers have an average or better sOPS+ in 192 of those. Some of the ones they missed on: They’re 0-for-2 when pinch-hitting for their DH, they’re hitting .150/.227/.250 in 22 plate appearances against starters on their fourth time through the order, and they have just a 13 sOPS+ on 51 bunts.

There are, however, some bigger splits in which the Dodgers are not only worse than league average, but far worse. But most of those present no tactical advantage: For instance, the Dodgers hit worse than average in losses (90 sOPS+). They’re also far worse than average from the fifth (73 sOPS+) and ninth (69 sOPS+) spots in the order, but 13 National League teams are below average from the ninth spot because they have a pitcher batting there. Even still, those lineup spot weaknesses do opposing pitchers no good because not only does the batting order change from day to day, but they have to face the other seven guys no matter what. The Dodgers’ top six hitters by plate appearances have an OPS+ of 100 or better, and four of them are at or above 140—there’s not really a way to attack this lineup as a whole.

There might, however, be a way to attack the pitching staff.

Hit Them Left-on-Left
The largest tactically exploitable split where the Dodgers are worse than league average comes on the defensive side of the ball. Despite having the best left-handed pitcher of the past 15 years, Dodgers lefties as a whole are allowing left-handed batters to hit .255/.326/.435 in 614 PA, an sOPS+ of 117.
Whether 614 plate appearances involving dozens of pitchers and hitters across four months is generalizable is hard to say. But it does reveal an interesting tactical weakness.

In addition to Kershaw, the Dodgers have three other excellent left-handed starting pitchers: Alex Wood, Hyun-Jin Ryu, and Rich Hill. Every single one of them has a reverse platoon split this year, meaning same-handed batters hit better against them than opposite-handed hitters, which is not the norm. Kershaw, Ryu, and Hill have severe reverse splits, all more than 250 points of OPS. That makes some sense for Wood and Ryu, whose most common off-speed pitch is a changeup—which frequently breaks in on right-handed hitters—but Kershaw and Hill are two of the most breaking-ball-happy starters out there, and by all rights ought to devour same-handed batters.

If everyone’s healthy, Kershaw, Wood, and Hill are probably going to make up three-quarters of the Dodgers’ playoff rotation. Come the postseason, Ryu will likely join a bullpen that was, until last Monday, righty-heavy. Avilán and Grant Dayton, who’s currently on the DL, were essentially the Dodgers’ only lefty relievers until GM Farhan Zaidi added two Tonys—Watson and Cingrani—at the trade deadline. That ought to help matters late in games.

But it’s not clear how much. Cingrani has a career 4.53 ERA as a reliever, which isn’t helped by his 6.04 ERA in 27 relief appearances this season. Watson, a low-arm-slot guy, is better, and for his career, lefties are slugging just .291 off the former Pirates closer. But he’s not exactly Andrew Miller, either; Watson’s ERA+ is his worst since 2012, and his strikeout rate (17.1 percent) is the lowest of his career at a time when the leaguewide strikeout rate is rising faster than ever. Watson’s outpitching his DRA by almost two runs, so he could regress, and if he regresses at the wrong time, Dodgers manager Dave Roberts might lose faith in him. Tuesday night against the Diamondbacks, he gave up a game-losing grand slam to Jake Lamb, who—you guessed it—bats left-handed.

Whether the Dodgers’ relative left-on-left weakness is exploitable depends on whether a potential opponent has a lot of good left-handed hitters. The Diamondbacks and Astros are both quite righty-heavy, and among the Cubs’ stable of lefties, Jason Heyward and Kyle Schwarber haven’t hit much of anything this season, though Anthony Rizzo is the second-best left-on-left hitter in baseball this year by wRC+ (minimum 100 PA).

However, the Nationals boast Bryce Harper and Daniel Murphy, both of whom are better-than-average left-on-left hitters and among the best hitters in baseball overall. It’s not like it never would’ve occurred to the Nationals to get Harper and Murphy to the plate in big moments, but if they do, the Dodgers are going to have a tough time playing matchups with their bullpen.

Meet Strength With Strength
The only way to defeat an opponent with no weaknesses is to match strength with strength. Sun Tzu didn’t say that, but I bet you didn’t read The Art of War and would’ve believed me if I told you he did.

There is one opponent whose strength can match the Dodgers’ strength, and that’s the Houston Astros. Not only do they have the second-best record in baseball, but their offense has been just as eye-popping as the Dodgers’ pitching. The Astros’ team OPS+ of 136 leads the league by a much greater margin than Los Angeles pitchers’ ERA+ does. While the Dodgers have two aces and seven above-average MLB starters, the Astros have four hitters—Carlos Correa, George Springer, José Altuve, and Marwin González—with at least 340 PA and an OPS+ of at least 160. They have seven hitters with 250 PA and an OPS+ of 120 or better, plus Yuli Gurriel, who’s at 119.
And if you want to believe in some of those weird, small-sample splits the Dodgers have, the Astros play in a stadium with a retractable roof, and for three games, the Dodgers would be forced to use a DH, a position that’s hit .214/.313/.250 this year.

On Tuesday, ESPN’s Sam Miller dug into the numbers and offered the opinion that if your favorite team isn’t in the hunt, you should be rooting for a Dodgers-Astros World Series so we can see Godzilla and the MUTO slug it out. He’s right: The Dodgers’ pitching against the Astros’ offense would be a true heavyweight fight, baseball’s answer to Cavs-Warriors.

The reason the Astros, with their tidal wave of an offense, are still on pace to finish 11 games behind the Dodgers is that their pitching isn’t as good as the Dodgers offense. When Dallas Keuchel, Lance McCullers, Chris Devenski, and Ken Giles are all healthy and pitching well, Houston’s pitching is quite good, but those four guys don’t always click at the same time. In an Astros-Dodgers World Series, the Dodgers would be favored, but the gap isn’t big enough to make it a foregone conclusion.

Hope for Injury Asymmetry
The truth is, if the Dodgers don’t win the World Series, it will probably be the result of one of two factors. The first is general playoff shenanigans. Great baseball teams have fallen short of a championship for stupid reasons since before the phrase “Merkle’s Boner” was funny. No amount of preparation or team-building can completely insure against the Dodgers running into something weird.

The second thing they can’t insure against is injuries. It’s kind of amazing that the Dodgers are where they are despite the injury trouble they’ve had. They’ve lost almost every starting pitcher to injury at some point, and Adrián González, Justin Turner, and Joc Pederson have all spent time on the DL, but they’ve made do.

Even so, much of this Dodgers optimism is predicated on Kershaw returning from his back injury in time to work back up to full strength before the NLDS. Kershaw’s recovery is going well, but his return is not a certainty. Nor is it a certainty that Brandon McCarthy, who’s on the DL with a blister issue, will return for the playoffs, or that one of the Dodgers’ five other starting pitchers—all of whom have sustained some injury or other over the past two seasons—won’t land on the DL on September 30 and screw up the rotation.

This isn’t a tactical advantage for anyone else: The Nationals are without Stephen Strasburg; the Astros are without Correa, Springer, and McCullers; and the Diamondbacks are without Robbie Ray. Injuries are part and parcel of the game. But they’re not distributed fairly across all teams, and if Strasburg comes back and Kershaw doesn’t, for example, that could shift the balance of power.

Of course, there’s nothing the Dodgers’ opponents can do, short of—Hey! Put down that crowbar right now!—to influence this situation, which makes it a potential looming obstacle for the Dodgers more than an advantage for any other their opponents.

Bust Out the Clichés
The Dodgers are 79-33 overall, but 29-19 against winning teams. That’s still phenomenal, but over a five-game series, that’s a 3-2 record. Over seven games, that’s 4-3. Several of the Dodgers’ potential playoff opponents have played them tough this year; the Diamondbacks are 5-6, with seven of those 11 games
coming in Los Angeles, while the Nats took two in an extremely low-scoring three-game series at Dodger Stadium in June.

Baseball people are fond of sayings like “take it one day at a time” or “win the next pitch,” which are annoying and reductive, but also useful. A 16-inch pizza looks intimidating as a whole, but if you concentrate on one slice at a time, you can eat the whole pie in one sitting if you put your mind to it. That’s how you hope to beat the Dodgers. They have an advantage over almost everyone in almost every phase of the game, but no single advantage is so great that it can’t be overcome in a short series.

That sentiment probably won’t be particularly comforting to whichever pitcher Cody Bellinger blasts into the ocean in Game 1 of the NLDS, but the Dodgers can be beaten. Whether anyone can pull it off is another question entirely.

NBC LA

Dodgers Rally Against Zack Greinke to Defeat Diamondbacks, 3-2

By Michael Duarte

It could be one heck of an NLDS.

Cody Bellinger homered and the Los Angeles Dodgers rallied off old friend Zack Greinke to defeat the Arizona Diamondbacks, 3-2, in a potential NLDS preview on Wednesday night at Chase Field.

Bellinger belted his team-high 33rd home run of the season off Greinke in the second inning to give the Dodgers an early 1-0 lead.

The blast was the rookie’s first against Greinke of his career, and puts him two home runs shy of Mike Piazza’s franchise record for home runs in a season by a Dodgers rookie.

Unfortunately for Los Angeles, the Snakes have a home run slugger of their own and first baseman Paul Goldschmidt put his full power on display against Alex Wood in the fourth inning.

Goldschmidt tied the game when he absolutely demolished a 92MPH four-seam fastball from Wood that traveled 443-feet to dead center with an exit velocity of 109 MPH.

Before Goldschmidt’s home run, Wood was the best in baseball at preventing the long ball this season, allowing just five total homers in 104.1 innings entering the game.

J.D. Martinez, acquired by the Diamondbacks from the Detroit Tigers to face left-handed pitching, showed his importance to the playoff push when he hit a two-out RBI single off Wood to give the D-Backs a 2-1 lead.

Wood (14-1) outdueled his former teammate Zack Greinke, allowing just two runs on six hits with one walk and four strikeouts in six strong innings.
"I felt good," Wood said of his start. "I felt like my stuff was back where I wanted it to be. It was a great team win."

Wood improved to 5-3 with a 3.06 ERA in 12 career games against Arizona.

Entering the seventh inning, Greinke had allowed just one hit—the homer to Bellinger—but the rookie got the best of him again to start the rally in the seventh inning.

Bellinger led off the inning with a double, and scored three batters later on an RBI double by Joc Pederson.

Pederson had been a 0-for-23 slump before the at-bat but happily knocked in the tying run after Greinke, his former teammate, famously said he was "an easy out," last season.

"He made really good pitches in my other at-bats. In that last at-bat he made a mistake and I capitalized," said Pederson of his game-tying double off Greinke. "It was my first hit in a long time. To come up big and help the team win a ballgame was a nice feeling."

Two pitches later, the Dodgers recaptured the lead on an RBI single by Yasiel Puig.

With the home run and double by Bellinger, the Dodgers recorded two or more extra-base hits for the 53rd consecutive game, the most in the Major Leagues since 1913.

Greinke (13-5), was handed his first loss at home this season by his former team as he allowed three runs on four hits with four walks and eight strikeouts in 6 and 2/3 innings.

"You want to approach every game like it's the same, but when you have one of their best in Zack Greinke out there, and one of our best in Alex Wood taking the mound, the players look forward to it," said Dodgers manager Dave Roberts. "Alex wanted to pitch well and Zack knows a lot of these guys and wanted to pitch well against us."

Josh Fields pitched two scoreless innings of relief and Kenley Jansen recorded his 29th save of the season with a scoreless ninth inning.

"I just tried to not make mistakes, especially in a one-run game," Jansen told Alanna Rizzo fo SportsNet LA after the game. "They have great hitters and can do damage against you. I just tried not to take anything for granted and make pitches."

The Dodgers became the first team to win 80 games on the season as they extended their division lead over the Diamondbacks to 16 games.

L.A. improved to 7-5 against Arizona this season in head-to-head matchups and recorded their 34th comeback victory, tied for the most in the Majors this season.

"They're tough," Roberts said of the D-backs. "It's fun to play those guys. We're familiar with each other and each one of these games could have gone either way."

Up Next:
The newest star on the Dodgers will shine brightly on Thursday as Yu Darvish takes the mound against LHP Anthony Banda at 6:40PM PST.