

Baseball

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR ARETE

October 9, 2014

There are many terrific and zany baseball quotations that make their way across the nation at this time of year. Between Dizzy Dean, Yogi Berra, and Phil Rizzuto almost all aspects of the game were covered. Broadcasters too have added to the diamond lexicon. My favorite, however, comes from the former pitcher for the Houston Astros and St. Louis Cardinals, the incomparable Joaquin Andujar whose most memorable line covers nearly all of the possibilities of the game.

"In baseball," he once said, "there is only one word, you never know."

The playoffs opened September 30 with the Wild Card Game in the American League where the Kansas City Royals showed up as the surprise guest and host. Over and over again came the reminders that the Royals had not been in post-season play since 1985 when they won the World Series. Now they faced the Oakland A's who managed to somehow get into the game after suffering a major collapse after the All-Star game. The A's acquired several front line pitchers to ensure their continued success and then forgot how to hit. Several players moved below the Mendoza line and the long ball vanished faster than you could say Yoenis Cespedes. As for the Royals they hadn't done much hitting all season long.

So who would win this game that was certain to be dominated by two great starting pitchers? The low scoring affair turned out to be a 12 inning run-fest that ended when the A's took an 8-7 lead in the top of the 12th inning, only to watch KC get two runs in the bottom half to win 9-8. The Royals had 15 hits and seven stolen bases and no home runs.

"In baseball you never know."

The next night in the National League Wild Card game another pitchers duel was predicted but only one pitcher dominated as the Giants beat the Pirates 8-0.

"In baseball you never know."

On Thursday the American League Divisional Series opened in Baltimore and Los Angeles. In Baltimore the Orioles made their first appearance in the Divisional playoffs since 1997, having cruised to the end of the season clinching early. Meanwhile Detroit had to go to game 162 to clinch their spot atop the division and avoid the Wild Card Game.

The Tigers arrived with three former Cy Young winners, and so naturally were swept three games to none. The Orioles scored 12 and 7 runs in Games 1 and 2, and finished the sweep with a 2-1 victory over Cy # Three, 2-1 on a two-run homer by Nelson Cruz.

"In baseball you never know."

Meanwhile in the other Divisional Championship the surprising Royals went off to Los Angeles to face the team with the best record in baseball, led by an array of big name hitters with home run power. KC was last in home runs in the league. The first game went eleven innings with the Royals winning on a home run by Mike Moustakas, the score, 3-2. The second game also went extra innings, 11 again, and again KC won on a home run, a three-run shot by Eric Hosmer. No team had ever started the playoffs by winning three extra inning games in a row.

The Royals completed the sweep of the mighty Angels without extra innings. This time they scored 7 runs in the first four innings winning by a final score of 8-3. The Angels had one lead at the end of the top of the first inning, 1-0. Just to continue the theme the Royals hit two more home runs, Hosmer and Moustakus again, The team with the best record in the American League was gone.

"In baseball, youneverknow."

Perhaps there would be more sanity in the National League. Here the team with the biggest payroll, the Los Angeles Dodgers, faced the weak hitting St. Louis Cardinals. The Dodgers had the hitting and the pitching with the consensus Cy Young award winner for this year, Clayton Kershaw. They also had the pitcher with the best winning percentage in the history of Dodger Stadium, Zack Greinke, not mention home field advantage.

Kershaw looked like Kershaw in game one allowing only two runs in the first six innings and leading 6-2 going to the seventh. The Cardinals proceeded to spank him in the seventh with eight runs. There had been one warning shot fired in the 6th when Matt Carpenter hit a long home run off Kershaw. Carpenter added a three-run double in the 7th inning. The Dodgers added runs in the 8th and 9th innings to make the final score 10-9 in the battle of the two best pitchers on their respective teams.

"In baseball youneverknow."

The next night order was restored with a 3-2 win for the Dodgers led by Greinke's pitching and Kemp's 8th inning game winning home run. Carpenter hit his second homer for the Cards. The series then moved to St. Louis where the Cards won game three

with Carpenter hitting another home run while the game winner came in the 7th inning when Kolten Wong hit a two-run homer.

Clayton Kershaw returned to the mound on short rest for game four. He was once again cruising through the first six innings, having not allowed a run and only one hit. Then came the seventh. The first two batters had scratch hits and then Matt Adams launched a three-run homer to give the Cards a lead that they did not relinquish. It was a 3-1 win and the Cardinals beat Kershaw twice, the same Kershaw who lost only three times the entire season.

The Dodgers spent a lot of money to win, a record payroll for baseball. However, it is not how much you spend, but how you spend it that counts. This isn't the NBA, Mr. Johnson.

"In baseball you never know."

As for the other National League series the Wild Card winner, San Francisco, took it to the team with the best record in the National League, the Washington Nationals. This series was the only one close to form, although the team with the best record lost three games to one and did so in a flurry of self-destruction. The winning run in the final game scored on a wild pitch, and that was followed by another wild pitch on an intentional walk with the runner from third trying to score and being cut down at the plate.

So what lies ahead beginning Friday?

As Joaquin Andujar would tell you, "you never know."

After a lifetime of watching baseball I believe Andujar, and I also believe that in almost every game you will see something you have never seen before.

On Sport and Society this is Dick Crepeau reminding you that you don't have to be a good sport to be a bad loser.

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