

Daily Clips



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Dodgers could be on same path as 2006 Cards

By Will Leitch

The 2000s were an incredible decade for the St. Louis Cardinals. They made the postseason seven times from 2000-09, reaching the National League Championship Series five times and winning 100 games or more twice. Albert Pujols won three NL MVP Awards, 14 Cardinals made the All-Star team and the club had an attendance of more than three million fans every season but one. The Cardinals just had a great team year after year. Except for one year.

The 2006 St. Louis Cardinals were not a good baseball team. They only won 83 games that season, nearly collapsing with a seven-game losing streak down the stretch, which couldn't have been unfamiliar territory; they had already lost eight games in a row twice previously that season. Their second-best hitter might have been Chris Duncan. That 2006 season was when it all started to fall apart, with the Cards' 105-game-win team decaying and atrophying into a team that was too old and too thin to do much of anything. Except! The rest of the NL Central was lousy, too, so the Cardinals ended up winning the division and -- most importantly -- getting hot in the playoffs, flying past the Padres in the NL Division Series, outlasting the Mets in an epic NLCS and beating an error-prone Tigers team in the World Series, earning Pujols and Tony La Russa and the gang their long-awaited title. The 2000, '01, '02, '04 and '05 Cardinals were all good enough to deserve a World Series win, but they didn't get one. Turned out, the 2006 team was the one that did. It works out that way sometimes.

Which brings us, inevitably, to the Los Angeles Dodgers, who beat the Atlanta Braves 6-2 on Monday night to reach the NLCS for the third consecutive season, where they will face the Milwaukee Brewers, who are only playing in their second-ever NLCS. The Dodgers have won the NL West six straight years and are coming off a 104-win season in 2017, the most that franchise has won since moving to Los Angeles. They came within one game of a championship last season, within two games of a World Series in 2013 and '16. They have been so close, but never quite broken through.

Which is why it would be truly astounding if it turned out to be this year, of all years, that the Dodgers finally win that championship. Because of all the Dodgers' six consecutive NL West-winning seasons, this one has been by far the most tumultuous. If the Dodgers win the World Series this year -- if this Dodgers team is the one that finally does it -- it will have been as unlikely as that insane 2006 Cardinals team. Because this Dodgers season has been nuts. Here's a month-by-month look at the roller coaster ride that has been the 2018 Los Angeles Dodgers season.

MARCH/APRIL

The Dodgers, already concerned about their offense after a Spring Training pitch fractured Justin Turner's left wrist, opened up the season by being shut out by the rival Giants twice. (The first game was the first opener the Dodgers had ever lost with Clayton Kershaw on the mound.) They then went to Arizona and were swept, with one loss coming on a Kenley Jansen blown save and another in which the

bullpen walked four batters in the seventh inning. The Dodgers continued to stumble, particularly getting knocked around by the D-backs, and a loss on April 29 dropped them to 12-15. But it got worse the next day, when it was revealed that Corey Seager, the heart and soul of the team, would undergo Tommy John surgery and miss the rest of the season. The Dodgers were seven games behind the D-backs at this point. It would be eight after they lost to Arizona the last night of April.

MAY

It kept getting worse for the Dodgers to start the month, with another loss to the D-back and then a series loss in Mexico against the lowly Padres. After splitting two more games with Arizona, the Dodgers hoped to get well with seven games against Cincinnati and Miami, two of the worst teams in baseball. It was at this point I wrote a "Don't worry about the Dodgers, they'll be fine!" piece. The Dodgers responded by losing six in a row, dropping to a staggering 16-24, eight games back of those D-backs and their worst start since 1958. It was around this time that Max Muncy's power took off, and the Dodgers actually rebounded in the second half of the month, getting to 26-30, only four games back from Arizona, which was starting to fade itself.

JUNE

At last, a winning month. The month began with a sweep of the Rockies at Coors Field and built up to an 11-2 start to June, with an offense -- led by Muncy, Matt Kemp, Joc Pederson and Cody Bellinger -- that was hitting home runs like crazy. The pitching got wobbly as it went along -- this was Walker Buehler's worst month, with a 7.94 ERA, that led some to wonder whether he was being pushed too hard too fast -- but a June 10 win pushed the Dodgers over the .500 mark, finally, and they'd never be under it again. They still weren't gaining on the D-backs, though, who stabilized in June and held a 3 1/2-game lead at the end of the month.

JULY

Wins in the first four games of July put the Dodgers on the brink of first place for the first time all season, but they wouldn't actually get there until July 12 with a win over the Padres. Then came the All-Star break -- which, lest you forget, featured Kemp being voted in by the fans, maybe the weirdest thing to happen all season -- and the All-Star Game, in which the primary subplot involved Manny Machado openly flirting with the Dodgers. The Dodgers made their trade with the Orioles official the next day, and Machado made his debut, against NLCS opponent Milwaukee, by reaching base four times in a 6-4 win. The Dodgers appeared to have turned a corner ... but then, just when you thought they were about to take off and play like the 104-win 2017 team, they went out and lost their final three games of the month and fell out of first place again. They also traded for Brian Dozier and John Axford, neither one of whom would make much of a difference.

AUGUST

The month began with 11 games against teams that would end up making the 2018 postseason, and the Dodgers would go 5-6, including three losses in a row at Coors Field against the surging Rockies. The

agita about a collapsing bullpen reached a fever pitch when Jansen returned from the disabled list after suffering an irregular heartbeat just in time to blow two saves against the Cardinals in a series sweep at Dodger Stadium. This was the extreme freakout moment for Dodgers fans. They were 4 1/2 games out of first and in third place. Just to keep everybody on their toes, the Dodgers went on to win six of their last seven the rest of the month.

SEPTEMBER

Just in time for the postseason-eligibility deadline, the Dodgers acquired October hero David Freese from the Pirates. As you might have noticed Monday, he would come in handy. September ended up being the Dodgers' best month -- the month when they finally played like the team the numbers argued they were all along. Unfortunately, the Rockies were just as good, and they spent most of the month toggling around each other atop the division. After a sweep of the Rockies on Sept. 17-19, the Dodgers had a 2 1/2-game lead, but Colorado just refused to stop losing, and two critical losses in Arizona on Sept. 26-28 ended up with the two teams tied when neither lost the rest of the way. The Dodgers would need one more win to grab that sixth straight division title.

OCTOBER

The Dodgers got it, 5-2 at Dodger Stadium, and then they blitzed past the Braves in the NLDS and now they are here, four wins away from their second consecutive World Series appearance. With Turner back and everybody healthy (other than Seager, obviously), the Dodgers now look like the team they were supposed to be all along ... except now they have Machado. Kershaw is dominant again, the bullpen is gathering steam, they have platoon options at every position and they even have Freese, the ultimate October bat off the bench. It took a long, winding road to get here. But now that they're here ... it might just be this particular Dodgers team that's the one that does it after all.

LA-MIL season series an NLCS preview?

By Adam McCalvy

MILWAUKEE -- If the best-of-seven National League Championship Series is as compelling as the seven games the Dodgers and Brewers played in the regular season, it will be a good one.

The season series went to a Game 7, which Los Angeles won ... really, really, really won. But along the way, the teams traded memorable player debuts and highlight-reel defensive plays, a Milwaukee comeback against Clayton Kershaw and a Dodgers walk-off at home. Now, they will meet again for the NL pennant, beginning Friday night at Miller Park.

Here's a look back at the teams' regular-season drama:

Friday, July 20

Dodgers 6, Brewers 4 at Miller Park

The headline: Dodgers win Manny's debut

With young shortstop Orlando Arcia in the midst of a slump that spanned most of the season, the Brewers made a strong offer for then-Orioles All-Star Manny Machado, only to see Baltimore trade him to the team that opened the second half of the season at Miller Park: the Dodgers. Machado, relieved to be able to focus on baseball after months of trade rumors, singled off Milwaukee left-hander Wade Miley in his first Dodgers at-bat and finished with two hits and two walks in a game decided by Enrique Hernandez's three-run homer in the ninth inning off Brandon Woodruff.

"It was amazing to go out there and put on that uniform," Machado said.

Saturday, July 21**Brewers 4, Dodgers 2 at Miller Park****The headline: Brewers stage comeback vs. Kershaw**

The series-opening loss extended Milwaukee's losing streak to seven, its longest skid all season, and part of a larger funk leading into and coming out of the All-Star break during which the Brewers lost nine of 11 games. But with baseball being baseball, they snapped the skid against Kershaw in the lefty's first loss since April.

Ryan Braun returned from the disabled list and scored twice, reaching on one Dodgers error and scoring the go-ahead run on another, as Milwaukee took advantage of miscues to score three unearned runs. Christian Yelich stayed hot with a game-tying home run, and rookie Corbin Burnes extinguished a bases-loaded no-out jam in the fifth inning on the way to his first Major League win in his home debut. Burnes tagged out Kershaw trying to score on a pitch in the dirt for the first out of that escape. This was also the night that Brewers relief ace Josh Hader returned to work after tearfully apologizing for hateful tweets he sent as a teenager.

"I feel like you just need one [win], just to get some positive vibe back on the team," Yelich said. "You break through, you can take a deep breath and be like, 'All right, we got back on the right side of things and now we can just try and build off that.'"

Sunday, July 22**Dodgers 11, Brewers 2 at Miller Park****The headline: Kemp powers L.A. rout**

Matt Kemp's return to L.A. included one multihomer game. It was this one, in which he led off consecutive innings against Milwaukee left-hander Brent Suter with homers to help the Dodgers score 11 unanswered runs after Milwaukee took a first-inning lead against Alex Wood. It got so bad for the Brewers that they pitched multiple position players (Hernan Perez and Erik Kratz) for the first time since 1979 -- but not the last time in 2018.

"I can't imagine a much deeper lineup," Wood said. "It's the deepest one I've ever played with. It feels like we have eight guys every night and it's, 'Who's going to be the game-changer?' It's a lot of fun to be out there pitching."

This game proved costly for both teams. Justin Turner exited with a groin injury and would miss the rest of the month. Suter strained his forearm and was diagnosed with a torn UCL that required Tommy John surgery.

Monday, July 30

Brewers 5, Dodgers 2 at Dodger Stadium

The headline: Brewers stay hot out west

If Milwaukee general manager David Stearns was seeking motivation to make last-minute additions to a roster he'd just fortified with trades for White Sox closer Joakim Soria and Royals slugger Mike Moustakas, the Brewers provided it by winning for the fourth time in the first five games of a West Coast road trip, the final contest before the non-waiver Trade Deadline. An inning after the stadium lights went out, Eric Thames smashed a three-run home run off Kenta Maeda, and the Brewers "A" relievers -- Hader, Soria, Jeremy Jeffress and Corey Knebel -- covered the final five innings. Get ready to see a heavy dose of those five pitchers in the NLCS, including Maeda, who is now an integral member of the Dodgers' relief corps.

For Los Angeles, Machado provided a silver lining by hitting a home run in his Dodger Stadium debut.

Tuesday, July 31

Brewers 1, Dodgers 0 at Dodger Stadium

The headline: Cain carries Crew

Lorenzo Cain climbed the wall, and the Brewers climbed back to first place just in time for the calendar to flip to August. In the narrowest of victories hours after Milwaukee's bid to land a starting pitcher at the non-waiver Trade Deadline fell short, Cain drove in the game's only run with a double in the third inning before saving a run in the seventh with the best of a series of superlative defensive plays. He leaped at the center-field wall to pull back Cody Bellinger's high fly, preserving what became a two-hit shutout for Miley and relievers Soria and Jeffress.

"I said, 'Damn,'" Bellinger said. "That's all you can say."

The Brewers didn't get a starter that day, but they did swing a surprising trade for Baltimore infielder Jonathan Schoop, who struggled to contribute down the stretch. Ditto for the Dodgers' additions that day: second baseman Brian Dozier and reliever John Axford.

Wednesday, August 1

Dodgers 6, Brewers 4 at Dodger Stadium

The headline: Grandal's walk-off homer seals see-saw affair

Dozier had a big night in his Dodgers debut, going 3-for-4 with a home run, and Yasmani Grandal had a bigger night, following a productive July with a pair of home runs on the first day of August, including a two-run home run in the 10th inning off Brewers reliever Matt Albers after Kemp snapped an 0-for-26 funk with a single. The win, a back-and-forth battle in which Los Angeles trailed, 2-0 after three innings, tied the game at 2 in the fifth and took a 4-2 lead in the seventh only to see it slip away in the eighth on run-scoring hits for Moustakas and Milwaukee catcher Manny Pina, snapped the Dodgers' three-game losing streak and lifted them into a tie with Arizona atop the NL West.

"This was very much like the playoffs," said Moustakas, who made the defensive play of the game in the eighth inning to deny the Dodgers a win in regulation. "Playoff atmosphere. The crowd was into it, [the Dodgers] were into it, we were into it. It was fun. This is what baseball is about, coming down the stretch and playing these types of games."

Thursday, August 2

Dodgers 21, Brewers 5 at Dodger Stadium

The headline: Dodgers score three touchdowns

For all the drama of the first three games of the series, the finale was an absolute rout. In a matchup of Jhoulys Chacin and Kershaw that could be repeated in Game 1 of the NLCS, the Brewers set a franchise record by allowing 21 runs and Los Angeles set a Dodger Stadium record for runs scored while matching the franchise record for a home game by clubbing seven home runs. Joc Pederson and Yasiel Puig each homered twice, and Bellinger delivered the game's big blow when he followed a disputed walk with a grand slam off Chacin that gave L.A. a 5-1 lead in the third inning. Once again, the Brewers called upon both Perez and Kratz to pitch an inning.

For the Dodgers, it was a heck of a tune-up for a visit from the Astros, who were in L.A. next for a rematch of the 2017 World Series.

"There's no letdowns one through nine [in the Dodgers' batting order], which makes an offensive team really good," said Dozier. "It's not just 'sit back and hit with power' and that kind of thing. It's running the bases right and speed mixed with power."

For the Brewers, it was "move on to tomorrow," said manager Craig Counsell.

It's that simple?

"Yeah, it is. It is that simple," Counsell said. "That's what we do. We lost, we move on to tomorrow."

Two months later, the teams are ready for a rematch.

Counsell: Kershaw, LA staff will be 'big challenge'

By Adam McCalvy

MILWAUKEE -- The Brewers weren't ready to name a starting pitcher for Friday's Game 1 of the National League Championship Series on Tuesday, the first full day their matchup against the Dodgers was set. That should surprise no one, since Milwaukee opted not to say Jhoulys Chacin would start the NL Central tiebreaker game at Wrigley Field until three hours before the first pitch, and then they waited until the morning of Game 1 of the NL Division Series against the Rockies to make the surprise announcement that Brandon Woodruff would be the "initial out-getter" on what amounted to a bullpen day.

But while the Brewers played coy -- Chacin is the most likely candidate, barring another Game 1 bullpen day -- they know who they are up against.

Clayton Kershaw, coming off a superlative performance in the NLDS against the Braves, will start Game 1 for the Dodgers on Friday at Miller Park.

"Look, it's a big challenge," Milwaukee manager Craig Counsell said. "Their starting pitching is very good, so it's a challenge. Against good pitching, execution feels more valuable, because you don't feel like you're going to get as many opportunities. I think that's true any time you face good pitching. So I think that, of course, is going to be a key.

"At the same time, home runs do still win these games. Home runs are still a big part of these games. You don't have to put big rallies together if you can get a walk and a two-run homer. More than you think, there are playoff wins on home runs. It is the big blow. And really, the message is it's tough to put extended rallies together against good pitching. The one mistake, and popping one, is a lot more likely to happen in a lot of ways."

Kershaw has been as good as you'd expect in 14 career starts against the Brewers, registering a 2.86 ERA and a 1.02 WHIP. Milwaukee has won six of those starts, including one of two this season. The Brewers came from behind to beat Kershaw and the Dodgers at Miller Park on July 21, when Christian Yelich homered and Milwaukee capitalized on errors to score three unearned runs in a 4-2 win. Yelich is 9-for-17 with a pair of home runs in his career against Kershaw and has a .409/.429/.636 slash line against the pitchers who were on the Dodgers' NLDS roster.

In the regular season, the Dodgers took the season series from the Brewers, 4-3.

"It's different because it's a playoff series, as much as anything," Counsell said. "We rolled into both Dodgers series, and we had to protect some pitching. In two of the games, we used position players. It's just different. I mean, it's the playoffs, and things are going to be managed differently.

"It's a good team, and there were some good games in some of the seven we played. We know what to expect. We played them both in the second half, so it's not that long ago, and it's similar personnel."

Decisions, decisions

When the Brewers set an NLDS roster with 11 pitchers and 14 position players, general manager David Stearns conceded that it was specific to a best-of-five series in which teams don't play more than two consecutive days. Things could look different in the best-of-seven NLCS under a 2-3-2 format.

Left-handed reliever Xavier Cedeno is a candidate to get back into action after being left off the NLDS roster. So is right-handed starter Zach Davies, who was one of three Brewers pitchers, with Junior Guerra and Freddy Peralta, who threw to hitters in a brief workout at Miller Park on Tuesday.

Guerra and Peralta were on the NLDS roster but, like Gio Gonzalez, didn't pitch. Davies and Gonzalez served as starting pitchers in September. Guerra and Peralta worked out of the bullpen down the stretch in the regular season.

The Brewers will have to submit a 25-man NLCS roster by 10 a.m. CT on Friday.

"We had one conversation today, and we'll have another one [Wednesday]," Counsell said. "Yeah, it's a different series. There's a potential for seven games in nine days instead of five in seven days, so that's a different equation."

Just like in the NLDS, the pitchers were forced to stay flexible.

"I don't know what the plan is right now," Guerra said, "but it was good to see hitters and get ready. We're waiting. We're excited, too."

Last call

- The old "rest vs. rust" debate doesn't much apply to this series, since the Brewers finished a sweep of the Rockies on Sunday and the Dodgers closed out their 3-1 NLDS win over the Braves on Monday before traveling home to Los Angeles. If their postseason tradition holds, the Dodgers won't fly to Milwaukee until Thursday before taking part in a workout that evening.

"Look, both teams are going to go into this series very fresh," Counsell said. "We're in the series. However you get there, you're happy about getting there. The break allows you to consider more options."

- Director of grounds Michael Boettcher and his crew were working on their artistic skills Tuesday, turning an NLDS logo along the baselines into an NLCS logo. All they had to do was alter the letter C.

The roof was open for most of an 80-degree day in Milwaukee on Tuesday, but it is likely to be closed the rest of the week, including for Games 1 and 2. A storm system is expected to bring temperatures in the 40s by Thursday and Friday.

- Major League Baseball set the first pitch times for the first two games of the series on Tuesday. Friday's Game 1 will begin at 7:09 p.m. CT, and Game 2 on Saturday will begin at 3:09 p.m. CT.

LA TIMES

Dodgers will face a tough Brewers team in NLCS

By Jorge Castillo

The Dodgers' celebration at Atlanta's SunTrust Park on Monday was as much about checking off a box as it was what they had accomplished. They expected to advance to the National League Championship Series, to within four wins of another trip to the World Series, after last year's disappointment. The path this season was rockier than anticipated, but anything less would've been a colossal letdown.

The party the Milwaukee Brewers had at Coors Field in Denver a day earlier had a different flavor. They weren't projected to reach the NLCS. They play in baseball's smallest market, an afterthought in Chicago's shadow, and have one of the majors' slimmest payrolls. It was their first playoff series victory since 2011, the last time they were in the playoffs. They went to the NLCS that year and lost. They haven't won a World Series or even been to one since 1982. This is unfamiliar territory.

But the clubs will have at least one thing in common when they arrive at Milwaukee's Miller Park for Game 1 on Friday: They're both playing their best baseball. The Dodgers have won seven of their last eight games, outscoring opponents 47-15 during the stretch. The Brewers have been even better, winning 11 straight games and breezing through the NL Division Series by outscoring the Colorado Rockies 13-2 in a three-game sweep.

"It's going to be great," Dodgers shortstop Manny Machado said. "Both ballclubs have worked hard to get to this situation. They're both two good ballclubs facing off in the championship. And we're just going to go out there and play baseball, be ourselves, keep doing what we've been doing all year, and hopefully we come out on top."

Presumptive National League MVP Christian Yelich anchors a deep Brewers lineup that features a little bit of everything. They're traditional in that regard.

But pitching is another matter. The Brewers deploy their pitchers like most analytically driven clubs; they'd rather not let a pitcher face a lineup three times, regardless of pitch count, and they're not afraid to shift a heavier onus on to their bullpen. But the Brewers have catapulted the revolution to another level.

Manager Craig Counsell would rather not label his pitchers "starters" or "relievers." He prefers "out-getters." In Game 1, he ditched the traditional starter entirely, opting to begin the game with Brandon Woodruff, a reliever. Woodruff tossed three shutout innings. Traditional starters Jhoulys Chacin and Wade Miley started the final two games, but logged just 7 2/3 innings combined.

The strategy is effective because Milwaukee's bullpen — headlined by Jeremy Jeffress, Josh Hader and Corey Knebel — is one of baseball's best, and the postseason schedule, which affords more off-days, renders the approach more viable. Jeffress, Hader and Knebel each appeared in all three NLDS wins over the Rockies. They gave up two runs and six hits and tallied 12 strikeouts in 8 2/3 innings — and they'll be fresh Friday after a four-day layoff.

Meanwhile, the Dodgers, realizing their strength lies elsewhere, are countering the sport's current.

Hyun-Jin Ryu threw seven scoreless innings in Game 1 against the Atlanta Braves. Clayton Kershaw tossed eight in Game 2. Walker Buehler was given enough leash to push through a five-run second inning in Game 3 before settling in to log five innings, and Rich Hill was pulled in the fifth inning in Game 4 after issuing five walks. A year after riding Kenley Jansen and a deep bullpen to Game 7 of the World Series, the Dodgers' success is dependent on their starting rotation.

“Hyun-Jin [was] unbelievable,” Kershaw said. “And Walker, after he took his lump there in that one inning, came back and threw really well. So I think that was huge for him moving forward and Richie kept us in the game Yeah, we’ve got some depth there, which is huge.”

Kershaw will get the first crack on Friday. He found out about the assignment from a reporter amidst the Dodgers’ postgame celebration on Monday. It wasn’t the obvious choice, not after his bosses decided to start Ryu over him in Game 1 of the NLDS. It was the first time Kershaw didn’t start a Game 1 for the Dodgers when he was available since 2009. That order has been restored.

It will be the Dodgers’ first visit to Miller Park since they opened up the second half there. The Dodgers were an unfinished product then. Machado had just arrived from the Baltimore Orioles and made his debut in the series opener. Brian Dozier was a Minnesota Twin. Ryan Madson was with the Washington Nationals. The Pittsburgh Pirates employed David Freese.

Three of the four played significant roles in Monday’s series-clinching win. Freese cracked a pinch-hit, go-ahead, two-run single. Madson escaped a bases-loaded, one-out jam. Machado crushed a three-run home run. It was another display of the depth that buoyed the Dodgers’ internal expectations. Those expectations are high, and they include two more celebrations.

“We had a really good team last year,” Dodgers third baseman Justin Turner said. “We have a really good team this year. The only difference is we’re trying to win one more game.”

OC REGISTER

The Dodgers’ depth – and players willing to accept diminished roles – has proven invaluable

By Bill Plunkett

Dave Roberts knows better than anyone how small contributions can have big implications in October.

An every-day player with the Dodgers in 2004, Roberts became a role player when he was traded to the Boston Red Sox at midseason. During the playoffs that year, he never picked up a bat – but he will never have to pick up another check in New England thanks to his series-turning stolen base in Game 4 of the American League Championship Series against the New York Yankees.

That experience makes Roberts an ideal salesman for the latest iteration of the Dodgers’ win-by-numbers approach, one that has reduced established every-day players like Matt Kemp, Yasiel Puig, Cody Bellinger, Brian Dozier and others into cogs in an analytical wheel.

“I think the No. 1 sell is to win a championship and to sell guys that they can be a part in this process, in this collaboration, in this team in different capacities,” Roberts said. “And guys have delivered at different spots. So I think that that’s kind of the selling point.

“But with that comes a sacrifice, and just understanding that when your number is called, then just be ready when called upon. So it’s tough. It’s an adjustment for a lot of players. But, fortunately, we have players who have bought into that.”

That hasn’t been an entirely voluntary process.

“Honestly, we have no choice but to buy into it,” Kemp said in Atlanta on Monday with a laugh, adding that he has talked to Chase Utley about accepting his new reality.

“It’s been working. Like you said, we got guys on the bench that could go somewhere and play every single day and make an impact. But we’re trying to win a championship, and every guy is on the same page, and our own common goal is to win a championship.”

The sacrifices have been widespread, particularly in September when the Dodgers went full capacity, activating everyone on their 40-man roster. With that full house and a wide assortment of positional flexibility, Roberts went all in on platooning.

As a result, Kemp, Chris Taylor and Brian Dozier have not started more than three games in a row since August. Bellinger didn’t start more than four games in a row (despite being an option at two positions) in September. Max Muncy and Joc Pederson haven’t started more than three in a row since July.

Only Justin Turner and Manny Machado were truly every-day players for the Dodgers over the final two months of the season.

On the pitching staff, Ross Stripling, Alex Wood and Kenta Maeda were pushed from the starting rotation to the bullpen. Stripling (this year) and Wood (last year) were All-Star selections as starting pitchers. Maeda took a financial hit, giving up any chance of reaching bonuses in his contract based on life as a starter.

“It’s hard being platooned. Everybody knows it,” Bellinger said, champagne and beer soaking his shirt in the Dodgers’ third post-game clinching celebration in 10 days on Monday. “Our whole team basically was. That being said, you’ve got to perform when it’s your time – and we started to hit lefties.”

That is the ultimate rebuttal for any criticism of Roberts’ revolving lineups or in-house grumbling from players pushed into diminished roles – it worked.

“At the end of the day, you look back at September and we were 20-9,” GM Farhan Zaidi said. “We were 20-9 with the expanded roster. We performed as well against left-handed pitching as we did all year. We know that position players want to play and starting pitchers want to start games. When they have that identity, that’s how they want to be used.

“In this game, you need that kind of confidence. But I think going through that has put guys in better positions, where there’s some familiarity coming off the bench in this situation. The guys that we put in the ‘pen got their feet wet during the season and now are more comfortable doing it.”

Roberts no longer has 40 players at his disposal. But the Dodgers still head into their third consecutive NLCS with uncommon depth – in Game 4 of their NLDS against the Braves, Roberts used last year’s NLCS co-MVP (Taylor), a 2018 All-Star Game starter (Kemp) and a former World Series MVP (David Freese) as pinch-hitters.

That depth has caused him to evolve his own philosophy as a manager, Roberts admitted, and now he “100 percent believes in” searching for every advantage rather than rolling the same players out day after day because it’s easier for the manager and more comfortable for the players.

“The reason I’ve evolved is because the options we have this year versus years past – are better,” Roberts said. “And were they good before? Absolutely. But when you have a certain option and it could be lesser, in my opinion or whatever, then the sell is a lot harder. If it’s a lot more stark and clear, then it’s an easier sell. And I think right now where we’re at when I look at our options they are clearly very good options.

“The same thing goes in the bullpen. You can use these guys in the sixth, seventh inning or whenever. Then when you’re shaking hands at the end of a game, you can go, ‘I’m Scott Alexander. I got a lefty to hit into a double play in the seventh inning. That could have been the turning point.’ ‘I’m Max Muncy. I didn’t start but I got four RBIs the other day against the Padres’ or ‘I made a great defensive play’ or ‘I led the inning off and drew a walk.’ For me, that is really tangible stuff. So when we’re shaking hands after a game or we’re looking back on the season I’m going ‘I’m as much a part of this as the next guy.’” There might be a little more kumbaya to that than Roberts would admit. Players focus to varying extents on their numbers during the regular season. As competitors, they measure themselves against other players based on those numbers. As capitalists, they know their paycheck depends on them.

In the month of October, though, numbers matter less.

“I think it’s a different situation in the playoffs when the roster shrinks and it’s all about winning or losing that day,” Zaidi said. “Certainly you have that during the regular season, but the focus is even heightened now.

“Guys have seen and remember too many relievers or pinch-hitters or pinch-runners who swung playoff games and those are the guys that get remembered. Everybody knows it just takes one moment to help win a game or a series this time of year.”

TRUE BLUE LA

Dodgers need to take advantage of Brewers’ starting pitching

By Dustin Nosler

The Dodgers are heading to their third consecutive National League Championship Series after defeating the Braves on Monday afternoon. They’re doing so, largely, because of their starting pitching. They also got some timely home runs from the offense.

They are set to face the Brewers, who dispatched the Rockies with relative ease. Their starting pitching, however, wasn't a huge reason why. Sure, the Brewers' starters allowed no runs to the Rockies, but the starters also threw just 12 2/3 innings in the three games. Jhoulys Chacin had the longest outing (five innings) of the trio. Admittedly, the Brewers went the bullpen game route in Game 1, but there's a reason why: Their rotation is the weakest part of their team. If the Dodgers are going to have success against them in the NLCS, they're going to have to jump on the starting pitchers.

Presumably, Chacin will start Game 1 of the NLCS for the Brewers. He made an MLB-best 35 starts this season, but he averaged just 5.5 innings per start. In fact, the Brewers starting staff, on the whole, averaged just 5.2 innings per start this season. They pitched to a 3.92 ERA and 4.32 FIP. They were also 19th in MLB in K-BB% (11.6) and were near the bottom of the league in ground ball percentage (40.7 percent). By comparison, the Dodgers' starters had a 3.19 ERA & 3.42 FIP (both 2nd-best in MLB), a 19.6 K-BB% (3rd-best) and an MLB-best 45.9 percent ground ball rate.

After looking at those numbers, it's a fair question to ask how the Brewers were so good in 2018. It's because they have an elite bullpen. Using the metrics above, the Brewers had a 3.47 ERA (5th-best), 3.57 FIP (4th-best) & 18.1 K-BB% (4th-best) and a 46.8 GB% (3rd-best). With guys like Josh Hader (ugh), Jeremy Jeffress, Joakim Soria and a fixed Corey Knebel, it's not surprising the Brewers are leaning on their bullpen. Teams have ridden an elite bullpen to a World Series championship before — as recently as 2015. The only weakness in their 'pen is the fact they can be a bit wild (9.5 BB%). Other than that, it's going to be difficult to score off that quartet and the rest of the Milwaukee relievers.

It would behoove the Dodgers to jump on the starting pitching early and as often as possible. The Dodgers were the most patient team in baseball (10.2 BB%) and the Brewers' starters induced the 8th-fewest swings outside the strike zone, so that could be a problem for the Brewers. But if the Milwaukee starters get into trouble early, Craig Counsell won't hesitate to turn to the bullpen.

It's going to be an interesting matchup overall. The Brewers won the most games in the National League this season. That didn't happen by accident. They have the offense (led by potential NL MVP Christian Yelich) and the superior bullpen that could carry them to the World Series. If the Dodgers want a great shot of returning to the World Series, the offense will have to a) show up and b) get after the Brewer starting pitching. We'll see if Manny Machado, Justin Turner and friends are up to the task.

David Freese has been one of the best acquisitions of the year

By Blake Harris

On August 31, the Dodgers made an interesting trade, acquiring infielder David Freese from the Pittsburgh Pirates. After making a huge trade-deadline splash with the acquisitions of Manny Machado and Brian Dozier, the Dodgers appeared to be done adding bats to an already stellar team.

Freese wasn't expected to be an immediate starter with LA. He was expected to be a bat off the bench, as well as a veteran presence in the locker room.

The front office though, had other ideas.

Freese was brought over for depth, as well as being a voice in the locker room, but his main purpose wasn't expected to be on full display until October.

"Yeah. It's great. I didn't know -- you never know if you're going to be in the postseason," Freese said on getting a postseason chance with the Dodgers. "You never know if you're going to get back. Obviously, my career is winding down."

Mostly well known for his historic 2011 postseason, Freese has established himself as one of the more clutch players of the last few decades. In 2011, Freese hit .545 with three home runs and 9 RBI in the NLCS versus the Brewers. He had 12 hits in only six games.

His World Series was even more memorable. Winning MVP, he hit .348 and had an unforgettable performance in Game 6. Down to the final strike, Freese tripled in two runs, tying the game.

In the 11th inning, Freese walked it off, sending the series to a seventh game, in which the Cardinals ultimately won.

When Freese came over to LA, he owned a .281/.357/.517 slash line with eight home runs and 30 RBI in his postseason career.

For the 35-year-old, he was better than advertised in the month of September. In 18 games, Freese hit .385, which was the highest in the national league, along with two homers and nine RBI. His OPS of 1.130 was second in the league.

Expecting to be a bench piece, Freese was able to work himself into the everyday lineup for the teams most crucial stretch of the year.

After three games in the NLDS, Freese only saw one at-bat. He got the start in game three, but was taken out of the game, as Max Muncy pinch-hit for him.

In a crucial fourth game, the Dodgers had runners on the corners with two outs. Trailing one run in the sixth, LA was in desperate need of someone to deliver with runners in scoring position. For LA fans, there likely wasn't a debate for who they wanted to see at the plate.

After a pitching change, Dave Roberts sent Freese to the plate. A stolen base from Yasiel Puig put runners at second and third. The count reached 3-2, and the most important pitch of the series was about to be thrown.

Freese connected on a 96-mph fastball, hitting it under the glove of former Dodger Charlie Culberson, and through to center field, bringing in two runs to give LA a 3-2 lead.

It was his only at-bat of the game, but Freese did exactly what he was expected to do when he was traded to LA, deliver in the clutch.

“You never know what this game is going to give you, what opportunities arise for you,” Freese said. “You just gotta be ready. That’s what I’ve learned over the years. Whether you’re in high school, college, whatever, just be ready. You don’t have to be the best player in the world. You don’t have to make the most money, but you’re going to have a shot to do something cool. I learned that early in my career, and just try and stick with it.”

Dave Roberts spoke after the game on what it’s been like counting on Freese in the lineup.

“And now when you’re talking about putting him in a spot in a big moment, you just can bet on the pulse,” Roberts said. “He’s obviously come up with some big hits for us in such a short period of time. But obviously this is probably the biggest one, and we’re lucky to have him.”

Keibert Ruiz headlines Dodger prospects in Arizona Fall League

By Craig Minami

The Arizona Fall League (“AFL”) began play on Tuesday. The six-team league that has minor league prospects from each Major League organization will play until November 15th. The championship game will be played on Saturday November 17th.

Eight Dodger minor league players were assigned to the Glendale Desert Dogs and the following are some items of note about each one of them.

AFL assignment celebrates big year for Keibert Ruiz

Keibert Ruiz is the only top-100 prospect from the Dodgers playing in the AFL. The 20-year old catcher completed a full-season at Double-A Tulsa. His year culminated with strong finish in Tulsa’s run to the Texas League championship. Ruiz hit .333/.351/.500 in the playoffs. He hit two home runs and did not strikeout in 36 at-bats.

The other Dodger position player prospects playing for the Desert Dogs are shortstop Errol Robinson, first baseman Jared Walker and outfielder Cody Thomas.

Errol Robinson also played second and third base at Tulsa. Robinson turned 24 last week, he was the Dodger’s sixth pick in the 2016 draft out of Mississippi. In 117 games this season, Robinson hit .247/.309/.353 with ten home runs.

Jared Walker played at both Great Lakes in the Midwest League and was then promoted to Rancho Cucamonga at the beginning of the second half of the season. Walker had begun to put together some good slugging numbers at the end of the 2017 season and he continued that into 2018.

After Walker had a .838 OPS in 228+ plate appearances at Great Lakes, he improved to a .980 OPS in 229+ plate appearances at Rancho Cucamonga. He hit 17 home runs at Rancho Cucamonga and he had a total of 25 home runs in his 2018 season.

Walker also played second base at Rancho Cucamonga and he added some third base starts at Great Lakes this season.

Cody Thomas played a full-season at Rancho Cucamonga. The former Oklahoma Sooner was drafted in the 13th round by the Dodgers in 2016. Thomas, who just turned 24 on Monday, had a great second half. He hit .297/.373/.556 with 21 doubles, three triples and 15 home runs in a little over 300 plate appearances.

Top draft pick Jordan Sheffield is one of four pitching prospects in AFL

Right-handed pitcher Jordan Sheffield is highest ranked prospect to pitch in this year's AFL. The other three pitchers from the Dodger organization are left-handed pitcher Ben Holmes and two other right-handed pitchers, Nolan Long and Andre Scrubb.

Sheffield was the 36th overall pick for the Dodgers in the 2016 draft and he started his season at Rancho Cucamonga as a starting pitcher. He made seven starts and gave up 24 runs (22 earned) in 27 innings pitched. Sheffield was put on the disabled list on May 13th and he returned to the Quakes on August 14th.

When Sheffield came back, he began to pitch out of the bullpen. And despite one rough outing, he did appear to adapt well to the change. Time will tell if this change is permanent for the 23-year old pitcher.

Ben Holmes had originally been drafted by the Miami Marlins in 2014. The Marlin organization released Holmes during the 2018 season and then he was signed by the Dodgers was assigned to Rancho Cucamonga on July 6th.

Holmes pitched in six games for the Quakes with three starts and three relief outings. He pitched 17 innings and struck out 25 while walking 5. Holmes was then promoted to Tulsa on August 4th.

At Tulsa, Holmes he started six games and pitched 38⅓ innings. He struck out 30 and walked 12. Holmes also won a postseason start where he pitched 6⅓ scoreless innings.

Right-handed pitcher Nolan Long pitched at both Rancho Cucamonga and Tulsa. The 24-year old was drafted in the 16th round in the 2015 draft. Long made 43 appearances in his two-stop year. He pitched a total 70⅓ innings where he gave up a .177 Batting Average Against with 92 strikeouts.

Andre Scrubb is the final player from the Dodger organization on the Desert Dogs. The 23-year old right-handed pitcher was drafted in the 8th round in the 2016 draft.

Scrubb pitched for three teams in 2018, starting his season at Great Lakes. He was then assigned to Rancho Cucamonga on June 21st. Finally, he was promoted to Tulsa on August 11th.

For the entire 2018 season, Scrubb pitched in 38 games and pitched 63 total innings. He struck out 72 but he also walked 32 in those innings.

Manny Machado is ready to make his own postseason legacy

By Stacie Wheeler

The Dodgers are ready to defend their National League Championship title, but this time around they will have to battle the Brewers and not the Cubs. The Dodgers knocked out a very promising young Braves team on Monday night in Atlanta, a club that is sure to factor into the postseason for years to come. Manny Machado was the player of the game, driving in four runs to help the Dodgers clinch the series with a 6-2 win.

Now Manny and the Dodgers will turn their focus to Milwaukee, a team who was one of several teams pursuing Machado before the July non-waiver trade deadline. The Dodgers got Manny in a blockbuster trade, while the Brewers snatched up NL MVP frontrunner Christian Yelich prior to the season. Now the two talented superstars will battle it out against each other to get to the Fall Classic.

Ten years after the original Manny (Ramirez) became one of the most successful late-season acquisitions in Dodgers history, the front office traded for the most sought-after bat available on the market in mid-summer to make a late-season push toward their sixth consecutive NL West division title.

Machado's hyped up Dodgers debut, which took place ironically in Milwaukee, lived up to all the expectations. He reached base four times, hitting two singles and walking twice in the 6-4 win over the Brewers.

The Dodgers were only the second major-league team Machado played for since being drafted by the Orioles in 2010 and making his MLB debut at the tender age of 19. After his Dodgers debut, Machado's numbers slipped. He slashed .273/.338/.487/.825 with 13 home runs and a 42 wRC+ in 66 games, a significant decrease in overall production from his first 96 games with Baltimore (.315/.387/.575/.963 with 24 home runs and a 77 wRC+). He struck out 5.6% more in LA and walked 2.5 % less. His defense at shortstop, that looked surprisingly better than the metrics suggested, was arguably not worth his price alone without the offensive production. Even his seemingly lack of hustle on routine groundouts was magnified.

The Dodgers acquired Machado in order to shore up the infield and provide offense with the absence of their All-Star shortstop Corey Seager, lost for the year after Tommy John surgery. Machado never hit a Ramirez type stride. OG Manny wowed with a 1.232 OPS and 17 home runs over 53 games in late 2008.

Despite the inconsistencies at the plate, LA fans finally got a taste of what Mannywood 2.0 was supposed to be in September. He helped trim the Dodgers' magic number to 7 for the NL West division title with his three-run home run off Jacob Nix during a five-run third inning, propelling the Dodgers to a 7-2 win over the Padres on his bobblehead night.

Dedicating a bobblehead night to Machado was a questionable promotion considering he had only been with the Dodgers for a brief time and was offensively disappointing since the All-Star break trade. Dave Roberts indicated that Manny could be pressing as a result of adjusting to pitchers in a new league, a transition that doesn't happen seamlessly with all traded players. His on-base plus slugging percentage with the Dodgers in the regular season ended 138 points lower than it was in Baltimore, and he struggled against right-handed pitching (.253 average vs. RHP in 66 games as a Dodger).

Machado's iconic bobblehead homer was his 100th RBI of the season, a career-high, on a night that also saw the Dodgers set a new franchise record with 222 home runs on the season. Joc Pederson and Yasmani Grandal also went deep later in the game.

Machado had lofty expectations looming over him going into October. He came into Game 4 of the NLDS just 1-for-12 in the series. He did crush an important two-run home run in Game 2, but that seemed to be quickly forgotten as he swung at balls far out of the zone in the series, racking up seven strikeouts.

Social media is a powerful method of immediate discussion and dissection nowadays, and there's no question Machado had at least seen or heard about some of the criticism spreading across Twitter and the internet.

Machado was acquired by the Dodgers' front office exactly for this scenario. The Dodgers were facing a tight NL West race, and he was expected to perform at the highest level in order to lead the Dodgers back to the World Series. Coming into the playoffs, Machado had been good but still underwhelming as far as elite players are concerned, spurring the backlash and criticism from Dodger fans.

Ramirez, who also donned trademark hair, never got a shot at the World Series with the Dodgers. Those Dodger teams infamously fell to the Phillies four games to one in both the 2008 and 2009 NLCS. Now Machado has his own postseason legacy to carve out, and he's peaking at just the right time.

Machado looked locked in during Game 4 of the NLDS, hitting the ball hard in all of his plate appearances. He finally got his 'Manny Moment' with his epic three-run home run in Game 4. Now all eyes turn to Milwaukee for perhaps the biggest series of his career. His performance this postseason could solely be what defines his time with the Dodgers.

Manny has been plagued with inconsistency since joining the Dodgers, but the Dodgers themselves as a whole have battled inconsistency throughout the entire season. Inconsistency could be the theme of the 2018 Dodgers. Now Manny and his teammates have found a groove at just the right time, but they still have work to be done to get back to the World Series in order to find redemption from the Game 7 loss. The stinging loss still lives with them, at least a little bit, even if they don't want to admit it.

Machado is looking to get paid handsomely this offseason, whether it's with the Dodgers or somewhere else. He really didn't have much opportunity to play on the biggest stage in October with the Orioles, but now he has the platform to prove his worth as an elite player in a large market atmosphere. He has the infectious smile to light up Dodger Stadium, but the Dodgers look to his bat to light up their opponent.

THE ATHLETIC

Looking back on the 'crazy' idea the Dodgers had for Kenley Jansen

By Pedro Moura

On the Fourth of July in 2009, Carlos Subero called Kenley Jansen into his office inside San Bernardino's San Manuel Stadium.

Subero was managing the Dodgers' Class-A affiliate in the Inland Empire, where he encountered a 21-year-old Jansen, then a switch-hitting catcher with a .202 batting average. The Dodgers' farm director, DeJon Watson, had decided it was time to convert Jansen into a reliever. It was Subero's job to break the news.

"I'll never forget it: He was crying," Subero said earlier this year. "I told him we were making the transition from catching into pitching. And, in that broken Spanish he had, Kenley told me, 'Carlos, please don't let that happen.'"

Jansen argued that he had excelled in that spring's World Baseball Classic. He brought up how he had thrown out the Brewers' Ryan Braun on an attempted steal of second base — from his knees.

"Kenley," Subero said, "that shows arm strength."

By both men's recollection, Jansen was resolute.

"I can play in the big leagues as a catcher," he insisted.

Subero ran a regular chapel for his players. Through Jansen's participation, they had built a strong relationship. The coach relied upon it to convince his pupil to make the move.

"In our evaluation, you can be a backup catcher in the big leagues, or you can be an All-Star pitcher," Subero told Jansen. "Which one do you want to be? You can spend three or four years going up and down, or you can be in the big leagues in a year and a half."

Jansen threw his first bullpen session the next day and made the majors in one year flat. The natural cut in his throwing motion made him an immediate late-inning relief weapon.

From 2015 to 2017, Jansen logged one of the best three-season stretches by a reliever in baseball history. The 2018 season has been more of a struggle, but his performances against Atlanta in the National League Division Series hinted he might be finding his way.

On Friday in Milwaukee, Jansen and the Dodgers will begin the NL Championship Series against the Brewers and Subero, who became Milwaukee's first base and infield coach three years ago.

Back in 2009 with Inland Empire, Subero was far from the only Dodgers staffer who guided Jansen toward the mound. Watson, pitching coach Charlie Hough and vice president for player personnel Vance Lovelace were among the key voices. During that offseason, they had discussed the possibility of moving both outfielder Scott Van Slyke and Jansen to pitching.

"We didn't know the ball was gonna cut like that," Subero said of Jansen. "But we knew he had a special arm."

Subero said he strived to limit Jansen's initial innings, so as to not allow opposing clubs to detect his potential and force the Dodgers to put him on the 40-man roster that winter.

They did anyway, after he struck out 28 of 81 batters he faced between Class-A and the Arizona Fall League. The next season, Subero managed the Dodgers' Double-A affiliate in Chattanooga, Tenn. Within a month, Jansen had been promoted there. Two months later, he was in the big leagues. On his third day with the Dodgers, he saved a 1-0 win after an eight-inning start by Clayton Kershaw.

Since 2016, Jansen and Subero have seen each other twice a year when the Brewers meet the Dodgers. Subero always reminds Jansen of his teary protestation that holiday afternoon, and they laugh.

"He helped me a lot, in those tough times, to stay strong," Jansen said in August. "It was crazy, what they asked me to do. But I did it. And look at me now."

Before his big league promotion in 2010, Jansen threw two perfect innings on one memorable May night in Jacksonville, Fla. In between the innings, he batted in the tied game and whacked a leadoff double. He took off for third base and made it safely — for the last stolen base of his career. Soon, he scored the game's go-ahead run.

"Hitting is so easy now," Jansen told Subero when he reached the dugout. "There's no pressure anymore."

After that game, Subero received an urgent call from Los Angeles: Please don't have Jansen stealing third base. Already, he had reached the big league team's radar.

The opposing catcher that night? Chris Hatcher, who years later converted to pitching and became Jansen's bullpen mate in L.A.

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Dodgers counting on Machado to push them over Series hump

By Paul Newberry

ATLANTA (AP) — Even with all their star power and deep pockets, all their booming hitters and ace pitchers, the Los Angeles Dodgers are approaching three decades since their last World Series championship.

They're making another run at that elusive title.

Only this time, Manny Machado is along for the ride.

The slugging shortstop hit a three-run homer that wrapped up a 6-2 victory over the Atlanta Braves on Monday, sending Los Angeles to the NL Championship Series for the third year in a row and fourth time in six seasons.

This is what the Dodgers had in mind when they acquired the free agent-to-be from the lowly Baltimore Orioles back in July.

They're hoping Machado is the one who turns Tinseltown into Titledown for the first time since 1988.

"Can't say enough about him," Los Angeles manager Dave Roberts said. "A player of his caliber, there are so many expectations put on him."

Machado had only three hits in a 3-1 division series victory over the Braves, but two of them were homers. He finished with six RBIs.

"We prepared ourselves to get here," Machado said. "We're not going to stop till we get what we want."

Clearly, nothing less than a World Series title will do.

While the Dodgers went through the customary celebration that follows any postseason victory — they doled out T-shirts and caps, posed for pictures in the middle of SunTrust Park, then doused themselves with beer in the clubhouse — the focus turned quickly to the next round.

The Dodgers will face the Brewers in the NLCS. Game 1 is Friday night in Milwaukee.

"We all know that there's a lot more work to be done," Roberts said. "We have eight more wins to go."

Los Angeles spent much of the season locked in a tight race with division rivals Colorado and Arizona, and required a one-game playoff with the Rockies to clinch its sixth straight NL West title.

“We took a hard path to get to this point, but I do think it made us stronger and kind of galvanized our team,” Roberts said.

It certainly helps to have a player of Machado’s caliber bolstering an already potent lineup. The Dodgers hit a franchise-record 235 homers during the regular season, and added eight more in the NLDS.

“They’re a very powerful team,” Atlanta manager Brian Snitker said. “It’s what they’ve done all year is hit home runs. We’re not built like that yet.”

Indeed, the Baby Braves were thoroughly overmatched in their first postseason appearance since 2013, hitting .154 overall and scoring just eight runs. Though the future looks bright for a team that pulled off a massive rebuilding job much quicker than expected, Atlanta was not quite ready to contend with a team of the Dodgers’ quality.

Los Angeles had too much power, too much depth, too much pitching.

Not to mention too much Machado.

“It was a great ride,” Snitker said. “We took a huge step forward this year. We had some very young players get a lot of great experience, both during the regular season and the postseason. And we have some really good players coming up. I really am excited about the future of the Atlanta Braves right now.”

The Dodgers are locked firmly in the present.

This is a franchise desperate to win one more game than it did a season ago, when the Houston Astros took Game 7 of the World Series at Dodger Stadium.

That’s why they acquired Machado.

“Coming over from Baltimore midway through the season — new ball club, new atmosphere, new teammates, new coaching staff, new front office, I mean, it’s always a bit of an adjustment,” he said. “But they’ve been nothing but amazing to us, to myself and my family. And coming here to a winning ballclub that’s been determined the whole way since last year to get into this situation and further, I’m just sitting here enjoying everything, enjoying the ride.”

Machado wasn’t the only in-season acquisition to play a key role in the clinching victory over the Braves. David Freese, picked up from Pittsburgh just minutes before the trade deadline, came through with a pinch-hit, two-run single that put the Dodgers ahead to stay in the sixth.

The MVP of St. Louis’ improbable victory in the 2011 World Series, Freese is eager to take part in another magical postseason run.

“You never know what this game is going to give you, what opportunities arise for you,” Freese said.
“You just gotta be ready.”