

CUBS

WORLD SERIES QUEST

Kluber, yes; Lester, no; Schwarber, certainly, as Indians snare Game 1

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Too much Corey Kluber, too little Jon Lester in the Indians' 6-0 victory over the Cubs in Game 1 of the World Series.

That's the simple storyline of Game 1 of the first Cubs Fall Classic of the TV era. Good pitching beats good hitting, nothing more complicated than that. And if it's all-time great Fall Classic pitching, then the opponents have no chance.

Indians ace Kluber simply overpowered the Cubs in the same manner as Sandy Koufax (15 strikeouts) to the Yankees in 1963 and Bob Gibson (17 whiffs) to the Tigers in 1968. The two-time 18-game winner would be considered the best thing since sliced bread if he pitched in New York or Chicago.

"This guy's slider is filthy," miked-up David Ross told Mike Napoli when he singled in the third.

Lester simply could not match Kluber, first man to strike out eight batters in the first three innings of the World Series. And when the Cubs' ace southpaw was just off his game, the modest Cleveland production resulting was enough for the hosts to snare Game 1 in a contest blown open very late by the second of catcher Roberto Perez's homers.

The Cubs wasted a memorable comeback by designated hitter Kyle Schwarber, defying experts like Pete Rose and John Smoltz, and a bases-loaded, no-out rally in the seventh. The National League pennant winners now have four chances in a possible six remaining Fall Classic games to break the Indians' postseason pitching mojo. They came in with a 1.77 staff playoff ERA in throttling powerful lineups in Texas and Toronto.

Indians manager Terry Francona will take a calculated risk bringing back Kluber on three days' rest in Game 4 scheduled for Saturday at Wrigley Field, and again in a



Corey Kluber (left) was more than on, while Jon Lester was just off to set the tone for Game 1.

Game 7 if played. Looking ahead, he pulled Kluber at the 88-pitch mark in favor of Andrew Miller in the seventh. Kluber going on three days' rest would be the 21st century equivalent of Sandy Koufax and Mickey Lolich laboring with two days' rest in the 1965 and 1968 World Series, respectively.

Lester at his best would have had trouble out-pitching Kluber. He had command and control trouble combined with a tight strike zone by Larry Vanover, in the first as the Indians tallied two runs. Roberto Perez completed the Indians' scoring off Lester with a fourth-inning homer.

The southpaw was not flying blindly. He was familiar with many of the Indians hitters, having pitched during his Red Sox and Athletics days to the likes of Mike Napoli, Carlos Santana, Jason Kipnis, Rajai Davis and Lonnie Chisenhall.

Fletcher calls Schwarber's return

Schwarber's astounding comeback, predicted back in May 1 by Chicago Baseball Museum president Dr. David J. Fletcher after he toured the Cubs new clubhouse medical facility, almost overshadowed the game itself. The smart, savvy strongman was thought to be out until spring training after a severe knee injury. Yet his access to expanded Cubs training facilities speeded his healing. Schwarber, a 2015 post-season hero with five homers, played in two Arizona Fall League games before being activated Tuesday and slotted in No. 5 in the lineup.

In his first at-bat, Kluber started Schwarber out with breaking pitches before working his heater in to strike him out, knowing Schwarber would have questionable timing.

On the Fox telecast, Rose predicted he'd strike out three times. Later, game analyst Smoltz talked of Schwarber's monumental task coming back with little game preparation. But don't underestimate the determined Schwarber. A millisecond after Smoltz's comment, he banged a fourth-inning double off the right-center field wall. He went into the record books with Kluber as the first player to get his first hit of the season in the World Series.

Maddon certainly knows his young hitter. He left Schwarber in to face 6-foot-7 lefty Miller swooping in from the bullpen in the seventh. Schwarber artfully squeezed a walk out of Miller to fuel the eventually-aborted bases-loaded rally.

At the end of his endurance with a season-high 46 pitches, however, Miller's last bullet was employed on Schwarber to strike him out swinging with two Cubs on in the eighth.

"He should not have any restrictions other than I believe quick cuts and explosive steps that would be required in the outfield," said Fletcher. "Based on his Game 1 performance with a walk and double, he looks game-ready at the plate. I don't expect him to play in the field."



Despite two strikeouts, Kyle Schwarber impressed in his surprising comeback.

One old Cubs connection found his way into the Indians' lineup to contribute. Outfielder Brandon Guyer started in left field, and was hit by Lester with the bases loaded in the first. Getting plunked is a Guyer specialty, leading the AL in hit-by-pitches two seasons in a row (totaling 55) despite being a platoon player.

A trade deadline pickup from the Tampa Bay Rays, Guyer had been the Cubs' No. 5 pick in the 2007 draft. He's gotten far more out of his career than infielder Josh Vitters, the Cubs' first pick in '07. Vitters batted just .121 in 36 Cubs games in 2012.

Guyer never played in the majors in Chicago, departing with Chris Archer to the Rays in the early 2011 deal for Matt Garza. He thus was known to Joe Maddon in his Rays managerial days.

Indians second baseman Kipnis was particularly motivated against his childhood favorite Cubs. The Northbrook product knew all the home folks were watching intently. He had yet another unique tie to Cubdom, having grown up down the street from Steve Bartman, recalling how police cars guarded the ill-fated fan's home on Oct. 15, 2003.

Moving on to Game 2 Wednesday, Cubs fans will hope a somewhat wobbly Jake Arrieta will not only pitch effectively, but also quickly. Anticipating heavy rain moving east from Chicago to hit town later in the evening, the Lords of the Game have moved the start time up one hour to 6:08 p.m. Central Time.

Panic should not grip the Cubs Universe. Maddon's hitters responded well after being stymied by the likes of Clayton Kershaw and Rich Hill. Miller won't be available in Game 2 to allow Francona to quickly yank starter Trevor Bauer, bothered recently by an injured, bloody pinky finger.

The quest to retire 1908 goes game-by-game, pitch-by-pitch, breath-by-breath.