

YANKS

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champions.

These bend-but-don't-break Yankees staved off elimination for the fourth time in this postseason and advanced to play the Houston Astros in the AL Championship Series starting Friday at Minute Maid Park.

"It's just our time," starter CC Sabathia said.

The AL West champion Astros, led by 5-foot-6 dynamo and MVP candidate Jose Altuve, went 5-2 against the wild-card winners this season.

After winning twice in New York, manager Joe Girardi and the Yankees — with little offensive help from rookie star Aaron Judge — came into Progressive Field and finished off the Indians, who won 102 games during the regular season, ripped off a historic 22-game winning streak and were favored to get back to the World Series after losing in seven games a year ago to the Chicago Cubs.

Cleveland's Series drought turns 70 next year — baseball's longest dry spell.

The Indians closed to 3-2 in the fifth against Sabathia before David Robertson pitched 2 2/3 hitless innings for the win. Yankees closer Aroldis Chapman, who faced Cleveland in last year's spine-tingling World Series and signed an \$86

million free agent contract in December, worked two innings for the save.

Chapman went to the mound with a three-run lead in the ninth after Brett Gardner battled Cody Allen for 12 pitches before hitting an RBI single, with New York's fifth run scoring when Todd Frazier raced home on right fielder Jay Bruce's throwing error.

Gardner's gritty at-bat was symbolic of these Yankees. They wouldn't give in. "We can win a lot of different ways," Gardner said.

When Austin Jackson was called out on strikes to end it, the Yankees rushed to the mound to celebrate with a wide-eyed Chapman. Girardi broke into a huge smile and hugged his coaches.

These baby Bronx Bombers became the 10th team to overcome a 2-0 deficit to win a best-of-five playoff series. New York also did it in 2001, rallying to beat Oakland — a series remembered for Jeter's backhand flip to home plate.

Gregorius, who took over at shortstop following Jeter's retirement after the 2014 season, hit a solo homer in the first off Kluber and added a two-run shot in the third off Cleveland's ace, who didn't look like himself during either start in this series.

One win shy of a Series title last year, the Indians had only one goal in mind in 2017.

They came up short again, and have now lost six consecutive games with a

chance to clinch a postseason series dating to last year's World Series, when they squandered a 3-1 lead to the Cubs.

Cleveland is the first team in history to blow a two-game series lead in consecutive postseasons.

Everything was set up for the Indians: Kluber on the mound, Game 5 at home, sensational setup man Andrew Miller rested.

The Yankees, though, wouldn't be denied. They battled back from a 3-0 deficit in the first inning of their wild-card game against Minnesota and then had to overcome a crushing loss in Game 2, when Girardi's decision not to challenge a hit batter drew heavy criticism and possibly cost New York during in a 9-8 loss in 13 innings.

But these young Yankees, who are ahead of schedule to be contenders, displayed pinstriped pride.

"This team has never stopped fighting and never stopped believing," Girardi said before Game 5. "That's the mark of a very good team. They know how to persevere and continue to grind out everything, whether it's an at-bat or it's on the other side, you're facing a batter, how you grind it out."

The Yankees did it without much help from Judge, who struck out four times in Game 5, and went 1 for 20 (.050) in the series with 16 strikeouts.

But the 6-foot-7 rookie might have saved New York's season in Game 3,

when he reached above the right-field wall to rob Francisco Lindor of a two-run homer in a 1-0 win.

Kluber was one of baseball's most consistent pitchers all season, winning 18 games and leading the AL with a 2.25 ERA. He's a favorite to win his second Cy Young Award.

However, October has been cruel to the right-hander. He allowed nine runs, including four homers, over 6 1/3 innings in two postseason starts, hardly what he or the Indians expected.

Gregorius came in batting just .077 (1 for 13) in the series and only .133 (2 of 15) in his career against Kluber before tagging the right-hander for two homers in the first three innings.

The 27-year-old with the easy smile and sweet swing gave the Yankees a 3-0 lead in the third, pulling an 0-1 pitch into the lower deck in right. Gregorius set a franchise record for home runs in a season by a shortstop with 25, one more than Jeter hit in 1999 when No. 2 led the Yankees to a second straight World Series title.

Just as in Game 2, Kluber didn't get out of the first unscathed.

Gregorius got New York off to an ideal start, homering with two outs in the first when Kluber grooved a fastball. The shot deep into the seats in right raised the anxiety level to an already jittery Cleveland crowd fearing the worst.

A few hours later, those fears were realized.

GREENEVILLE

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grandfather, Dave Rider, was once Elizabethton's head coach and engaged in many memorable battles with former Greeneville coach Fred Sorrells' Greene Devils.

The Witten brothers played on the 1998 Elizabethton team that defeated Greeneville in the third round of the playoffs — the final game of Sorrells' coaching career.

The Cyclones had been in a lull, though, when Witten took over the helm of his alma mater in 2007. But since then, they have played at least 12 games in seven different seasons and reached the state semifinals in 2009, 2010 and 2012.

Elizabethton went 11-2 a year ago before losing to eventual state champion Alcoa 17-14 in the quarterfinals.

"There is a lot of tradition with both schools," Ballard pointed out. "We're gonna play hard, they're gonna play hard, and hopefully we can do what we need to do to win. If we take care of the football and limit our mistakes, I like our chances."

With only three games remaining in the regular season, the winner of this game will take a huge step toward clinching the Region's top seed for the postseason.

That is key due to the fact that the odd regions get home field advantage in the state playoffs this year, meaning the top team out of Region 1 is assured home field advantage all the way to the state championship game.

"People don't understand what a big thing that is to host games," Ballard said. "First of all, it's good for our players, the fans, the school, the community. But it's

also awesome financially. Most people don't look at that."

Greeneville enters Friday's contest with a perfect 7-0 record on the season, outscoring its opponents by a 340-83 margin. The Greene Devils haven't been tested since their Sept. 8 win over Science Hill. They've won their last two contests, over Sullivan Central and Sullivan South, by a combined score of 125-7.

The Devils are certainly road tested, though, as their wins over Morristown West and Science Hill both came away from the friendly confines of Burley Stadium.

"When you look at our schedule, even going back to our scrimmages in August, we've been preparing for this," Ballard explained. "We knew that games like this were coming, that we would have to go on the road at some point — especially in the playoffs — and play a good team in a big-time environment. This is one of those games."

Elizabethton (6-1, 3-0) has won six straight since a season-opening 50-25 loss to the same Science Hill team. The Cyclones defeated Union County 42-13 last week.

Elizabethton's roster is highlighted by do-everything back Corey Russell, who lines up at a multitude of positions on the field. The junior is averaging 124.7 rushing yards per game this season, including a whopping 11.0 yards per carry. He has 11 touchdowns on just 68 totes.

He has caught ten passes for 113 yards and a touchdown while also attempting four passes on the year.

"He's their guy and we've got to contain him," Ballard said of Russell. "Sometimes they put him out wide and throw to him. They'll throw to him out of the backfield. I think they'll hand it to him first and see if

they can get something going running."

Ballard was also highly complimentary of Elizabethton quarterback Carter Everette, who stands 6-foot-3 and is also only a junior.

Everette has completed 120-of-162 passes this season, totaling 1,550 yards and 21 touchdowns to just two interceptions. He has had three games that he has thrown for four touchdowns. Last week against Union County he was 20-of-24 for 280 yards and two scores.

"He's a really good player too," Ballard said. "They have some weapons on offense. The quarterback is a big frame guy who throws it well. He's also a good enough runner that he can extend some drives that way."

It's no surprise that both Russell and Everette had their worst statistical games of the year in the loss to Science Hill. Russell needed 18 carries to gain just 76 yards, a 4.2 ypc average. Everette was 19-of-29 for 199 yards with two interceptions and a touchdown.

Defensively, Elizabethton works out of a four-man front that is highlighted by standout defensive lineman Cameron Coleman, who has a team-high 10 tackles for a loss this season.

Another standout on defense is senior linebacker Nestor Grubb, who leads the team in total tackles with 54.

"Those are the two disruptors on defense," Ballard noted.

The position battle of Everette versus Greeneville gunslinger Cade Ballard will be one of the ones to watch. Ballard is completing passes at an eye-popping 81 percent rate (87-108) while racking up 1,459 yards and 21 touchdowns to four interceptions.

He is also the Devils' leading rusher with 401 yards and seven touchdowns on

82 carries.

His has a bevy of weapons at his disposal as Greeneville has three other players who have rushed for over 100 yards this season and nine receivers who have caught multiple passes.

Ty Youngblood and Jaevon Gillespie handle most of the work out of the backfield, tallying 336 and 201 rushing yards, respectively, with five touchdowns each.

On the outside, the bruising Dorien Goddard and the speedy Seth Crawford form their own version of smash and dash. They have 29 catches each this season. Crawford has totaled 619 yards and 10 touchdowns, while Goddard has 416 yards and seven scores.

Greeneville's special teams effort has been highlighted by place kicker Eli Shepherd who is perfect on the year, making 38-of-38 extra point tries and 2-for-2 on field goals.

Senior Kenny Kershaw and Youngblood lead the Greeneville defense in total tackles with 75 and 69, respectively, from their linebacker positions.

Jacques Gillespie-Taylor has team highs in tackles for a loss (10) and forced fumbles (5), while Logan Shipley has six TFLs with 59 total tackles. Crawford leads the secondary with four interceptions, while Cameron Hite got his second of the season last week. Dalton McLain has recovered three fumbles.

The Greene Devils did get some good news on the injury front this week as starter Garrin Shuffler was cleared to return to the field after having missed the past five weeks due to injury.

Shuffler can line up at several different positions on both sides of the ball, including receiver and running back on offense, and linebacker and defensive back on defense.

PLAYOFF

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started to click and they have scored over 40 points in each outing. With each game, freshman quarterback Brock Thompson is getting more comfortable leading the squad.

Last week Thompson and the Blue Devils beat Unaka 64-30 as he threw for 180 yards and two scores.

Brett Strother, who Thompson replaced under center early in the year, will line up all over the field. He ran for two touchdowns against the Rangers. Kody Lewis will lead Unicoi on the ground. Last week he ran for 87 yards and two scores.

West Greene will bring its own balanced attack into the contest. The Buffaloes are led by Juliun Lane, who had 140 all-purpose yards last week against Class 5A power Knoxville Catholic.

"When you have a player like Juliun, you have to get him the football," Case said. "They are going to double him up. Even a great 5A football team like Catholic at times double and triple teamed him, and we were still able to get him the ball. He is a great athlete and everybody knows that he is our bell cow, but we also have a lot of other guys who can make plays too."

If the Devils try to double Lane or throw everything at stopping him, look for Kyler Clowers, Brian McCrary or Dexter Fry to make plays for the Buffaloes.

Delivering the ball to those guys is quarterback Alick Daugherty, who has been impressive after coming into the season as a bit of a question mark.

"After Friday night he has thrown for over 1,000 yards and is probably the first guy we have had do that since I've been here," Case said. "He's already got the school touchdown record for a single season. He has done a great job and continues to get better."

Chuckey-Doak at Claiborne

Chuckey-Doak will have a chance to clinch a playoff spot on Friday as it goes on the road to Claiborne.

With a win the Black Knights will qualify for the postseason, and with a loss they would have to beat West Greene in the

season finale and then hope they get help.

Both teams are coming into the game off of losses. Chuckey-Doak fell to Grainger 30-14 and Claiborne lost to Johnson County 34-0.

Chuckey-Doak (4-4 overall, 1-2 region) will look to get its offense back on track after only putting up 149 yards against the Grizzlies.

Fullback Elijah Long will lead the way in the power running attack and he will be flanked by wings Peyton Fletcher and Nick Jennings, who add a change of pace in the Black Knights' Wing-T offense. Connor Smith also got involved in the ground game last week and scored a touchdown against Grainger.

Trevor Grubbs was able to make some explosive plays last week as both a receiver and kick returner, but who will be throwing him the ball this week may be in question.

Starting quarterback Jacob Willett left last week's game early and fill-in Devin Jennings chose to play through pain. Both are also key defensive players and Chuckey-Doak will need them on Friday.

Claiborne (3-4, 0-3) is also battling injuries at the quarterback position with starter Elijah Beason missing last week's game.

Without their best player to lead their triple-option attack, the Bulldogs relied on Bryce Laws and he carried the ball 12 times for 94 yards in the loss.

Claiborne's offense has been shut out in two of its last three contests and in between those losses it beat Oliver Springs (2-5) by a score of 12-10.

South Greene at Hampton

South Greene's offense has found some life over the past two weeks and as a result the Rebels have picked up two lopsided wins.

Last week the Rebels beat County rival North Greene 42-12 and the game prior they knocked off Cosby 47-7

With a win on Friday against Hampton, the Rebels would clinch a spot in the Class 2A playoffs. South Greene can make the playoffs without beating Hampton as long as Hampton beats Cosby or the Rebels beat Happy Valley on October 27.

If Cosby were to beat Hampton and South Greene lost to Hampton, that would



SUN PHOTO BY DAREN REESE

West Greene running back Juliun Lane and the Buffaloes head to Unicoi County this Friday for a key Region 1-3A tilt.

create a three-way tie for two playoff spots. The first tiebreaker is overall record and right now South Greene is 3-5, Hampton is 1-6 and Cosby is 3-4.

Over the past few weeks, the Rebels have relied on running back Derrick Howlett to lead the offense. In last week's 42-12 win over North Greene, he ran for 80 yards.

Quarterback Levi Myers has been able to air the ball out this season but last week he only completed two passes, one being for a touchdown. Myers also ran for two touchdowns.

Hampton has lost six consecutive contests since a season-opening win over Trinity Academy.

Hunter Davenport will be the do-everything back for the Bulldogs. In last week's 22-20 loss to Cloudland he ran for 104 yards and had 87 yards receiving.

North Greene vs. Johnson County

North Greene broke a four-game scoreless streak last week in a 42-12 loss to

South Greene, and things will not get any easier for the Huskies on Friday as they host Johnson County.

Johnson County (7-0, 3-0) is undefeated and comes into the game ranked third in the state in Class 3A. The Longhorns beat Happy Valley 14-7 last week.

Johnson County will be led by dual threat quarterback Nathan Arnold, who has put up big numbers both running and passing.

The Longhorns produced less than 100 yards of offense a week ago, but their defense was strong enough to slow the Warriors.

North Greene (1-6, 0-3) broke its scoreless streak last week on a 15-yard fumble return by Brandon Lawson. The offense scored its first touchdown since week two when Briggs Kiker and Matt Priolo connected on a 90-yard touchdown pass.

Radley Frazier led the Huskies on the ground with 36 yards rushing against South Greene.