

# Phillies playing role of favorites for first time

By Rob Maaddi  
ASSOCIATED PRESS

PHILADELPHIA — The Philadelphia Phillies find themselves in a new role this postseason.

The two-time MLB champions are no strangers to big games, having advanced this far in three straight years. The only difference between now and the last two trips to the league championship series is the Phillies are the favorites to win it all this time, thanks in large part to the three proven aces in their pitching rotation.

It's World Series or bust in Philadelphia. Nothing less is acceptable in a city that's become spoiled by its baseball team's success.

Who would've thought the losingest franchise in pro sports would reach the point where it's the one other teams hope to emulate?

The Phillies are trying to become the first NL club in 66 years to win three consecutive pennants, and they're going for their second World Series title in three years.

Odds makers have made them an overwhelming favorite to beat the San Francisco Giants in the NLCS, and also give them an edge over the New York Yankees or Texas Rangers in the World Series.

"It's a good challenge for you. Expectations should bring out the best in someone," manager Charlie Manuel said on a rainy Thursday. "At the same time, I like players to have expectations of themselves. That's even better. I like everything about our players and we think we can play and we think we can play in big, tough games. Last year when we got beat in the World Series, I said I want to go back and play the New York Yankees. That's what I was talking about."

For some, higher expectations

increase pressure. But the knits are a loose, close-knit group that has plenty of experience playing important games in October. They expected to reach this point, even when they trailed Atlanta by seven games in the NL East in late July.

"When you get to talking favorites and what's expected of you, that goes beyond the realm of what you can control," left fielder Raul Ibanez said. "We don't focus as a club on what's expected of us. We focus on what's expected of ourselves. We have high expectations of ourselves as a team, regardless of what's being said outside the locker room."

"It's a confident team, not an arrogant team. It's a team that's going to grind it out and fight. I think the only expectations that are important are the ones we place on ourselves. It's a great environment to come work every day. We never feel like we're out of a game. Nobody ever quits. You never hear a negative word or a

snide comment. Never. It's a bunch of guys that have tenacity, a passion for the game and really a passion for winning."

Game 1 against San Francisco is Saturday night at Citizens Bank Park. It'll be a marquee matchup featuring Roy Halladay and Tim Lincecum going head-to-head on the mound.

The Giants are newcomers to the postseason. They clinched the NL West on the last day of the regular season to snap a six-year playoff drought, and eliminated the injury-depleted Braves in four one-run games to advance past the first round.

Now that they're here, the Giants won't be satisfied unless they win. They appreciate how good the Phillies are, but refuse to be intimidated.

"You don't really fear any team," right fielder Cody Ross said. "As a player you always feel like you're better than teams and you have to have that sort of mentality that you can go in there and beat them

two out of three during the season, but knowing in the back of your mind that they're a really good team. They've had their struggles, though. They had a tough time scoring runs throughout the year at one point. It's going to be a dog fight. Both teams have really good pitching staffs and both teams have guys who can really swing the bat. I think it's going to be an amazing series."

Giants left fielder Pat Burrell was a big part of Philadelphia's championship team in 2008. He played for the Phillies when they got swept by Colorado a year earlier after ending a 13-year postseason drought. He sees the Giants being ahead of schedule because they not only made it in but they advanced.

"We decided we were better than that and we were going to take it to the next level," Burrell said of the Phillies' mentality after losing in '07.

"I think along the way you learn these types of things."

# Yankees open ALCS against left-hander Wilson

By Stephen Hawkins  
ASSOCIATED PRESS

ARLINGTON, Texas — The New York Yankees avoid Cliff Lee on Sunday Game 3 of the AL championship series. In the opener, they instead face another Texas

Rangers left-hander who has been greatly influenced by the postseason ace in their short time together.

"Before he was here, I was actually a right-handed second baseman," C.J. Wilson joked Thursday.

Because Lee had to pitch a deciding Game 5 in the division series against Tampa Bay, Wilson starts Game 1 against New York and lefty CC Sabathia on Friday night at Rangers Ballpark.

Wilson already was making an impressive transition from reliever in his long-desired chance to be a Rangers starter again before Texas acquired Lee on July 9. But Wilson immediately began watching his new teammate and asking questions.

"The thing with Cliff is that he keeps his process the same no

matter what is going on around him," Wilson said. "As I've gotten more comfortable in my role as a starting pitcher, I've had to thicken those walls in my bubble to keep everything else out and stay in my little zone and stay with what is making me successful, and that's the thing he and I talk about all the time."

Wilson won 15 games in the regular season, then followed Lee's spectacular Game 1 start in the first round with a gem of his own, allowing two hits in 6 1/3 scoreless innings.

But after winning those games at Tampa Bay, the Rangers lost both at home and had to go back to Florida for the deciding game with Lee back on the mound Tuesday night.

Now that the Rangers have finally won a postseason series for the first time, they get to play New York, which has won 27 World Series titles and 40 pennants.

The Yankees, who haven't played since wrapping up a three-game sweep over Minnesota on Saturday night, have a nine-game postseason winning streak against Texas. New York knocked

the Rangers out of the playoffs in their only three previous appearances between 1996 and '99.

"You do worry about not playing for six days," said Yankees manager Joe Girardi, who celebrated his 48th birthday Thursday. "Hopefully, they won't be rusty and they will come out and the rest actually did them good."

This is the first time the Rangers open a postseason series at home. The team still has never won a playoff game at Rangers Ballpark, going 0-6 including the two losses last weekend to the Rays.

Lee won both of his World Series starts for Philadelphia last year, including a six-hitter at Yankee Stadium when he struck out 10 and gave up only an unearned run. New York won the other four games.

The Yankees avoid facing Lee twice only if this series ends in fewer than seven games. Lee is 6-1 in his last eight starts against them, postseason included, going 4-0 with a 1.16 ERA and two complete games in his past four starts in New York.

For Game 1 of this series, Lee's

biggest impact will be his influence on Wilson.

"I'm not a guy that pushes a bunch of information on anybody, but he's definitely a guy that knows how to pitch," Lee said. "We've shared information, ideas on how to pitch guys, what to do with certain things. Definitely, it's not very often you see a guy go from the bullpen to the starting rotation and do the things he has. A lot of credit goes to his talents and just his stuff. He knows how to pitch."

Wilson was primarily a starter in the minor leagues and missed all of 2004 recovering from ligament transplant surgery.

After being called up by the Rangers for the first time in 2005, he was 0-5 with a 12.05 ERA in six starts. But in 18 appearances out of the bullpen his rookie season, he had a 2.73 ERA and Texas continued to utilize him as a reliever, even opening the 2008 season with him as the closer.

Nick Swisher saw Wilson as a reliever plenty when he was in the AL West with Oakland. Swisher said the big difference now is the left-hander is "more of a pitcher

instead of a thrower" and is using his off-speed pitches.

"The ball's moving a lot more. He's throwing the cutter, the two-seamer," Swisher said. "Before it was just grip it and rip it. ... He's really, really learned a lot through the maturation process."

Wilson always wanted to be a starter again, and the Rangers gave the crafty and insightful lefty that chance during spring training this season.

"What he's done this year is really impressive," teammate Michael Young said.

Wilson pitched 204 innings and his 15 wins were the most on the staff. He held left-handed batters to a major league-low .176 slugging percentage.

"He's always had great stuff," Yankees shortstop Derek Jeter said. "The difference now is his confidence."

While Wilson's record and ERA were virtually identical in 17 starts before and 16 after Lee arrived, his strikeouts increased, his walks decreased and, more importantly, the former reliever didn't fade down the stretch as the innings piled up.

## Hall

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Northwestern, both No. 20 Northwestern, both on the road.

Minnesota is second in the conference in hitting percentage and opponent hitting percentage behind Penn State, and is third in blocks.

Gophers' outside hitter Tabitha Love, a 6-foot-6 sophomore, is fourth in the conference with 4.43 points per set and fifth with 3.83 kills per set.

"They have a lot of net presence and they're just very challenging to play with in the front row just cause they're big and I think that's

always been our challenge with them," senior libero Alyssa D'Errico said. "They've always had that history of having big, physical players that are going to make it tough for you in the front row if you're not executing your system very well."

The Gophers are doing all of this despite injuries to three of their players, including senior middle blocker Lauren Gibbemeyer and senior outside hitter Hailey Cowles, both of whom were voted to the 2010 Preseason All-Big Ten team.

Minnesota coach Mike Hebert said Gibbemeyer, who broke her right wrist — her hitting arm — in practice on Sept. 8, will travel to

Happy Valley but will "probably not" play tonight. Cowles, who was on the 2009 NCAA All-Tournament team, is out for the season with a torn left anterior cruciate ligament (ACL). Freshman libero Steffi Sooter is also out tonight with a concussion.

However, a couple of Minnesota's freshmen have stepped up despite the injuries to their teammates.

Freshman middle hitter Tori Dixon and freshman outside hitter Ashley Wittman, who is a three-time Big Ten Freshman of the Week selection, are second and third on their team in kills, respectively. Hebert said he has been very impressed with how his

rookies have performed.

"We put them in a difficult position having to start as freshmen in the Big Ten and [Dixon and Wittman] are both [playing in my mind, at a level that demonstrates maturity beyond their years," said Hebert, who is in his 14th year at Minnesota. "They can make freshman errors at times but they're both in there all the time."

The Hawkeyes enter this weekend second-to-last in the Big Ten. But as Rose pointed out, Iowa defeated Indiana, which beat Penn State last Saturday.

The Lions hope to move on from last weekend's disappointment and continue their dominance at home. D'Errico said it's definitely

easier playing in front of the Rec Hall crowd, especially for younger teams.

"There's people supporting you versus trying to tear you down and make it harder for you to play," D'Errico said. "And every time the other team gets a little bit of a run you know your fans are going to stand up and try to get you back in the match, so that's always comforting."

"And mentally, for younger players, it's much easier to bounce back from a mistake when people are clapping and cheering you on. So we'll see what happens this weekend."

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## Statement

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back line, the Lions never gave up an inch of field without a fight and they matched everything Akron threw at them.

"We come out and pressed Akron a little bit early and no one presses them," Penn State coach Bob Warming said of the team's latest effort.

"Everybody drops back 35 yards and tries to hold for the whole

game and I think that shocked them a little bit."

Senior midfielder Drew Cost missed the game due to a foot injury he suffered last Sunday and junior Justin Lee was hobbled by cramps late in the game, taking away the Lions rock-solid central midfield.

All the team did was rally around Andrew Casais, playing defensive mid for the first time. Treavor Gelsinger and Grant Warming.

Matching up against a Zips mid-

field featuring two-time All-American Anthony Ampaipitakwong.

"It gives me a lot of hope for the future," Warming said. "They played against the best central midfielders in the country and I'm really happy. We had Andres in a role he never played before and he did all right. It's a testament to all those guys."

Despite being the underdog, the Lions players stepped up to the challenge at every position. Forward Corey Hertzog's goal

was just the third the Zips have surrendered all year, while right back Matt Smallwood was a force on defense and offense and left back John Gallagher more than held his own against the lightning-fast Kofi Sarkodie.

Goalkeeper Brendan Birmingham made a career-high six saves and commanded the net in a strong performance.

The redshirt freshman's growth in confidence personifies what Warming has seen overall in the team and the coach couldn't be

happier with how his team has grown up.

Casais said the fact the Lions were within three minutes of tying Akron says they can play with anybody. It only took one call to keep the Lions from a draw, but the way the players are looking at their performance, it's all about the big picture.

"It says if that's the No. 1 team, then we'll be in the national championship," Hertzog said.

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## Trend

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conference, only Illinois has won a Big Ten championship.

Yet despite the shake-ups, the upsets and the parity, one thing has remained constant: There's no place like home.

Through 34 conference matches this year, the home team has won nearly 68 percent of those matches.

So when the No. 9 Nittany Lions host No. 19 Minnesota at 7 p.m. Friday at Rec Hall, they'll be looking to continue that trend.

"In our league, there seems like there's a lot of success this year at home," Penn State coach Russ Rose said. "Hopefully we'll play well at home."

The statistics are certainly in the Lions' favor.

Penn State has an 82-match home winning streak, dating back to 2006.

That includes a perfect 7-0 mark at Rec Hall this season.

Meanwhile, three of the Gophers' four losses this year have come on the road.

Minnesota coach Mike Hebert said he has noticed the trend of home teams dominating the Big Ten so far.

He thinks it's because the playing field has leveled out.

"What that means is there is nobody in the conference that is head and shoulders above the other teams," Hebert said.

"I think the home-court advantage this year is significant and I think it's going to continue for another few years."

It's certainly glaring when looking at the Big Ten standings.

No. 8 Illinois, which currently leads the Big Ten with a 13-3 overall record, has suffered all three of its losses away from Huff Hall.

In addition, the No. 15 Michigan Wolverines — whose 17-2 record is the best start through 19 matches in school history — has also only lost on the road.

One of those defeats was an Oct. 2 setback to Penn State — at Rec Hall.

As the Lions try to rebound from last weekend's pair of road losses to the Boilermakers and Hoosiers, they'll find comfort in the fact they're playing in the cozy confines of Rec Hall.

"Of course we're excited," sophomore setter Kristin Carpenter said.

"There's no place like home."

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## Challenges

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Wisconsin plays a similar style. Monroig said the Lions will have to use the wide spaces well and put numbers in the box if they want to score.

"They are committed to destroying the game," Walsh said.

"We're going to have to create

it. We're going to have to get past frustration and move the ball quickly and we're going to work to create it and at times, make something out of nothing."

Returning home with a 3-1 Big Ten record, the players are aware winning the conference title and its automatic bid are their best chance of getting to the NCAA Tournament.

With that in mind, Monroig said the mindset going into this

weekend is only on one thing — two wins.

"Getting two wins this weekend is crucial to our Big Ten run," Monroig said. "There are no possible ties, there are no thoughts about losing, we win both games. Both games are very important if we want to keep winning and have a chance in the Big Ten."

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## Revenge

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"As a team, we really need to work on burying our chances."

Daley said the Iciers learned their lesson from last season and have worked hard to correct their mistakes.

"We have to put pucks in the net when we have the opportunity," Daley said.

"Even if we run into a hot goalie, we have to find a way to win. It's not like our season is over this weekend if we lose, but it's the point of just finding ways to win."

The Bronchos' 3-6 record is deceiving, as every one of their losses have come against

Lindenwood, Iowa State and Oklahoma — all ranked in the top five.

With that said, Polidor said the Iciers aren't taking their opponents lightly.

"It's dangerous to look at a team based on their record," Polidor said.

"We're taking the game as essential because it's against the team that beat us last season that we know is good that's coming to our building. It should be just a great game."

Daley describes the Bronchos play as tough and gritty, and said while they might not have the most skill or talent on the ice, they work hard and find ways to win.

O'Brien said the team has

been working hard in practice this week, using battle drills to help prepare for the Bronchos' physical style.

"We'll have to try and not only match their work ethic but try and outmatch it," Daley said. "We want to tire them out."

O'Brien said he noticed one thing preventing the Iciers from winning last year's contest.

"Last year I think we got a little complacent with our team and we saw how that turned out," O'Brien said.

"This year, we're not going to let that happen again. Everyone's working that much harder and taking it that much more serious."

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