

GILLASPIE'S BLAST LIFTS NY GIANTS OVER METS

NEW YORK: Conor Gillaspie belted a three-run home run in the top of the ninth inning Wednesday to lift the San Francisco Giants to a 3-0 victory over the New York Mets in the National League wildcard game. Giants pitcher Madison Bumgarner produced another playoff gem, throwing a four-hit shutout as San Francisco ousted the defending National League champions to book a NL Division Series against the Chicago Cubs.

The Giants, winners of the World Series in 2010, 2012 and 2014, will be aiming to douse the fervent hopes of a Cubs team who have amassed the best regular-season record in the major leagues as they chase a first World Series title since 1908. The Giants have now won their last six knockout games dating back to the 2012 National League Division Series. Bumgarner gave up two walks, struck out six and threw 120 pitches, 79 for strikes. He has allowed only one run in his past 30 post-season innings dating back to the start of the 2014 World Series. The Giants defied the dominance of Mets starting pitcher Noah Syndergaard, who took a no-hitter into the sixth inning.

Syndergaard allowed two hits with three walks and struck out 10 in seven scoreless innings. But Brandon Crawford led off the top of the ninth with a double against Mets relief pitcher Jeury's Familia. After Familia struck out Angel Pagan, Joe Panik walked to bring Gillaspie to the plate. Gillaspie, who started at third base only because Eduardo Nunez had a strained hamstring, belted a 1-1 pitch over the right field fence to put the Giants up 3-0.

"I was trying to get something elevated, that was pretty much my only chance against him," said Gillaspie. "Pretty much the whole game I was spinning off balls, so I was telling myself to stay in there as much as I could, and trust I could get there." Bumgarner retired three straight Mets batters in the bottom of the frame to seal the win. "Great to move on and get going to Chicago," said Bumgarner. "Ain't much to say. That's a big game for us



NEW YORK: San Francisco Giants second baseman Joe Panik, left, throws the ball to third as New York Mets' TJ Rivera (54) is caught in a rundown during the fifth inning of the National League wild-card baseball game. — AP

right there, and we were fortunate to get some late runs, and we got the win."

Pitchers' duel

It was a tense pitchers' duel between Bumgarner and Syndergaard for most of the night. Neither team got a runner past first base until New York's TJ Rivera led off the fifth

with a double. He was then caught in a rundown between second and third on Rene Rivera's one-out ground ball. San Francisco put a runner on second in the sixth, when Denard Span broke up Syndergaard's no-hitter with a two-out single. Span stole second before Brandon Belt hit a high fly to center field, where Curtis Granderson crashed into

the wall making the catch to a roar of appreciation from the crowd of 44,747.

Syndergaard was lifted after seven innings and his stellar effort went for naught. "Everybody knows what kind of stuff he's got," Bumgarner said of his opposite number. "We were fortunate to get his pitch count up, get him out of the game." — AFP

A LOOK AT ALL 16 POTENTIAL WORLD SERIES MATCHUPS

NEW YORK: With the wild-card games out of the way, there are now four teams left in each league and 16 possible matchups for the World Series. Here's a list of them all - and what would make each of them noteworthy. The matchups are listed in descending order of likelihood, using probability figures from Fangraphs.com heading into Thursday's action.

DODGERS vs. RED SOX (11.7% chance)

Dave Roberts might still be able to dine for free in Boston after his role in the 2004 postseason for the Red Sox, but he manages Los Angeles now. These two franchises met in the World Series 100 years ago, when the Dodgers played in Brooklyn and were called the Robins. One can only imagine what Magic Johnson, a part owner of the Dodgers, would think about having to go through Boston to win a title in baseball.

CUBS vs. RED SOX (10.1%)

We were a few plays from Baseball Armageddon in 2003, but the pennants slipped away from the Cubs and Red Sox. Since then, Boston has ended its long wait for a championship and added two more titles for good measure, so if the Red Sox do meet the Cubs in the World Series this year, the narrative figures to be less about dueling curses and more about Theo Epstein.

DODGERS vs. BLUE JAYS (9.2%)

Russell Martin received his first All-Star nod in 2007 when he was 24 and playing for the Dodgers. Three teams later, he's with the Blue Jays and remains one of the game's more productive catchers.

CUBS vs. BLUE JAYS (7.9%)

This "Original Six" World Series between Chicago and Toronto would have the hockey fans - and the Great Lakes enthusiasts - excited.

GIANTS vs. RED SOX (6.7%)

Avert your eyes from this matchup if you'd like to see some new blood in the World Series. Boston and San Francisco have won a combined six titles since 2004. The Red Sox and New York Giants met in the 1912 World Series, which went to a winner-take-all Game 8 because Game 2 had ended in a tie. Boston won in 10 innings with the help of a dropped fly by Fred Snodgrass.

DODGERS vs. RANGERS (6.6%)

A homecoming for Dallas native Clayton Kershaw, plus the potential for a head-to-head matchup between Yu Darvish and Japanese countryman Kenta Maeda.

DODGERS vs. INDIANS (6.3%)

Another throwback matchup: Cleveland

and Brooklyn played a best-of-nine World Series in 1920, with the Tris Speaker-led Indians prevailing in seven.

NATIONALS vs. RED SOX (6.1%)

This would have looked considerably more intriguing if Jonathan Papelbon were still on the Nationals.

CUBS vs. RANGERS (5.7%)

Has there ever been a World Series with a 90-degree game in one city and a snow delay in the other?

CUBS vs. INDIANS (5.4%)

In another year, the Indians might be huge sentimental favorites as they try to win their first World Series title since 1948, but good luck making that argument if this is the matchup.

GIANTS vs. BLUE JAYS (5.3%)

The Giants very nearly moved to Toronto in 1976, but they remained in the Bay Area after being bought by Bob Lurie. The Blue Jays played their first season as an expansion team in 1977.

NATIONALS vs. BLUE JAYS (4.8%)

Canada's team against the team that left. There would be some interested observers in Montreal, oui?

GIANTS vs. RANGERS (3.8%)

A rematch of the 2010 World Series, which the Giants won in five. Madison Bumgarner was 21 when he pitched in that postseason, blanking Texas for eight innings in Game 4.

GIANTS vs. INDIANS (3.6%)

Willie Mays and Vic Wertz. A 111-win Cleveland team going down in four straight. There's lots of history here - and if the Giants take a 3-1 lead in the series but have a key player suspended for Game 5, Bay Area fans might have a sinking feeling about what comes next.

NATIONALS vs. RANGERS (3.5%)

Washington fans old enough to remember the Senators are also old enough to remember where they moved after the 1971 season. Even Redskins-Cowboys would have to take a backseat to this DC-Texas rivalry for a couple weeks. Maybe.

NATIONALS vs. INDIANS (3.3%)

When the Nationals were still the Expos, they traded Cliff Lee, Grady Sizemore and Brandon

Phillips to the Indians for Bartolo Colon. It was a lopsided trade in Cleveland's favor - but then again, Colon may end up outlasting them all. — AP