

Dodgers eye World Series repeat

Major League Baseball's new season begins today

LOS ANGELES: The Los Angeles Dodgers are determined to follow their long-awaited World Series victory by completing back-to-back championship wins as Major League Baseball's new season gets under way today.

A year after COVID-19 plunged the sport known as America's pastime into chaos, baseball returns for a full 162-game regular season with the Dodgers desperate to repeat their breakthrough 2020 victory. Last season, the pandemic and a subsequent protracted row over player benefits meant that the season was slashed to just 60 games, starting in July and ending in September.

Most games took place in empty stadiums, before playoffs held at neutral locations, with the Dodgers finally ending their 32-year wait for a title in the unfamiliar surroundings of Globe Life Field at Arlington, Texas.

Although limited numbers of fans were allowed at the World Series, the Dodgers were denied the opportunity to celebrate their title in front of their home fans at Dodger Stadium. Dodgers manager Dave Roberts says the National League West giants are keen to correct that anomaly this season.

"We want to do it again to ultimately enjoy all the fruits of winning a championship," Roberts said. "Understanding the situation, what the climate was last year, we couldn't. But that's something that's a carrot out there for all of us to understand. Number one, we have a lot of work to do."

With Los Angeles being one of the worst-affected US cities in the pandemic, lockdown restrictions also meant the

Dodgers were unable to celebrate the World Series title with a parade.

First of many?

Veteran third baseman Justin Turner, who was dramatically pulled from the closing stages of the Dodgers' World Series-clinching game six last year after testing positive for COVID-19, wants last year's breakthrough win to be the first of many.

"We finally accomplished what we were trying to accomplish over my last seven years," said Turner. "Seeing the banner go up, getting that ring, is going to be a good feeling. That's what every kid dreams of, winning the World Series. We were able to accomplish that last year and now the goal is to win a few more."

The Dodgers will be able to call on arguably the strongest roster in baseball as they chase a repeat. As well as an all-star hitting line-up that includes former MVPs Cody Bellinger, Mookie Betts and World Series MVP Corey Seager, the Dodgers pitching staff includes three Cy Young Award winners in Clayton Kershaw, David Price and Trevor Bauer, the Dodgers' blockbuster off-season acquisition. "We have a chance to do something really special and win a championship," Roberts said. "If you look at the talent, potentially, it could be as good as any team that the Dodgers have ever fielded."

The Dodgers open their campaign on the road in Denver against the Colorado Rockies, with a home opener against the Washington Nationals set for April 9. The biggest threat to the Dodgers' chances of repeating could well come from within the NL West, where the San Diego Padres have bolstered their pitching resources with the



LOS ANGELES: Mookie Betts of the Los Angeles Dodgers hits a home run in the fourth inning against the Los Angeles Angels on Tuesday in Los Angeles, California. — AFP



arrival of Japan's Yu Darvish and Blake Snell, one of the stars of the Tampa Bay Rays' march to the World Series last season.


The American League challenge meanwhile is likely to be headed by the New York Yankees, who are chasing a first title since 2009. The Yankees have reached the playoffs for four straight seasons, losing twice in the AL Championship Series, and twice in the Division Series.

Nevertheless manager Aaron Boone believes the pieces are now in place for the Bronx Bombers to end their wait for a 28th championship. "We understand we're a talented team, but we also understand we haven't done anything yet," Boone said this week. "A lot of guys have been here now for a few years and experienced a lot of highs and playoff success, playoff failures and disappointing ends to the season. We've gone through a lot as a

team and we've added to the mix some ingredients we think can get us over the hump. I've felt this way the last couple years: We have a very hungry group and we want to kick the door in in the worst kind of way."

Unlike last season, fans will be in attendance at Yankee Stadium and elsewhere across the league, though most teams will operate at reduced capacity due to COVID-19. — AFP



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