

Cliff Pennington makes history as first position player to pitch in postseason

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By Israel Fehr

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TORONTO – Cliff Pennington has always dreamed of pitching in a major-league game.

He never imagined it would happen like the situation that unfolded Tuesday, though. Pennington, an eight-year big-league veteran with experience in the infield and outfield, entered Game 4 of the ALCS with two on and two outs in the ninth inning and the Blue Jays trailing Kansas City 12-2 to become the first full-time position player to pitch in a postseason game.

"Obviously the circumstances aren't what you want," said Pennington "But, you know, we're trying to save an arm down there. We've got to win three in a row. We need everybody healthy and fresh for tomorrow and so I figured I'd go in there and help.

"I think in the eighth we had a little conversation about it. So we don't burn anybody. We need everybody for tomorrow."

Mark Lowe got the first two outs in the ninth but after he hit Royals outfielder Alex Gordon with a pitch to put runners at first and second, Pennington was tabbed by Blue Jays manager John Gibbons to close out the inning.

After a quick conversation with catcher Russell Martin, he popped in a first-pitch strike to Paulo Orlando at 90 mph. The crowd cheered wildly. The players on the Blue Jays bench howled with laughter. It brought some levity to a game that desperately needed it after R.A. Dickey gave up four runs in the first inning and Kansas City led throughout.

Orlando ended up hitting a single to right field to load the bases. Alcides Escobar was up next and his single to right scored the two inherited runners. Pennington recorded his out against the third batter he faced, getting Ben Zobrist to pop up behind the plate in foul territory.

With those two ninth-inning runs, the Royals claimed a [14-2 win](#) to take a 3-1 series lead and push the Blue Jays to the brink of elimination.

"It was getting so ugly," said Gibbons. "You try to have a little pride, anyway. I hate to use position players, maybe we made history today, I don't know. A big game like that, a position player pitches."

Turns out Pennington had been preparing for this opportunity his entire career. He pitched as a reliever at Texas A&M and in high school he preferred pitching to playing in the field.

"I was decent. Better than I was out there today," said Pennington. "I threw faster in college, probably 95-96 mph in college. But I was just trying not to throw it to the backstop. I was just trying to throw it to Russ' mitt."

According to Los Angeles Dodgers right-hander and [exceptional Twitter follow Brandon McCarthy](#), a teammate of Pennington's in Oakland and Arizona, we only saw a glimpse of what Toronto's newest right-hander relief pitcher can do. "Penny has 4 pitches plus command. Could easily pitch in the big leagues," McCarthy wrote on Twitter.



"I've thrown a lot of bullpens to Brandon McCarthy. I'm guaranteed he's mad I didn't throw a cutter," said a smiling Pennington, who used a fastball, curveball and changeup during his brief seven-pitch appearance.

At least there was one fun moment to take from an otherwise miserable night for the Blue Jays.

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