

Josh Donaldson doing his best to carry Blue Jays' stale offense

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By Israel Fehr

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CLEVELAND – Josh Donaldson stood by his locker and might as well have been asked how he had walked on water.

The Toronto Blue Jays had just [lost Game 2 of the ALCS 2-1](#) on Saturday at Progressive Field, but it was Donaldson who had the answer to the question everyone wanted to know. How did he possibly manage to work a hit off Cleveland reliever Andrew Miller?

“I can’t stand here and tell you all my secrets right now,” said Donaldson. “Maybe after.”

It was a pithy response brought forth with a half-smile, which for Donaldson is an improvement on the grimace he’s been wearing across his face lately as he battles to get his banged-up body ready to play.

His hit off Miller, a line-drive single to center field, came in Toronto’s 2-0 loss in Game 1 on Friday on a 2-2 slider in the eighth and is memorable because it’s the only one Miller has allowed in 3 2/3 innings in the first two games of the series. 12 batters faced, 10 strikeouts, one groundout and that one hit. Miller’s Game 2 line looked like this: two innings, no hits, no walks, and five strikeouts.

Baseball can be a complicated game. There’s nothing complicated about what took place at Progressive Field over a 24-hour span: Toronto’s 0-2 deficit in the ALCS falls squarely on the offense.

There was supposed to be some relief not seeing Corey Kluber on the mound Saturday afternoon, but Josh Tomlin performed almost as well in Game 2 as Cleveland’s ace – a top Cy Young award contender in the AL – did in Game 1.

Tomlin went 5 2/3 innings, giving up one run, and just like Friday night, Cleveland’s bullpen had no problem closing it out. Bryan Shaw came in for one out, Miller for six and Cody Allen for the final three to seal the win.

It was Donaldson who drove in Toronto’s run with an RBI double in the third, his 12th hit of the postseason and his sixth double. It was one of three Blue Jays hits, and the only one that went for extra bases. See why his knock against Cleveland’s lights-out left-hander was still top of mind a day later?



Donaldson has risen to the occasion since the playoffs began, but it's clear to the eye that he's not close to being completely healthy, even if he won't admit it. He missed a series in September due to a sore right hip and when he did play, he did not produce anywhere close to his usual MVP-type standards. It's not a coincidence that the team's worst month of the season happened to be September, and that they fell from division leaders to wild-card hosts.

Perhaps the fact that he's in the lineup and producing at that level now fuels his belief that a breakthrough for his team is coming. More than ever, the Blue Jays' offense goes as Donaldson does.

"We feel like we can score against them. I know we haven't done much but we feel like we can score against those guys," said Donaldson. "We still have some games left and we still feel confident that we can score against Miller, or whoever. We've done it before in the past and we feel like we can do it again."

The sooner, the better, because the way things are going Donaldson's "after" might mean after Game 4 or Game 5 with Cleveland off to the World Series. But Donaldson, and Edwin Encarnacion, can't do it alone. Jose Bautista (0-for-6, two walks and five strikeouts in the series), Troy Tulowitzki (1-for-8, one strikeout) and Russell Martin (1-for-7, four strikeouts) must support them, or else Toronto is in trouble. Any contributions from Ezequiel Carrera, Kevin Pillar or Darwin Barney would be an added bonus.

"Every run right now is important, whether you get it in the first or the ninth. It would be nice to jump out and get a lead early but that hasn't been the case," said Donaldson. "We've faced them two days in a row. We should know what they're going to do against us and hopefully we have a little bit better approach."

Having seen Miller the night before didn't do the Blue Jays any good in Game 2. Sunday they get a reprieve from facing Miller, or any of Cleveland's pitchers that have given them fits, before taking the field for Monday night's pivotal Game 3 at Rogers Centre. This much is no secret: Toronto needs that game, and at least one of the next two, to send the series back to Progressive Field. Donaldson will lead the way, the others just need to follow. And if he can get a hit off Miller, what's so difficult about another trip across Lake Ontario and Lake Erie?

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