

Aaron Sanchez keeps Blue Jays in ALCS with great Game 4 start

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TORONTO – Aaron Sanchez stepped on the mound at Rogers Centre on Tuesday afternoon knowing full well he could be making his final start of the season.

After pitching six innings of one-run ball as the Blue Jays beat Cleveland 5-1 in Game 5 of the ALCS, Sanchez made sure it wouldn't be the final start of the year for his team.

Down 0-3 in the series, Toronto needed the first win before they could start dreaming of an October comeback for the ages, and Sanchez delivered with one of his best performances of the season to spark the faith. The 24-year-old right-hander started the game by striking out [Carlos Santana](#) and [Jason Kipnis](#), two of his five strikeouts in the game, and allowed two hits and two walks over six innings. His fastball was sharp, with lots of late life, and his curveball kept Cleveland's hitters off balance.

"I think from pitch one, in a must-win game you've got to be ready to go," Sanchez said. "I think the book's out that I'm aggressive with my heater. I knew I needed to get them off that a little bit. And by doing that I used my curveball."



[Josh Donaldson](#) put the Blue Jays in front with a solo home run in the third, the first game of the series where they've taken a lead. For a lineup that features some of the game's biggest sluggers, they felt it was about time they gave their starters some runs to work with after being limited to three runs over the first three games of the series.

"We haven't been able to get a lead in this series. And I felt like it was very important for us to get out to a lead. And even if it was one run," Donaldson said. "We felt like Sanchez, he's been a horse for us this entire year, and to be able to kind of allow him to do his thing. For us to be able to jump out [to a lead], I felt like that was very important."

And Sanchez rolled along from there, allowing his lone run in the fourth. The Blue Jays added two runs in the

seventh and another in the eighth as insurance, and relievers [Brett Cecil](#), [Jason Grilli](#) and [Roberto Osuna](#) combined to throw three shutout innings.

Sanchez, who last pitched eight days ago in the ALDS clincher, was slotted as the Game 4 starter before the ALCS began, a testament to the depth of Toronto's rotation and the circumstances surrounding Sanchez's usage. From the start of spring training, his innings count was a hot topic of conversation. As recently as early August, even though he had been named to the All-Star team as a starter, there was the possibility he would be moved to the bullpen in an effort to preserve his arm.

While he ultimately stayed in the rotation, there was a brief break toward the end of August and some skipped starts. For this series, having him pitch Game 4 meant he would make just one start in the series. Sanchez made the most of it, picking up the biggest win of his burgeoning big-league career.

Cleveland went with ace [Corey Kluber](#) on Tuesday on three days' rest and would have Kluber available for a Game 7, on short rest again. Given how careful the organization has been with Sanchez this season, another start in this series appears unlikely. But he's yet to talk with manager John Gibbons or pitching coach Pete Walker about their short-term plans as the Blue Jays fight to keep playing and join the 2004 Boston Red Sox as the only team in baseball history to erase a 0-3 deficit in a best-of-seven series. If Sanchez has his way, maybe he'll end up down in the bullpen after all.

"I'm sure when I come in tomorrow there will be more conversations about that," Sanchez said. "But I can tell you right now I'm ready to go, whatever it takes to win, I'm up for it."

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