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Nationals Snap Gerrit Cole's 19-Game Winning Streak, Beat Astros in World Series Game 1



20-year-old Juan Soto had three hits, three RBIs and a stolen base to help propel the Washington Nationals to a 5-4 win over the Houston Astros Tuesday night. (Thomas B. Shea - USA TODAY Sports)

By [Laurie Lauletta-Boshart](#) October 22, 2019

HOUSTON — It took a 20-year-old hitting phenom and a strong fifth inning for the Washington Nationals to best the Houston Astros and its ace pitcher, Gerrit Cole, in front of a home-packed crowd at Houston's Minute Maid park Tuesday night.

After losing in the National League Division Series during its four previous postseason appearances, the Nationals beat the Los Angeles Dodgers in the NLDS and swept the St. Louis Cardinals in the NLCS to punch their ticket to the 2019 World Series. Hailed as underdogs coming into tonight's game, the Nats wore the label as a badge of honor, preferring to be underestimated and then proving the pundits wrong. And prove them wrong they did, recovering from a 2-0 deficit in the first inning to beat the Astros 5-4 in Game 1.

Following a postseason game plan that's worked tremendously well for Houston, the Astros quickly jumped out to a 2-0 lead in the first inning against starter Max Scherzer. The three-time Cy Young Award winner surrendered a leadoff walk to centerfielder George Springer, followed by a Jose Altuve single and an off-the-wall double by first baseman Yuri Gurriel. But the Nationals answered with solo home runs in the second and fourth innings from veteran Ryan Zimmerman and newcomer Juan Soto, who smacked a high fastball past the outfield seats to knot the score at two.

With Cole tiring and the Nationals making the necessary adjustments at the plate, Washington blew the score wide open in the top of the fifth. Catcher Kurt Suzuki drew a leadoff walk and moved to third after a Victor Robles single and a Trea Turner sac fly. With nobody out and two on, Eaton poked a single to right, plating Suzuki and putting Washington up by one. Then Soto—who Nationals hitting coach Kevin Long calls a hitting savant—stroked a towering double off the outfield wall to bring in Robles and outfielder Adam Eaton. Astros shortstop Carlos Correa made a diving catch to prevent National League MVP Howie Kendrick's fading line drive from getting into the outfield and scoring additional runs. But the damage was done and the Nats tacked on three runs to hold a comfortable 5-2 lead.

The Astros had the potential to pad their own score in the bottom of the seventh with the bases loaded and Altuve at the plate. The second baseman chased some balls out of the zone and struck out swinging, leaving three stranded on base. Houston had to settle for one run on a leadoff homer from Springer.

Trailing 5-3, the Astros threatened again in the bottom of the eighth. Reliever Daniel Hudson gave up a first-pitch single to pinch hitter Kyle Tucker, who moved to second on a sacrifice fly from Aledmys Diaz and scored on a Springer double. Hudson got Altuve to fly out to right and then the Nationals elected to go to their bullpen. Reliever Sam Doolittle was brought in to face lefty Michael Brantley who sent a line drive into left field that was dealt with by Soto to end the inning. Doolittle closed out the ninth with a one-two-three inning to clinch the game and earn the save.

Soto, who will turn 21 on Friday—and is being hailed as the next Ty Cobb—admitted to being nervous in his first at bat in the biggest game in baseball. "I'm not going to lie, I felt a little shaky in my legs," he said. "But I just decided to refocus and drive the ball." After striking out his first time at the plate, Soto hit a home run, a double and a single, and added a stolen base to round out the night. "He is a phenomenal hitter and an amazing talent, especially for someone so young," remarked Nationals head coach David Martinez. "You don't usually see that kind of discipline and talent from a rookie; he is definitely an exception."

The Astros have been in this position before; the Yankees beat them soundly in Game 1 of the ALCS 7-0. The Astros eventually went on to win the next three games and then clinch the series in six. "We obviously wanted to get the first win here at home," said Astros coach A.J. Hinch. "We had our chances, but we left too many men on base, and we can't do that if we want to win the game. We know what we need to do and we'll need to be better about executing it tomorrow night."

The Astros and the Nationals face off in Game 2 of the World Series tomorrow night at 5:00 p.m. (PST) in Houston. Scheduled starting pitchers are Justin Verlander for the Astros and Stephen Strasburg for the Nationals.

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