

Dykstra's 9th-inning homer gives Mets 2-1 playoff lead

FROM THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW YORK — Instead of setting the table, Lenny Dykstra cleaned it Saturday as the New York Mets won a big game in a battle of little guys.

Dykstra hit a two-run home run into a stiff wind to right field in the ninth inning off Astros relief ace Dave Smith as the Mets rallied to win Game Three of the National League playoffs over Houston 6-5.

"This is a great feeling," said Dykstra, whose role with the Mets has been to get on base, to be delivered by the power hitters. "The last time I hit a home run in the bottom of the ninth to win a game was in Strat-O-Matic against my brother. That's the baseball game where you throw dice."

With this throw of the dice, the Mets took a 2-1 lead in the best-of-seven series. Not only was it a pivotal game, but it also represented a departure from past form in a series that had been dominated by pitching.

Mike Scott, Houston's winner in the playoff opener, will come back on three days' rest to face Sid Fernandez in Game Four Sunday night.

"I think we put a little bit of pressure on them now," Dykstra said. "Now they have to come back with Mike Scott, and I know he would probably like to have another day off."

The Astros scored two runs in each of the first two innings against Ron Darling, two on a homer by Houston leadoff hitter Billy Doran.

"I wish my home run meant as much as Lenny Dykstra's," Doran said.

Darryl Strawberry capped New York's four-run sixth against Bob Knepper with a three-run homer that tied the score 4-4, and the Astros broke the tie in the seventh with an unearned run, scored by Doran. Third baseman Ray Knight committed the error.

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— Lenny Dykstra, New York Met

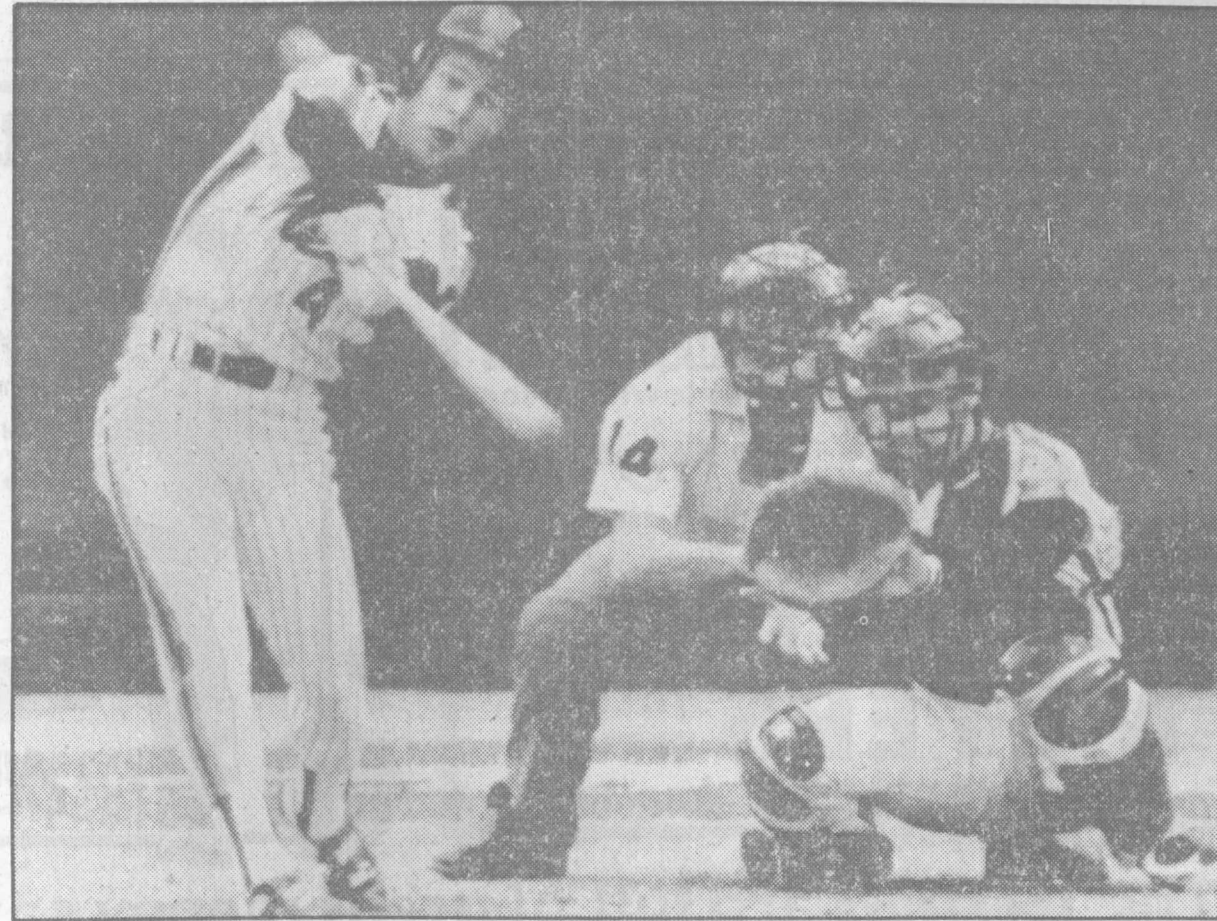
"We started off bad. Darling was a little tentative and not very aggressive, like he was during the season," Mets Manager Davey Johnson said. "But we battled back, and that's the big thing. We got the big hit from Strawberry and had the miscue in the seventh, but I really thought that we had the momentum in the ninth inning."

Smith, 1-1 with an ERA of 15.00 against the Mets during the season, said he was trying to get Dykstra to hit a ground ball.

"This is as bad a feeling as I've had as a player," said Smith, who entered the game when the Mets came to bat in the ninth. "I threw a bad pitch to him — a forkball changeup. ... I didn't do my job."

Dykstra, who came in as a pinch-hitter in the seventh inning, said when he came up in the ninth he thought of a game on the Fourth of July. With the score tied 1-1 in that game, Dykstra doubled home the winning run against Smith.

"He threw me a fastball that time," Dykstra said. "This time, I didn't think he would. He threw me a fastball on the first pitch, and I fouled it off. Then I knew I wouldn't get a fastball, and sure enough the next pitch was a forkball."



Lenny Dykstra launches swing that results in game-winning homer for New York Mets.

AP PHOTO

KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

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