



Lucky hats and hot dogs: The real reasons why Astros are in World Series

By Andrew Dansby | October 23, 2017 | Updated: October 23, 2017 8:29pm



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IMAGE 1 OF 42

Houston comedian (and Astros fan) Dusti Rhodes with her lucky hat.

Click through the gallery to see how fans celebrated the Astros ALCS victory through Instagram. And don't forget to send us your sports superstitions. The links are at the bottom of the story.

Dusti Rhodes was in Wisconsin last week when the Astros were battling the New York Yankees for a birth in the World Series, but not without her lucky hat.

At the beginning of this season Rhodes, a Houston comedian, bought an " '86 Stros World Serious" hat off eBay for \$8. She didn't wear it to the first home game she attended this season, and the team lost.

"I decided I'd never again walk into Minute Maid (Park) without that hat," she says.

During the course of a game, she goes with whatever is working.

"In Game 7, I was lying down on the floor when they got some hits, so that was how I spent the rest of the game," she says. "It's ridiculous, obviously, this idea that if I do this *one* thing, that will affect the whole game. It's not José Altuve being great or the fact that the front office

built this amazing team or anything Justin Verlander does. No, it's this hat and it's me sitting a certain way."

Ridiculous? Maybe. But rare? Certainly not.

Baseball has famously been populated by the superstitious - players switching clothes or routines to break out of slumps, or not changing an approach to preserve hot streaks. That belief system of hexes and rituals often bleeds over to the fans.

During the playoffs, when the game transforms into a more frenzied beast, its observers are often teeming with jitters. And desperate fans make desperate grasps for some cosmic control. October baseball brings with it unwashed victory shirts and lucky pants, ugly neckties and other totems with some greater meaning we infuse into them.

Some believe talking about their superstitions renders the superstition powerless. Others just do what they do. For Houston musician Steve Gilbert the ritual involves hot dogs. Not any hot dog. He will only eat 97 percent fat free Hebrew National hot dogs on game day.

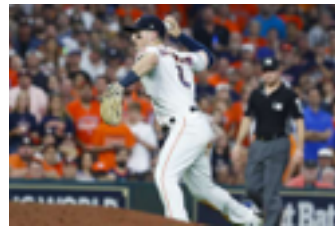
ASTROS IN THE WORLD SERIES



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Books and academic studies have been dedicated to the subject - not just superstitions, but specifically sports superstitions and even more specifically those practiced by fans. They're essentially coping mechanisms for involvement in an activity over which we have no control.

"I look at it as an anxiety management measure," says Dr. Rick Grieve, who works in the psychology department at Western Kentucky University. "And you see an increase in this behavior when the games become more meaningful. ... What was that phrase from the beer commercial? 'It isn't crazy if it works.' That's all anxiety management."

Grieve is one of the authors of "Examining the Superstitions of Sports Fans: Types of Superstitions, Perceptions of Impact, and Relationship With Team Identification."

Grieve was quick to point out one of his co-authors is Dr. Ryan Zapalac - who works in the kinesiology department at Sam Houston State and is a bright orange Astros fan. For what it's worth, Zapalac says their study included quite a few Astros fans.

He says they observed among fans, "apparel superstitions were the most prevalent - shirts, hats, just things you wear. But we also found some funnier stories that had to do with hygiene issues. One Astros fan said she preferred not to shower a week before a playoff game.

TRANSLATOR

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Another wouldn't use the restroom until after the seventh inning.

"In all these cases, people want to feel like they're influencing the game in some way. Short of running out on the field and getting escorted out, there's not much you can do to influence the outcome."

Grieve points out that our more rational inclinations can fall by the wayside.

"People start to believe that something is successful because it worked once," he says. "It's a behavioral effect that we'd call one-trial learning."

It sounds damning put that way.

Zapalac said one man in the study thought his entire family was an Astros hex. Until they went to a game without the mother and the team won. Suddenly the hex was one particular person.

Fans with particularly strong connections to teams are referred to as "highly identified." And

LIFESTYLE



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highly identified fans can become highly agitated as the funnel of that long season winds more tightly. And highly identified fans are prone to the sort of rituals that become superstitions. Even if most of us don't really believe in them.

Martin Schleuse attended an Astros game in the summer of 2015. His seats were in left field, designated Keuchel's Korner. On that day, fans there received a free orange shirt with the distinctive bearded silhouette of Astros pitching ace Dallas Keuchel.

"He kicked (butt) in that game, so the next time he pitched I wore it again," Schleuse says. He wears the shirt every game Keuchel pitches.

"I would not characterize it as a superstition," he says. "It's more of a ridiculous ritual. But I reached the point where I wouldn't even check a score unless I had that stupid little shirt on, even though I do not believe it has any actual effect on his pitching.

"But it does get me to do the laundry more often."

Some fans wear the opposition's hat as a form of reverse hex. Some only follow the game on the radio during the playoffs.

Mary Ellen Martin devours the food of the opposition in preparation for games. So she ate beans and lobster for the Red Sox, and a New York strip and bagels for the Yankees. "You have to devour the other team," she says. "It's just good luck."

On Friday she played the lottery based on a Justin Verlander start: His number, 35, plus a 1 for his spot in the post-season pitching rotation. After dinner at the Grotto downtown, she wanted to pass by the sign for Craig Biggio's restaurant at the Marriott for good luck. In doing so she ran into Biggio himself. Things were looking good.

Then Verlander won the game. And her lotto numbers hit to the tune of \$300.

"Today when I woke up I bought my mother some orange Astros flowers for this week," she says. "Got to keep the mojo going."

If most superstitious activity is of an active nature, some is rooted in passivity. Christine Tremoulet is a Chicago native who lives here and has rooted for the Astros since the 1990s. She believes watching the team on TV - even following the game on her phone - activates a jinx. So she doesn't watch.

Last week she thought Game 3 of the ALCS was a day game. She assumed enough time had passed to see who won.

"It wasn't a final score, and I thought, 'Dammit,' " she says. "Then we lost. So that was it for me."

Tremoulet believes the team can still win if she attends a game. But following remotely creates the problems. If she's in a restaurant and an Astros game is on, she'll move to a table with no view of the TV.

"It's just a sacrifice I have to make," she says. "It has to be a full blackout. So I've really made it a point with these games this season to not watch a single one. I'm doing it for the team.

"You're welcome."

What makes the Astros win? Share your superstitions with us on social media. Tweet us at [@HoustonChron](#), tag us on Instagram at [@HoustonChron](#) or comment on our post at [Facebook.com/HoustonChronicle](#).

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