

Three things we learned from Kansas City Royals’ frustrating series vs. Astros

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HOUSTON
The Kansas City Royals have a clear winning formula.

Much is predicated on their starting rotation, which remains near-flawless this season, and their stagnant offense being able to scratch across a few runs. The formula has worked for most of the 2025 campaign.

For a while, it was on full display against the Houston Astros at Daikin Park. However, the Royals couldn’t put away the Astros in the late innings on consecutive nights.

On Wednesday, the Royals (25-20) fell 4-3 in the series finale.

Royals starters Michael Wacha, Kris Bubic and Michael Lorenzen were sharp in their outings.

The trio allowed seven earned runs in 20 innings. Bubic continued to make a case for an All-Star nomination in Tuesday’s pitcher duel with Astros star Framber Valdez. This season, Bubic ranks fifth in the majors with a 1.66 ERA.

“We are playing good ball,” Lorenzen said. “You know, our pitching is doing great and we are playing good defense. Every game is like a war and we are getting battle tested for sure. So we will take that.”

Offensively, the Royals scored in spurts. KC logged seven runs in Monday’s game but was shut out after the third inning. Valdez limited KC to one run — a Freddy Fermin RBI single — and the club scored three times against Astros rookie Colton Gordon.

The consecutive losses sting. The Royals now sit 4 1/2 games behind the Detroit Tigers in the American League Central.

“They are tough losses,” Royals manager Matt Quatraro said. “I mean, we

come in and have a game and get off to a good start. Then these last two are one-run games. We play a lot of close games and we have to figure out how to be one run better.”

ROYALS AT ASTROS: WEDNESDAY RECAP

The Royals took advantage of Gordon making his first MLB start. A few timely hits gave Lorenzen an early cushion on the scoreboard.

Maikel Garcia powered the offense on Wednesday. He hit a solo home run in the second inning and added an RBI double that bounced off the second-base bag.

This season, Garcia ranks second on KC in home runs and fourth in RBIs. He made an adjustment this offseason by incorporating a toe tap in his batting stance. Now, he is able to remain balanced and better connect with incoming pitches.

“The last couple of games, they have thrown me a lot of breaking balls when they are behind in the count,” Garcia said. “So I was just waiting for it and I hit a homer.”

Garcia drilled a 79.1 mph slider into the Crawford Boxes. The homer traveled 405 feet and fueled the Royals in short order.

Lorenzen took over from there. He limited the Astros to four runs in 7 1/3 innings. Astros third baseman Isaac Parades hit a solo homer to account for the lone early damage.

“The process was good and I attacked the whole time,” Lorenzen said. “You can’t be afraid to give up a game. So we went out there and attacked. You’re afraid to get punched in the face, you are never going to accomplish anything.”

Parades belted two homers in the series. He was responsible for the Astros’ walk-off victory Tuesday night.

This time, things fell apart in the eighth inning.

“I just kept going out there and attacking,” Lorenzen said. “I think the game of baseball kind of beat us today with those staying fair there. Two in row and that happens. We were right there the whole time. We played a great game and it just didn’t go our way.”

Houston (22-20) scored twice to take a 4-3 lead. Mauricio Dubon hit an RBI double to tie the game. Next, Jeremy Pena added the go-ahead single to put the Astros in front.

Astros closer Josh Hader closed the door and picked up the save.

Here are three takeaways from the series...

JONATHAN INDIA THRIVES IN LEADOFF SPOT

It took a minute for Jonathan India to find his footing with the Royals. He posted a .216 batting average in April and dealt with a few hurdles.

India was hit in the helmet by an errant fast-ball against the Cleveland Guardians. Later, he dealt with a right quad tightness.

In recent games, the Royals have seen better production. India entered Wednesday’s action hitting .306 (15-for-49) with an .810 OPS in his last 12 games.

India went 3-for-5 with two RBIs in Monday’s game. He added an RBI single in the series finale.

“The last couple of weeks he has really started to put good at-bats together,” Quatraro said. “We have seen he’s already compiled a bunch of walks. Now, he is getting some hits in big spots.”

BOBBY WITT JR. DAZZLES IN SERIES

It’s wise to not blink when Bobby Witt Jr. is at the plate. There is a chance he could do something extraordinary with each swing.



THOMAS SHEA | Imagin Images

Kansas City Royals catcher Salvador Perez (13) reacts to striking out against the Houston Astros to end the first inning at Daikin Park on May 14, 2025.

In the series, Witt hit two triples. He showcased his dynamic speed on Monday by racing home-to-third in 11.07 seconds. It was the third-fastest time of that distance in the majors this season.

And Witt flashed the leather defensively.

Witt has a knack for making difficult plays look

routine. He helped turn some key double plays that got the Royals out of potential jams.

“That’s a special player, man,” Royals second baseman Michael Massey said Monday. “You know, obviously sometimes we take it for granted while watching it. That’s just amazing. He is a great player, great

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IN THE DISTRICT COURT
OF JOHNSON COUNTY, KANSAS
Child In Need Of Care Proceedings Under Chapter 38 of K.S.A.

In the Interest of
MARIE FAY COKER
Date of Birth 10/05/23

Case No.23JC00363
Division 10

NOTICE OF HEARING
TO: Deanna Coker, mother, all unknown grandparents of the above Respondent, Marie Fay Coker, and all other persons who are or may be concerned:

You are hereby notified that a Petition has been filed in the above named Court by Donald W. Hymer, Jr., Assistant District Attorney, alleging that said child is a Child in Need of Care as defined by K.S.A. 38-2202, alleging that natural parent is unfit by reason of conduct or condition which renders the parent unable to care properly for a child and the conduct or condition is unlikely to change in the foreseeable future; and requesting the Court to permanently deprive their parental rights in and to said child, and to further place said child for adoption pursuant to K.S.A. 38-2269 or, in the alternative, appoint a permanent custodian for said child.

The mother is Deanna Coker. The father is Johnny Dewayne Coker. The hearing will determine why said parents should be permanently deprived of their parental rights and the right to permanent custody; and that the care, custody and guardianship of the person and estate of said child be committed to the Kansas Secretary of the Department for Children and Families. Or, in the alternative, the hearing will determine why said parents should be rendered unfit; and that the care, and custody of the person and estate of said child be committed to the Kansas Secretary of the Department for Children and Families, with the appointment of a permanent custodian.

You are required to appear before this Court via Zoom at 3:00 o'clock p.m. on the 9th day of June, 2025, in the Juvenile Section of the District Court of Johnson County, Kansas, City of Olathe, Division 10 or prior to that time file your written response to the pleading with the Clerk of the Court. If, after a child has been adjudged to a Child In Need of Care, the Court finds a parent or parents to be unfit, the court may be petitioned to make an Order permanently terminating the parent's or parents' parental rights.

Michelle Anne DeCicco, an attorney, has been appointed as Guardian Ad Litem for said child. Each parent or other legal custodian of the child has the right to appear and be heard personally either with or without an attorney. Ryan Kaiser, an attorney, has been appointed as attorney to represent the natural mother of the minor child. Donald S. Smith, an attorney, has been appointed as attorney to represent the natural father of the minor child. Each parent has the right to appear and be heard in this Court. The Court will appoint an attorney for a parent who is financially unable to hire one.

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FROM PAGE 1B ROYALS

“I think the toe tap has always been something that I’m interested in,” Zumwalt said. “For me, watching Chipper Jones as a high school hitter and trying to figure things out with a heavy front side, it was something I instituted as a high school hitter. It’s one of those things that is about rhythm and timing.”

Zumwalt talked to Jones to get a deeper understanding. He learned that a successful toe tap requires a rhythm that prevents over-striding through the strike zone.

There must be synergy throughout the batting stance. Jones detailed that a toe tap allows a hitter to create space and recognize a pitch better.

“It’s usually very rhythmic,” Zumwalt said. “I like to think of the metronome in music. The good ones have that metronome cadence to their toe tap.”

Zumwalt was named Royals hitting coach in 2022. In his tenure, he has helped players find their timing at the plate. Zumwalt played an instrumental role in Garcia adding the toe tap this offseason.

He suggested to Garcia to bring back the toe tap. After watching film, Zumwalt felt that Garcia was crashing into the plate. The re-addition of the toe tap was designed to help Garcia control his gather

and generate more contact balance.

“He feels himself getting back in a really strong position early,” Zumwalt said of Garcia. “That’s allowing him to slow the pitch down and create more space between his eyes and the baseball.”

Garcia has an instrumental role in the Royals lineup. He offers production in the middle of the order behind Bobby Witt Jr. Vinnie Pasquantino and Salvador Perez.

“This is the most consistent he’s been, obviously, in his big league career,” Zumwalt said. “I saw stretches of him like this in the minor leagues. ... Seeing him do it at this level and be consistent with it — his work and seeing him smile — he is having fun.”

TIC-TAC-TOE

While Garcia has seen the biggest growth with the toe tap, the Royals also have other players utilizing it from time to time.

Infielder Jonathan India switched to the toe tap in recent weeks. He doesn’t have a set batting routine but felt the toe tap could help him regain his timing.

“I just needed to be athletic,” India said. “In the spring, it was working and I was hitting everything hard. Being here I was just being stiff. My foot didn’t have any swag and the rhythm was lost.”

India entered Wednesday hitting .317 (19-for-60) in his last 15 games. In that span, he

added seven RBIs and registered seven walks. On May 4, India hit his first home run of the season against the Baltimore Orioles.

He attributed the toe tap adjustment as a reason for his quick turnaround.

“It creates timing and rhythm for me,” India said. “I have timing and I can see the ball better. I never have a set stance. I’m a player that plays the game. Whatever it is it is. I’m going to enjoy it, have fun and play hard.”

Both Pasquantino and Perez have used the toe tap as well. Michael Massey experimented with it for a while.

“Everyone has to find their own ways to time the pitcher and be able to adjust,” Zumwalt said. “No two guys do it exactly the same, but all of the good ones get into a similar position at toe touch.”

Zumwalt also believes repetition is needed to perfect the move. He continues to work with Royals assistant hitting coaches Keoni DeRenne and Joe Dillon to help players find ways to be successful.

The toe tap is one discipline that has worked.

“It looks simple, but it’s really hard,” Zumwalt said. “I think that’s why you don’t see a lot of people do it. Just seems like we have a lot on this roster that are doing it right now.”

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