TEXAS RANGERS CLIPS - September 21, 2009



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Rangers' pitching struggles in defeat Starter Holland cedes three homers as Texas falls 7 1/2 back By T.R. Sullivan / MLB.com

ARLINGTON -- It's over. The Rangers' homestand, that is.

A homestand that the Rangers knew was going to be the biggest of the season came to a crashing end that was just as disappointing as the way it started.

With one last chance to make the Angels squirm at least a little bit, the Rangers instead let a 5-3 lead after five innings slip away in a 10-5 loss on Sunday afternoon at Rangers Ballpark in Arlington.

The Rangers, after going 2-7 on the homestand, are now 7 1/2 games behind the Angels in the American League West. There are just 14 games left in the season. The Angels magic number is seven. By the way, the Rangers are eight games behind the Red Sox in the AL Wild Card race.

"We knew this could make or break us, and that's what it was," second baseman Ian Kinsler said. "We didn't play well. Everybody knows what happened the last nine games. We're not mathematically out of it, but our chances aren't very good."

A 7-2 homestand would have left the Rangers 1 1/2 games behind the Angels. Instead, they lost three consecutive series at home for the first time this season after losing two of three to the Angels. The Rangers were outscored, 48-19, on the homestand, and their offense hit .204. They hit .152 with runners in scoring position.

"We knew it would be a battle," Marlon Byrd said. "We knew we had to win some games in a row, and maybe something crazy would happen. But we keep falling back. We were hoping the Angels would hit a losing streak or Boston [would] hit a losing streak, and [then we could] see what happens. But they're both good teams. It just didn't happen."

The five runs were the second most the Rangers scored in the homestand. They had a 3-0 lead after one inning and a two-run lead going into the sixth. But rookie left-hander Derek Holland couldn't hold it and ended up suffering his fifth straight loss.

Holland is now 7-12 with a 6.17 ERA on the season. Since World War II, only 20 rookies have pitched at least 100 innings in the Major Leagues and finished with an ERA over six runs a game.

"I feel fine; I just let everybody down," Holland said. "It was a big game for us. I'm not happy at all at not doing my job."

The home run continues to hurt Holland. He gave up three more on Sunday and has now allowed 25 on the season, the most ever by a Rangers rookie. His 1.77 home runs per nine innings is the fourth-highest rate by any Rangers pitcher with at least 100 innings pitched in a season.

"I don't know why he's prone to the home run ball," Rangers manager Ron Washington said. "If we did, we'd stop it. Sometimes, he makes bad pitches in the wrong spot. He's not a 3-4-5 year pitcher; he's a young kid. The guy is in a learning process."

Holland pitched a three-hit shutout in his previous outing against the Angels on Aug. 9 in Anaheim.

"[Holland] wasn't quite as crisp as when he pitched against us in Anaheim," Angels manager Mike Scioscia said. "That game he pitched in Southern California was as good a game as we've had pitched against us all year. The last couple outings, he's been struggling a little.

Holland, sitting on a 4-2 lead, gave up a solo home run to Juan Rivera in the fourth. He was leading, 5-3, in the sixth when the Angels tied it on a two-run home run by Howie Kendrick. Two batters later, Gary Matthews Jr.'s home run gave the Angels the lead for good.

Washington had right-hander Neftali Feliz warmed up in the bullpen, but wanted Matthew, a switch-hitter, to bat right-handed against Holland. Matthews entered the game hitting .184 from the right side. But this was not a homestand where things went right for the Rangers, and the final day proved to be no different.

"Going into the sixth inning, we had momentum," Washington said. "After the sixth inning, we couldn't shut them down. ... Was it devastating? That's a harsh word. We played a pretty good team over there. They won the game. We didn't win the game. They won the game."

The Rangers left Texas on Sunday afternoon bound for Oakland to open a four-game series with the Athletics on Monday. The Angels go home for three games with the Yankees, who have the best record in baseball. The Rangers still have four games left with the Angels in the final week of the season.

There is still a sliver of hope, but it could have been much more than that with a better homestand.

"We've still got a lot of games left," Washington said. "They may go on a losing streak. We may continue to play good baseball and go on a winning streak. We may get to Anaheim and have it decided there. They haven't put an X by our name yet."

Millwood to throw in opener in Oakland Texas (81-67) at Oakland (71-78), 9:05 p.m. CT By T.R. Sullivan / MLB.com

ARLINGTON -- Kevin Millwood returns to the mound for the first time since Sept. 12 when he pitches against the Athletics on Monday at the Oakland Coliseum.

Millwood is 1-3 with a 6.54 ERA in his past six starts, and the Rangers gave him some extra time between starts to work with pitching coach Mike Maddux. That included throwing a simulated game on Friday.

Maddux and Millwood were working on mechanics -- more specifically, Millwood's balance and posture on the mound. A video comparison of Millwood now and in 2005 when he led the American League in ERA showed he has been arching his back too much lately, rather than standing straight in his delivery.

"That's a lot of it, maintaining your posture throughout your delivery," Maddux said. "What we're working on now is exactly he did in '05. We're getting back to basics."

Monday's game is a big start for Millwood. He has pitched 175 2/3 innings this season. Once he pitches at least 180 innings, he guarantees his contract of \$12 million for 2010.

"I'd like for that to be out of the way, so I don't get asked about it anymore," Millwood said. "It's just been tough to sit back and watch lately. I just want to get back out there and pitch."

Pitching matchup

TEX: RHP Kevin Millwood (10-10, 3.94 ERA)

Millwood has made two starts against the Athletics this year. He beat them, 5-4, on April 28 when he allowed two runs in eight innings. His second start against them was on May 31, and the Rangers won again, 5-4. Millwood wasn't involved in the decision, but he allowed just two runs in six innings. He is now 5-3 with a 3.66 ERA in 15 career starts against the Athletics.

OAK: RHP Edgar Gonzalez (0-2, 4.74 ERA)

Gonzalez is 0-1 with a 3.79 ERA in four starts and 0-1 with a 5.21 ERA in 20 relief appearances. His previous outing was a start against the Rangers on Tuesday, when he allowed one run in four innings in a game the Athletics won, 6-1. Gonzalez has a 3.34 ERA at home, as opposed to a 6.26 ERA on the road. Opponents are hitting .219 against him at home and .322 against him on the road. Left-handers are hitting .325 off him, while right-handers are hitting .217.

Tidbits

Catcher Jarrod Saltalamacchia will undergo shoulder surgery on Monday. He has Thoracic Outlet Syndrome, a condition where a rib bone pushes on a nerve and causes pain and numbness in the arm and fingers, and the surgery is intended to alleviate that condition. The recovery time is 3-4 months, but he should be ready for Spring Training. ... Hitting coach Rudy Jaramillo turned 59 on Sunday. ... Sunday was the Rangers' 39th day game this season, fewest in the Major Leagues.

Tickets

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On television

• FSSW HD

On radio

• 105.3 The Fan, KFLC 1270 (Español)

Up next

- Tuesday: Rangers (Brandon McCarthy, 7-3, 4.97) at Athletics (Trevor Cahill, 9-12, 4.54), 9:05 p.m. CT
- Wednesday: Rangers (Tommy Hunter, 8-4, 3.25) at Athletics (Clayton Mortensen, 2-2, 6.14), 9:05 p.m. CT
- Thursday: Rangers (Scott Feldman, 17-5, 3.62) at Athletics (Brett Anderson, 10-10, 4.21), 2:35 p.m. CT

Blalock to be in lineup vs. right-handers Skipper Washington says veteran could even start vs. lefties By T.R. Sullivan / MLB.com

ARLINGTON -- Rangers manager Ron Washington said he likes Hank Blalock's veteran presence in the lineup.

"I wish he would like it more often," Blalock said.

That could be the case this week. Blalock was back in the lineup for a second straight day on Sunday, one day after his sixth-inning home run gave the Rangers a 3-2 victory over the Angels. Blalock played first base while Chris Davis was at third base.

Washington said he is going to stay with that arrangement for a few days. The Rangers, who faced righty John Lackey on Sunday, face three right-handers in the first three games of a four-game series with the Athletics that starts on Monday in Oakland.

Washington said Blalock will continue to start against right-handers. The Rangers aren't scheduled to face a left-hander until Oakland pitches Brett Anderson on Thursday. Blalock figures to be in the lineup at least until then.

"Who knows, he might play against everybody," Washington said. "But I know he'll get those right-handers."

Blalock hasn't played much since the Rangers recalled Davis on Aug. 25 and put him back at first base. Blalock played first for six weeks while Davis was in the Minor Leagues, but found himself on the bench when Davis came back. Blaylock had started just three games since Aug. 25 before Saturday night.

Washington decided to go with Blalock on Saturday after his team had been shut out four times in five days, and the decision paid off. So Blalock was back in the lineup on Sunday.

"You watch those kids go out there and play their hearts out and it's not happening, and you've got an experienced bat on the bench," Washington said. "I just decided to get Hank back in there. I didn't want to move Chris to third base, but that was the only option I had."

Washington could have used Blalock at designated hitter, but that would have meant taking Julio Borbon out of the lineup.

"That's not going to happen," Washington said.

So Blalock, who is third on the team with 24 home runs, gets a chance to showcase himself with the Rangers before becoming a free agent at the end of the season.

"It's not up to me who's in the lineup," Blalock said. "All I know is when I'm in the lineup, I'm going to go out there and give it my best effort."

Young re-injured hamstring in return Rangers star admits he came back to lineup too soon By T.R. Sullivan / MLB.com

ARLINGTON -- Rangers third baseman Michael Young admitted Sunday morning that he actually aggravated his strained left hamstring when he played on Tuesday against the Oakland Athletics.

Young was not in the lineup for Sunday's game against the Angels and is not expected back anytime soon.

"What it comes down to is I came back too early and re-aggravated it," Young said. "It's frustrating. I knew it was risky but I rolled the dice. We had just been shut out twice and I wanted to play. I'm not back to Square 1, but it's not as good as it was when I tried to go back in."

Young originally injured the hamstring in the second game of a doubleheader against the Blue Jays on Sept. 2. He was supposed to be out 2-4 weeks. He came back in two weeks as the Rangers' designated hitter on Tuesday against the Athletics.

In his first at-bat, he aggravated the injury on the second pitch. Athletics pitcher Edgar Gonzalez threw him a slow breaking ball, Young tried to check his swing and his hamstring grabbed him.

"I had been swinging hard for five days," Young said. "But that was off a machine and my mechanics were perfect. The first time I go up to bat, I got caught off-balance and it grabbed me."

Young left that game after one at-bat and hasn't played since. His return is not known.

"The tough thing about a hamstring is it's not pain," Young said. "If it was just pain, I could have played the next day. They just don't let you go. You start to run and it's says, 'No, I'm not going to let you go.'

"I took a shot when I did and it didn't work out. Now I'm going to make sure I get it right. We have a great training staff here, it's time I listened to them."

Young is leading the Rangers with a .322 batting average, seventh-best in the American League.

FORT WORTH STAR-TELEGRAM

Josh Lewin and Tom Grieve keep Texas Rangers fans entertained By RAY BUCK

On a recent Texas Rangers telecast, play-by-play man Josh Lewin gave "a quick shout-out to Erica and Chris from Waxahachie."

Nothing unusual there. The chatty Lewin often takes breaks from pitch counts and situational stats to put his own unique spin on the telecast. Let's face it, his brain moves a lot faster than most baseball games.

"[Erica and Chris] just got married," continued Lewin, "and right now they're spending their wedding night hanging out and listening to us."

Booth partner Tom Grieve, seated directly to Lewin's right, gushed openly, "Wow, congratulations ... and thank you!"

Lewin quickly added, "Yes, very honored," then pausing. "A little weirded out, too ... but honored."

This is what Rangers fans have come to expect from a Lewin-Grieve telecast: Something for both the baseball diehard and the casual fan.

Roughly 200 e-mails pour into Lewin's Apple MacBook Pro inbox on a nightly basis. He chooses to read a handful on the air.

The results are unscripted, unrehearsed. Definitely unpredictable.

The Odd Couple

Lewin, 40, and Grieve, 61, may not be exactly Felix Unger and Oscar Madison because they share a booth without driving each other crazy (sort of the question raised in the oldOdd Couple TV show jingle).

On the air, Josh is Josh but Grieve is "TAG" because of his initials for Thomas Alan Grieve.

Despite their difference in age and baseball acumen on the field and in the front office, Lewin and Grieve have developed quite a knack for creating dialogue on almost any topic from how it must have felt to lose to the '62 Mets (40-122) to what Grieve ate for lunch in Anaheim.

Also, their voices are unalike, which means no one at home needs to wonder "Who's saying what?"

Grieve is the straight man. Low-key. Ex-player. Ex-GM. Lewin is considerably more wired, both personally and technologically. Trivia buff. Incessant Googler. Fearless broadcaster.

"I don't have the nerve to say some of the things that Josh says, even if I was thinking them," Grieve said.

"I'm much more self-conscious. To do what Josh does, you can't worry what somebody is going to think."

They dress similarly, or at least from the waist up.

This particular night, Lewin's on-air attire was a golf shirt, dark slacks and black business loafers. Grieve wore a golf shirt, khaki shorts and a pair of all-terrain sandals.

No matter if the Rangers are winning or mired in a miserable slump with frequent rain delays, the telecast remains positive (something manager Ron Washington has come to appreciate) and entertaining.

Fox Sports Southwest, which carries the bulk of Rangers games, has shown a 68 percent jump in ratings from '08 to '09. This is the second-best improvement among major-league teams.

One big reason why? OK, there are two.

Aside from the team's success on the field, Rangers fans are made to feel privy to what's happening in the TV booth.

"We easily get 200 e-mails a game," Lewin said. "I'd say a good 75 percent just want to get in on our conversations."

Dustin vs. Dustin

Lewin once observed during a Rangers-Red Sox game: "This is a first for a Dustin pitching to a Dustin [Nippert to Pedroia] in baseball history."

That's just how Josh's mind works.

"I don't know where these things come from ... but I'm not surprised when they do," Grieve laughed.

Lewin calls it the "magic of the ADD brain," a reference to the ADD Generation that includes practically anyone who is overly stimulated by electronic gadgets.

"I'm probably the poster child for the ADD Generation," Lewin said with a smile.

During any given Rangers broadcast, Lewin might e-mail, Twitter, Google and/or text-message during two-minute commercial breaks between innings and pitching changes.

He's the consummate multitasker.

He basically juggles play-by-play duties with live readings of team promos and sponsorship messages, chats with Grieve and manages to keep one eye on the 12-inch "graphics preview" monitor and one ear tuned to his producer's directives.

Grieve wouldn't change a thing. He knows the play-by-play role is busy and complex, but he doesn't feel a need to keep pace.

"I might chuckle at something that Josh says, but I'm not inspired to go two or three minutes into the first time a Dustin pitched to a Dustin," Grieve said. "I suppose we could rehearse it. I could find out how many times a Harold pitched to a Harold, but then I think you've gone too far with it.

"These things are good when they're tossed out there quickly."

Lewin takes it one step further.

"Dustin vs. Dustin obviously isn't for the hardcore baseball fan or people without a sense of humor. I understand that," Lewin said.

"But if one out of five viewers at home says, 'Hey, honey, did you hear that one?' Then, I'll take that risk."

The booth

Rangers TV stage manager Ally Muntean is in her 10th season.

Ally literally has Lewin and Grieve's back. She's seated directly behind the broadcast team.

Each home game requires a TV crew of six or seven, comfortably spaced throughout an elongated work space behind home plate. Fans seated in Section 225 are directly below.

The TV booth is carpeted but sparse. A refrigerator and a microwave occupy space along the back wall, although no one can remember the last time anyone tried to microwave anything.

Lewin and Grieve sit in swivel desk chairs. A piece of tape marks each man's seat — first name only. Grieve chooses to watch the game without arm rests.

They wear matching headsets ... and seldom make eye contact. They know each other well enough now.

"It's bottled water for Tom and Diet Coke for Josh ... they're very easy," Muntean said of these two stars who don't act like stars.

"Yeah, I suck 'em down like crazy," said Lewin, whose plastic cup is constantly refilled with fresh Diet Coke.

"No soft drinks for me," said the heath-conscious Grieve, quickly adding, "But it's not that I don't like them. If you put a Pepsi in front of me right now, I'd drink it."

Around the third or fourth inning, a plate of whole wheat crackers and fresh fruit are placed on a small table between the two broadcasters.

If you've listened to a Rangers telecast, you know that cookies frequently make their way into the booth from well-wishers.

Viewers have options

Lewin has a rule about small talk.

"If it's a 4-3 game in the eighth, it's not the time to talk Dustin vs. Dustin," Lewin said. "But if it's 13-0 or even 9-2, you're basically singing for your supper. I mean, you don't want people turning the channel to a rerun of Scrubs quite yet."

Lewin has made it his business to fully comprehend the options available to a 21st-century television viewer.

"I'm always cognizant that Joe Consumer has 499 other channels available to him," Lewin said.

"If the game is lagging or we don't sound passionate about the product, he has 13 other games on the MLB package, besides the Travel Channel, The Discovery Channel, Speed ..."

You get the idea. And while Lewin "doesn't want to wear people out," he stands by his belief.

"Some of our older fans can remember when they would sit down to watch a baseball game, that was it. There was no remote control to click around," Lewin said. "In the '60s and '70s, dead air wasn't going to scare anybody away, but we're in a different time and place now."

Baseball is still the most affordable sport for families. Likewise, MLB has targeted a younger demographic.

"Fans we're trying to cultivate are 18, 19, 20 years old," Lewin said.

"Most of them probably have seven different windows open on their computer. They're jumping from a chat room to Facebook to Twitter to Sims to Mafia Wars ... [and] if they're doing seven things at once, I just want to make sure that Rangers baseball is one of the seven."

Preparation styles

Neither Grieve nor Lewin wants to be an air hog. Or a show stopper.

After 15 seasons in the Rangers TV booth, Grieve still maintains, "I've never looked at myself as a professional broadcaster."

Lewin, meanwhile, has a dual broadcasting career — in baseball and football. He does radio play-by-play for the San Diego Chargers.

Grieve has grown children nearly Lewin's age. In turn, Lewin was 3 years old when the Washington Senators moved to North Texas in the spring of 1972. A 24-year-old outfielder on that '72 Rangers team: Tom Grieve.

"Most of what I say comes from up here," said Grieve, tapping his forehead. "If I have something to chip in, I do it. If I don't have anything, I don't. And if I don't know the answer to a question, I'm not afraid to say, 'I don't know.' There are some people on radio and TV who are afraid to say that, and that's when you make a fool of yourself."

What Lewin and Grieve create on a nightly basis is "free-form jazz" — a term Josh has borrowed from fellow play-by-play broadcaster Gary Cohen of the New York Mets.

"Things might be a bit unpolished at times, but [Cohen's] analogy is that whatever notes you hit will probably be fine," explained Lewin, who has a passion for music. He plays keyboard in a band called Independent George.

"I think what we do," said Grieve, "we give each other our space."

Lewin puts considerable prep time into each broadcast — first at his Southlake home (where he lives with his wife and two school-aged children), then again when he arrives at the ballpark several hours before the game.

Does he ever get butterflies before going on the air?

"Not really," Lewin said. "I get more nervous standing up in front of 10 Kiwanis Club members."

Secret: No rehearsal

Lewin marks up his Rangers press box notes with multi-colored highlighters.

He checks his red cellphone for messages. He occasionally counts on his fingers and frequently checks the time on his wristwatch.

Lewin doesn't go 10 minutes without looking up something on the World Wide Web.

"You might already know it," he said. "But you still check it so you can say it with conviction."

Grieve's work station is less cluttered ... far less plugged in.

His career in television began alongside the legendary Mark Holtz in 1995. Holtz taught Grieve that an analyst's input should come naturally.

"Just watch the game and talk about what you see, when you want to," Holtz told Grieve. "I'll take care of everything else."

Lewin actually calculated between innings of a recent telecast: Grieve has been involved in more than 5,000 Rangers games as either a player (1972-77), general manager ('84-94) or broadcaster ('95-present).

Conversely, Lewin is a relative newbie. He came here in 2002 from the Detroit Tigers, where he also did TV.

"I had to inhale everything [Rangers] I could get my hands on," Lewin recalled. "Looking back, I learned the hard way that maybe I should've let Tag take the stick my first couple of years.

"I didn't necessarily need to blast into town and be a Rangers expert ... because, in fact, I wasn't."

Their biggest problem now is trying to find an on-air balance between the "infield fly rule" for the baseball diehard and the random stuff for the casual fan.

"I'd prefer everything to be spontaneous," Grieve said. "In fact, we don't rehearse anything."

The ratings show: More and more viewers are all right with that.

Angels start hitting nails into Rangers' coffin By JEFF WILSON

ARLINGTON — Well within reach of a postseason berth 10 days ago, the Texas Rangers knew their final long homestand of the season could be where they launched a charge into the playoffs.

Instead, Rangers Ballpark in Arlington will be the site where the Rangers all but bowed out of contention during a 2-7 homestand marred by soaking rains and an offensive drought.

Pitching, though, did in the Rangers on Sunday.

Derek Holland issued three homers and six runs in 5 2/3 innings, and the Angels scored three times in the sixth and seventh to rally to a 10-5 victory.

The Rangers were 5 1/2 games back in the West but only two back of Boston in the wild-card race when the homestand opened Sept. 11. But the Rangers lost two games in the standings to the Angels and a whopping six to the Red Sox in only nine days.

"It was either make or break us, and that's what it was," second baseman Ian Kinsler said. "We all knew it was important. We just didn't play well."

A 7-2 homestand, even with both losses to Los Angeles, would have left the Rangers only 2 1/2 games down in the West and three back in the wild-card race with 14 games to play.

The Angels' next three games are against New York, and they play the Rangers four more times. But those games will mean little for the Rangers unless the bizarre occurs during a quick four-game trip to Oakland and the final home series against Tampa Bay this weekend.

The Rangers faced a tough task entering the homestand. Now, it's a monumental task.

"We knew we had to rally and get some wins in a row, and hopefully something crazy would happen," center fielder Marlon Byrd said. "We keep falling back, falling further and further back. It makes it tough. We'll try to win as many games as possible and see what happens."

The offense disappeared for most of the homestand, especially once the stationary rain system moved out of town early last week. The Rangers suffered four shutouts in a five-game stretch and scored only once in 48 innings.

But the bats started early Sunday against John Lackey, jumping on the Aledo resident for three two-out runs in the first on singles by Hank Blalock and Nelson Cruz.

The Angels countered with two in the top of the second, the first of three times that Holland couldn't keep momentum in the Rangers' dugout.

Los Angeles received a solo home from Juan Rivera in the fourth to offset a Rangers run in the third. Holland's inability to give a shut-down inning continued after Byrd had given the Rangers a 5-3 lead in the fifth.

Holland (7-11) entered the sixth with a manageable 76 pitches, but Vladimir Guerrero beat the infield shift with a single to right, and Howie Kendrick tied the game two batters later with a shot into the left-center-field seats.

After recording his fifth strikeout, Holland surrendered an opposite-field solo homer to Gary Matthews Jr. to put the Angels up 6-5 and send Holland out of the game.

The Angels put the game away in the seventh with three more two-out runs. Jason Grilli replaced Neftali Feliz with two outs, and gave up a walk to load the bases. Kendrick followed with a triple off the glove of a stretched-out Byrd in center field.

Kendrick finished 3-for-5 with five RBI, and Holland saw his ERA jump to 6.17.

Ultimately, nothing worked during a critical homestand that has seen the Rangers all but disappear from postseason contention.

"Devastating, that's a harsh word," manager Ron Washington said. "You never know what might happen. They may go on a losing streak, and we may continue to play good baseball and go on a winning streak. They haven't put an X by our name yet, so our heads are still high."

Texas Rangers' Millwood ready to get back on hill

The questions of when and if Kevin Millwood will pitch again for the Rangers should be answered tonight.

Millwood, who hasn't pitched since Sept. 12, is scheduled to start the series opener against Oakland.

The right-hander has spent the time between starts working on his mechanics by throwing bullpen sessions and a simulated game. He's also had to deal with questions about if he'd pitch again. Millwood is just 4 1/3 innings away from reaching 180 on the year. Once he does that, his \$12 million contract of 2010 is guaranteed.

That hasn't been a concern of Millwood's.

"I'd like to get it over with so you guys don't ask me about it anymore," he said after Saturday's 10-5 loss to Los Angeles. "It's been tough to sit back and watch here lately. I just want to get out there and pitch."

Pitching coach Mike Maddux has stressed proper balance in his work with Millwood. He lasted just 3 2/3 innings in his last start, allowing eight hits and five runs.

Maddux said they watched video of Millwood from 2005 when he won an ERA title while pitching for Cleveland.

"We ran some things by him and he did them," Maddux said. "What we've been working on is exactly what he did in '05. We're getting back to basics."

— Anthony Andro