



Clips
(October 2, 2009)

From the Los Angeles Times

BASEBALL

Angels' Ervin Santana will start the playoffs in the bullpen

Angels will use a four-man rotation against Boston that includes John Lackey, who gets his final tuneup before the postseason in an 11-3 loss to Texas.

By Kevin Baxter

October 2, 2009

Mike Scioscia says he hasn't settled on a postseason roster, but the contours of the Angels' pitching rotation for their first-round series with the Boston Red Sox appear to be taking shape.

Scioscia announced that right-hander Ervin Santana, who gave the Angels the division title Monday with a seven-hit shutout of the Texas Rangers, will start the playoffs in the bullpen.

Scioscia juggled his pitching staff to have John Lackey, Jered Weaver, Scott Kazmir and Joe Saunders start the final four regular-season games in that order, and that's likely to be the way they will pitch against Boston.

"We're going to use those guys in some combination, which is still being determined," Scioscia said. "We're not committing to anything. We can still tinker with it."

In his final tuneup before the playoffs, Lackey made just 40 pitches in the Angels' final home game of the regular season Thursday, giving up a two-run home run to Chris Davis in an 11-3 Rangers win.

Although Scioscia started six regulars including Lackey, by the sixth inning nine of the 10 players in the lineup were minor leaguers.

If Scioscia sticks with that rotation, the Angels would start two left-handers in Fenway Park, with its short left field. Kazmir and Saunders have had success there, with Kazmir going 2-0 with a 3.27 ERA in two starts for Tampa Bay this summer while Saunders is 3-0 with a 2.84 ERA lifetime in Boston.

"If you look at how those guys have fared, they've pitched very well there," Scioscia said. "So that would be an option we'll be looking at."

Right-hander Jose Arredondo, meanwhile, may have pitched himself out of consideration for a spot on the playoff roster by walking three consecutive batters in a two-run ninth. Arredondo missed the strike zone with 17 of his 28 pitches.

The Adenharts get a cut

The Angels had a players-only meeting Wednesday to determine how they will divide their playoff shares. Although that information is kept closely guarded until after the World Series, it was learned the team has voted a full share to the family of rookie pitcher Nick Adenhardt, who was killed along with two friends when the car in which they were riding was struck by an alleged drunk driver after the third game of the season.

A full playoff share for the Angels last season was worth \$32,022.38, and a full share for the World Series champion Philadelphia Phillies amounted to \$351,504.48.

On the mend

Second baseman Howie Kendrick sat out his second consecutive game Thursday while undergoing treatment for a staph-like infection below his right knee. The infection developed after Kendrick tore open a scab sliding during Saturday's game with Oakland.

"We kind of caught it right at the beginning stages, so hopefully it will go away pretty soon," said Kendrick, who is taking antibiotics after receiving an injection during a doctor's visit Wednesday.

Dodgers rookie Xavier Paul was hospitalized with a staph infection that developed after he scraped a knee making a sliding catch during a May game in Miami. He wound up missing the rest of the season. However, Kendrick said he feels well enough to return to the lineup today.

"If it was up to me, I'd be ready to go," he said. "It's more being on the cautious side. We don't want anybody else to get it. So we're being a little more cautious right now."

Making up for lost time

Last year's playoff loss to the Red Sox was disappointing for everyone in the Angels' organization. But perhaps none felt it more deeply than Maicer Izturis, who missed the postseason after undergoing season-ending surgery on his left thumb in August.

"I was really sad. And a little frustrated," said Izturis, the team's opening-day shortstop last season. "I knew if I did my job I could have helped. Playing defense, running the bases. Something "

He will get the chance this fall. Izturis, who goes into the final weekend of the season having already played in a career-high 114 games -- establishing personal bests for batting (.300), home runs (8), runs (74) and RBIs (65) -- figures to play a lot against Boston.

"He has the potential to be very, very important to us, whatever his role is," Scioscia said. "There's a lot of things that Izzy does that are important to us."

Short hops

The Angels' three runs Thursday pushed their season total to 869, breaking the 30-year-old club record of 866. The Angels, who are hitting a baseball-best .285, are also on pace to break the franchise record for batting average. . . . Thursday's announced crowd of 38,552 brought the season attendance at Angel Stadium to 3,240,386. That's the lowest total since 2003, although it still ranks second, behind the Yankees, among American League clubs this season.

From the Orange County Register

Thursday, October 1, 2009

Starters to get tuneups; Santana goes to bullpen

Lackey's next start likely to be Game 1 of ALDS.

By BILL PLUNKETT
THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

ANAHEIM John Lackey might have found an odd formula for playoff success.

"I had my worst one (start) ever before last year's playoffs and did alright," the Angels right-hander said after giving up a two-run home run to Rangers designated hitter Chris Davis in his abbreviated final regular-season tuneup today.

Lackey threw just 40 pitches over two innings and the Angels went on to lose their final home game of the regular season, 11-3.

A year ago, Lackey was much worse in his season finale — 10 runs in 22/3 innings, also against the Rangers. In the playoffs, though, he held the Red Sox to four runs in 132/3 innings over two ALDS starts.

"You kind of try to fake yourself out in the bullpen. It's definitely a different feel," Lackey said of the lack of adrenaline in a game such as today's.

"I felt good. I threw about another 20 extra pitches (in the bullpen before his start). I got what I needed done."

Lackey's next start figures to be Game 1 of this year's ALDS against the Red Sox, either Wednesday or Thursday.

As expected, Manager Mike Scioscia said today that Ervin Santana would be the odd man out of the Angels' starting rotation and will move to the bullpen for the first-round series against the Red Sox. Santana will pitch once out of the bullpen this weekend as his final tuneup.

Like Lackey Thursday, Jered Weaver, Scott Kazmir and Joe Saunders each will make a shortened start in the season-ending series at Oakland.

"Ervin has done it before," Scioscia said. "Right now, those four guys that are going to finish this weekend for us are all throwing and pitching very well. Ervin is going to provide a lot of depth in our bullpen."

Santana could be used in any number of roles out of the bullpen, Scioscia said, though he indicated Kevin Jepsen, Darren Oliver and Jason Bulger will maintain their roles as the final links to closer Brian Fuentes.

NOTES

The Angels set a club record with their three runs scored today, giving them 869 this season. The previous record was 866 runs set in 1979. ...

The Angels announced the winners of their minor-league awards. Infielder Alexi Armista was selected the organization's Player of the Year, left-hander Trevor Reckling the Pitcher of the Year and outfielder Peter Bourjos the Defensive Player of the Year. Armista, 20, won the Class-A Midwest League batting title (.319). Reckling, 20, was 9-9 with a 2.68 ERA while going from the Class-A Cal League to Double-A Arkansas. Bourjos, 22, made just one error in 109 games for Double-A Arkansas.

The Angels finished the regular season with a total attendance of 3,240,386.

FRIDAY

RHP Weaver (15-8, 3.84) opposes Oakland A's LHP Gio Gonzalez (6-6, 5.73) at 7:05. The game will be broadcast on FSN, KLAA/830 and KWKW/1330 (Spanish).

Wednesday, September 30, 2009

Scioscia makes his pitch

The Angels' plans for the playoffs become clearer.

By BILL PLUNKETT
THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

ANAHEIM — Angels manager Mike Scioscia is still keeping his PIN number secret, but he finally has made his pitching plans obvious.

Though he reserved the right to "tinker with it" if the picture changes somehow this weekend, Scioscia has lined up his four starters for the playoffs in this order — John Lackey, Jered Weaver, Scott Kazmir and Joe Saunders — with Ervin Santana "likely" to head to the bullpen for the ALDS against the Boston Red Sox.

It is a bit of an unconventional choice, lining up two left-handed starters — Kazmir and Saunders — to pitch Games 3 and 4 in Boston where the Green Monster in left field traditionally has made life difficult for left-handers.

But Kazmir and Saunders each has had some success in Fenway Park.

Kazmir has a career record of 6-4 with a 3.05 ERA in 13 regular-season starts including 2-0 with a 3.27 ERA this season. He also started twice against the Red Sox for the Tampa Bay Rays in last year's ALCS, including Game 5 at Fenway Park where he held the Red Sox to two hits in six shutout innings, though the Rays eventually lost.

"I don't know," Kazmir said when asked to explain his success at Fenway Park. "You can't pinpoint one thing against that lineup. All the hitters they have on that team, they can just attack you.

"I'm one of those guys who likes that stage, I guess. The fans are right on top of you, yelling. I kind of like that."

Saunders is 3-0 with a 2.84 ERA in four career starts at Fenway Park. His only postseason start is the Angels' only victory over the Red Sox in their three ALDS meetings over the past five years — Game 3 at Fenway Park last year.

Probable ALDS rotation

Game 1 at Angel Stadium (Wednesday or Thursday, time TBA): John Lackey (11-8, 3.88) vs. Jon Lester (15-8, 3.41)

Game 2 at Angel Stadium (Friday, time TBA): Jered Weaver (15-8, 3.84) vs. Josh Beckett (16-6, 3.78)

Game 3 at Boston (Oct. 11, time TBA): Scott Kazmir (9-9, 5.06) vs. Clay Buchholz (7-4, 3.74)

x-Game 4 at Boston (Oct. 12, time TBA) LHP Joe Saunders (15-7, 4.62) vs. RHP Daisuke Matsuzaka (3-6, 6.08)

x-Game 5 at Angel Stadium (Oct. 14, time TBA)

x- If necessary

Thursday, October 1, 2009

Monkeys, halos, fans flood Angels rally

Post-season party at Angel Stadium sends team off in style.

By ERIC CARPENTER
THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

ANAHEIM – As the ball game inside Angel Stadium wound down and some fans headed for the exits Thursday evening, thousands more fans began flooding into the aisles, looking for the best seats.

They rushed through the gates after the eighth inning of the game to find a seat for a free, post-game, post-season rally. The intent: To cheer on the Angels and pump up fans as the team heads into the playoffs for the third consecutive year.

The Angels lost their final home game 11-3. The team is headed to Oakland for the final three regular-season games of the year, before coming home for the American League Division Series against the Boston Red Sox – which will start either next Wednesday or Thursday.

Despite Thursday's loss, fans at the rally were pumped and already thinking about the playoffs.

"I'm totally excited that we're back in the playoffs. That's a big accomplishment," said Larry Ferguson, 32, a fan as long as he can remember. "But it's not good enough just to get in the post-season this year. We've got something to prove."

Ferguson echoed what many Angel fans were saying at the start of the rally. The Angels have captured the American League West title for three consecutive years. The past two years, they exited quietly after the first playoff series – losing both times to the team from Boston.

They want to avoid a repeat of that this year.

"It used to be the Yankees felt like our big nemesis – now it's those darn Red Sox. We've got to get past them this year – got to!" said Claudia Garcia, 36, of La Habra. She and her three kids were covered in Angel red and adorned with Rally Monkeys – the team's lucky mascot – around their necks.

Fans formed a sea of red and cheered wildly as team members emerged minutes after the game in street clothes, before boarding the team bus in right field.

Star players Torii Hunter and Chone Figgins took to a stage set up in the infield and vowed that they would do their best to ensure a more positive result in the playoffs this year.

Hunter called this the best team he's played with in his long career and told the crowd: "We've got a lot of motivation," citing previous playoff disappointments and the death of pitcher Nick Adenhardt, who was killed at the start of the season in a traffic accident in which the other car's driver is accused of driving drunk.

Fans also were led in cheers by former Angel players Clyde Wright and Bobby Grich, who led the chant "Yes We Can."

The rally started with a parachute jump by the U.S. Army Golden Knights. And ended with an elaborate fireworks display.

Garcia, who brought eight family members all together, said she couldn't afford to bring her whole family to the game – and definitely won't be able to afford playoff tickets. But she wanted her family to be a part of the rally.

"It feels like a family being an Angels fan," Garcia said. "And letting us come in for free is a cool thing for the team to do. The kids are bouncing off the walls. And it makes us feel like we're part of the family, even though we'll be rooting from home after this."

Angels manager Scioscia moving Santana to bullpen for postseason

By The Associated Press

Posted: 10/02/2009 12:00:00 AM PDT

ANAHEIM - Manager Mike Scioscia confirmed Thursday what was expected, that Ervin Santana will pitch out of the bullpen when the playoffs begin next week.

In lining up his rotation for the final series of the season, Santana was not included. Jered Weaver will pitch tonight in Oakland, followed by Scott Kazmir and Joe Saunders.

Santana will pitch in relief during one of the games this weekend before taking a relief role for the American League Division Series against the Boston Red Sox.

"He obviously adds an incredible piece to a bullpen and we'll see how things pan out," Scioscia said. "We're going to have to wait and see how things develop to exactly where he will be most valuable to us, but just having him down there adds a tremendous amount of depth to a lot of areas."

In 2005, Santana worked out of a long relief role and proved valuable when he entered in the second inning of the deciding Game 5 of the American League Division Series against the New York Yankees. Taking over for an injured Bartolo Colon, Santana pitched the Angels into the American League Championship Series.

He will most certainly be responsible for covering that role in this postseason and could be counted on to pitch in the seventh or eighth innings of games where the Angels have the lead. But Scioscia sees an even different spot where Santana could be of use.

"I think there will be a bigger opportunity to pitch in extra innings if he was needed," Scioscia said. "There is a lot we can look at and we'll see how it evolves. There will be a functional role for him down there."

Final tuneup

If you blinked you missed it as John Lackey pitched just two innings Thursday in his final start of the season. The outing, which was scheduled to be brief, lasted 40 pitches. He also threw 20 at full strength in a simulated setting in the bullpen before the game.

Lackey gave up two runs on four hits with two strikeouts. Both runs came on a home run from the Texas Rangers' Chris Davis.

Unhappy with his previous two starts, when he gave up a combined 10 earned runs, Lackey was trying to fine tune his delivery.

"It was nothing in particular, I just need to execute pitches a little better," Lackey said. "It's not one specific thing."

Close call

Angels reliever Trevor Bell got a scare in the fifth inning, when the head of Davis' broken bat hit the right-hander on the left shoulder. Bell wasn't even looking as the end of the barrel, and not the pointed broken end, nailed him.

He fell to the ground and was helped off the field by the training staff. Davis ended up with a groundout to shortstop.

Bell returned to pitch in the sixth inning. He gave up six runs (three earned) on six hits in 23 innings.

"My attention was on the ball so I had no idea the bat even broke," Bell said. "It took me a second to figure out what happened. I was joking with (Jered Weaver) and said, 'Weave, why did you come out and punch me in the shoulder?'"

More from K-Mo

Kendry Morales hit a two-run home run in the third inning, his 34 th of the season. He also has 107 RBIs.

Morales is now tied for the club record for home runs by a first baseman. Mo Vaughn had 36 in 2000, but 34 came while playing at first. Wally Joyner had 34 in 1987.

In his last four games, Morales has three home runs and eight RBIs.

Also ...

Thursday was the team's annual hazing day as rookies had to dress in costume for the flight to Oakland. Matt Palmer was an oversized baby with rattle and bottle, Sean O'Sullivan was one of the Teletubbies, Rafael Rodriguez wore an inflatable ostrich costume, Bell wore a Reno-911 police officer's uniform, while Chris Pettit modeled a pink dress. - The Angels' 869 runs are a club record. - Angels starters have a 2.62 ERA over their last 31 outings and have allowed two earned runs or less in 25 of their last 35 games. - The Angels finished with a total home attendance of 3,240,386, second in the American League to the Yankees' 3,719,358.

Angels outfielder Hunter ready for postseason to commence

By Doug Padilla Special to the Daily News

Posted: 10/02/2009 12:00:00 AM PDT

ANAHEIM - Torii Hunter isn't swinging the bat well and admits that he is still searching for things at the plate. So why is this man smiling?

The calendar has just flipped to October.

It's that time of the year when even the worst struggles are wiped clean for a new start come playoff time. Of course the bright lights of the postseason can humble a man - just ask Alex Rodriguez - but Hunter isn't coming at it from that angle this year.

"When I'm in the playoffs I'm a different player no matter what," the Angels center fielder said.

The stats would seem to back that up. In five previous division series, Hunter is batting .350 with three home runs and 13 RBIs. Those numbers have come in 20 games, meaning that if Hunter played in with the intensity of the postseason for the entire regular-season schedule, he would be on pace for 105 RBIs.

"I can't even explain it to you man," said Hunter, who was not in the starting lineup for Thursday's regular-season home finale, an 11-3 loss against to the Texas Rangers. "It's a different adrenaline, it's a different mindset, everything. You're hungry. You want to win. You find ways to win."

The team's hottest hitter in the first half has been a mere mortal over the final two months, though, ever since he returned from a strained right adductor muscle.

The injury first happened in late May, when he crashed into the wall at Dodger Stadium while taking an extra-base hit away from Matt Kemp. He met another unforgiving wall in San Francisco less than three weeks later and made the injury even worse.

It wasn't until early July, though, that he left the lineup. By July 10, his disabled-list stint was made official.

The adductor healed and Hunter rebuilt his core strength, but not everything came back as it once was.

"It just went away," Hunter said of a sweet swing that produced a .305 first-half batting average with 17 home runs and 65 RBIs in 285 at-bats. Since returning to action Aug. 16, he has a .286 batting average with five home runs and 23 RBIs in 161 at-bats.

"Since I came back I never felt the same," Hunter said. "I wish I never got hurt. I'd probably still be doing what I do. But I lost my rhythm. I lost everything. I lost my timing and my swing and it's taken me a while to find it."

While the second half has belonged to Kendry Morales, the team's MVP as voted on by Angels players, Hunter was the main man in the first half. He earned his third career All-Star Game appearance, but had to miss the game in St. Louis.

"I would like to have seen what Torii would have done if he didn't miss the five weeks of playing time," manager Mike Scioscia said. "I'm really sold that he would have been a leading (American League) MVP candidate for what he did to both from the defensive side and the numbers he would have put up on offense."

It's not like the playoffs are some kind of guarantee that Hunter will thrive. In his only championship series, in 2002 for the Minnesota Twins against the Angels, he batted just .167 (3 for 18).

Yet, as the Angels are getting in their final preparations before playing host to the Boston Red Sox next week in the American League Division Series, Hunter is stress free. Even as things are about to get more hectic and intense, he has an inner calm.

"During the season you have numbers you want to put up and when you put up those numbers and reach your goals, you're going to help your team out," Hunter said. "But when you're in the playoffs you're just trying to win whether it's hitting a guy over, bunting him over, getting that run over, whatever it may be, you're just trying to win.

"That's something I really know how to do."

From the Press Enterprise

Millwood gets some consolation

RANGERS 11, ANGELS 3 Lackey says it's time for the Angels to end the talk of a Red Sox playoff hex.

The Associated Press

ANAHEIM - While the playoff-bound Angels and their fans were enjoying a postgame pep rally on the field, Kevin Millwood was in the visitor's clubhouse savoring a positive ending to a difficult season.

Millwood struck out a season-high 10 and recorded his third complete game of the year, beating the Angels, 11-3, Thursday night.

"I didn't want to come out," Millwood (13-10) said. "We get paid to win ballgames, and that's the way we've got to approach it. This place has been pretty miserable the last three days, so getting a win today was pretty important for us."

Chris Davis homered and drove in three runs, and Julio Borbon drove in the go-ahead run in a six-run sixth inning.

The Angels, who completed their home schedule with a 49-32 record, open the division series in Anaheim next week against the Boston Red Sox, who beat them in the first round in each of the previous two years.

John Lackey (11-8, 3.83 ERA), who will start the playoff opener, threw 40 pitches over two innings and allowed two runs on four hits in his final tuneup. His only start against Boston resulted in a 4-1 loss on Sept. 15 at Fenway Park.

Lackey, Jered Weaver, Scott Kazmir and Joe Saunders are the other starters.

"You've got to like our four starters for sure, but they've got four pretty good guys, too," Lackey said, referring to Josh Beckett, Jon Lester, Clay Buchholz and Daisuke Matsuzaka. "We've just got to perform. We've got to get it done. We're tired of answering these questions. But until we win, it's still going to be there."

Davis, who sat out the previous two games because of a left hamstring strain, had his 21st homer in the second. Lackey was upset about Davis' slow trot around the bases and said something to him.

"He was going pretty slow, so I encouraged him to maybe move it along a little bit faster," Lackey said.

NOTES

The crowd of 38,552 gave the Angels a final attendance figure of 3,240,386, their lowest total since 2003.

The Angels' first run was their 867th, breaking the previous single-season franchise record set in 1979.

The Angels have 897 victories in this decade. Their previous best was 783 in the 1980s.

Vladimir Guerrero batted .404 this season against the Rangers. His career average against them is .396.

Texas won the season series 12-7, matching the best the Rangers have ever done against the Angels.

From angelsbaseball.com

Angels set franchise runs record

Club eclipses old mark of 866 in home finale

By Rhett Bollinger / MLB.com

10/01/09 10:30 PM ET

ANAHEIM -- Despite not making his first start of the season until Thursday, Angels outfielder Terry Evans somehow found a way to etch his name into the Angels' record books in back-to-back games.

A day after Evans drove home the Angels' 866th run on Wednesday to tie the franchise record for runs in a season, Evans scored the record-breaking run in the third inning of Thursday's 11-3 loss to the Rangers on a wild pitch by Kevin Millwood.

It was a cool treat for Evans, who was called up earlier this month after the rosters expanded to 40 players on Sept. 1.

"Someone texted me this morning about driving in the run to tie the record last night, so that was pretty cool," Evans said. "I didn't even realize it. But it's awesome. The coolest part is that I'm getting some playing time down the stretch."

Just moments after Evans scored, Kendry Morales connected for a two-run homer to add to the Halos' record-breaking total, which now stands at 869 runs with three games remaining.

The Angels' offense currently ranks second in the Majors in runs scored behind the Yankees (898), averaging 5.5 per game.

This season also marked the ninth time that the Angels reached the 800-runs plateau, with five of those seasons coming since Mike Scioscia took over as manager in 2000.

"It says a lot," catcher Mike Napoli said of the Angels' prolific offense. "We all worked together and clicked together this year, and it just happened. I don't know what to put on it, but we're just doing our thing."

Weaver ready for final pre-ALDS nod

Los Angeles (94-65) at Oakland (75-84), 7:05 p.m. PT

By Rhett Bollinger / MLB.com

10/02/09 12:01 AM ET

ANAHEIM -- Fresh off winning the Nick Adenhardt Award as the Angels' best pitcher this season as voted on by his teammates, right-hander Jered Weaver will make his final start of the season on Friday against the A's in the first game of the final regular-season series.

His start is expected to be a brief one, just like John Lackey's on Thursday, when the right-hander pitched just two innings against the Rangers before coming out of the game after deciding 40 pitches was enough to get a good feel.

Weaver said Thursday he wasn't sure how many innings he'll throw, but Angels manager Mike Scioscia said "it'll probably be a little bit short."

Weaver did say his approach, however, will remain the same as when he took the mound in his other 32 starts this season.

"You treat it the same way," Weaver said. "You still take the winning mentality out there, but at the same time you're trying to clean some stuff up to get everything mechanically sound going into the playoffs."

It'll be Weaver's last tuneup before likely starting Game 2 of the American League Division Series against the Red Sox at Angel Stadium on Friday.

Scioscia unofficially unveiled his starting rotation for the first-round of the playoffs with Lackey and Weaver starting the first two games, and then left-handers Scott Kazmir and Joe Saunders following them.

But Scioscia said the team's series in Oakland could change the order of the rotation, depending on how his pitchers feel after their short outings.

"There are a few things coming out of this weekend, such as how our starters feel, and it'll give us a little direction for what our roster will be," Scioscia said.

Both Scioscia and Weaver, though, said it'll be important for the team to maintain its usual intensity during the three-game series, even though it has no bearing on the playoff picture.

"Hopefully we can take these three games seriously," Weaver said. "Momentum is huge. It's a big part of getting into the playoffs."

Pitching matchup

LAA: RHP Jered Weaver (15-8, 3.84 ERA)

Weaver, enduring a hard-luck stretch, yielded only two earned runs in six innings against

the Athletics on Friday night at home but dropped his third straight start for the first time in his career. A leadoff walk in the fifth cost him a run on a two-out single, and another two-out hit delivered the second A's run in the sixth. Weaver gave up six hits and three walks, striking out one. Weaver is 0-1 with a 4.02 ERA in three starts against the A's this season and 2-3, 2.93 in 10 career outings.

OAK: LHP Gio Gonzalez (6-6, 5.73 ERA)

Gonzalez shook off his previous two shaky outings to throw 6 1/3 scoreless innings against the high-powered Angels offense on Friday at Angel Stadium to get his sixth win of the season. Gonzalez also struck out seven batters and walked just one. Gonzalez is 1-0 with a 3.86 ERA in two starts against the Angels this season.

Tidbits

Bobby Abreu will reach a milestone in his next start, as it will mark the 12th straight season in which he has played in at least 150 games. Only Willie Mays, Pete Rose, Billy Williams and Cal Ripken have accomplished that feat. ... On Thursday, the Angels announced their Minor League awards for the 2009 season, naming infielder Alexi Amarista as Player of the Year, left-handed pitcher Trevor Reckling as Pitcher of the Year and outfielder Peter Bourjos as Defensive Player of the Year. ... The Angels are 9-7 against the A's this season.

Questions turn to Sox after Angels fall

ALDS takes focus after Rangers' rout spoils home finale

By Lyle Spencer / MLB.com

10/01/09 11:10 PM ET

ANAHEIM -- Halos righty John Lackey faced 10 batters during Thursday's game against the Rangers, and at least that many questions after regarding the Red Sox and their recent postseason stranglehold on the Angels in anticipation of a third consecutive American League Division Series showdown next week.

"We're tired of answering the questions, and you're probably tired of asking them," said Lackey, the Angels' likely choice to open the series. "Until we win it, it's probably going to be there."

The Rangers struck early against Lackey in the Angels' home finale and went on to register an 11-3 victory on Thursday in front of 38,552 at Angel Stadium.

After Lackey yielded a two-run homer to Chris Davis in the second inning, the Angels came back in the third against Kevin Millwood to take the lead with three runs, establishing a franchise record for runs in a season with 869.

Terry Evans delivered the record-breaking run after leading off with a single and scoring on a wild pitch before Kendry Morales unloaded a two-run homer to left-center, No. 34 of the year for the slugging first baseman. Morales has 107 RBIs.

Lackey said he threw about 20 pitches in his pregame bullpen session, having been informed by manager Mike Scioscia he'd probably go no more than two innings.

"I felt good," Lackey said. "I worked on some things in the bullpen. I knew I wasn't going to be out there for long."

Lackey wasn't happy with the time it took Davis to complete his home run trot, not learning the first baseman was favoring a hamstring ailment until his next at-bat when Davis told catcher Jeff Mathis.

The Angels, losing the season series (11-8) to the Rangers for the first time in five years, will go into the postseason with a rotation of Lackey, Jered Weaver, Scott Kazmir and Joe Saunders, with Ervin Santana joining the bullpen.

Scioscia is waiting to see how Lackey comes out of his weekend bullpen session before announcing the order of his starters, but it's apparent how the Red Sox will line up. Boston figures to open with Jon Lester, who pitched superbly on Thursday, followed by Josh Beckett, Clay Buchholz and Daisuke Matsuzaka.

Angels starters have a combined 2.62 ERA in 31 games since the Aug. 28 arrival of Kazmir, who, with Saunders, gives Scioscia two lefties who have experienced success at Fenway Park.

That's where Games 3 and 4 (if necessary) will be played after the first two are held at Angel Stadium.

"You've got to like our four starters, sure," Lackey said. "They've got pretty good guys, too."

After Morales' homer in the third against Millwood (13-10) in the home finale, the Rangers tied it with a fifth inning run on Ian Kinsler's RBI double against Rich Thompson.

Texas broke it open with a six-run sixth against Trevor Bell, the rookie right-hander narrowly escaping injury in the fifth when Davis lined out to short.

As he looked toward the path of the ball, Bell was struck by part of Davis' broken bat. He avoided the scare and stayed in the game.

"I was following the ball, and it just hit me," Bell said, having dropped to 1-2 with the loss. "I had no idea the bat had even broken. It took me a second to figure it out."

Bell said the left shoulder was swollen, adding, "I'm lucky the [sharp] end didn't go in the shoulder."

The Angels, who wrap up the season with three weekend games in Oakland, finished their home slate 49-32. They are 45-33 on the road.

"Physically, we're healthy," Lackey said. "That's a big key. The year before last, we were pretty banged up. The guys feel pretty good. We've got to get the boys back in there this weekend and get ready."

Lackey shows intensity in final tuneup

Angels ace jaws with Rangers' Davis during his two frames

By Rhett Bollinger / MLB.com

10/01/09 10:20 PM ET

ANAHEIM -- If there was any question whether right-hander John Lackey would bring his normal intensity into his planned two-inning start on Thursday, it was answered in the second inning, when the Rangers' Chris Davis hit a two-run homer and took his time trotting around the bases.

Lackey didn't appreciate seeing Davis trotting slowly, so he yelled at him to hurry up while Davis was rounding both second and third base.

"I encouraged him to maybe move along a little faster," Lackey said after the Angels' 11-3 loss at Angel Stadium. "I knew I was throwing only two innings, so I was like, 'Come on.'"

But the one thing Lackey didn't know at the time was that Davis was running slowly because he has been nursing an injured left hamstring. Lackey didn't find that out until Davis told Angels catcher Jeff Mathis about his injury the next time he came up to the plate.

"I didn't know until he told Mathis," Lackey said. "It's not a big deal now. It's whatever."

Davis agreed it wasn't a big deal as well because he knew that Lackey didn't know about his hamstring injury.

"He definitely had no idea I was hurt," Davis said. "I can't see myself run around the bases, but I wasn't being disrespectful. I ran like I always do with my head down. I didn't do anything different."

The two-run homer gave the Rangers the only two runs they scored off Lackey. He allowed four hits and walked none while striking out two.

Lackey also threw 40 pitches in his final tuneup before starting next week against the Red Sox in the American League Division Series after throwing 20 extra pitches in a pregame bullpen.

"It felt good," said Lackey, who finished the regular season with an 11-8 record and a 3.83 ERA and figures to get the Game 1 nod on either Wednesday or Thursday. "I worked on a few things and got what I need to get done."

Fans gear up for ALDS after home finale

Angel Stadium hosts rally prior to Halos' final road trip

By Rhett Bollinger / MLB.com

10/01/09 11:00 PM ET

ANAHEIM -- Several former and current Angels helped celebrate the club's fifth American League West title in six seasons at a postseason rally in front of an estimated 40,000 fans on Thursday at Angel Stadium immediately after the club's 11-3 loss to the Rangers in its final home game of the regular season.

Broadcasters Steve Physioc and Rex Hudler hosted the event and invited players and manager Mike Scioscia up to the stage at second base to thank the fans.

"These are the best fans in the world, and I've seen a lot around the country," Scioscia said over the loudspeaker. "We couldn't have this atmosphere without the fans."

Many of the 38,552 that attended Thursday's game stuck around for the free postgame rally, while others were let in after the eighth inning.

Fans chanted for players when they went on the stage, such as when Torii Hunter and Chone Figgins went up to together to say a few words.

"It's like basketball. You guys are like the sixth man," said Figgins. "We couldn't do it without you."

Hunter elicited the loudest cheers when he announced that the Angels are "the team to beat" and that the team is going to the playoffs "in Nick Adenhardt's honor."

A few former Angels such as Bobby Grich and Clyde Wright also took the platform, and they didn't hold back.

"I'm sick and tired hearing about Boston and the Yankees," said Wright, who owns the franchise record for most wins in a season by a left-hander with 22. "I think it's about time to shut them all up."

The event also featured highlights of the 2009 season on the video board, the U.S. Army Parachute Team, "Golden Knights," and a fireworks show set to music to end the night.

Santana to spend ALDS in Angels' bullpen

Scioscia undecided on order, but rotation's pieces in place

By Rhett Bollinger / MLB.com

10/01/09 6:10 PM ET

ANAHEIM -- Angels manager Mike Scioscia, somewhat by default, unveiled his starting rotation for the American League Division Series by announcing that right-hander Ervin Santana will be in the bullpen during their first-round matchup with the Red Sox.

Scioscia wouldn't announce the order of the starters, but it appears to be right-handers John Lackey and Jered Weaver here followed by left-handers Scott Kazmir and Joe Saunders in Boston, based on the order of their starts to close the season. Game 5 of the best-of-five series would be back at Angel Stadium.

But Scioscia said he's waiting to see how his pitchers come out of their starts, with Lackey going Thursday against the Rangers before Weaver, Kazmir and Saunders go this weekend against the A's.

"We're not committing to anything," Scioscia said. "We're going to get these guys ready. We can still tinker with it."

Scioscia is expected to start his left-handers at Fenway Park because of their past success in Boston. Kazmir is 6-4 with a 3.05 ERA at Fenway in 13 career starts, while Saunders is 3-0 with a 2.84 ERA in four career starts there.

"If you look at how those guys have fared, they've pitched really well there," Scioscia said. "So that could be an option."

Meanwhile, Santana will pitch out of the bullpen in one game this weekend against the A's on either Saturday or Sunday.

Santana's role in the bullpen is yet to be defined, as Scioscia said he's still comfortable with the back end of his bullpen. Darren Oliver, Jason Bulger, Kevin Jepsen and Brian Fuentes expected to retain their regular-season roles.

"There are a number of roles for Ervin," Scioscia said. "He could pitch in some of the middle to possibly later innings. He also could have a big opportunity to pitch in extra innings to start fresh. And he could also come in early, too, in like in the third if we're in trouble."

The other benefit is that Santana has some experience as a reliever in the postseason, as he served in that capacity in both 2005 and '07.

In '05, he came in the game in the second inning against the Yankees in Game 5 of the ALDS after Bartolo Colon lasted just one inning and picked up the series-clinching win in the process. And in '07, he threw two scoreless innings in Game 1 against the Red Sox.

"He obviously adds an incredible piece to our bullpen," Scioscia said. "Ervin has done it before, and I think right now those four guys are all pitching very well, so Ervin will be called on to provide a lot of depth in our bullpen."

Weaver honored with first Adenhardt Award

Morales named Angels MVP as players hand out hardware

By Rhett Bollinger / MLB.com

10/01/09 5:50 PM ET

ANAHEIM -- Angels right-hander Jered Weaver was honored with the first Nick Adenhardt Award as the team's best pitcher and first baseman Kendry Morales was voted the team's Most Valuable Player by their teammates on Wednesday.

"It's a tremendous honor, not only that the teammates voted on it, but that it was named after Nick," said Weaver, who was very close to Adenhardt before the pitcher was tragically killed in a car accident on April 9. "It's something I'll be able to hang up and remember him by.

"I'll be able to look at it and remember what a good person, teammate and friend he was."

Angels manager Mike Scioscia was also happy to see Weaver win the award, knowing that the righty was a close friend of Adenhardt's while also being the most consistent starter this season with a 15-8 record and a 3.84 ERA in 32 starts.

"Weav has been the rock of our rotation this year," Scioscia said. "He's made every start and always gives us a chance to win. So Weav getting the Nick Adenhardt Award is very special."

Meanwhile, Morales was also honored by winning the MVP in just his first season as a regular starter.

He's put up huge numbers this season with a .303 batting average, 33 home runs and 105 RBIs. And he beat out Bobby Abreu, Torii Hunter and Chone Figgins, who are all had big years as well.

"When you're voted MVP of your club by your peers that means something," Scioscia said. "I think it just underlines the terrific year he's had and what a terrific career he's going to have."

Molitor, Abreu: two of a kind

When I first came up to big league camp with the Twins in 1997, Paul Molitor was nearing the end of his career, and he had a big impact on me. What's interesting is that I now see so many similarities between Molitor and Bobby Abreu, who has been such a great teammate this season.

Molly came over and didn't talk about himself, what he'd done. He just talked about things that he thought could help me. It wasn't like he was trying to tell me what to do - he was giving me options, things to think about. He wasn't about changing your swing. It was about figuring out the best ways to use your natural ability.

One of the things Molly stressed was getting a good pitch to hit. Be aggressive, but also be smart. Don't bury yourself in counts swinging at pitchers' pitches. I'd been a very aggressive hitter in my Minor League career, and Molly stressed that I had a better chance of getting hits swinging at strikes.

He had so much information and was so willing to share it, I couldn't understand why more guys didn't go to him. Corey Koskie, Jacque Jones and myself, we all tried to pick his brain every chance we got. He was a DH in '97 and '98, at the end of his career, but we knew everything he accomplished - 3,000 hits, clutch hitter, World Series champion.

He had a short stroke and was aggressive up there. Back in those days, it wasn't about on-base percentage and walks as much as it is now, and from my point of view that's more about how the strike zone has changed than anything else. You look at old game film on MLB Network, and you'll see strikes called that are balls now.

With Bobby, it's the same thing here, working with all these young guys, as it was with Molly in Minnesota. Bobby will talk about hitting, baserunning, defense, anything you want to talk about. He knows the game inside-out.

He's been a huge help to Erick Aybar, Kendry Morales, even better players like Chone Figgins and myself. Howard Kendrick, I'm sure he's gone to Bobby. When you have somebody like that in your clubhouse, you take advantage of his knowledge.

One thing Bobby pushes is that you've got a better chance to get a hit in the strike zone - the same thing Molly talked about. With Bobby, he can tell you about it and show you how to do it. His approach up there is amazing. He has such great awareness of the strike zone and confidence in his ability to hit with two strikes. He's always looking for that pitch he can handle, and when he sees it, he goes after it.

Something else about Bobby: He's always been a clutch hitter. Just like Molly. When I was in Minnesota, Bobby was the one guy we didn't want to beat us. Everybody knew what kind of hitter he was in the clutch.

It seems like Bobby is finally starting to get the respect he deserves with the media and fans. He's always had much respect from the players. Everyone in the game knows what a great player he's been for a long time.

When you think about it, it was that way with Molly too. Late in his career, people started looking at his numbers and seeing how great he'd been for a long time.

I've been lucky to play with two guys like that - total pros who play the game right and love to share their knowledge and experience.

-Torii Hunter

From the Los Angeles Times Blogs

Pick the best from record-setting offenses

October 2, 2009 | 9:13 am

In 1979, the Angels set a club record by scoring 866 runs. The record stood for 30 years, until Thursday. This year's Angels have scored 869 runs, with three games to play.

The 1979 offense might be a little bit more impressive in retrospect. They led the league in runs scored in what was a pitchers' park; this year's Angels rank second in what is a more neutral park. The American League ERA was 4.23 in 1979; it is 4.45 this year.

Enough with the nitpicking. We want to select the best offensive lineup from the two teams. You can click on the links above for all the statistics, and let us know your choices:

C: Brian Downing (.326, 12 HR, 75 RBI) or Mike Napoli (.267, 19 HR, 54 RBI)?

1B: Rod Carew (.318, 3 HR, 44 RBI) or Kendry Morales (.304, 34 HR, 107 RBI)?

2B: Bobby Grich (.294, 30 HR, 101 RBI) or Howie Kendrick (.298, 10 HR, 61 RBI)?

SS: Jim Anderson (.248, 3 HR, 23 RBI) or Erick Aybar (.304, 5 HR, 58 RBI)?

3B: Carney Lansford (.287, 19 HR, 79 RBI) or Chone Figgins (.300, 5 HR, 54 RBI)?

LF: Joe Rudi (.242, 11 HR, 61 RBI) or Juan Rivera (.285, 24 HR, 87 RBI)?

CF: Rick Miller (.293, 2 HR, 28 RBI) or Torii Hunter (.298, 22 HR, 88 RBI)?

RF: Dan Ford (.290, 21 HR, 101 RBI) or Bobby Abreu (.297, 15 HR, 102 RBI)?

DH: Don Baylor (.296, 36 HR, 139 RBI) or Vladimir Guerrero (.294, 15 HR, 50 RBI)?

UT: Willie Aikens (.280, 21 HR, 81 RBI) or Maicer Izturis (.300, 8 HR, 65 RBI)?

-- Bill Shaikin

One big key: The on-base duel

October 1, 2009 | 9:45 pm

In the upcoming Angels-Red Sox managerial chess match between Mike Scioscia and Terry Francona, nothing will be as important as the on-base duel between the two teams.

If you want to beat the Sox, you have to keep leadoff hitter Jacoby Ellsbury off base. He leads the American League with 67 steals and is the same kind of offensive catalyst as Chone Figgins. Ellsbury and second baseman Dustin Pedroia set up everything for Kevin Youkilis, Jason Bay, Victor Martinez and, yes, David Ortiz, who is alive and well by the way, contrary to popular opinion.

The Angels will counter with Figgins and Bobby Abreu, who between them have 71 steals. Torii Hunter (18), Erick Aybar (14), Maicer Izturis (13) and Howie Kendrick (11) could also pose problems stealing bases.

It's no secret Boston has been having trouble defensively behind the plate. Jason Varitek is a shadow of his old All-Star self, and Martinez is more noted for his bat than his glove. Together, they could have a difficult time with Scioscia's roadrunners, who will be taking off at every opportunity.

Again, it could come down to which of the top-of-the-order guys can get on base more consistently.

Ellsbury, who hits in the high .290s, only had a .351 on-base percentage going into Wednesday night's game. Pedroia, with a .369 OBP, is not much higher.

Figgins and Abreu, at .399 and .394 respectively, have been getting on base, with both hits and walks, regularly all season. For the Angels to win this series, that will have to continue in the first round.

The Red Sox's best on-base guys are in the heart of the order. Youkilis is at a remarkable .414, while Bay's OBP is an impressive .385.

So which team has the edge? Clearly, the Angels seem better at the top of the lineup, but the Sox rank higher in the middle.

Take your pick, but keep your eye on those OBP numbers. They could be the key to who wins this thing.

-- STEVE BISHEFF

Angels honor minor leaguers Amarista, Reckling and Bourjos

October 1, 2009 | 5:25 pm

The Angels announced their minor league organizational awards Thursday, naming infielder Alexi Amarista player of the year, left-hander Trevor Reckling pitcher of the year and outfielder Peter Bourjos defensive player of the year.

Amarista, a 20-year-old Venezuelan, led the Class-A Midwest League in hitting at .319 and ranked second in doubles (39) and triples (10). He also scored 84 runs and stole 38 bases in 125 games at Cedar Rapids.

Reckling, 20, started the year at Class-A Rancho Cucamonga, where he posted a 0.95 earned-run average in 19 innings to earn a promotion to double-A Arkansas. He went 8-7 with a 2.93 ERA for the Travelers, leading the team in wins, innings (135 1/3) and strikeouts (106). He finished the summer pitching for the victorious U.S. team in the World Cup, where he was sidelined after straining a muscle in his side.

Bourjos, 22, committed just one error in 109 games as an outfielder for double-A Arkansas, compiling a .997 fielding percentage. He also led the Texas League with 14 triples while batting .281 and scoring a team-high 72 runs.

-- Kevin Baxter

Red Sox defense: Good or bad?

October 1, 2009 | 9:39 am

Take a look at these statistics and you'd think the Boston Red Sox have a pretty good defense. Only five teams have committed fewer errors, and only five teams have a better fielding percentage.

In fact, the Red Sox have the best fielding percentage in the major leagues since they acquired Alex Gonzalez to plug a shortstop hole created by an injury to Jed Lowrie and filled poorly by Julio Lugo and Nick Green. In this article, Boston General Manager Theo Epstein's comments make clear he does not consider it a coincidence that the Red Sox have the best fielding percentage in the majors since Gonzalez's arrival.

But one statistician has a much different take. In this article at Baseball Prospectus (subscription required to read beyond the first part, and linked at the excellent local baseball site 6-4-2), author Jay Jaffe uses a statistic called defensive efficiency to argue that the Red Sox have the fourth-worst defense in the major leagues. He ranks third baseman Mike Lowell and center fielder Jacoby Ellsbury as particularly poor defenders, suggests catchers Victor Martinez and Jason Varitek will struggle to control the Angels' running game -- and says the defense actually has turned fewer balls into outs since the arrival of Gonzalez.

-- Bill Shaikin

From the Orange County Register

Expect this Angels lineup when playoffs start

October 2nd, 2009, 5:35 am by BILL PLUNKETT, OCREGISTER.COM

When the Angels open the ALDS next week against the Red Sox, it will be with the lineup featuring Bobby Abreu hitting second. Angels manager Mike Scioscia said that seemed to be the most productive setup “at this point.”

“When Bobby was hitting third, that lineup seemed like it ran its course,” Scioscia said. “I think this lineup with Bobby hitting second really connects a lot of our guys that are swinging the bats well and gives us a situational look down at the bottom of the lineup.

“When we had that situational look at the top of the lineup – whether it was with Izzy or Erick (Aybar) hitting in the 2 hole, we seemed to stall. The last few days and earlier in the year, this lineup has been very productive for us.”

The Angels actually have a losing record (23-24) when Abreu bats second. But they did break out of their September slump when Scioscia went back to that look last week, scoring 28 runs in the most recent three games Abreu started as the No. 2 hitter.

With the Red Sox expected to start a left-hander (Jon Lester) in ALDS Game 1, this is the Angels’ likely starting lineup:

3B Chone Figgins

RF Bobby Abreu

CF Torii Hunter

DH Vladimir Guerrero

LF Juan Rivera

1B Kendry Morales

2B Howie Kendrick

C Jeff Mathis

SS Erick Aybar

Rivera and Morales would swap places against the Red Sox’s right-handed starters Josh Beckett, Clay Buchholz and Daisuke Matsuzaka with Maicer Izturis replacing Kendrick.

Angels remember Adenhardt again

October 1st, 2009, 6:57 pm by BILL PLUNKETT, OCREGISTER.COM

ANGELS

Criticized in some quarters for their beer-and-champagne tribute to Nick Adenhardt during Monday's division-clinching celebration, the Angels acknowledged Adenhardt's memory in a much quieter way this week as well.

The team held its post-season meeting before Wednesday's game to vote on playoff shares. Players who were on the major-league roster the entire season divide up the shares, voting on partial shares for players who only spent part of the season with the team.

Adenhardt, who was killed by a drunk driver just four days into this season, was voted a full playoff share. The money will be given to Adenhardt's family.

Playoff shares are based on gate receipts for the entire post-season. A full share can run from approximately \$35,000 for teams eliminated in the first round to over \$350,000 for the World Series-winning team.

Santana odd man out for playoffs (lineups)

October 1st, 2009, 2:25 pm by BILL PLUNKETT, OCREGISTER.COM

ANAHEIM

Angels manager Mike Scioscia finally confirmed today that the Angels' post-season rotation is set and Ervin Santana will "most likely" go to the bullpen for the first-round series against the Red Sox.

After John Lackey makes his final tuneup start today, it will be Jered Weaver's turn tomorrow, Scott Kazmir Saturday and Joe Saunders on Sunday. Santana will pitch out of the bullpen once during the weekend series in Oakland.

Scioscia said he reserves the right to "tinker" with that setup if necessary — but that's not likely at this point. Look for Lackey and Weaver in Games 1 and 2 next week, Kazmir and Saunders in Games 3 and 4 (in Boston).

This is what Santana had to say about pitching out of the bullpen in the post-season (look for more at www.ocregister.com later).

"If we win the World Series it's not going to say who was in the bullpen and who was starting, is it?"

Prank or hoax? Jordan Walden victim of fake interview

October 1st, 2009, 1:31 pm · 139 Comments · posted by sammiller

A week ago, I posted an excerpt of an interview with Jordan Walden at an Angels fan site. Walden's answers were bold and confident. He boasted of the time he "completely dominated" his opponent in a playoff game. He said he would "absolutely not" convert to relief pitching if it were his best route to the majors. He professed love for sausage and eggs. "I can't go without my sausage and eggs."

The answers were out of character for the quiet Walden. "That's not how he talks at all," said Phil Elson, the voice of Walden's Double-A Arkansas Travelers.

He doesn't, and he didn't. "I never said any of that stuff," Walden told me by email yesterday. It appears that Walden's Facebook page was breached, and that he and AngelsWin.com were victims of either a prank or a hoax.

Here's what seems to have happened:

In March 2008, Chuck Richter — the executive editor of AngelsWin.com — sent Walden an interview request through Facebook. The pitcher agreed, but his answers were short. Richter decided not to run the interview, and he emailed Walden. "I said, 'You're probably busy right now, hit me up when you have some time.'"

Last Thursday, at about 4 a.m., Richter got an email from Walden. It had come from Walden's Facebook account, the same (real) account through which he and Richter had communicated before. No reason to be suspicious. Walden told Richter he was getting back to him on the previous interview request, and invited Richter to send his questions along. Richter reworked the questions, sent them along, and got a long and detailed reply. He ran the interview (you can see it here) on AngelsWin's blog.

On Tuesday, I got an anonymous email saying the interview was fake. "I know for a fact," the guy told me. I emailed Walden, who told me the interview wasn't him, and who contacted his agent, who contacted Richter.

"He went on to say Jordan is a quiet guy, and I brought up the interview that he did a year ago and (the agent) said 'Yeah, that's Jordan Walden. Really shy guy, hates doing interviews, kind of an introvert.' We came to the conclusion that his Facebook got hacked," Richter said.

By whom? Richter wonders whether it was a teammate, playing a trick on his buddy. Or one particular Walden-obsessed fan, orchestrating a hoax to fool the fan site.

The interview was removed from this site this week. It has shaken Richter — who has expanded AngelsWin to include some credentialed reporting at the stadium this year.

“All our interviews are legitimate,” he says. “Now comes the task of me trying to let everybody know that, Hey, this one was bogus.”

BALTIMORE ORIOLES

INSIDE PITCH

It's been two months. Brad Bergesen still can't run.

The Orioles pitcher, whose breakout rookie campaign was cut short when he was struck in the knee by a batted ball, told The Sun recently that he's still experiencing significant side-effects from what he feels was a hairline fracture of his left shin.

"That's just my own personal opinion," the 24-year-old right-hander said of the perceived fracture. "I've really been trying to rest it as much as possible and let it heal properly. I haven't tried running quite yet. I don't think I'm there, but pretty soon, I should start doing impact things on it."

Bergesen was 7-5 with a 3.43 ERA in 19 starts and was undoubtedly the club's best pitcher when Royals slugger Billy Butler lined a comebacker off his knee.

He plans to enter spring training with the mind-set of winning a job — not being handed one. But unless the Orioles significantly upgrade their rotation this winter, Bergesen can boldly etch his name into the club's plans.

Bergesen and fellow rookie Brian Matusz impressed enough in their debuts for president Andy MacPhail to pencil both into next year's rotation.

Matusz was supposed to be a top-of-the-rotation prospect. Bergesen, however, showed more than most analysts and front office members expected in his first stint in the majors. All of his pitches have movement, and Bergesen seems to be confident and comfortable beyond his 24 years.

ORIOLES 3, RAYS 2: The third-longest losing streak in club history ended at 13 games as the Orioles won their final road game of the season, finishing with a 25-56 road record. A strong spot start by LHP Chris Waters and RBIs by Nick Markakis, Melvin Mora and Jeff Fiorentino ensured that the Orioles finished their final road swing with a 1-9 record, averting the first winless trek of the season.

NOTES, QUOTES

—RHP Jeremy Guthrie has one more opportunity this weekend to put a positive spin on a disappointing 2009. Guthrie, who is 10-17 with a 5.05 ERA, told The Sun his preseason goals included making all his September starts and reaching 200 innings. Guthrie — who has missed significant time in the final month of the season in each of his first two years in Baltimore — needs 7 2/3 innings in Sunday's season finale to reach 200 innings.

—RHP Jim Johnson turned in just his fourth scoreless September appearance in Wednesday's loss. He then allowed a run during a harrowing ninth inning Thursday before picking up his ninth save in 15 opportunities and first since Sept. 5. Johnson has allowed runs in four of his past five appearances, and in six of his 10 games since Sept. 1. In 8 1/3 innings over that span, Johnson has an 11.89 ERA. He's likely pitched his way out of the closer role for 2010.

—RHP David Hernandez showed the typical glimpses of hope and causes for worry in the final outing of his rookie season. Hernandez allowed seven runs on five hits and two walks in 4 1/3 innings Wednesday against Tampa Bay to fall to 4-10. He struck out four but allowed two home runs — including a three-run blast by Ben Zobrist. Manager Dave Trembley said Hernandez must improve his secondary pitches and his command before next season.

BY THE NUMBERS: 18 — Losing seasons in the last 24 years for the Orioles, including 12 in a row.

QUOTE TO NOTE: "If I go in 10 days and be a free agent, I'll go with my head up. That I did everything I was supposed to do with the Orioles. Whatever I am going to be next year, I'll never get tired of thanking the Orioles, because I made my career here." — 3B Melvin Mora, to The Sun, on the likely culmination of his career upon the conclusion of the 2009 season.

BOSTON RED SOX

INSIDE PITCH

For the sixth time in his seven-year tenure as the Red Sox's general manager, Theo Epstein built a team deemed postseason worthy after baseball's gauntlet of a schedule.

It wasn't always easy when his team endured an epic 31-inning scoreless drought in front of a frothy Yankee Stadium crowd, or when the rotation began coming apart at the seams with each new low uncovered by Brad Penny or John Smoltz. But — in the end — the Sox find themselves in a familiar position as a wild-card team.

"It's something the organization is proud of. Our ultimate goal hasn't been reached yet, and it still in front of us. To do it six times (out of seven years) is something we're proud of and is part of our business plan," Epstein said. "In essence (our plan) is to build a club every year that's a 95-win team and gets us into the postseason — and helps us accomplish our goal every year, which is to win a World Series title."

Epstein executed one of his finest seasons with the Sox when he correctly diagnosed several ballclub flaws, and he found a suitable answer for each while keeping the integrity of his team intact.

He caught the Indians in the middle of a fire sale and essentially acquired an All-Star catcher for a long reliever/fifth starter and prospects. Epstein temporarily shut the revolving door at shortstop with a waiver deal for Alex Gonzalez, and he patiently waited for Clay Buchholz to develop into the No. 3 starter.

"This year we faced our challenges. We had some starting pitchers go down and had some starting pitchers not do very well," Epstein said. "Our defense wasn't as good as we projected it to be, and we went through a stretch of time during a crucial period where we didn't hit at all. That put us in a period of instability, and we came out of it."

The Massachusetts native is being modest in simply stating that the club "came out of it."

The simple truth is he did what every good baseball executive worth his weight in scouting reports would do. He went about creating solutions, and it's made all the difference for Boston with the playoffs waiting dead ahead.

RED SOX 3, INDIANS 0: Boston snapped a season-worst six-game losing streak and watched Jon Lester rebound strongly from taking a line drive off the right knee last weekend at Yankee Stadium. Lester pitched into the seventh inning and allowed only two hits while racking up his 15th win of the season. Victor Martinez collected two hits and scored a run in his first game against the team that dealt him at the trade deadline.

NOTES, QUOTES

—RF J.D. Drew was out of the lineup Thursday for the second straight game with a sore left shoulder, and manager Terry Francona indicated that Drew would also miss Friday's game. Resting Drew also gives the Sox coaching staff a chance to evaluate OF Joey Gathright for a potential spot on Boston's playoff roster given his blazing speed on the basepaths. "He's got great speed — game-impacting speed," Francona said. "You're always looking for that — and maybe here more than anywhere — that Dave Roberts guy. That's probably a long shot to think that that would happen. But, you know, he's a guy that can impact the game with his speed. So it's something that we need certainly think about moving forward."

—LHP Jon Lester looked no worse for the wear and didn't appear to have any difficulties with his right knee in Thursday night's win over the Indians. Lester was knocked out his last start at Yankee Stadium last weekend when he was drilled in the right knee with a line drive, but Lester finished with 6 1/3 innings of two-hit ball and experienced no pain in his knee. The 25-year-old lefty earned his 15th win of the season and surpassed 200 innings in Thursday night's outing, and he became the first Sox southpaw since Bruce Hurst to accomplish those benchmarks for two consecutive seasons. Manager Terry Francona wouldn't confirm it, but it appears that Lester has locked up his position as the Game 1 starter in the AL Division Series.

—RHP Josh Beckett threw a 62-pitch side session before Wednesday night's game and appears set to make his scheduled postseason tune-up start against the Cleveland Indians on Saturday night. Beckett had three minor cortisone shots administered to his sore back on Tuesday, but general manager Theo Epstein indicated that the staff ace should be

healthy going forward into the playoffs. "Beckett threw a really good side. He felt great," Epstein said. "It's significant news for us. We were really optimistic, but this confirms that he's in really good health."

—C Dusty Brown appeared in the ninth inning of Wednesday night's loss as a pitcher and made all kinds of Red Sox franchise history in the process. Brown became the franchise-record third position player to pitch for the Sox this season and also became the first catcher to pitch for Boston. OF Jonathan Van Every and SS Nick Green also have pitched for the Red Sox this season. Brown gave up a run in his inning of work but also fanned Toronto DH Randy Ruiz on a deceptively named 84 mph fastball. "I used to be a closer in junior college and actually had a few teams that looked at me as a pitcher," said Brown. "They approached me the inning before (about pitching), and I just went out there and just tried to get some outs."

BY THE NUMBERS: 26 — Major league-leading number of home runs that

DH David Ortiz hit from June 6 through Sept. 25.

QUOTE TO NOTE: "He's literally been our MVP. He's delivered big hit after big hit for us. He's run the bases well. He's been our staple, pretty much all year." — C Jason Varitek, talking about OF Jason Bay, who has set career highs in home runs and RBI in his first full season with the Red Sox.

CHICAGO WHITE SOX

INSIDE PITCH

Splitting a doubleheader against the lowly Indians on Wednesday before heading to Detroit for an off day didn't exactly make Ozzie Guillen's exit strategy from Chicago next week any easier.

It was after the 2007 season that the manager admitted he was "embarrassed" walking through the airport to leave the city for his winter home in Miami. It won't be any easier this time, no matter what the Sox do against the Tigers over the weekend.

"Of course, the same way," Guillen replied, when asked if he felt as embarrassed this time around.

"This year maybe even worse, because I felt like this year we had a shot more than 2007. Of course, when you don't do what you're expected to do, you feel like you owe somebody something. I think we owed the fans a better year than what we had.

"This year we had a chance, had an opportunity to be better than what we did, and we didn't do it. I came (to Cleveland) a couple days ago (through the Midway Airport), and

fans were still optimistic, people were still acting nice, but I don't blame the fans for being upset."

Not that Guillen and his players still weren't hoping to have some sort of final say in how the AL Central works out.

Friday starter Jake Peavy was up front about the fact that his last start of the season puts the Sox in the power position of trying to play spoilers.

"I think my last start, you definitely sense the anticipation on the other side of the ball," Peavy said. "I think it will take this team's play to another level when you see a team that has stuff to play for, as opposed to (Wednesday's doubleheader) where both teams are out of it, just playing the season out. Certainly you have guys playing hard, but it's a different atmosphere.

"I'm hoping Friday night in Detroit will be packed out and have a lot of energy in the ballpark."

NOTES, QUOTES

—LHP Mark Buehrle continued to show the White Sox why he is the face of the organization, taking the ball Wednesday night in a doubleheader and throwing six shutout innings, despite the fact he was supposed to be shut down for the rest of the season. Now Buehrle is looking ahead to next season, using the offseason to build his arm strength and hopefully be a part of an elite starting staff.

"It would be nice to start opening day," Buehrle said. "Someone said if I get one more it sets a record. To be honest with you, I've said this all along, once we got (Jake) Peavy, if I'm the White Sox organization, I start him. The guy has dominated, Cy Young Award winner. To be honest with you, I think he's a better pitcher than I am. If I'm the White Sox organization, I would start him opening day and kind of fill everyone out from that. But that's next year in spring training, so we will see what happens."

—Manager Ozzie Guillen thought Detroit would give New York a better matchup in the postseason than the Twins because of pitching, but he felt either team from the AL Central could be trouble in Round 1 against the Yankees. "That's going to be tough, but in a short series you never know what's going to happen," Guillen said. "To me right now, New York and Boston got the edge because they can set the rotation very well. New York has a great ballclub and great ballplayers."

—Manager Ozzie Guillen did not like hearing the news that Indians skipper Eric Wedge was fired Wednesday morning, especially since Guillen selected him for his coaching staff for the 2006 All-Star Game. At the same time, Guillen is well aware that the nature of his job is to get fired. It's just a matter of when. "As a manager, you don't want to see that happen," Guillen said. "Like I said a couple days ago, it's easy to fire a couple of guys rather than look yourself in the mirror and say, 'Wow, the players didn't do it right.' There were a lot of things that worked against him — players getting hurt, trades ... someone had to pay the price. Somebody had to be the face of the negative situation. I

called my wife right when I got the message and my wife said Wedge just got fired. I said, 'Don't worry about it, you never know when you're going to get my phone call telling you I got fired.'"

BY THE NUMBERS: 5-1 — Record for Jake Peavy over his last seven starts — two with the Sox and the rest in San Diego — through Sept. 25. Peavy also had a 3.62 ERA over that time.

QUOTE TO NOTE: "It wasn't supposed to be. The names are good. They haven't performed up to expectations and they know that. Sometimes with relief pitching, the ebb and flow of it is ridiculous." — GM Ken Williams, on the inconsistencies of the bullpen.

CLEVELAND INDIANS

INSIDE PITCH

The latest Cleveland pitcher to make his last start of the season was newcomer Carlos Carrasco. He was the starter and loser Thursday in a 3-0 loss to Boston.

Carrasco's start was even shorter than expected, as he left in the fourth inning after getting hit in the leg with a line drive.

The right-hander finished 0-4 with a 8.87 ERA in five September starts. Carrasco was acquired from Philadelphia as part of the midseason trade that sent lefty Cliff Lee to the Phillies.

In a combined 26 starts at Class AAA Columbus and Class AAA Lehigh Valley, Carrasco was 11-10 with a 4.64 ERA. His five starts with the Indians in September weren't particularly impressive, mainly due to his inability to pitch deep into games.

Carrasco pitched more than five innings in only one of his starts, going six innings against Kansas City on Sept. 13. His biggest problem was a lack of command. He frequently was at or near 100 pitches by the fifth inning.

RED SOX 3, INDIANS 0: The Indians were held to three hits and were shut out for the second consecutive game, extending their scoreless streak to 20 innings. The Indians' only hits were doubles by OF Matt LaPorta and C Lou Marson and a single by OF Michael Brantley.

NOTES, QUOTES

—The Indians' 3-0 loss to Boston on Thursday was their 12th consecutive defeat on the road. That ties the club record for most consecutive road losses. The Indians lost 12 in a row on the road in 1963 and 1991.

—The Indians finished their home season with a record of 35-46. That's their worst home record since 1991, when they were 30-52 at home, en route to a franchise-record 105 losses.

—The Indians finished with a final home attendance of 1,766,242. That's their lowest home attendance since 2003 and second lowest since 1992.

BY THE NUMBERS: 12 — The Indians' team record, set in 1931, for longest losing streak. The Indians came within one of tying the record before beating Baltimore 4-2 on Sept. 25 to halt their losing streak at 11 games.

QUOTE TO NOTE: "No matter how often you get your butt handed to you, you've got to go out there the next day with confidence." — Manager Eric Wedge, during the Indians' 11-game losing streak in September.

DETROIT TIGERS

INSIDE PITCH

Don't look for bad blood to linger between Detroit and Minnesota just because a couple of players were hit by pitches or thrown at in Thursday's game between the AL Central rivals.

The Twins are chasing the Tigers for the division title, but the rivalry has always been fiercely contested.

It looked nasty at the end, with Detroit manager Jim Leyland kicked out in the eighth inning, and then right-hander Jeremy Bonderman and catcher Gerald Laird getting tossed in the ninth after the reliever's first pitch of the inning hit Delmon Young in the calf.

The twist came when Young pointed and yelled into his own dugout. Twins manager Ron Gardenhire confirmed Young was angry at Minnesota left-hander Jose Mijares, who threw behind Detroit's Adam Everett in the eighth.

Mijares apparently was upset over that two Tigers had just moved up a base on defensive indifference. There was also a thought it was a misguided belated retaliation for a hard slide into second base in the fourth inning by designated hitter Marcus Thames.

Young apparently was letting Mijares know he felt it was his pitcher's fault that Bonderman hit him in the leg with a pitch.

Benches cleared, but there was no pushing, shoving or yelling.

Minnesota right-hander Scott Baker was pitching Thames up and in during the game, and the designated hitter had to hit the dirt twice, giving the pitcher a stone-faced glare both

times. He was hit with a breaking ball leading off the fourth and made a hard take-out slide into second that caused shortstop Orlando Cabrera to throw wide in his attempt to complete a double play.

Cabrera yelled into the Detroit dugout and appealed to umpires to have the double play called due to runner interference, but Thames was close enough to second on his slide for a no-call on the play.

Minnesota's Denard Span was hit by a Nate Robertson curveball, but that came on an 0-2 pitch with a runner on first and Detroit leading 1-0.

Leyland was ejected after a warning was issued to both managers following Mijares' pitch behind Everett's back. Bonderman and Laird were kicked out after Young was hit.

TWINS 8, TIGERS 3: Detroit failed to clinch its first division title since 1987, as Minnesota scored three in the third inning and four in the eighth. LHP Nate Robertson gave up four runs, three earned, in six innings, and Minnesota roughed up three relievers in the eighth. Detroit got an RBI single from C Gerald Laird to take a 1-0 lead in the first, but Minnesota answered to take control of the game, as the Tigers left eight on base in the first five innings. The Tigers added two runs in the eighth on one of four Minnesota errors and an RBI single by CF Curtis Granderson.

NOTES, QUOTES

—LHP Nate Robertson had a decent slider Thursday, but his control deserted him while Minnesota was scoring three times in the third to take a 3-1 lead. Robertson allowed an unearned run in the fourth but retired nine in a row until giving up two singles to start the seventh, causing his removal from the game. Robertson won't pitch again in the regular season.

—RF Magglio Ordonez was hitting .258 at the start of August — and ended the first day of October batting .301. Ordonez hit .410 in September. He went 2-for-4 Thursday and is in the hunt to hit .300 for his third straight season, and four of the past five.

—2B Placido Polanco got a day off Thursday as manager Jim Leyland tried to freshen him up for the last series of the regular season. Polanco is ready to start all three games against the Chicago White Sox this weekend as Detroit tries to clinch its first division title since 1987. Whether he plays all three games would depend on when or if Detroit clinches.

—RHP Alfredo Figaro will make the Saturday start that was taken away from RHP Rick Porcello because a rainout pushed him back from Monday to Tuesday. Figaro made two June starts for Detroit, a win and a loss, but saw very little action after that — and all in relief — because of a sprained right wrist. He wasn't even recalled until Sept. 15, and it happened then only because injuries decimated Detroit's rotation. Figaro didn't allow a run in 2 2/3 innings of relief Saturday and hasn't pitched since. Manager Jim Leyland's other option, RHP Zach Miner, has worked 12 straight scoreless innings in relief, and the

manager doesn't want to take him out of the bullpen. "We think he's the best guy," Leyland said. "That's what we've got. That's how we're going."

—RHP Eddie Bonine recovered from a shaky first inning Wednesday to pitch five solid innings in his second straight start for Detroit. Bonine got the first out of the first inning but then gave up three straight hits, an intentional walk and a single to deep center that scored only one run because Minnesota's runners thought it was going to be caught. He got DH Jose Morales to hit into an inning-ending double play and allowed the Twins just two more hits over the next four innings. He was keeping the ball down in the strike zone, using a sharp curve and mixing in knuckleballs. He lost his previous start but allowed only two hits, one of which was a two-run home run. "I tried to attack more," Bonine said of his adjustment after the first. "I tried to be too fine. I just got away from my game plan."

BY THE NUMBERS: 4 — Pitchers who have won 14 games in a season before their 21st birthday since 1970 after rookie RHP Rick Porcello won his 14th on Sept. 23 in Cleveland. RHP Bert Blyleven won 16 for Minnesota in 1971, LHP Don Gullett won 16 for Cincinnati in 1971 and RHP Dwight Gooden won 17 as a teenager in 1984 and 24 for the New York Mets the following year.

QUOTE TO NOTE: "It's like I told the guys when I was congratulating them after the game. 'You have to keep grinding. You can't let up mentally or physically.' This is like October baseball in September." — Manager Jim Leyland, following Detroit's 6-5 win at Cleveland on Sept. 24.

KANSAS CITY ROYALS

INSIDE PITCH

Left-hander Lenny DiNardo makes his final start of the season Friday at Minnesota, and it could go a long way toward determining his future with the Royals.

DiNardo said he welcomes the opportunity for this September audition and a chance to be part of the Royals' plans moving into 2010. The Royals would like a left-hander in their rotation next year.

"I like him a lot," manager Trey Hillman said. "I like him because he's left-handed. I love his work ethic. I like that he can get in and away from right-handers and the fact that he's not afraid to throw the changeup and has pretty good command with it.

"I've never been a huge (radar) gun guy. I know how (his stuff) plays out. But he's got a little extra in the tank, and it's deceptive because of the motion and the quick arm."

DiNardo has a below-average fastball, so he needs to have pinpoint accuracy with it and reliable secondary pitches to succeed.

In his first two starts, DiNardo held the Tigers and Orioles to six runs in 10 1/3 innings. But his past two starts have been troublesome — 15 runs, 10 hits and nine walks in 10 innings against the Red Sox and Twins. Five of the runs against Minnesota were unearned, however, after a Yuniesky Betancourt error.

DiNardo was a Pacific Coast League All-Star, going 10-5 with a 3.32 ERA with Class AAA Omaha before his September promotion.

NOTES, QUOTES

—RHP Joakim Soria picked up his 30th save Wednesday, becoming the first Royals closer to log back-to-back 30 save seasons since RHP Jeff Montgomery from 1991 to 1993. RHP Dan Quisenberry holds the club record with four consecutive seasons of 30-plus saves, 1982-85. Soria logged 10 saves in September.

—2B Tug Hulett batted second Wednesday, becoming the 12th player to hit in that slot this season. The others were OF Josh Anderson, SS Mike Aviles, INF/OF Willie Bloomquist, 2B Alberto Callaspo, CF Coco Crisp, LF David DeJesus, OF Ryan Freel, INF Luis Hernandez, OF Mitch Maier and C Brayan Pena.

—The Royals finished September with a 15-13 record. It was their first winning month since they went 12-10 in April.

—RHP Robinson Tejeda threw 81 pitches, 49 for strikes, in five innings Wednesday. He gave up three runs on four hits while walking three and striking out five in a no-decision. Tejeda finishes the season with a 4-2 record and 3.54 ERA in 35 games, including five starts to end the season. Manager Trey Hillman said Tejeda will go into spring training as a rotation candidate.

BY THE NUMBERS: 12 — Starting pitchers used by the Royals in 2009.

QUOTE TO NOTE: "It was a sloppy defensive game and it very well could have been the difference in the game. It was poor focus and concentration. Obviously with the numbers of errors we've had, it's disappointing." — Royals manager Trey Hillman, on the club making five errors, leading to six unearned runs, in a Sept. 24 loss to the Red Sox.

LOS ANGELES ANGELS

INSIDE PITCH

Despite throwing a shutout to clinch the division title for the Angels on Monday, righthander Ervin Santana will be the odd man out of the rotation for the playoffs and will move to the bullpen.

Manager Mike Scioscia confirmed Thursday that the Angels would go with John Lackey, Jered Weaver, Scott Kazmir and Joe Saunders (most likely in that order) against the Red Sox in the AL Division Series.

"Right now, those four guys that are going to finish this weekend for us are all throwing and pitching very well," Scioscia said. "Ervin is going to provide a lot of depth in our bullpen."

Santana has been in this position before. As a rookie in 2005, he won 12 games during the regular season, then moved to the bullpen in the playoffs. He replaced an injured Bartolo Colon in Game 5 of the ALDS against the Yankees and went 5 1/3 innings in relief as the Angels won. In 2007, he struggled through a poor season and was even demoted to Class AAA in midseason. He pitched two scoreless innings in relief in the ALDS against the Red Sox.

Santana said he is not disappointed about the change in roles for the playoffs.

"Not really, because I've done it before and I've done a great job," he said. "If we win the World Series, it's not going to say who was in the bullpen and who was starting, is it?"

RANGERS 11, ANGELS 3: The Angels broke the club record for runs scored in a season while losing to the Rangers in the final home game of the season Thursday. They had tied the previous record (866 runs in 1979) on Wednesday, then broke it with a lineup of reserves Thursday. 1B Kendry Morales hit his third home run in the past four games, but the Rangers scored six times in the sixth inning, including three unearned runs after an error by SS Brandon Wood.

NOTES, QUOTES

—The Angels are only the second team since the 1930 Cardinals to have 10 players drive in 50 or more runs. The 2007 Tigers also had 10 players with 50 or more RBIs (including OF Craig Monroe, who drove in 55 before being traded).

—Angels starting pitchers led the majors with a 2.96 ERA in September. They lowered their season ERA from 5.00 to 4.48 over a 33-game stretch, moving from 12th among American League starting staffs to fifth.

—With Thursday's loss, the Angels finished with just eight wins in 19 games against the Rangers this season. That is their first losing season against the Rangers in five years.

—RHP Jered Weaver received the inaugural Nick Adenhardt Award, instituted to honor the young pitcher who was killed in a car accident earlier this season. The award goes to the pitcher voted by his teammates as the Angels' best for the season. Weaver is 15-8 with a 3.84 ERA and leads the team with 206 innings pitched and four complete games.

BY THE NUMBERS: 0 — Grand slams hit by the Angels this season (the only AL team without one this season). The Angels have not gone through a whole season without a grand slam since 1974.

QUOTE TO NOTE: "We try to fly flags. We don't talk." — RHP John Lackey, responding to the Texas Rangers' trash-talking earlier this season.

MINNESOTA TWINS

INSIDE PITCH

When Detroit reliever Jeremy Bonderman plunked Twins left fielder Delmon Young in the back of the knee in the ninth inning of Thursday's game, prompting a warning for both benches, Young knew it was coming.

Nonetheless, the outfielder, after falling to the ground in pain, stood to yell and point toward his own dugout, angry with left-hander Jose Mijares because it was Mijares' bad decision that forced Detroit to retaliate.

"They play baseball over there," Young said of the Tigers, "so I knew somebody was going to have to wear it."

An inning earlier, Mijares had thrown behind Detroit shortstop Adam Everett, apparently because he was upset over two Tigers who had just advanced one base on defensive indifference. Earlier in the game, Minnesota right-hander Scott Baker had hit designated hitter Marcus Thames, and Detroit right-hander Nate Robertson hit center fielder Denard Span, but that had nothing to do with Mijares' decision, one that infuriated Young, Twins manager Ron Gardenhire and shortstop Orlando Cabrera.

"It was," Cabrera said, "a selfish act on his part."

Bonderman and catcher Gerald Laird were tossed after Young was hit. Detroit manager Jim Leyland had been tossed after the benches were warned for Mijares' throw behind Everett.

After the game, Ron Gardenhire said he called Leyland to apologize.

Young said his anger toward Mijares was no accident.

"Oh no. That was predetermined. (He's) got to pay attention to how baseball's played," Young said.

"We got a big lead. They're playing the game the way you're supposed to play it. That's the same way we play it. We didn't need any of this to happen, two teams going down to

the wire in a pennant race, to have any players injured or suspended over nothing. (If) I'm going to get hit, it's going to be because I did something stupid."

TWINS 8, TIGERS 3: Minnesota put together one three-run inning and another four-run inning, staving off the elimination that would have come if Detroit had won the series finale. The Tigers' magic number to clinch the AL Central remained at two.

NOTES, QUOTES

—SS Orlando Cabrera extended his hitting streak to 12 games with a 2-for-5 afternoon Thursday. He's batting .396 during the streak. He also has scored a run in 12 straight games, the longest Twins streak since 1986, when Kirby Puckett scored in 14 straight.

—LF Delmon Young went 3-for-4 Thursday and 7-for-16 in the four-game series against Detroit. He's batting .375 with seven RBIs in his last 13 games.

—RHP Carl Pavano told the Twins, manager Ron Gardenhire said Tuesday, that he's willing to pitch on short rest. If the Twins take up Pavano on his offer, he would likely start Sunday on three days' rest. Pavano has started on three days' rest once, in his final start of the 2004 season vs. Montreal, when he was with Florida. He gave up one run on three hits in seven innings and won 9-1.

—DH Jose Morales thought maybe he could beat out a one-hop smash to 2B Placido Polanco in the first inning Wednesday after Polanco bobbled the ball. But Polanco recovered and turned an inning-ending double play that seemed to drain the life out of Minnesota's lineup for the rest of the game. Said Morales of not beating out the throw: "Either I hit it too hard or I'm a little bit too slow."

BY THE NUMBERS: 56 — Consecutive games CF Denard Span had led off before missing two games last week after being hit by a pitch.

QUOTE TO NOTE: "I don't believe they were trying to hit me. But even if they were, I don't think anyone would try to hit me in the head. I haven't done anything to that team or anybody." — CF Denard Span, explaining he had no hard feelings for White Sox reliever Randy Williams after his beaming.

NEW YORK YANKEES

INSIDE PITCH

CC Sabathia, who has lived up to his title as an ace after a sluggish start, could put a nice capper on his regular season by earning his 20th victory Friday night. Then he can actually go about earning the hefty check he picked up in the offseason.

Sabathia surely knows that's the mind-set in the Bronx, where Hal Steinbrenner recently all but echoed his father's old demands that a season without a championship is a failure.

The key for Sabathia will be to avoid putting extra pressure on himself in October, which might have contributed to his past postseason problems.

Sabathia will start Game 1 of the AL Division Series next week. He has a postseason mark of 2-3 with a 7.92 ERA.

Those numbers were skewed a bit by last season's poor performance in the NL Division Series for Milwaukee, when Sabathia pitched on short rest down the stretch to help the Brewers reach the postseason.

There's also a growing feeling among these Yankees that the pressure of living up to their potential has been spread so well among so many stars and, especially, newcomers, that the spotlight's glare might not be as big a factor as it has in the recent past.

For his part, Sabathia has been his usual laid-back self, though his desire appears to match that of his team.

"I'm excited to be able to take the ball for this franchise and we'll see what happens," Sabathia said after the Yankees clinched the AL East. "To win a World Series would mean more than winning 20 games, so that's what I'm focused on."

NOTES, QUOTES

—RHP Dave Robertson is expected to pitch one more time this weekend so manager Joe Girardi can make sure his arm feels all right. If Robertson comes out of the outing feeling as well as he did earlier in the week when he reported no problems in his first appearance since Sept. 5, Robertson could be a significant weapon in the postseason. He has 62 strikeouts in 41 2/3 innings. "You want guys that have the ability to strike guys out when they come in during the middle innings with guys on base," Girardi said. "He definitely has that."

—LHP CC Sabathia can earn his first 20-win season with a victory Friday night against Tampa Bay. Sabathia, who is 19-7 with a 3.21 ERA, won 19 for Cleveland in 2007. Manager Joe Girardi said this week he would offer Sabathia a solid shot at the victory by playing his regulars.

—LHP Andy Pettitte will follow ace CC Sabathia in the final series of the regular season against Tampa Bay this weekend, but manager Joe Girardi did not say Pettitte would supplant RHP A.J. Burnett as the No. 2 starter in the postseason. "There are still questions for us to be answered," Girardi said in his press briefing. "... There are probably three or four things that go into it — opponent, how a guy's pitching, whether he pitches better at home or away. Is it more of a right-handed hitting lineup or a left-handed hitting lineup? We don't have all those answers yet." Girardi said he was waiting to see whether

the Yankees would play Detroit — which features a predominantly right-handed hitting lineup — or Minnesota in the first round before making several decisions.

—LHP Damaso Marte, who could be vying for a postseason spot as an extra lefty in the bullpen, took the loss in Kansas City's 4-3 win over the Yankees, but it wasn't a performance that allowed for a lot of evaluation. Marte struck out one batter, walked another and was lifted for RHP Sergio Mitre, who allowed the go-ahead run to score on a triple.

BY THE NUMBERS: 6 — Stolen bases Sept. 25 against Boston, a season high.

QUOTE TO NOTE: "The team's playing well. We wanted to come in and play well tonight and we did." — 3B Alex Rodriguez, after the win over Boston on Sept. 25.

OAKLAND ATHLETICS

INSIDE PITCH

Oakland's bullpen depth might be the team's greatest strength, and this September underscored that.

On Wednesday, hard-throwing Henry Rodriguez recorded two scoreless innings at Seattle, striking out three and walking none — and that second stat is the more important one for the 22-year old. His arm isn't a question — he regularly hits triple digits on the radar gun — but his control can be more than shaky at times.

John Meloan, picked up off waivers a month ago, also pitched two scoreless innings at Safeco Field, and he has not allowed an earned run in seven innings overall while striking out nine. He has given up two hits and two walks.

Oakland's relief corps is so extensive that Ryan Webb was dealt to San Diego in the Scott Hairston deal in July, and there's a chance that the team would again look to move some relievers this offseason because it's such an area of strength.

With Joey Devine expected to be back for spring training after Tommy John surgery, Michael Wuertz, who is arbitration-eligible, could be expendable in the right deal — but it would take a lot to pry him loose. No one did at the trade deadline this year, though there was much demand because Wuertz has been the league's top setup man the entire year. Wuertz has not allowed a run in his past 10 outings, and he has 100 strikeouts, tops among AL relievers.

MARINERS 4, A'S 2: 3B Adam Kennedy's error on a two-out grounder by Jose Lopez in the fifth inning led to three unearned runs against LHP Brett Anderson, and the rookie's four-game winning streak ended. Kennedy has made a team-high 20 errors this year,

including 13 at third, a position he is playing for the first time after 10 years at second base. Seattle took eight of nine home games from Oakland this season.

NOTES, QUOTES

—LHP Brett Anderson allowed only one earned run in five innings Thursday in his last start of 2009, but an error by 3B Adam Kennedy tacked three unearned runs onto his total, and Anderson took the loss to finish the season 11-11. Anderson's four-game winning streak ended. Anderson whittled his ERA down from 5.77 on June 14 to 4.06 at the end of the season.

—LHP Gio Gonzalez will make his final start of the season Friday at the Coliseum. The rookie went 2-1 with a 4.50 ERA in September and he is coming off a sensational start against the Angels, the team he'll face Friday. At Anaheim one week earlier, he threw 6 1/3 innings and allowed four hits and a walk, teaming with Michael Wurtz and Andrew Bailey on a shutout of the division winners. Gonzalez has 99 strikeouts in 92 2/3 innings this season.

—RHP Clayton Mortensen gave up four runs in the first inning Wednesday, three on a homer by Ken Griffey Jr., and then didn't get an out in the second inning, allowing eight hits and six runs in his final start of the season. Ichiro Suzuki led off the game with an 11-pitch at-bat before singling, and he also tripled and scored in the second. "That guy's a pain," Mortensen said.

BY THE NUMBERS: 26 — Pitchers used by the A's this season, tying the Oakland record. The A's have used 51 players overall, matching last year's total, which is the second highest in Oakland history behind 2007's 54.

QUOTE TO NOTE: "Kind of a bummer. They authenticated the bat I used, though, so I'll do something with that. It would have been nice to have the ball, and I would have been happy to give him a bat and signed it — that's (worth) more than a baseball, anyway. But that's OK, I have a souvenir, I'm happy." — Outfielder Matt Carson, telling the San Francisco Chronicle that the fan who caught Carson's first big-league home run wouldn't return the ball without a large payoff, which the team would not provide.

SEATTLE MARINERS

INSIDE PITCH

Manager Don Wakamatsu is fond of saying you can't judge a starting pitcher until you've seen him 10 times or more.

His rationale is that two or three starts can be a fluke or can come against weak competition or things can just click.

But when a pitcher gets to 10 starts or more, he is likely to have experienced both ups and downs, and the manager will have had a chance to see how he handles adversity as well as the good times.

To this point, Seattle rookie right-hander Doug Fister has made 10 starts after debuting with a relief appearance on Aug. 8. And with each of the starts, he's done more to impress Wakamatsu. He's beaten two teams headed to the postseason, the Yankees and the Angels, and Thursday he picked up his third win by beating the A's.

"He's pitched games against some of the best in the game," Wakamatsu said. "This was his last start of the season, and he's left us with a belief that he figures in the rotation for next year."

MARINERS 4, A'S 2: Rookie RHP Doug Fister limited the A's to five hits and one run in seven innings for his third big-league victory Thursday.

Fister allowed just three men past first base. Two of those came in the fourth inning, when C Kurt Suzuki tripled and 1B Daric Barton doubled. After the Barton double, however, Fister set down 11 of the next 12 batters he faced.

3B Adrian Beltre got the Mariners on the scoreboard with a solo homer in the second, just the eighth homer of the season for the third baseman who has spent two stints on the disabled list after hitting a team-high 25 homers last season.

DH Mike Sweeney broke a 1-1 tie in the fifth with a two-out, bases-loaded single, and Beltre followed with an RBI single for Seattle's final run.

The Mariners finish the season with three games against Texas, and a sweep of the Rangers would leave Seattle tied for second place with Texas in the American League West.

NOTES, QUOTES

—2B Jose Lopez singled in his first at-bat Thursday to extend his hitting streak to a season-best 10 games. Lopez, hitting .271, has only had two longer streaks in his career.

—RHP David Aardsma gave up a solo homer, but he still registered his 37th save. That moves him into a tie with RHP Kazuhiro Sasaki for third place on the Mariners' single-season saves list.

—RHP Doug Fister is making a push for a spot in the Seattle rotation in 2010, even though he wasn't on the 40-man roster when he started the season at Class AA West Tenn. In 10 starts, he's allowed one run or fewer four times, including Thursday against Oakland.

—RHP Brandon Morrow's eight innings of one-hit ball Wednesday represented his best start since his first against the Yankees on Sept. 5, 2008, when he carried a no-hitter into

the eighth inning and wound up striking out eight. He had nine strikeouts against Oakland, a career best.

BY THE NUMBERS: 33-18 — The Mariners had won 33 of 51 one-run games this year, through Sept. 25. That was the best record in Major League Baseball this season.

QUOTE TO NOTE: "If it happens, it happens. And if I had a vote, I'd vote for Greinke. He's had a great season." — RHP Felix Hernandez, talking about possible Cy Young Award competition with Kansas City RHP Zack Greinke.

TAMPA BAY RAYS

INSIDE PITCH

One of the biggest mysteries of this season is how Matt Garza can have such good stats and such a poor record, 8-12.

Manager Joe Maddon said Garza's season was significantly better than his record showed: "That's a shame that it gets judged that way."

But Garza found little consolation in the supporting stats. "It's bittersweet," he said. "You pitch to win, and this year I didn't do that job."

He did a lot well, logging more than 200 innings for the first time.

Garza has a .233 opponents' average that is fourth best in the American League (and the best in Rays history), including a .196 mark against left-handers that tops all right-handed starters in the majors.

He has an average of 8.38 strikeouts per nine innings that is sixth best among AL starters, and a total of 189 K's that is ninth in the league and second highest in franchise history.

He has a team-high 19 quality starts (six or more innings, three or fewer runs). He has a 3.95 ERA that ranks 16th in the league, and he's the only one of those 16 with a losing record.

"It doesn't really make a whole lot of sense," teammate Ben Zobrist said. "He's pitched really well for us and been very solid, and we just weren't able to get him those wins. You feel bad for him as an offense. He definitely shouldn't look at his record and think in any way he didn't have a good year because he pitched really well for us."

ORIOLES 3, RAYS 2: The Rays didn't do much early and came up short late, allowing the Orioles to snap their major league season-high 13-game losing streak. Pat Burrell's ninth-inning sacrifice fly cut Tampa Bay's deficit to one, but Akinori Iwamura grounded out with runners at the corners to end the game.

NOTES, QUOTES

—OF Ben Zobrist homered Thursday to cap a monster season against the Orioles, hitting .407 with seven homers and 18 RBIs. He does not have more than three homers or nine RBIs against any other team. "(LHP Chris Waters) stayed away from the middle of the plate except to Babe Ruth over there," Orioles manager Dave Trembley said. "I'm glad that's over with. I thought he was no longer out there, but he's been reincarnated against us this year."

—The Rays sent a franchise record for runs with 783, but it didn't wind up producing a playoff appearance.

"It's just there's been days where we just really poured it on and other days where we couldn't get it going," INF/OF Ben Zobrist said.

—With B.J. Upton stealing his 40th and 41st bases a game after Carl Crawford swiped his 60th, the Rays became the first major league team with two 40-plus players since the 1993 Angels (Luis Polonia and Chad Curtis) and Expos (Marquis Grissom and Delino DeShields), and the first AL team with two players combining for 100 since the 1997 Tigers (Brian Hunter and Damian Easley).

—RHP Russ Springer on Wednesday got his first save since April 24, 2001, a span of 400 games. It was the ninth save of his 17-season, 740-game career. "It ain't no big deal," he said.

—RHP James Shields put a good ending on a disappointing year, working eight strong innings Wednesday in a 5-3 victory over Baltimore. "It was a good way to finish my season off," said Shields (11-12, 4.14 with a career-high 219 2/3 innings). "I felt really good out there, and that's always a positive going into the offseason."

BY THE NUMBERS: 1 — American League teams to have more home runs (187) and stolen bases (182) than the Rays did (through Sept. 25) for a season — the 1998 Blue Jays, who hit 221 homers and stole 184.

QUOTE TO NOTE: "I'm on vacation, a paid vacation." — LHP J.P. Howell, after being shut down for the rest of the season, and being teased by teammates.

TEXAS RANGERS

INSIDE PITCH

Kevin Millwood finished off his season in most impressive fashion.

The right-hander pitched his third complete game of the season Thursday to help the Rangers stop a four-game losing streak and beat the Angels 11-3. Millwood threw 122

pitches in the win, the third time this year he's crossed 120 pitches. It was the most pitches he's thrown in a game since July 27, 1999, while with Atlanta.

After an awful six-week period from August until the middle of September, Millwood rallied with the help of pitching coach Mike Maddux. Maddux identified a flaw in Millwood's delivery, and the duo worked on getting him to stand more upright to improve his balance.

Millwood was chased after just 3 2/3 innings on Sept 12 and took three bullpen sessions with Maddux to work on the change. He returned to win his final three starts and compile a 1.57 ERA in those games.

The strong finish allowed Millwood to lock in a vesting option in his contract that guarantees he will return to the Rangers in 2010 for \$12 million. The option vested at 180 innings. Millwood finished with 198 2/3 innings and a 3.71 ERA. He goes into the last weekend of the season ranked ninth in the AL in ERA.

RANGERS 11, ANGELS 3: With the playoffs and 90 wins now officially out of the question, the Rangers broke a four-game losing streak and clinched at least a tie for second place in the AL West. If they can win one of their final three games at Seattle this weekend, they will finish in second place in the AL West for the second consecutive year. Facing a lineup comprised mostly of reserves and September call-ups, the Rangers broke open a close game with six runs in the sixth inning. Texas had lost six of the last eight meetings with Los Angeles and had been held to 19 runs total in those defeats.

NOTES, QUOTES

—1B Andruw Jones went 0-for-4 Thursday with four strikeouts (he was hit by a pitch with the bases loaded to drive in a run). Jones' batting average dropped to .207 for the season. He is batting just .167 since the All-Star break. Since hitting a pair of homers against Detroit on July 29, Jones is 10-for-75 (.133) with no homers.

—3B Michael Young, who returned to the lineup Monday after missing almost all of September with a severe hamstring strain, sat out Thursday's day game after a night game. Young is expected to be able to play during this weekend's final series at Seattle.

—LHP Derek Holland, in his last start of the season, allowed two seventh-inning runs Wednesday to ruin what had been a quality start. Holland finishes the season at 8-13 with a 6.12 ERA. He struggled badly down the stretch. On Aug. 20, he beat Minnesota to improve his record to 7-7 and lower his ERA to 4.72, finishing off a stretch of four impressive wins in five starts. But after that he was just 1-6 with a 10.13 ERA. Though he didn't allow a homer in 6 1/3 innings Monday, he allowed nine homers in 35 1/3 innings over those final seven starts.

BY THE NUMBERS: 907 — Career appearances for LHP Eddie Guardado through Sept. 27, putting him past Cy Young for the 21st most games pitched all-time. Guardado has started talking about retiring after this season. He has struggled for much of the year and has pitched in pain for several seasons.

QUOTE TO NOTE: "If you can tell me why, I would appreciate it. Mechanically, he is repeating his delivery exactly as the last time." — Pitching coach Mike Maddux, on the mysterious drop in velocity for rookie RHP Neftali Feliz, who threw 100 mph in his August debut but is currently sitting in the 95 mph range.

TORONTO BLUE JAYS

INSIDE PITCH

Paul Beeston is headed to Baltimore this weekend. Does that mean the Blue Jays' interim CEO and president will lower the boom on general manager J.P. Ricciardi?

"I'm only going there to carry on Mr. (Peter) Hardy's tradition," Beeston said.

Hardy, former chairman of the board and a member of the Canadian Baseball Hall of Fame, kicked off each season with a gathering where he'd wish the Jays well. And he'd close each year with a team luncheon to congratulate players on their season.

"I'm not sure what day, but I want to express thanks to the players for their efforts," Beeston said. "I was on radio the other day and said how this season was a little of the good, the bad and the ugly. Aaron Hill and Adam Lind have had great seasons."

Ricciardi has his annual end-of-the-year, state-of-the-franchise address booked for Monday morning. This is Ricciardi's eighth season without making a postseason appearance. He has one year remaining on his contract.

The bad part of the season includes outfielders Vernon Wells and Alex Rios failing to live up to expectations, and closer B.J. Ryan performing to such a level that he had to be released. The Jays let the White Sox claim Rios off waivers, ridding themselves of his hefty contract.

Beeston's mandate when he took over the Jays last fall was to care-take until he could hire a new president. The job was supposed to take weeks, but it has stretched on for a full year.

Looking ahead to the offseason, Beeston has a lot on his plate. He has to find a president, he has to decide whether to retain his general manager ... and does the future include right-hander Roy Halladay?

If Marco Scutaro and Rod Barajas walk this year as free agents, the Jays would go into next year's draft with nine picks in the top 120 or 130. The Jays, however, signed only one of their first five picks this June.

NOTES, QUOTES

—C Rod Barajas' batting average is not what will draw free agent suitors this winter. Barajas has 19 homers heading into the final weekend with a single-season best 71 RBIs. He's hitting .228. Barajas says he wants to return to the Jays. "Rod's a pretty good hitter when goes up there and does the things he's supposed to do," said manager Cito Gaston. "I'm not surprised he's done what he's done."

—RF Jose Bautista has hit a homer in three consecutive games for the first time in his career. Eight of his 11 home runs this season came in September.

—DH Randy Ruiz had two homers Wednesday and 1B Lyle Overbay and RF Jose Bautista each had one a day after the Jays hit six. The Jays hit 46 in September, two shy of the team record for any month set in June 2000. Said manager Cito Gaston, "I hope we go out and go home with something positive to take home and bring back next year." The Jays have 203 homers on the season, the fifth time in club history they have hit 200 or more homers.

BY THE NUMBERS: 1 — Win in his last three starts for Roy Halladay at Rogers Centre, through Sept. 25. He had a 1.33 ERA in that stretch.

QUOTE TO NOTE: "We're going to need a catcher. I hope not, he's been great for this organization. He's done everything he could here. But if he moves on, we certainly hope he moves on, out of this division, and out of this league, so we don't have to face him." — Manager Cito Gaston.