

## A's News Clips, Sunday, September 26, 2010

### Oakland A's watch Rangers, former coach Ron Washington celebrate

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

The mob formed right around third base as the Texas Rangers poured out of their dugout Saturday afternoon to celebrate their first American League West title in 11 years.

A's second baseman Mark Ellis knows that euphoria. That's what made the Rangers' 4-3 division-clinching victory over the A's at the Oakland Coliseum so difficult for him to digest.

Ellis is the only player on the A's active roster who was part of Oakland's last AL West-winning squad in 2006.

He can attest that being part of the celebration is more fun than watching it.

"It's just so hard watching it on your home field," Ellis said. "It's tough. "... You want it back. It's been a while here now. It's been, I guess, four years? It's something you want every year."

Jorge Cantu's homer off Michael Wuertz in the top of the eighth snapped a 3-3 tie, paving the way for a Rangers party that seemed all but assured for the past several weeks.

Texas has led the AL West by at least seven games every day since July 25. And while the Rangers entered Saturday just 24-25 since Aug. 1, neither the A's nor the Los Angeles Angels could mount the kind of winning streak needed to put on any pressure.

A's manager Bob Geren tipped his cap to the Rangers, who claimed the fourth division title in club history. They also won the AL West in 1996, 1998 and 1999.

"I think a lot of it was that stretch in the middle of the season," Geren said. "They won (11) in a row (in June), where they separated themselves from the pack."

As much as it pained Ellis to watch the Rangers clinch, he said he was happy for Texas manager Ron Washington, a member of the A's coaching staff from 1996-2006.

Washington left following the 2006 season when Geren replaced Ken Macha as the A's skipper. He was hired that same winter to replace Buck Showalter in the Rangers' dugout.

"I'm 100 percent happy for Wash. He's done a great job with that team," Ellis said. "For him to do as much as he did for our organization, and go to that team and take them to the playoffs is pretty neat."

Washington, who dealt with a media storm in spring training after news surfaced he had failed a drug test in 2009, gave each of his players a hug as they lined up and proceeded past him after the final out.

"I'm a lifer in baseball," Washington said. "I do know that you've got to keep things in perspective, because your main focus is to get to the World Series. But we've accomplished what needed to accomplish to get an opportunity to do that."

Geren said the A's now must shift their attention to other goals. They're 77-77 with eight games remaining, and they're seeking their first winning record under Geren. They're also trying to hold on to second place, which would be their highest finish since 2006.

"We have a great pitching staff, and if we can improve offensively, that could be us" celebrating in the future, Geren said.

Cliff Pennington pulled the A's into a 3-3 tie with a two-run homer off Clay Rapada in the seventh.

But Cantu answered in the eighth, homering on a 3-2 hanging slider from Wuertz (2-3) to put Texas back on top. Wuertz hadn't pitched since Monday because of swelling in his right thumb.

Cantu also drove in a run with a single in the sixth, his first RBI in 84 plate appearances since being acquired from the Florida Marlins on July 29.

## **Oakland A's update: Brad Ziegler**

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

Ziegler has Middle East visit on offseason agenda

Brad Ziegler's plans for the offseason include a trip to the Middle East to visit with American troops.

The reliever will join other major leaguers for a one-week trip in early December. He said the group will spend a couple of days in Qatar before visiting troops in Afghanistan.

"Thanksgiving and Christmas have got to be a hard time to be away from your family," Ziegler said. "So we're trying to do something to bring some smiles over there, just kind of talk to them, anything we can do to encourage them."

Ziegler signed on for the trip through his contact with an Air Force official who works for the Armed Forces Entertainment organization, which is recruiting other major leaguers to make the trip.

A group of Florida Marlins, including former A's and De La Salle High catcher John Baker, made a similar trek to Iraq and Kuwait last January.

Ziegler has several relatives with military backgrounds and has been active in his support for troops since his big league career began in 2008.

Earlier this season, he started the foundation "Pastime for Patriots," through which he's distributed roughly 2,600 A's tickets to military personnel and their families.

Outfielder Ryan Sweeney has chosen not to have surgery on his left knee, saying an operation surely would have sidelined him for the start of next season.

He's been bothered by tendinitis in both knees, and he had season-ending surgery on his right knee in early August. But Sweeney said an MRI confirmed his left knee is in better condition than his right knee was before surgery. He's hopeful that rehab and treatment will eliminate much of the pain.

"I want to come into spring training healthy and be ready to play," Sweeney said in a phone interview.

The recovery from his right knee surgery is estimated at four to six months. His goal is to start hitting in January and be doing all baseball activity by February.

Gio Gonzalez went six innings and gave up two runs in the A's 4-3 loss to Texas on Saturday. "... Rajai Davis was back in center field after missing two games with a "non-baseball related issue." Davis hasn't given details of that issue, but manager Bob Geren stressed that Davis' absence was not disciplinary. "... Lefty reliever Jerry Blevins said a sore shoulder likely will shut him down for the year.

## **Chin Music: Rajai Davis back in center field for A's**

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 9/25/2010 1:15PM

We'll go short and sweet with this update, as the A's try to delay the Rangers' plans to celebrate ...

—Rajai Davis is back in center field today after missing two games with a "non-baseball related issue." Bob Geren stressed that Davis' absence was "100 percent" not for disciplinary reasons.

—Michael Wuertz says the swelling has gone down in his right thumb and he's available out of the bullpen.

—Daric Barton is the only left-handed hitter in the lineup against Texas' Derek Holland, who is holding lefties to a .154 average.

Your lineups:

A's — Davis CF, Barton 1B, Ellis 2B, Suzuki DH, Kouzmanoff 3B, Carter LF, Carson RF, Powell C, Pennington SS; Gonzalez LHP.

Rangers — Andrus SS, Young 3B, Cruz LF, Guerrero DH, Kinsler 2B, Francoeur RF, Cantu 1B, Treanor C, Borbon CF, Holland LHP.

## **Rangers beat A's, clinch AL West title**

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

As the Rangers celebrated their first AL West title in more than a decade, dancing and jumping on the diamond at the Coliseum on Saturday, most of the A's players and manager Bob Geren made a quick retreat to the clubhouse.

"Watching them celebrate on our field is not fun," A's shortstop Cliff Pennington said.

Pennington's two-run homer with two outs in the seventh inning tied the game, but unlikely Texas hero Jorge Cantu hit his first home run with the Rangers with two outs in the eighth to beat the A's 4-3 and end Oakland's playoff hopes.

The A's, however, could look beyond Saturday's result and find inspiration for next season.

"It just makes you wonder ... next year, it could be us," Oakland starter Gio Gonzalez said.

Oakland stayed 7-10 games back of the Rangers after the All-Star break, proving to be tough to shake. And the A's, with a young rotation, lead the league in ERA. With good team speed and defense already in place, if they can boost the offense this winter, the A's could be the team to beat in the West next season.

"It's like September and we were still right there," Geren said. "We have a repeat of that pitching staff and defense, improved hitting, and that could be us right there. I'll stay to watch that one."

Cantu hadn't recorded an RBI since July 21, when he was with Florida, and set a record for most games without an RBI at the start of a Rangers career, going 83 at-bats without one. On Saturday, he gave Texas a one-run lead in the sixth, driving in a run with a base hit off Gonzalez.

"He's a good hitter," Gonzalez said. "It was bound to happen for him."

After Pennington's homer tied it, Geren thought the Rangers might pinch hit for Cantu in the eighth against right-hander Michael Wuertz. Cantu stayed in the game, and he lined a slider over the wall in left-center.

Gonzalez also allowed a solo homer by Michael Young in the third. Gonzalez went six innings and allowed seven hits and three walks while striking out two. Saturday was his first career loss to Texas; he is 3-1 with 2.10 ERA in eight appearances against the Rangers.

The Rangers won their fourth division title and first since 1999. Their manager, Ron Washington, was the longtime A's third-base coach.

Oakland (77-77) returned to the .500 mark for the 21st time since the break and team-record 32nd time this season.

Rajai Davis returned to the lineup after missing two games with what was described as a "non-baseball related issue," which usually indicates an illness of some sort. Davis and the team have declined to say more, but Geren emphasized Saturday that the absence was not in any way a disciplinary action. "Absolutely 100 percent not," Geren said.

**Injury updates:** Andrew Bailey's elbow surgery Thursday went well, according to Geren, who said that some loose bodies were removed. The elbow is sound, and Bailey can begin to rehab immediately; the closer will be ready well ahead of spring training.

Outfielder Ryan Sweeney's left knee has checked out well and he will not have surgery on it, Geren said. Sweeney had patella surgery on the right knee July 30.

Left-hander Jerry Blevins said he isn't likely to pitch again this season because of the left shoulder strain that has sidelined him for a week and a half. Blevins did range-of-motion exercises and strength tests Saturday but he is still unable to throw.

## **Oakland A's leading off**

Susan Slusser, San Francisco Chronicle

**Attendance bump:** The A's will draw more fans this year than last, though it will be close. Last year's total was 1,408,783; Saturday's crowd of 20,136 put the total at 1,397,361 with one home game left. About 12,000 are expected for Dallas Braden Bobblehead Day.

## **Drumbeat: Davis back in; Blevins unlikely the final week**

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser at the Coliseum 9/25/2010 1:06PM

Rajai Davis is back in; he and the team still will not say why he was out last night and scratched the night before that, but manager Bob Geren said firmly that it was nothing disciplinary in nature. "Absolutely 100 percent not," Geren said. Also, Davis isn't a guy who'd be likely to commit any team infraction, and I can't recall anyone being scratched from a game and then out the next for any rule violation. That's usually just a fine.

No, typically the "non-baseball related issue" is an illness of some sort. Davis said it's personal, and considering the medical privacy laws, that is good enough for me. The fact is, when people don't know, they tend to assume the worst, but really, if he doesn't want to talk about it, it's his right. Whatever happened wasn't the result of baseball activity, that's all we know or are likely to.

No real surprise here, but Jerry Blevins said he's unlikely to pitch again this season. Blevins, who has a left shoulder strain, did range-of-motion exercises and strength tests today, but he isn't close to throwing, and at this point, there is no reason to push it. Shoulders are tricky things - elbows are fixed fairly routinely these days, but shoulders are much more iffy. With a week left, taking any unnecessary risks would be foolish.

Now if the A's had managed to claw back close to the top, Blevins said, he'd be trying to convince the team otherwise; he'd really push hard to get back, he said.

Michael Wuertz's right thumb looks much, much better today. He's shown it to me almost every day this week, and it was puffed up like a cushion, but today, it's really looking like a normal thumb. The problem has been the fleshy pad area just below the thumb, on the palm - it's looked as if something poisonous bit him until today. (The initial diagnosis when the problem first cropped up a month or so ago was thumb tendinitis.)

Here's the lineup: Davis CF, Barton 1B, Ellis 2B, Suzuki DH, Kouzmanoff 3B, Carter LF, Carson RF, Powell C, Pennington SS

I asked Geren if he'd been tempted to use Jeremy Hermida after Hermida's four-hit night last night, but he said that the splits for Derek Holland are too clear: Left-handed hitters are 6-for-39 against him this season with no homers. You'll notice that Jack Cust isn't in the lineup for the same reason. Both are available as soon as Holland is out of the game, though.

## **A's can't delay inevitable in Rangers' clinch**

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Saturday's roller-coaster series of events fittingly compared to the ups and downs endured by an injury-ridden but youthfully talented A's team this season.

The A's bit first against the Rangers on a day when Texas was looking to officially eliminate Oakland from a shot at the American League West title. Looking to clinch, the Rangers proceeded to go ahead by two in the middle innings only to watch Oakland jump back in the saddle again by way of a two-run homer off the bat of Cliff Pennington in the seventh.

But Texas struck again an inning later, and the A's offered no answer this time.

Less than an hour later, the Rangers were clinging to champagne bottles, celebrating a 4-3 victory and their first division title since 1999. The A's, meanwhile, were silenced in their own clubhouse, soaking up a loss that officially put to rest any chances of a postseason appearance.

At one end sat young lefty Gio Gonzalez, who barely made the club's Opening Day roster five months ago, but has since transformed into one of the rotation's leading workhorses. Gonzalez was on the mound at the start of Saturday's affair, which saw him bulldog his way through six innings before handing a 2-1 deficit to the bullpen.

Next to the hurler stood Pennington. The A's shortstop shifted the momentum with a game-changing homer, but by day's end, it minimally compared to Jorge Cantu's go-ahead long ball an inning later off righty Michael Wuertz.

"At the time, down two, hit a home run, tying it up's nice," Pennington said. "But in the end, it wasn't enough."

The loss put the A's back at the .500 mark, where they've stood an ongoing franchise-record 32 times this season, including 21 times since the All-Star break.

It was one that featured an entertaining pitchers' duel for the first five innings, all of which featured Texas lefty Derek Holland on the mound. The Rangers' southpaw allowed just one run, an RBI fielder's choice in the bottom of the first inning from Kurt Suzuki.

Gonzalez, meanwhile, coughed up his first run in the third inning, when Michael Young led off the frame with a solo shot to left field. Three innings later, the A's lefty offered up a leadoff double to Ian Kinsler, who promptly scored on a single from Cantu, who at the time not only earned his first of two RBIs on the day but also his first since joining the Rangers.

Gonzalez exited after six frames, having given up two runs on seven hits while walking three and striking out two.

"Today was one of those games where you just want to keep your team in the game," he said. "I tried to do my best to go deep in the game, and I wanted to make sure it wasn't an easy battle for them."

Texas' one-run lead quickly turned into a two-run advantage, though, when Henry Rodriguez surrendered a run in the seventh. Pennington's two-run blast -- his fifth of the season -- in the bottom half of the frame momentarily had the A's back in it, but Cantu's shot off Wuertz in the eighth proved to be the final blow.

"I felt really good about [Wuertz], and in the back of my mind, I thought they might pinch-hit there," manager Bob Geren said. "But, either way, Wuertz was my guy right there. When he's on, his slider swing-and-miss pitch is the best in baseball, and that was actually a slider he hit. He just didn't get it where he wanted to.

"We came back and tied it. Anytime you get late in the game with a tie, and you have your better bullpen guys still available, usually it's to your advantage. It just didn't work out that way."

Rangers closer Neftali Feliz recorded the final four outs to secure his 38th save of the year, setting a new Major League rookie record. His efforts included stranding Jeremy Hermida on second base with one out in the ninth after center fielder Julio Borbon and right fielder Jeff Francoeur experienced a dose of miscommunication on a fly ball.

"When that ball fell, I wanted to go out there and punch Julio," Rangers manager Ron Washington joked later. "He's always almost running into people and that's the one time he lets it fall."

Still, the Rangers found themselves immersed in a hats-off celebration on Oakland's home turf just minutes later.

"Watching them celebrate on our field was not fun," Pennington admitted.

"They're pushing 90 wins, so they deserved it," Geren said. "Congratulations to the Texas Rangers and their organization."

The A's, however, have no plans of allowing Saturday's elimination put any sort of damper on their remaining eight games.

"We showed them that we're going to continue to battle," Gonzalez said. "This was by far one of those pitching matchups that I have to put up there in the top five of my career. It was definitely a competition of who was going to bite the bullet, and we fought till the very end. We gave them a run for their money. Hats off to them, though. They did a good job."

## **A's want to be the ones celebrating in '11**

### **First goal is to finish season strong, stay second in division**

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- The A's hurriedly raced out of their dugout Saturday afternoon, escaping a scene exuding far too much red and blue for their liking. They headed toward the next attainable goal on their list as the Rangers celebrated a 4-3 victory and their first American League West title since 1999.

"That's for them," A's manager Bob Geren said. "That's not for us. That's for them and their fans. I'll be the first to tell them congratulations. I'm happy for Ron Washington, his staff and his players. It's a good group over there. They can enjoy their celebration, but I don't really enjoy watching it."

Instead, Geren would like to witness his gritty team hold a second-place standing, along with a winning record -- two feats he didn't reach in his first three years at the helm in Oakland -- by the time the season closes on Oct. 3 in Seattle.

"Obviously, first is no longer there, but the guys want to finish with a winning record and finish in second place and build something for next year," he said. "They're going to play with the same intensity and the same desire as they did today the rest of the way."

Saturday's one-run loss gave the A's a 77-77 mark, representing the 32nd time they've stood at the .500 mark this season. They're set to play one final contest with the Rangers on Sunday afternoon before heading to Anaheim and Seattle for the last seven games with one thing in mind.

"Win every game," Mark Ellis said. "That's what we're going to try to do the rest of the way."

The veteran second baseman has seen his fair share of division losses, but he has also been a part of three AL West titles while in Oakland, thus understanding and envying the feeling Texas was awarded.

"You want it back," he said. "It's been awhile, so you want it back and you want to get that feeling again. It's one of those things you want to do every year, and unfortunately we'll have to wait a bit longer."

Hopefully not too much longer, though. At least that was the general sentiment in the A's clubhouse, where several noted feeling a sense of confidence in landing on top in 2011.

"Of course," hurler Gio Gonzalez said. "That's a spot we'd all love to be in. When you see something like that, it just makes you wonder if next year it could be us. We're going to continue to play hard baseball and see where it goes from there."

Gonzalez is part of a young pitching staff that has served as Oakland's core this year. He's expected to join Trevor Cahill, Brett Anderson, Dallas Braden and possibly Vin Mazzaro as the team's leading force next season, one which the A's hope will include some much-needed offensive help.

"With good pitching, you always have a good chance to win," Ellis said. "That's the plan. I don't know what's going to go on next year, but this team is close. Just a few pieces missing here and there."

For Ellis, watching any team other than his own celebrate a division title is tough. At the same time, he boasts quite the respect for Washington, who groomed Ellis into one of the league's best defensive second basemen while he was on Oakland's coaching staff before accepting Texas' managerial position in 2007.

"He's done a great job with that team," he said. "For Wash, it's neat for him to come from over here and to do as much as he did for our organization and go to that team and take them to the playoffs."

The Rangers' success this year included an 11-game winning streak in June, when Geren believes the division saw what turned out to be a permanent shift in the standings. The A's have stood between seven and 10 games back since June 25.

"That's when they separated themselves from the pack," Geren said. "Before that and after that, we played pretty equally. They just had that nice big run somewhere in the middle.

"We arrived in September and were still right there. If we have a repeat of the pitching and defense we showed this year, and improve somewhat offensively, that definitely could be us right there next season. I'll stay to watch that one."

## **Day after clinch, Rangers face A's in finale**

By John Schlegel / MLB.com

With the American League West settled, the Rangers and A's hit the field Sunday with less at stake than they might have otherwise.

But they won't do it with less focus on the job at hand, which for the Rangers is to stay on a roll into October.

"I'm a lifer in baseball and I'm a veteran in baseball and I've been around teams that have won divisions," Rangers manager Ron Washington said after his club clinched its first division title since 1999. "I do know that you got to keep things in perspective and your main focus is to get to the World Series. But we've accomplished what we needed to accomplish to get an opportunity to do that, and I don't think I'm going to let myself go until we get there."

For the A's, finishing strong as a team is high on the list, but so is finishing individual seasons on a strong note. And for AL Cy Young candidate Trevor Cahill, that means maintaining a high level of performance -- and continuing what has been a roll against the Rangers and possible Sunday starter Colby Lewis, who may get the day off. Michael Young and a few other position players may also sit in the finale.

They've met four times already this year, and Cahill and the A's have come out on top each time, the last one coming Aug. 8 in a 3-2 Oakland victory.

Cahill enters the game with the AL lead in opponents' batting average at .210, ranks third in ERA at 2.81 and is one of just four pitchers since 1986 to win 17 or more at age 22 or younger. The last to win more than 17 was Bret Saberhagen in 1985.

### **Rangers: Cantu can do**

It was a long time coming, but Jorge Cantu's first RBI proved to be quite large in their postseason clincher. His second one was even bigger, as it proved to be the game-winner in a 4-3 victory -- his first homer with the Rangers. He actually earned his second straight start at first base with a couple of excellent defensive plays the night before. "It's not always offense," Washington said. "He has been doing a great job at first base since we got him." Cantu may be the Rangers' best option against left-handed pitching. "I'm just trying to get on a roll," Cantu said. "All I can do is get ready for the playoffs. I've made a lot of progress, and I'm just trying to carry it into the game."

### **Athletics: Mazzaro to the 'pen**

Right-hander Vin Mazzaro will spend the remainder of the season in the bullpen. With Bobby Cramer thriving in the A's rotation, Mazzaro has made 22 appearances (18 starts) for the A's this season. He was sent down to Triple-A Sacramento on Sept. 6 after an eight-start stretch that saw him go 0-6 with a 5.60 ERA. "I'll approach it the best I can," Mazzaro said. "Just do my job, stay loose, be ready in the bullpen for whatever happens." ... The first 10,000 fans at the Oakland Coliseum for the A's home finale will receive a special Dallas Braden Perfect Game bobblehead, which features the left-hander pumping his fist and shouting, with May 9, 2010, on the base, marking the date of his perfecto vs. the Rays.

### **Worth noting**

The season series is tied at nine apiece entering Sunday's finale. The A's won last year's series 11-8, but had lost the previous three season series to Texas.

## **Blevins may be done for rest of season**

By Jane Lee & Alex Espinoza / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Jerry Blevins expressed continued improvement in his sore left shoulder on Saturday, but the A's reliever admitted he very well may be done for the remainder of the season.

"Nothing's been determined or really even discussed yet," Blevins said, "but at this point, where we are right now, it might be best not to push it."

The A's entered Saturday's contest against the visiting Rangers standing eight games back, with nine left on the schedule. Texas needs just one win and an Oakland loss this weekend to clinch the American League West title, a feat that would likely shelve Blevins.

"The competitive part of you wants to be out there, wants to finish the season healthy," he said. "But this isn't something I've dealt with before, so we're trying to be careful."

Blevins underwent "more extensive" drills with A's strength and conditioning coach Bob Alejo on Saturday morning, but he's yet to resume throwing. The southpaw compiled a career-high 48 2/3 innings a year after he tossed just 22 1/3 innings in 20 appearances through three stints with Oakland in 2009.

Blevins had not allowed a run in seven of his past nine outings before he succumbed to the shoulder injury following his most recent appearance, a one-inning relief stint in Kansas City on Sept. 15. His absence will leave Craig Breslow as the lone lefty in an injury-ridden bullpen, which also lost Andrew Bailey to season-ending elbow cleanup surgery this past week.

### **Mazzaro to finish out year in bullpen**

OAKLAND -- With the emergence of Bobby Cramer in the A's rotation, Vin Mazzaro has been relegated to the bullpen for the remainder of the season.

"I'll approach it the best I can," Mazzaro said. "Just do my job, stay loose, be ready in the bullpen for whatever happens."

Mazzaro, who will turn 24 on Monday, has made 22 appearances (18 starts) for the A's this season, but was sent down to Triple-A Sacramento on Sept. 6 after an eight-start stretch that saw him go 0-6 with a 5.60 ERA.

Mazzaro made one start with the River Cats before they were knocked out of the playoffs, and has made just one relief appearance in Oakland since then. He said the organization asked him to work on his changeup in Sacramento, but no major tweaks were made.

Looking ahead to next season, Mazzaro figures to be the front-runner for the fifth spot in Oakland's rotation, assuming the team keeps Trevor Cahill, Brett Anderson, Gio Gonzalez and Dallas Braden.

"He pitched in [the rotation] a lot this year," Oakland manager Bob Geren said. "He's young and talented, so he is definitely in the mix."

Geren added Mazzaro will be the club's primary long man for the next few days, as Boof Bonser has been used as the situational reliever in three of the past five games. Still, Mazzaro said he's focused on returning to the A's rotation next season.

"That's the whole goal," Mazzaro said. "I'm not a bullpen guy, I'm a starter. Hopefully, I'll be working in the starting rotation and the offseason goes well."

### **Worth noting**

Rajai Davis returned to the A's lineup on Saturday after missing two straight games due to what was deemed a "non-baseball-related issue." Manager Bob Geren declined to comment on the reason for his absence on the field, but assured it was not disciplinary-related. "Absolutely, 100 percent no," Geren said. ... Michael Wuertz said his sore right thumb has improved greatly. He was available Friday night and said he was good to go Saturday. ... Rookie Chris Carter entered Saturday's game having hit safely in each of his past five games (6-for-14) after going 0-for-32 over the first 11 games of his career, all of which came on the road.

## **Texas clinches AL West title**

## **Cantu's first home run for Rangers breaks eighth-inning tie**

ASSOCIATED PRESS

OAKLAND — Rangers manager Ron Washington stood in a corner of the crowded clubhouse wearing a champagne-soaked AL West division championship T-shirt.



Across the room, Bengie Molina and Vladimir Guerrero danced to Latin music blaring from nearby stereo speakers. Cigars were lit and the sweet smell of celebration wafted through the air.

Texas is back in the playoffs after an 11-year drought.

Michael Young and the Rangers became the second team to clinch a spot in the postseason with a 4-3 win over the Oakland Athletics on Saturday, setting off a nearly hourlong party that began on the field shortly after rookie closer Neftali Feliz retired Cliff Pennington for the final out.

"It's a proud day in Texas," said slugger Josh Hamilton, sidelined for the past three weeks with broken ribs. "It's been a long time."

Jorge Cantu hit a tiebreaking homer in the eighth inning, his first for the Rangers, and Texas ended the Los Angeles Angels' three-year run as AL West champs despite a rocky season that began with Washington's admission that he used cocaine. The team also underwent an ownership change in August when an 18-member investment group led by former Rangers star and current team president Nolan Ryan purchased the club from Tom Hicks.

On the field, things haven't been much easier.

Opening-day pitcher Scott Feldman, who led the Rangers with 17 wins in 2009, struggled early and was moved to the bullpen in late July. So was right-hander Rich Harden, who began the year as the team's No. 2 starter.

Texas has struggled at times without Hamilton, an MVP contender who is hitting .361 with 31 homers and 97 RBIs. He broke two ribs when he smacked into the outfield wall in Minnesota on Sept. 4 and is scheduled to be re-evaluated in the next few days.

Despite all that, the Rangers did what they had to in their final series against their closest rivals in the division.

"There's no better feeling I've had playing baseball," second baseman Ian Kinsler said as a mixture of beer and champagne flowed down his cheeks. "We just got Cantu a couple months ago and he came up with a humongous hit for us. It was a great team effort today and it's the way we've been playing baseball all year. We just seem to pick each other up constantly."

Players streamed from the Texas dugout after Feliz got Pennington on a fly ball to left field with the potential tying run on second base.

Hamilton hugged teammates and jumped up and down near third base as a mob of players celebrated. Washington and his staff formed a party line and hugged players as they came off the field. Reserve infielder Andres Blanco fired his hat into a crowd of Rangers fans waiting behind the team's dugout.

"When that ball went up all I wanted it to do was land in (left fielder Nelson Cruz's) glove," Washington said. "When it landed, I was able to relax. We committed to do something and we got it done, so that should tell those guys when they commit themselves and they bring the proper attitude and put the full effort there, real great things can happen for you."

Texas is the only current major league franchise never to win a playoff series. The Rangers won three AL West crowns from 1996-99, their only postseason appearances, but lost in the first round to the New York Yankees each time.

For Oakland, it marks the fourth straight season the A's will miss out on the postseason.

"I'm happy for Ron Washington, his staff and the players, but I don't really enjoy watching it," Oakland manager Bob Geren said. "With our pitching staff, the defense, maybe improve the offense, I could see us right there next year. I'd stay to watch that one."

Cantu hit a solo shot in the eighth, his first home run since being traded from Florida to Texas on July 29, and the Rangers hung on. Darren O'Day (5-2) pitched a scoreless inning and Feliz got four outs for his 38th save — breaking the previous rookie record of 37 set by Seattle's Kazuhiro Sasaki in 2000.

Young, a six-time All-Star who is in the playoffs for the first time after 10-plus seasons with Texas, also homered. Kinsler and Julio Borbon added two hits apiece for the Rangers, who won their second straight after losing the opener of the four-game series.

Clinching a playoff spot in Oakland was fitting for Washington, who is in the final season of his four-year contract with Texas. He was a coach with the A's for 11 seasons and is still popular at the Coliseum. Several security guards and ushers asked to work the weekend series so they could be around to see Washington and his players celebrate if they won.

When they did, the Rangers rushed the field. Perez was mobbed immediately, while players ran in from the outfield and bullpen to join in.

The celebration continued inside the clubhouse. Several Latin players formed a circle and sang songs. Other players, wearing ski and swimming goggles, grabbed bottle after bottle of champagne, spraying anyone within reach. Young had to react quickly to avoid getting doused with a tub of ice water.

"It's better than anything I've ever experienced," said Washington, repeatedly targeted by the flowing champagne. "When you're the head guy in charge you're always putting out fires and everything lands in your lap. The thing I'm proud of is that these guys landed in my lap."

Hamilton stayed outside the fray. Having battled drug and alcohol addictions in the past, the outfielder dressed quickly and even talked a few of his teammates out of pouring water on him after he had dressed.

"What's exciting to me is we have faith day here in Oakland and I'm going to give my testimony," Hamilton said. "So it would be kind of hypocritical of me to come in here and douse myself with alcohol and smoke cigars and then go out there and talk about Jesus."

Cantu's home run off reliever Michael Wuertz (2-3) couldn't have come at a better time. The Rangers, shut out in the series opener Thursday before busting out for 18 hits and 10 runs Friday, stranded six runners in the first four innings.

Cantu gave Texas a 2-1 lead with an RBI single in the sixth. The Rangers made it 3-1 in the seventh when Elvis Andrus walked, stole second and third and then scored on a wild pitch.

Pennington's two-out, two-run homer in the bottom half off reliever Clay Rapada tied the score 3-all.

## NOTES

A's starter Gio Gonzalez fell short in his third attempt to earn his 15th win of the season. Gonzalez scattered seven hits over six innings with two strikeouts and three walks.

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## Local Good Samaritan honored at A's game Rodriguez helped save two families from Fourth of July fires

By Cameron Macdonald – Elk Grove Citizen 9/21/2010

Gilbert Rodriguez was lounging with neighbors in a hot tub around midnight when they heard a bang. He first saw a bright flash coming from a nearby house, which was a common sight that night when his Laguna neighborhood celebrated the Fourth of July and lit fireworks on the street.

"Everybody thought it was just late night fireworks," he recalled.

A few minutes later, Rodriguez saw another flicker of light, followed by flames that shot high in the air.

He soon hollered and banged on the front door of his neighbor's burning house – he made enough noise to cause the homeowners to quickly grab their young children and flee the house

Rodriguez then helped evacuate an elderly couple from a neighboring house and later took a garden hose to battle the fire.

"But that didn't work so well," he recalled.

The flames shot to a house's upper story and jumped to a next-door house's rooftop where another fire soon broke out.

"It just got overwhelming for me," Rodriguez said. "It was a crazy experience, I'd never forget it."

Cosumnes firefighters extinguished the burning two houses on the 9000 block of Laguna Lake Way that night. Investigators believe that a disposed firework may have caused the fire.

Many charred remains of furniture and other belongings were left on one house's front lawn the next morning but nobody

was injured in the tragedy thanks to Rodriguez.

The Oakland Athletics staff later heard his story a few months later and honored him and other citizens who saved lives during emergencies at their Firefighter Appreciation Night event they held at the Oakland-Alameda County Coliseum on Sept. 11.

Rodriguez was recognized on the field where he received an autographed baseball and a jersey that he plans to frame.

"I was pretty nervous...you don't want to trip up or slip and fall," Rodriguez recalled about the ceremony, laughing.

He mentioned that four firefighters threw the opening pitch at once during the ceremony.

"That let the pressure off of me because I was sweating bullets," Rodriguez said. "(The event) was something I would never forget."

Other people honored were a Richmond resident who saved a family of six from a burning house last spring and 10 San Francisco high school students who taught fire prevention skills to people living in low-income apartments.

Also a 3-year-old girl from Manteca who saved her father's life after he took wrong medication.

Detra Paige, the Athletics' community relations director, said that her staff searched for citizens to celebrate at the Firefighter Appreciation event.

She mentioned one honoree from Manteca who saved her father's life after he took wrong medication. When her father's body froze, the 3-year-old girl walked two blocks to a fire station to announce that he was in trouble.

"We honored (Rodriguez) as a hero," Paige said.

Rodriguez said that one of the homeowners he saved, a mother of two babies, comes to him in tears whenever they talk.

He reflected on where he happened to luckily be when he first saw the fire break out in his neighborhood.

"It was fate, you know," Rodriguez said.