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Late homers cut Texas' magic number to three

By T.R. Sullivan / MLB.com | 9/22/2011 2:34 AM ET

OAKLAND -- Rangers outfielder Josh Hamilton leads the American League with 20 game-winning RBIs. The latest one off Athletics reliever Grant Balfour -- a line-drive home run down the right-field line -- apparently didn't feel too good

"It felt terrible," Hamilton said, and he wasn't kidding. "I got jammed. I just happened to have the right bat, my thick-handled bat."

"I don't care if he said he got jammed, I knew that ball was going out," manager Ron Washington said after eighth-inning home runs by Ian Kinsler and Hamilton carried the Rangers to a 3-2 victory over the Athletics at the Oakland Coliseum on Wednesday night.

The Rangers trailed, 2-1, going into the eighth before striking against Oakland reliever Balfour, who had just taken over for Brandon McCarthy. Balfour had pitched seven scoreless innings against the Rangers this year and was 3-0 with a 1.84 ERA lifetime against them. But that didn't matter against a team closing in on an AL West title.

Kinsler, leading off the inning, worked the count full and then lifted a fastball over the left-field wall for his 30th home run to tie the score. He was 1-for-8 with a home run in his career against Balfour prior to that at-bat.

"He's got a good fastball," Kinsler said. "That's his strength and he went with his strength. He's got me out with it a handful of times. I didn't think it was going out. Balls weren't going out tonight, but fortunately I had enough strength to get it over the wall."

After Elvis Andrus flied out to right, Hamilton connected with a 1-0 fastball and lined it over the right-field fence for a home run. He now has two more game-winning RBIs than anybody else in the AL even though he missed six weeks because of the fracture in his right arm.

"Maybe my focus level goes up," Hamilton said. "I wish I could harness that focus all the time. That's all I can tell you."

Balfour had a hard time believing that Hamilton was able to hit that inside fastball out of the park.

"The one to Hamilton, I thought it was actually a pretty good pitch," Balfour said. "I was trying to go in on him and got it in there and just a good piece of hitting. Guy's a good hitter. I was kind of surprised he hit that pitch out. Thought I made a good pitch, guess it wasn't good enough."

Once his hands stopped stinging on a cool September night in the East Bay, Hamilton was able to enjoy the moment.

"I like it when the team gets excited," Hamilton said. "It's fun to see them get excited and it's fun to do something to get them excited. I've been on both ends of it."

The Rangers have much to be excited about. The victory leaves them with a five-game lead over the Angels in the AL West with seven left to play. Their magic number is three. They also remain tied with the Tigers for the second-best record in the AL.

Wednesday night also marked their 90th win of the season, the fifth time in club history they have won that many games. They have won four straight and are 13-5 in September.

"It was just awesome to see us come back like that," pitcher C.J. Wilson said. "We haven't been coming back like that lately."

Wilson went six innings and allowed two runs on five hits while walking three and striking out eight. He has 206 strikeouts on the season. But he threw 111 pitches and was bothered by a recurring blister on the middle finger of his left hand that popped up in the first inning.

"After the first I was battling my control the whole game," Wilson said. "I threw some close pitches and those guys were too disciplined, they're not going to swing. I wish I wasn't throwing as many pitches as I did in six innings. Too many full counts. I was trying to throw strikeouts instead of making them hit the ball. I made my own bed."

Wilson said the blister should not keep him from making his next start on Monday against the Angels.

Reliever Koji Uehara picked up his first victory since joining the Rangers. He took over for Wilson and pitched a scoreless seventh. Mike Adams set the side down in order in the eighth and Neftali Feliz pitched the ninth for his 29th save.

McCarthy was excellent for the Athletics, allowing one run through seven innings. He allowed six hits and left after throwing 79 pitches.

"McCarthy was awesome," Wilson said of his former teammate. "He looked really good. That's the best he's thrown against us this year. I thought they were going to send him out there for the complete game."

Oakland manager Bob Melvin did not. Melvin has been careful with McCarthy all season because of a long history of injuries that is quite familiar to the Rangers. Balfour's track record against the Rangers has been pretty good. But the Rangers got to him on Wednesday night and have now won 12 of their last 13 against the Athletics.

"It's not fun going through this year with them, with them just continually beating us and finding different ways to do it," McCarthy said. "It's something we should know going into the offseason that we have to take it to their level ... but over the course of the season it's starting to get a little old."

Endy making impact in 'very special' season

By T.R. Sullivan / MLB.com | 09/21/11 9:13 PM ET

OAKLAND -- Rangers center fielder Endy Chavez was 2-for-4 on Tuesday against the Athletics and is 8-for-16 in his last five games. That has raised his batting average to .305 on the season.

He is also hitting .313 in 208 at-bats this year as a center fielder. That is the second highest for an American League center fielder with at least 50 at-bats at the position. Jacoby Ellsbury of the Red Sox leads with a .317 average.

"Really? I didn't know that," Chavez said. "I'm really fighting right now. Honestly I just want to be productive for the team. I know if I can keep my average in that area, I'm helping the team. We're fighting to make the playoffs and I'm happy that I can contribute."

He has. The Rangers have used four center fielders -- Chavez, Craig Gentry, Josh Hamilton and Julio Borbon -- and they combined to hit .282, the third highest in center field for any AL team. Chavez has the most at-bats at the position on the team and has put himself into the running for Comeback Player of the Year after being out of the Major Leagues for almost two full years while recovering from a torn ACL in his right knee.

"This season has meant a lot to me," Chavez said. "It has been very special, especially coming back after two years. I feel very happy to do this, get healthy for the whole year and play the way I've been playing."

Chavez said part of his success comes from the way manager Ron Washington has used him. Chavez, 33, has been platooning lately with Gentry in center field and has been given regular time off so he does not get worn down.

"He has taken care of me," Chavez said. "All the time he makes sure I'm ready to play. He has been very good in that. He understands I didn't play for a long time. We're on the same page."

Rangers mull options for postseason roster

OAKLAND -- The Rangers have met and discussed the possible makeup of the postseason roster. Manager Ron Washington does not want to discuss it publicly before they clinch, fearing swift retribution from the baseball gods.

But there are clues. The Rangers took a 7-1 lead into the ninth inning on Tuesday night and with a rested bullpen, left-hander Michael Kirkman was sent into pitch. Washington admitted the Rangers wanted to take a look at him.

Kirkman, despite being in Triple-A most of the season, is a candidate for the postseason roster, especially if the Rangers carry eight relievers. There are others and no decisions have been made.

An eight-man bullpen would likely include closer Neftali Feliz, right-handers Mark Lowe, Koji Uehara and Mike Adams, and left-handers Darren Oliver and Michael Gonzalez. It would also include one starter not in the postseason rotation, possibly right-hander Alexi Ogando.

Kirkman could be attractive as a third left-hander in the bullpen. The Rangers will also look at three right-handers: Scott Feldman, Darren O'Day and Yoshinori Tateyama. All could contribute in different ways. Feldman's primary advantage over the others is being able to pitch multiple innings.

The Rangers are mulling all possibilities.

Cruz not yet ready for duty in outfield

OAKLAND -- Mitch Moreland was back on the bench Wednesday for the fourth straight game because Nelson Cruz is not ready to return to the outfield. Cruz, recovering from a strained left hamstring, remains at designated hitter and manager Ron Washington said he will be there again on Thursday afternoon as well.

"I don't think it's a good idea putting him in the outfield with the day game after the night game," Washington said.

But Cruz stays in the lineup even though he is 2-for-15 with six strikeouts since coming off the disabled list because Washington wants to get his bat going. Cruz was 1-for-5 with a double on Tuesday and Washington said he saw progress.

"I saw much better passes at the ball," Washington said. "I'm looking forward to him breaking out soon. He doesn't have to hit the ball out of the ballpark, just hit it hard."

Moreland, who has four hits in his last 25 at-bats, remains on the bench because Michael Young has to start at first base while Cruz is at DH.

"I understand the situation," Moreland said. "You do what you've got to do to keep it rolling. I'm still into the game every day."

Washington said the time off will help Moreland.

"He needs it," Washington said. "He's a grinder. It's a refresher. He has been grinding. It's not what I wanted to do but it worked out that way. He'll come back strong and mentally refreshed. In the past when I've sat Mitch like this, he's come back ready to go."

Young moves into rare 200-hit company

OAKLAND -- Michael Young became the 16th player in Major League history to have at least six 200-hit seasons in his career. Young had three hits on Tuesday and has 201 on the season.

Of the other 15 players, 11 are in the Hall of Fame while Ichiro Suzuki and Derek Jeter are still active. Pete Rose, who had 10 200-hit seasons, is banned from Hall consideration. The final player on the list is Steve Garvey, the former Dodgers and Padres first baseman.

Young went into Wednesday's game five hits behind Adrian Gonzalez of the Red Sox, who leads the league with 206. Gonzalez also went into Wednesday's game leading the league with a .340 average while Young was second at .333.

"Michael is unbelievable," third baseman Adrian Beltre said. "He does it every year ... 200 hits is tough to do in the big leagues. He's a guy you want on your team."

Worth noting

- The Rangers expect infielder Esteban German to return this weekend. He has been in the Dominican Republic after his mother passed away earlier this week.
- Manager Ron Washington hasn't decided if Yorvit Torrealba will start on Thursday. Mike Napoli has started four straight games at catcher.
- Derek Holland, 24, became the youngest pitcher in Rangers history to win 15 games in a season after the 7-2 victory on Tuesday night.

Rangers seek sweep to draw closer to title

By Jesse Sanchez / MLB.com | 9/22/2011 1:59 AM ET

It's hard to blame the Rangers for feeling optimistic these days.

They've won four games in a row, their magic number to clinch the American League West has dwindled to three and Colby Lewis' confidence is growing with each outing.

After Wednesday's 3-2 victory against the A's in Oakland, the Rangers still lead the Angels by five games in the AL West standings.

As for Lewis, he has won his past two starts and is now 5-3 with a 4.56 ERA in 12 starts since the All-Star break. What's more, he is 4-0 with a 2.83 in five starts against the A's this year, and when takes the hill in Oakland on Thursday, he will attempt to be the first Rangers pitcher with five wins against Oakland since Ferguson Jenkins did it 1974.

The A's will counter with Trevor Cahill in their final home game of the season.

Lewis is already one of four pitchers to have beaten the A's four times in a season since the three-division realignment in 1994. The others were Joe Saunders (2009), Felix Hernandez (2007) and Kenny Rogers (2005).

"There is no method to the madness," Lewis said. "No reason why. You know me, I just go out and do my thing no matter who is out there."

Only Jenkins, who went 5-0 for the Rangers against the A's in 1974, has beaten the Athletics five times in a season since they moved to Oakland in 1968. Jenkins also had five wins against Twins in 1974.

Despite an inconsistent season, particularly in the second half, Cahill has consistently been good against the potent Rangers lineup, collecting a 3-2 record and 2.91 ERA in five starts.

In his last outing, Cahill gave up three runs on nine hits in 6 2/3 innings in a loss against the Tigers. He struck out four and walked four in the start.

"I put myself in tough situations in a couple innings and was able to get out of them, make pitches when I had to," said Cahill, who dropped to 3-7 with a 6.58 ERA since the break. "That's one positive thing I guess you can take out of it."

Rangers: Beltre swinging hot bat

- Adrian Beltre went 2-for-4 Wednesday and has hit safely in 17 of his last 18 games. He's hitting at .365 with eight home runs and 21 RBIs since being activated from 15-day disabled list on Sept. 1.

- Michael Young went 2-for-4 on Wednesday. On Tuesday, he eclipsed the 200-hit mark for the sixth time in his career.

Young is just the 16th player in Major League history to produce at least 200 hits at least six times. Ichiro Suzuki, who accomplished the feat 10 times, and Derek Jeter, who has seven seasons with at least 200 hits, are the only other active players to accomplish the feat.

- There are approximately 10,000 tickets remaining for each of the three weekend games with Seattle in Arlington.

Athletics: Melvin on board with new deal

- The A's agreed to a three-year deal with manager Bob Melvin on Wednesday.

"Oakland deserves a manager like this," pitcher Gio Gonzalez said. "He's brought some good vibes, some great coaching with him. This is something we definitely wanted. He helped change things around in the second half."

- Andrew Bailey has 20 saves this season. He joins Kazuhiro Sasaki and Billy Koch as the only relievers in Major League Baseball history with at least 20 saves in each of their first three seasons.

- The A's are 8-10 since Sept. 2.

Worth noting

- The Rangers have consecutive 90-win seasons for the first time in franchise history.

- Texas shortstop Elvis Andrus went 0-for-4 on Wednesday to snap a 13-game hitting streak.

- The A's are 3-6 on the final homestand of the season with one to play.

- Texas slugger Mike Napoli has hit safely in his last eight games, batting .552 (16-for-29) during that stretch. He's also hit safely in 12 of last 13 games.

- The Rangers are 13-5 against the A's this season.

Lowe injures hamstring; status in doubt

Reliever Mark Lowe's availability for the remainder of the season and possibly post-season is in doubt after he injured his left hamstring before Wednesday's game with the Athletics.

The Rangers do not know the extent of the injury. But Lowe is being sent back to Dallas to be examined by Dr. Keith Meister. He injured it working out with other relievers before the game.

"We just won't know how bad it is until he's examined," Rangers manager Ron Washington said.

Lowe is 2-3 with a 3.80 ERA in 52 games and was almost assuredly going to be on the post-season roster. Now the Rangers have to wait and see if he will be ready.

FORT WORTH STAR-TELEGRAM

Derek Holland: Fear the moustache
Posted Wednesday, Sep. 21, 2011
By Gil LeBreton

OAKLAND, Calif. — No, Derek Holland didn't need to grow a moustache to tell us all he had grown up. We can see it in his pitching.

The consistency. The curveball. The maturity.

The moustache? Not so much.

On a Tuesday night when the Texas Rangers clubbed their way closer to another American League West title, beating Oakland 7-2, 24-year-old Holland earned his 15th win.

He's ready for the postseason. And so are the Rangers.

Yankee Stadium, Fenway, that Comerica graveyard or the Trop.

Bring them on. Holland is ready. Fear the Moustache.

He has literally grown up in front of our eyes, this baby-faced kid from Ohio. Holland was a 25th-round draft pick from a junior college in Alabama, and the Rangers signed him in 2007 for \$200,000.

Ask him what's responsible for his breakthrough 2011 season, and Holland has a ready answer:

"Maturity... experience... It's making better pitches, because I'm able to catch things and realize right away what I'm doing wrong."

As he explained it Tuesday night, the younger, no-moustache Derek Holland lacked the self-confidence to pick the brains of his more experienced Rangers teammates. When things went sour on the mound, Holland used to brood on the bench alone.

Now older, hairier, more socially comfortable with himself, Holland says he regularly talks with teammates about his pitches and about opposing hitters.

In the end, he said, "It's just having confidence — having the confidence that you can throw any pitch you want when you want."

Over his past five starts, Holland is 4-0 with an earned run average of 1.57.

But to better appreciate what Holland has done, you have to go back to the weekend of July 4th.

Inconsistency had marked Holland's season to that point. Against the New York Mets, he gave up 12 hits in six innings. In his next start, July 2 against the Florida Marlins, Holland failed to make it out of the first.

At least one semi-impatient local sports columnist suggested that the time was approaching when maybe the Rangers' rotation would be better served by moving Holland to the bullpen — or even to Triple-A Round Rock. I did meekly note, however, that Holland was only 24 and left-handed, as if that merited another chance.

He got that chance. In Rangers pitching coach Mike Maddux, Holland has an unwavering supporter.

"That's been huge," Holland said Tuesday night. "He's had confidence in me and stuck by me, even on my bad days."

After being knocked out in the first inning by the Marlins, Holland responded with back-to-back shutouts against Oakland and Seattle. Since that Florida game, 14 starts, Holland is 9-1 with an ERA of 2.63.

He's ready for October.

His upper lip? Still a work in progress.

Nicknamed the "Dutchstache," Holland's moustache has been a frequent topic on Twitter. The reviews, all in fun, haven't always been kind, mostly because Holland still looks like he's only 18.

Teammate C.J. Wilson tweeted after Tuesday's game, "Not sure if the Texas fans saw any of the super slo-mo close-ups of [Holland], but his Dutchstache was looking thick and bossy tonight."

Thick and bossy? Or is the story here that you need a high-definition close-up to find it? You read it here first: "Fear the Dutchstache" T-shirts will be the hottest items at Rangers concession stands come October.

Timing is everything, and no Ranger probably knows that more than Holland. Two summers ago, he was reported to be all but packaged and traded to Toronto as part of a deal for Roy Halladay.

A false alarm, as it turned out, because the Blue Jays announced on trade deadline day that Halladay didn't want to be traded to Texas. Holland also picked that night to pitch 8 2/3 innings of one-hit baseball.

Two years later, Halladay has 18 victories for the Phillies. Holland, 10 years younger, has 15.

"He knows I love him," said Rangers manager Ron Washington, who's had to give Holland an occasional midgame lecture in the past. "It's about helping him to grow up. He doesn't take any of it to heart. He just moves on, and I like that."

Washington, too, has seen Derek Holland literally grow up in front of him.

October, the harvest season, awaits.

Late homers lift Rangers over A's; magic number 3
Posted Thursday, Sep. 22, 2011
By Jeff Wilson

OAKLAND, Calif. - Ian Kinsler and Josh Hamilton hit solo homers in the eighth inning Wednesday to spoil seven solid innings by Brandon McCarthy and give the Rangers a 3-2 victory that reduced their magic number to clinch the American League West to 3.

The win allowed the Rangers to maintain a five-game lead over the Angels in the American League West, and they kept pace with Detroit for the No. 2 playoff seed. The Rangers and Tigers have identical 90-64 records, but the Rangers must finish a game up because Detroit has the tiebreaker by virtue of winning the head-to-head series this year.

McCarthy had allowed one run in seven innings, throwing only 79 pitches and outpitching C.J. Wilson, but was removed in favor of Grant Balfour in the eighth. Kinsler hit a 3-2 pitch off the top of the out-of-town scoreboard in left field for his 30th homer of the season to tie the game.

Hamilton followed a batter later with a line drive into the right-field seats.

The rally made a winner of Koji Uehara, his first victory of since joining the Rangers on July 31. Wilson went only six innings, logging 111 pitches and allowing two two-out runs in the fifth inning.

The left-hander struck out eight and walked three, both culprits for his high pitch count. Mike Adams worked a perfect eighth, and Neftali Feliz pitched around a leadoff walk to earn his 29th save.

Rangers' Beltre goes from injured to invincible with his bat
Posted Wednesday, Sep. 21, 2011
By Jeff Wilson

OAKLAND, Calif. -- Adrian Beltre has never been specific about the health of his left hamstring, which he strained July 22 and again 15 days later en route to missing 37 games.

All the Texas Rangers' third baseman will say when asked how he feels, or how well he's running, or how well he's managing the muscle, is "good enough."

At this point, he's redefining "good" since returning from the disabled list Sept. 1.

Beltre entered Wednesday with a hit in 16 of 17 games since his return. He leads the majors in September RBIs (21) and was tied for the major-league lead in homers (8) with teammate Ian Kinsler.

Those homers had come in the Rangers' previous nine games.

As a result, the Rangers lead the majors this month with a .321 average and 32 homers as they try to close out Los Angeles in the American League West.

Yeah, good enough.

"Hopefully I can do this stuff for however long we have left," said Beltre, who hit a three-run homer in the first inning Tuesday in the Rangers' 7-2 victory.

"In this lineup, you don't have to be the guy. You're just one of the guys, and it's easy for a hitter to just come and be yourself and contribute. Offensively, for a hitter, it's easier to do your job that way."

Beltre has made it look easy since his return, though he confessed that isn't entirely the case. He collected hits in each of his first 13 games back, but it took him about a week to find his comfort zone.

He started driving the ball Sept. 9, when he collected a double. He homered the next night, and had a double and two homers the next afternoon.

"The first four or five games I didn't feel so good," Beltre said. "I started getting my timing back, seeing the ball better and making better contact. That got me to here. I feel good right now."

Despite missing all of August, Beltre ranked in the top 10 in the AL in homers (28, tied for ninth), RBIs (97, tied for ninth) and slugging percentage (sixth, .541) before facing Oakland right-hander Brandon McCarthy in the second of three games at O.co Coliseum.

Had Beltre stayed healthy, he likely would rank higher in those categories and possibly be mentioned as a candidate for the MVP. Beltre, though, isn't a big believer in asking, "What if?"

"It happened for a reason," he said. "I hate being on the bench, but, at the same time, the team didn't miss a beat. Of course, I would want to play 159 games, but it didn't happen."

Something is happening now.

The Rangers' magic number to clinch the West entering Wednesday was 4. The offense is as finely tuned as it has been all season, and that's with Nelson Cruz searching for his comfort level after also missing time with a strained left hamstring.

Beltre might not want the credit, but his teammates are heaping credit upon him.

"He's doing what Adrian does," outfielder Josh Hamilton said. "It's been fun to watch. He's not only the most entertaining player I've ever played with, but he's one of the best pure hitters.

"He doesn't try to do too much. He takes what the pitchers give him, and he squares it up a lot of the time."

Beltre, though, seems to step cautiously when asked about his season. The Rangers still haven't clinched the West, and they hope to advance deep into October.

But he's been more than just good enough, no matter what he says.

"It's been good, but it's not over," Beltre said. "I'm just glad with whatever I'm doing that might help the team out."

Bad back won't hold back Blanco
Posted Wednesday, Sep. 21, 2011
By Jeff Wilson

OAKLAND, Calif. -- Utility infielder Andres Blanco said that he will be available for the rest of the regular season and postseason even though he has a fractured vertebra in his lower back.

He has played only sparingly since being activated Sept. 1 from the 15-day disabled list for a second time since July.

The first DL period, beginning July 8, was due to a stress reaction. The second was simply called lower back inflammation. Neither of the DL stints helped much.

The switch-hitting Blanco said he won't bat left-handed again this season. He will be shut down for three months after the season to give the fracture a chance to heal.

With the American League West title still up for grabs and a lack of infield depth in the organization, Blanco is prepared to fight through the pain.

"I've got no choice," said Blanco, who has appeared in only five games this month. "It's something I really want to do. Whatever will help the team, I will do it."

Manager Ron Washington said last week that the reason shortstop Elvis Andrus has played more late this season is because of Blanco's absence for much of August.

While his back hasn't improved, there is minimal risk of making the injury worse. Blanco works daily on exercises to help strengthen his back and core, but the back will heal fully only with rest.

Right field can wait

Nelson Cruz will be the Rangers' designated hitter for a fifth straight game today before returning to right field this weekend.

The turnaround from a night game to a day game today makes putting Cruz in the field too much of a risk, Ron Washington said. Catcher Mike Napoli, though, could catch today even though he was the starter behind the plate Wednesday.

Cruz said that he is getting closer to his comfort level at the plate after missing 12 games with a strained left hamstring. He doubled in his first at-bat Tuesday and scored on a wild pitch. Though only 1 for 5, his at-bats were better and he made better contact.

"Even on the breaking pitches I feel like I was on them," Cruz said.

His running also appears to be improving. He coasted into second base after his double, made his way to third on an Endy Chavez groundout, and made it home easily on a wild pitch.

He took off once the ball went to the screen but wisely coasted home once it became apparent that Oakland catcher Kurt Suzuki didn't have a play.

"I didn't feel anything," Cruz said. "I reacted quickly and then saw it was OK to slow down. It was a good test. I didn't run 100 percent. I tried to slow down once I saw I would make it."

Keeping mum

The Rangers have met to discuss how their postseason roster might shake out and what they plan to do with the starting rotation for the AL Division Series.

The Rangers could very well put the starter who isn't in the postseason rotation in the bullpen. Alexi Ogando, for instance, has recent experience as a reliever and could become another key set-up piece.

Ron Washington, though, wouldn't take the bait with eight games remaining. His tight-lipped approach on the postseason plans was designed to not upset the balance and positive vibes in the Rangers' baseball universe.

"We've met, but it's nothing I want to discuss," Washington said. "I can answer all of that once they put a 'y' by our name. The baseball gods will mess with you if you mess with them."

Aggressive approach drives Hamilton at plate Posted Wednesday, Sep. 21, 2011

Josh Hamilton admitted on Aug. 26 that he wasn't being as aggressive at the plate as he had been during his run to the American League MVP award in 2010.

Though he was hitting .296, Hamilton had only 17 home runs. He wasn't driving pitches the way that he had shown in previous seasons.

Hamilton was intent on changing his approach, and now a month later believes he has. His average had climbed to .300 entering Wednesday, and he has hit six homers and driven in 20 runs since becoming more aggressive.

"The thing about being more aggressive, you've got to be more aggressive in the strike zone," said Hamilton, who has 23 homers and 91 RBIs. "It is difficult because you're loaded up and more ready, but then you've got to be calm, recognize [the pitch] and then be aggressive."

His performance Tuesday was half-good, half-bad. He singled and doubled in his first two at-bats, but he struck out in his third at-bat after chasing a fastball out of the zone.

He also struck out in the eighth, swinging at three breaking pitches that weren't strikes.

"I wish he'd quit swinging at all that junk," said manager Ron Washington, who has seen Hamilton's demeanor change.

"I see him trying to do the right thing," Washington said. "I do see him not taking everything like it's the end of the world. He's louder, he's looser than he's been. That's another way he's become more aggressive." -- Jeff Wilson

Mac Engel: 'Moneyball' paints Grady Fuson as the villain
Posted Wednesday, Sep. 21, 2011
By Mac Engel

The word "villain" may rank either last, or dead last, in describing Grady Fuson. But when the movie Moneyball is released Friday, there is an actor portraying the former Texas Rangers' front-office executive on the big screen. It's a composite role, opposite star Brad Pitt, and represents the stodgy, anti-smarts of baseball -- doing things the dumb way and reluctant to change.

Do not believe this despite what the movie tells you: Grady Fuson was never fired by A's GM Billy Beane. Beane was not a happy man when the Rangers stole Fuson away in 2001.

"My wife was taken aback by that scene; that firing scene got to me a little bit," Fuson said one day after attending the movie's premiere in Oakland. "It's Hollywood and that part of it I have to get over with. I actually enjoyed the movie. I knew I would be the guy that argued [against Beane]. I knew I would be cast as the villain."

Do not believe the book, or the movie, that paints Grady as some antiquated baseball dope, or the philosophy that he believes in as invalid.

The reason we love baseball is because, while it can appeal to a nerdy economist who adores numbers, it represents the unpredictable nature of sport that can't be explained on a spreadsheet.

Baseball as it exists today combines the old-school way of looking at players, and some math. Your Rangers are a wonderful example.

Their GM is an Ivy League guy, well-schooled in baseball numbers. This is a reason I believe the Rangers have tried to get rid of Michael Young. The Moneyball theory says Young's defense is not countered by his offense.

But what Moneyball cannot quantify is the value a Michael Young brings to a team. The reason Ron Washington never lost that clubhouse, and why all of those younger players carry themselves in a professional manner, is because the highest-paid player is a total pro who cares immensely about winning, and acting like an adult.

One of pitcher Derek Holland's foremost mentors has been Michael Young. How are the Rangers doing if Holland had not matured the way he has?

How many wins, or runs, is Young's presence worth? Sabermetrics has no formula for that.

Meanwhile, the Rangers have a manager who is a career seam-head, who believes in the old-school values of running, bunting and a host of other things that are anti- Moneyball.

Baseball people insist the reason the Red Sox ended the curse is because of a Moneyball approach. It helped, but I say the reason they ended the curse is because they had Curt Schilling, Manny Ramirez and David Ortiz, not to mention a host of syringes.

"Baseball went through their sabermetric time and making it all a mathematical situation to get players, and now more teams are involved in that sabermath to help you arrive at certain situations," Fuson said. "When it's all said and done, the whole thing has come back full circle as far as using numbers and statistics to evaluate players.

"You have a lot of outside entities that come into play, and you have to have luck. You have to guesstimate on makeups and opportunity, and a lot of things have to hit for it to come to fruition."

Moneyball, which is a pretty good movie and successfully combines sports and pop culture, opens Friday. The movie is true to the book, and the '02 A's that won 103 games.

The same problem I had with the book I do with the movie: Both ignore the fact the A's team that lost Jason Isringhausen, Jason Giambi and Johnny Damon after the '01 season to free agency had the '02 AL MVP in Miguel Tejada, and three of the best starting pitchers in baseball -- Tim Hudson, Mark Mulder and Barry Zito. Throw in third baseman Eric Chavez, too.

Those guys were in that system long before Beane started to use sabermetrics more aggressively to find players.

What Bill James, Billy Beane, Paul DePodesta, Theo Epstein and right down to Rangers GM Jon Daniels all proved is that not all major leaguers have to look and act a certain way to be major leaguers.

But do not let the book or the movie deter you from what guys like Fuson know -- the best players are still the best players, and will trump a spreadsheet most every time. That there is a method to player evaluation that no number can quantify.

That's why Michael Young is as valuable as he is.

It is why Billy Beane never fired Grady Fuson, and why Beane hired him back last year.

DALLAS MORNING NEWS

Grant: C.J. Wilson's landmark season isn't just good - it's historic
EVAN GRANT

Published: 22 September 2011 01:04 AM

OAKLAND, Calif. — C.J. Wilson on Wednesday became the first Ranger in more than a decade to pitch 220 innings. He became the first Ranger in 20 years to reach 200 strikeouts in a season. And he became the first Ranger ever to surpass more than 30 double-play grounders in a season.

Amid all this history, however, he was unable to put the Rangers in position to trim the most important number of all — their magic number for clinching a second consecutive AL West title.

That required a little late-night work from Ian Kinsler and Josh Hamilton, who homered in the eighth inning to overcome a deficit and lift the Rangers to a 3-2 win — their 90th of the season.

The homers kept the Rangers five games ahead of Los Angeles with seven to play. Any combination of Rangers wins and Angels losses totaling three will net the Rangers another playoff trip.

The possibility, however, grows that the Rangers' three-game series at Los Angeles to end the season next week could still have huge playoff ramifications. The Angels trail wild-card leader Boston by 2 1/2 games. Even if the Rangers clinch before the series, the outcome could determine whether they open at home against Boston or Detroit or on the road at New York.

At the top of that list might be what to do with Wilson, whose last regular-season start would be scheduled for the series opener in Los Angeles. In the event the division is clinched, the Rangers would prefer he have only a brief outing to keep him rested in order to start Game 1.

But what if winning at Los Angeles could help the Rangers set up home-field advantage against the more "desirable" opponent?

On Wednesday, though, all that mattered was getting the Rangers a little closer to clinching a berth in the tournament.

Wilson kept the Rangers in the game long enough for the home run hitters to rescue the Rangers, but his night took a sharp turn from sensational to sloppy.

Wilson reached 200 strikeouts quickly, getting Jemile Weeks and Coco Crisp to start the game. He became the first Ranger since Nolan Ryan in 1991 to reach 200 innings.

And then Wilson seemed to get on a roll, facing the minimum number of hitters through the first three innings. The one runner he allowed to reach — Scott Sizemore — was eliminated on a double play. It was the 31st double-play grounder of the season induced by Wilson, giving him the Rangers record.

By the end of the fourth, Wilson had four scoreless innings and needed just two outs in the fifth to reach 220 for the year. The last Ranger to do that was Kenny Rogers (227) in 2000.

The problem was getting that third out. Wilson got Sizemore to ground out before allowing a double to Cliff Pennington, who also swiped third base because Wilson didn't hold him. After striking out Kurt Suzuki for the second out, he allowed a game-tying single to No. 8 hitter Brandon Allen on a 1-and-2 slider. Then, after getting ahead of No. 9 hitter Michael Taylor, he walked him to move Allen into scoring position. Weeks followed by lining a 2-and-2 slider for the go-ahead hit.

It was an ugly inning and ruined an otherwise historic night for Wilson, but the ruination was only temporary.

Even on his shakiest of nights, Wilson was good enough to keep the Rangers close enough.

And the offense had just enough to make up the difference.

Mark Lowe suffers hamstring injury; returns to Texas

By Evan Grant / Blogger

7:39 PM on Wed., Sep. 21, 2011

OAKLAND, Calif. - Putting the final touches on the Rangers' potential playoff bullpen suffered a blow Wednesday when reliever RHP Mark Lowe suffered a left hamstring injury while doing pre-game aerobic exercises at the O.Co Coliseum.

Lowe will return to Texas on Thursday morning and have the hamstring examined by team orthopedist Dr. Keith Meister. It's likely he will have an MRI exam.

Lowe, who pitched a perfect inning on Tuesday, left the relievers workout early and spent more than an hour in the trainer's room. He did not rejoin the rest of the team for batting practice workouts.

Lowe has never had a hamstring problem before, so the Rangers had no baseline information to deal with.

Lowe was a candidate for one of two or three open spots, depending on how the Rangers' structure the bullpen if they clinch the AL West. Closer Neftali Feliz, LHPs Darren Oliver and Michael Gonzalez and Mike Adams are all certainties. The Rangers will also probably shift RHP Alexi Ogando from the rotation to the bullpen.

If the club goes with a seven-man bullpen, it leaves two open spots for pitchers with Lowe, RHP Yoshinori Tateyama, RHP Koji Uehara and RHP Scott Feldman all among the possibilities.

Lowe is 2-3 with a 3.80 ERA in 52 appearances for the Rangers. He has the best "stuff" of the group, but doesn't really have a dominant pitch that he can throw for outs.

For Colby Lewis, it all comes down to execution
By SportsDayDFW sports
10:07 PM on Wed., Sep. 21, 2011

Right-hander Colby Lewis, who has a 7.94 ERA over his last five starts, maintains that he has no real concerns about being effective going down the stretch and into the playoffs.

"I'm really close to the same numbers I was at last year," said Lewis, who will make his 31st start of the season Thursday.

"In my last start, [catcher] Mike Napoli told me I had some of the better stuff I've had all year. I just didn't execute when I needed to. I can't get away with not executing pitches. When you throw 95-100 mph, sometimes you can. When you throw 90-91, you can't. It all comes down to location."

Lewis is 13-10 with a 4.45 ERA in 188 innings this season. Through 30 starts last year, he was 11-13 with a 3.79 ERA in 190 innings. The biggest difference this season is in home runs and strikeouts. Lewis has allowed 34 homers and struck out only 155. A year ago at this time, he had allowed 20 homers and struck out 186.

Record-chasing : There are approximately 10,000 tickets available for each of the final three home games this weekend against Seattle.

The Rangers enter the weekend needing 125,920 fans to break the franchise's season attendance record of 2,945,244, set in 1997. It would require an average attendance of 41,973 for the final series.

Briefly : Though he said he was content with the way DH Nelson Cruz managed his still-recovering hamstring while running the bases Tuesday, manager Ron Washington said he expects to keep Cruz at DH through the Oakland series. That will keep 1B Mitch Moreland on the bench for a full week before he probably returns to the lineup Friday.

The start time for Saturday's game against Seattle has been moved to 3:10 to accommodate a FOX Network (Ch. 4) broadcast. ... LHP Derek Holland's win Tuesday gave the Rangers a pair of lefties with 15 wins -- the other is C.J. Wilson. It's the first time in club history the Rangers have had two lefties reach at least 15 wins in a season.

Rangers-A's scouting report: Rangers square off with struggling Trevor Cahill
By SportsDayDFW sports
12:26 AM on Thu., Sep. 22, 2011

SCOUTING THE STARTERS

Rangers starter: RHP Colby Lewis (13-10, 4.45 ERA) hasn't been the same since pitching seven shutout innings vs. Los Angeles on Aug. 18. In the five starts since, he's compiled a 7.94 ERA and managed only one quality start. His problem always comes down to fastball location. If it's off, teams tee off because he throws lots of strikes. The one quality start in the stretch was against Oakland. He went 7 1/3 innings and allowed three runs on Sept. 9.

Matchup of note: Josh Willingham is 5-for-16 (.313) with three home runs against the homer-prone Lewis.

Oakland starter : RHP Trevor Cahill (11-14, 4.31) was 6-0 with a 1.72 ERA after beating the Rangers on May 9. Since then: 5-14 with a 5.27 ERA. In the rough stretch, he's lost command and has allowed 64 walks in 141 innings (4.1 per nine). He allowed just 63 walks in 196 innings in all of 2010. It hasn't stopped the Rangers from swinging away; they've walked four times in 20 innings in three starts since May 9. This is the seventh Lewis-Cahill matchup since the start of 2010.

Matchup of note : It might be a good day to start Yorvit Torrealba behind the plate; Mike Napoli is 1-for-18 (.056) against Cahill.

C.J. Wilson: "I got a little too amped up"
By Evan Grant / Blogger
12:41 AM on Thu., Sep. 22, 2011

OAKLAND, Calif. - C.J. Wilson was feeling good Wednesday night. And after a couple of good innings, he started feeling perhaps a little too good.

That, Wilson said, is what led to his trouble in the fifth inning in which he lost a 1-0 lead by failing to get the last out of the fifth inning. Three consecutive hitters reached against Wilson to put the A's ahead after he had two strikes on them.

Perhaps the most frustrating of those at-bats was against No. 9 hitter Michael Taylor. Wilson got ahead of Taylor 1-and-2, but ended up walking him to put the go-ahead run in scoring position. The go-ahead run then scored on Jemile Weeks' single.

"I got a little too amped up and tried to make [perfect] pitches," said Wilson, who became the first Ranger to reach 200 strikeouts in a season in 20 years. "When you try to do too much, that's what happens. You create something of an illusion."

In all, the night qualified as a quality start and was something of a history-making game for Wilson. In addition to the strikeout mark, he also crossed 220 innings, finishing the night with 221.1, and induced a double-play grounder to set the club record for a season with 31. He is the first Ranger to surpass 220 innings since Kenny Rogers had 227 innings in 2000.

Wilson, who has one start remaining, is currently one of two Ranger pitchers to ever have at least 15 wins, 200 strikeouts, 220 innings and an ERA of less than 3.00. The other was Ferguson Jenkins, who went 25-12 with a 2.82 ERA in a franchise-record 328 innings in 1974. He had 225 strikeouts that season.

Wilson finished the night with eight strikeouts, giving him 206 for the season. It is the sixth highest in a season.

Around the American League West
By Gerry Fraley / Reporter
12:07 AM on Thu., Sep. 22, 2011

A look at Wednesday's developments elsewhere in the American League West, which will be interesting until the finish:

LOS ANGELES ANGELS: The Angels believe right-hander Dan Haren avoided what would have been a crushing injury.

Haren was hit on the inside of the left wrist by a line drive from Toronto's Eric Thames for the final out of the eighth. Haren left the game in visible pain.

In a post-game session, manager Mike Scioscia told reporters that preliminary tests found a contusion but no signs of bone damage. Haren, who has never missed a start during his professional career, said he was initially concerned but now expects to take his next turn: at home on Monday against the division-leading Texas Rangers. The Halos are much closer in the wild-card race than the divisional contest.

OAKLAND: Bob Melvin, who is 42-50 since replacing the ineffective Bob Geren as manager, had the interim tag removed and was given a three-year deal to return as manager.

The length of the deal is significant. Geren, who served as the best man in general manager Billy Beane's first wedding, never had more than a two-year deal.

SEATTLE: Ichiro Suzuki had two hits in a 5-4 win at Minnesota, but his chances of getting a record 11th season of 200 hits have dwindled to nearly zero. Ichiro needs 22 hits in the final seven games to reach 200 for the season.

The Mariners' remaining schedule includes three games at the Rangers this weekend. Ichiro is hitting only .177 for 62 at-bats against the Rangers this season.

ESPN DALLAS

Rapid Reaction: Rangers 3, A's 2
September, 22, 2011
By Richard Durrett

OAKLAND, Calif. -- Late inning home runs by Ian Kinsler and Josh Hamilton allowed the Rangers to come back and win for the fourth straight time and eighth time in the last nine games. The magic number is now 3 with the Angels winning earlier in the night. Some quick thoughts (more to come from the clubhouse shortly):

* With the magic number at 3, the earliest the Rangers can clinch the AL West is Friday at home vs. Seattle. The Tigers won, so the Rangers stay even with them in the standings for homefield advantage in the first round (Detroit has the tiebreaker).

* The Rangers used eighth-inning power to pull out the win. With the Rangers down 2-1, Ian Kinsler hit a solo homer to left to tie the score. Two batters later, Josh Hamilton hit a line drive down the right field line to give Texas a 3-2 lead. It was the 27th go-ahead RBI of the season for Hamilton, tied for seventh-most in the majors (Ryan Howard has 36).

* Hamilton's homer was his 20th game-winning RBI, the most in the American League. It was his 24th homer and 92nd RBI of the season.

* Kinsler now has 30 home runs for the second time in his career. He is four stolen bases away from a 30-30 season, which would be the second of his career (31-31 in 2009). He is the first 2B in the AL with 30 homers, 30 doubles, 100 runs and 80 walks in a season.

* C.J. Wilson ran into trouble in the fifth. Cliff Pennington hit a double down the right-field line that was barely fair with one out. Then, with two outs, the A's got a single from Brandon Allen and Wilson walked No. 9 hitter Michael Taylor. Jemile Weeks' single scored the go-ahead run at the time, making it 2-1.

* Wilson's pitch count got up in a hurry thanks in large part to full counts. Wilson faced 24 batters and went to a full count on seven of them. He went six innings and gave up two runs on five hits with three walks and eight strikeouts.

* Wilson got his 200th strikeout in the first inning, becoming the first left-handed pitcher in club history to hit that mark. He was also the first since Nolan Ryan in 1991 to have at least 200 strikeouts in a season.

* Wilson tried to glove a ground ball up the middle with one on and one out in the second, but luckily missed it. Elvis Andrus was able to scoop it, step on second and throw to first. It was the 31st double-play Wilson has induced this season, a club record.

* Texas scored in the second thanks to consecutive singles by Michael Young and Adrian Beltre. With runners at the corners, Mike Napoli hit into a double-play. But that did score the run.

* The Rangers got a 'strike-em-out, throw-em-out' double play in the fourth as Coco Crisp struck out and Weeks was caught in a rundown between first and second. Andrus had to run a long way, but tagged him out. After making the play, Wilson showed off the antlers and pointed at Andrus.

* Kinsler's stolen base in the sixth was his 25th in a row. He has 26 on the season. The last time he was caught: April 15. The 25 straight stolen bases is a club record (he had the previous mark).

* The late lead allowed manager Ron Washington to utilize Mike Adams in the eighth and Neftali Feliz in the ninth to close it down. But don't forget about the job Koji Uehara did in the seventh, getting the A's in order.

Beltre's stats strong despite missed time
September, 22, 2011
By Richard Durrett

OAKLAND, Calif. -- Adrian Beltre doesn't seem interested in playing the "what if" game. The third baseman missed 35 games with a strained left hamstring and yet is still putting up solid numbers.

He is batting .290 with 28 homers and 97 RBIs. To think that he's approaching a 30-homer, 100-RBI season despite all the missed games is impressive.

"Things happen for a reason," Beltre said about not being able to stay healthy the whole season. "I'm not happy I got hurt. I hate being on the bench. But at the same time, the team didn't miss a beat. I would want to play 160 games, but it didn't happen. I can't change that."

What he can do is try to take advantage of the times that he is in the lineup. And since he returned on Sept. 1, he's been crushing the ball. Going into Thursday's game, Beltre has hit safely in 17 of 18 games (14 at third base and four as DH) and was hitting .365 (27-for-74) with eight homers and 21 RBIs this month. He leads the majors in RBIs and is tied for the lead in homers in September.

"The first four or five games, I was getting there," Beltre said. "Then I got my timing back and started seeing the ball better and making good contact more consistently."

He had also hit eight homers in his last nine games going into Wednesday. He was the first Ranger to do that since Rafael Palmeiro on Aug. 18 to 27, 1999.

"I'm seeing pitches well," Beltre said. "Right now I'm trying to make solid contact, and I'm doing that and the ball is going out of the ballpark. I hope I can do that for the next two weeks or so or whatever we have left."

Beltre has eclipsed 2,000 hits and 300 career homers since returning from the injury and is just the 13th active player to that in a career.

The hamstring certainly hasn't impacted his defense. He has the second-best fielding percentage of any third baseman in the AL and seems to make a highlight-reel play every other game.

Beltre said he feels like he's playing in a low-pressure environment thanks to the talent level around him.

"It's nice to know you don't have to be the guy," Beltre said. "In this lineup, you are one of the guys. It's easier for the hitter to come and be yourself and contribute. It's a solid lineup first through nine. Offensively, it's easier to hit knowing that."

Ian Kinsler closes in on 30-30 club (again)

September, 22, 2011

By Richard Durrett

OAKLAND, Calif. -- Ian Kinsler didn't think his long fly ball to left to start the eighth inning had a chance to go over the fence.

Kinsler hit a high ball that direction off Grant Balfour, but had seen fly balls from Josh Hamilton and Hideki Matsui hit hard that didn't go out.

But Kinsler watched as the ball just cleared the out-of-town scoreboard in left to tie the score. Two batters later, Josh Hamilton gave the Rangers the lead with a line-drive homer to right.

"He's got a good fastball, and that's his strength," Kinsler said of Balfour. "He's gotten me out a handful of times. I was able to get on top of one and get enough. I didn't think it was going out. The ball wasn't going anywhere tonight. I didn't think I had enough."

It was Kinsler's 30th home run of the season, one shy of his career-high set in 2009. That was also the last time he had at least 30 homers and 30 stolen bases. Kinsler stole a base on Wednesday, his 25th straight steal, and needs four more to match his feat of a few years ago.

Kinsler became the first second baseman in the American League with 30 homers, 30 doubles, 100 runs and 80 walks in a single season. Impressive.

Josh Hamilton focused in late-game at-bats

September, 22, 2011

By Richard Durrett

OAKLAND, Calif. -- No one in the American League has more game-winning RBIs than Josh Hamilton.

He delivered his 20th of the season on Wednesday, hitting a line-drive home run to right on a pitch that he said jammed him. The homer, just over the 330-foot sign down the line in right, put the Rangers up 3-2 in the eighth. They held on for the one-run victory over the A's.

"I just happened to have the right bat at the time," Hamilton said. "It was my thicker-handle bat. It worked out for me. It's fun to see my teammates excited and fun to do something that excites him. We've had a lot of guys do that this year, and I've been on both sides of that. It's cool."

So what is it about Hamilton's ability to deliver in crunch time?

"Maybe my focus level goes up a little bit," Hamilton said. "I wish I could harness it. I wish I could focus all the time like that."

It was Hamilton's 24th homer and his 92nd RBI despite missing nearly six weeks earlier in the season with hairline fracture in a bone in his upper right arm.

Wilson deals with blister, high pitch count

September, 22, 2011

By Richard Durrett

OAKLAND, Calif. -- Just after the first inning of Wednesday's 3-2 win over the A's, Rangers starter C.J. Wilson looked at the middle finger on his pitching hand and saw a blister had popped up.

Wilson dealt with it and found a way to go six innings, but he didn't have quite the same bite on his cutter and wasn't completely comfortable.

"It's not a big deal," Wilson said. "I've learned how to adjust to it."

Wilson still managed to go six innings and allowed two runs on five hits. It's the fifth straight start that Wilson has pitched at least six innings and allowed two or fewer earned runs. He has allowed just three earned runs in his last four starts -- that's a 0.92 ERA. Wilson had eight strikeouts, climbing over the 200 mark. He's the first left-handed pitcher in Rangers history to do that and the first Rangers pitcher since Nolan Ryan in 1991.

But he had a 1-0 lead on Wednesday until the fifth inning. A double, two singles and a walk gave the A's the lead. Wilson had trouble finishing off hitters in the inning and left the mound with his team behind, a rarity during the second half of the season. But he was up to 111 pitches after six innings and manager Ron Washington went to his bullpen.

"I just wish I wasn't throwing so many pitches in six innings every time out," Wilson said. "I make my own bed out there by going full counts on everybody. It was a lot of two-strike counts and then I get a little amped up and try to strike a guy out instead of throwing a good pitch. After the game I had against these guys last time I felt like if I got ahead in the count I was trying to make them miss, and that's not necessarily the most efficient way to pitch."

Wilson faced 24 batters and went to a full count to seven of them. He had seven at-bats of at least six pitches as his pitch count climbed in a hurry.

"I was battling my control the whole game," Wilson said. "I threw a lot of close pitches, but obviously these guys are disciplined and they're not going to swing if it's borderline. They hung in there really well and hit some through the holes."

Still, he left the mound with his team in the game and ended up with a no-decision when Ian Kinsler and Josh Hamilton homered in the eighth to give the Rangers the lead.

The Texas bullpen held through the final few innings as Koji Uehara, Mike Adams and Neftali Feliz got through the seventh, eighth and ninth.

"That's why we traded for those guys, so they could come in and shut it down," Wilson said. "Our bullpen has been pitching great lately and I have a lot of confidence in them."

Mark Lowe injures hamstring in warmups
September, 22, 2011
By Richard Durrett

OAKLAND, Calif. -- As the Rangers went through their pregame warmups on Wednesday, Mark Lowe injured his left hamstring. Lowe will head to Texas on Thursday morning to have the hamstring looked at by Dr. Keith Meister to get a sense of the severity of the injury. It's possible he could have an MRI.

Lowe, who has retired all five batters he faced in his last two outings, is 2-3 with a 3.89 ERA this season. He has a 2.75 ERA in his last 24 games beginning July 5 and has permitted just three of his last 14 inherited runners to score.

"We'll just have to wait and see what the doctor says," manager Ron Washington said after the Rangers' 3-2 win over the A's.

Notes: Nelson Cruz remains at DH
September, 21, 2011
By Richard Durrett

OAKLAND, Calif. -- Rangers manager Ron Washington said Nelson Cruz will remain at DH through Thursday's afternoon game in Oakland.

"I'm not going to put him in the outfield with the quick turnaround," Washington said. "He'll stay at DH and then we'll see what happens."

Cruz had a double in Tuesday's game and said he felt he took some better swings.

"The timing isn't all the way there, but I was swinging it better," Cruz said. "I'm feeling more comfortable."

He'll stay in that eighth spot in the order until that timing comes around and Washington can set things exactly the way he wants it.

Other notes:

* Mitch Moreland said he's sticking with his same routine and is focused on not trying to do too much. He conceded that it's tough to get in a rhythm, but said he wants to be ready when needed.

"He'll be mentally fresher," Washington said. "He's working. In the past, when I sit Mitch like this, he comes back ready to go."

Moreland is hitless in his last nine at-bats and is 4-for-25 in his last seven games. He is batting just .155 in his last 20 games to drop his average 20 points to .262, the lowest since July 21.

* So much for trying to nail down how the club might handle its pitching staff and roster for the postseason. Washington said he's met with his coaching staff and front office but won't reveal what, if any, decisions were made. "The baseball gods will mess with you if you mess with them," Washington said.

* Leonys Martin said he's focused on getting better reads in the outfield, running the bases and bunting. Those are the three things he is spending extra time on before games. "I know I can get better," Martin said through an interpreter (shout out to Endy Chavez).

FOXSPORTSSOUTHWEST.COM

Rangers getting it done without Lee in the rotation

Anthony Andro

September 21, 2011

The trips to Arkansas last winter to try and woo Cliff Lee may not have been a lost cause for the Texas Rangers after all.

Lee's decision to ditch the Rangers for Philadelphia may have set the stage for the big season for the starters for Texas.

With Lee in the rotation, there still would have been a good chance for the Rangers to earn their second-consecutive trip to the postseason. But who would it have come at the expense of? Derek Holland and his 15 wins? Matt Harrison and his 13? Alexi Ogando and his All-Star season?

We will never know what a Lee-led rotation would have meant for the Rangers, but we do know that without the starting five the Rangers have, they wouldn't be on the doorstep of the postseason.

"We're where we are because of our starting rotation," Texas manager Ron Washington said. "They are the ones who got us here. When we left spring training we weren't sure because things got into flux at the end. We knew these guys had potential, but potential doesn't win ballgames. You've got to go between the lines to do that."

The Rangers have done that, setting records along the way.

Anchored by the starters, the Rangers have already shattered their club record for shutouts in a season with 19. That's the most in the American League since Oakland had 19 in 2002 and trails only Philadelphia (21) for the major-league lead.

Mr. Shutout for the Rangers has been Holland, who is tied for the AL lead with Tampa Bay's James Shields. The only pitcher in the majors with more than Holland is Lee, who has six. If Lee would have remained with the Rangers, Holland could have been the odd-man out in the rotation.

Instead, he's been able to establish himself as a rotation fixture with at 24. He's nine years younger than Lee and cost the Rangers more than \$10 million less than the Phillies are paying Lee this season.

Holland's won nine of his last 11 decisions and may have moved up to the No. 2 spot in the rotation as the Rangers put together their playoff rotation.

There's no doubt C.J. Wilson is No. 1. He took what he learned from Lee last year and established himself as one of the best starters in the AL in only his second full season as a starter. Without Lee, Wilson was the Opening Day starter for the Rangers and has embraced his role as the team's ace.

Wilson has a team-high 16 victories, helping spearhead a pitching staff that has received 70 victories from its starting rotation. The only team in the majors with more from its starters is Philadelphia, which has 71.

Only twice have the Rangers had more victories from their starting rotation. The record is 75, which was set in 1996 and is now in jeopardy.

One area where not even Lee's Phillies can match the Rangers is in the durability of the starting five. Texas is the only team in the majors with five starters with at least 13 victories.

The Texas rotation, which didn't come together until the final week of spring training after Alexi Ogando replaced Tommy Hunter in the rotation, is the first in club history to have five starters reach double figures in wins.

Ogando may not be in the playoff rotation, but his 7-0 start was key to the Rangers getting off to a good start.

And Harrison's emergence mirrors Holland's in several ways. Both should be better pitchers in the future because of the year they had. Harrison also may not have been a 13-game winner if Lee was still on the staff.

Certainly the Rangers would have loved to had Lee in the rotation this year. Every team would. Lee is a playoff workhorse and a strike thrower. That's not up for debate.

And as good as the Rangers have been in the regular season, there is no guarantee the rotation will hold up in the postseason.

But at least for now, as the Rangers have a magic number of four, the rotation is just fine even without Lee.

And let's not forget that money the Rangers didn't use to sign Cliff Lee they did use to sign Adrian Beltre. Sure he doesn't pitch, but every member of the rotation will tell you how important he is behind them.

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Kinsler, Hamilton homers lead Rangers over A's September 22, 2011

OAKLAND, Calif. (AP) -- Now that he has a spot in the American League record books, Texas slugger Ian Kinsler wants to get the Rangers there, too.

With a few more wins, they'll be on their way to making that happen.

Kinsler hit a tying home run leading off the eighth and Josh Hamilton followed with another homer two batters later, lifting Texas to a 3-2 win over the Oakland Athletics on Wednesday night and reducing the Rangers magic number to clinch the AL West to three.

In doing so, Kinsler became the first second baseman in AL history to have 30 home runs, 30 doubles, 100 runs scored and 80 walks in the same season.

That's a nifty accomplishment but Kinsler is focused on something more important -- getting the defending AL champs back into the postseason for another shot at the capturing their first World Series title.

"That's something you think about when the season's over and you're sitting on your couch after a week of just hanging out," Kinsler said of his achievement. "But right now it's all team. It's about winning games, shrinking that magic number and getting to the postseason as quick as possible."

The Rangers, who lost to the San Francisco Giants in five games during the 2010 World Series, inched closer to doing just that.

Although second-place Los Angeles beat Toronto earlier in the day, Texas maintained its five-game leading over the Angels in the West with seven to go. The Rangers can clinch their second straight division title as early as Friday in Arlington when they host Seattle in the beginning of a three-game series.

"We went through some ups and downs this year but we were able to stay pretty consistent," Kinsler said. "Right now we're playing good baseball and we just want to make sure we continue that."

Michael Young, Adrian Beltre and Mike Napoli added two hits apiece for Texas, which won its 90th game to match its win total of 2010.

Texas squandered numerous scoring opportunities and trailed 2-1 going into the eighth before Kinsler and Hamilton powered the Rangers back.

"It was an example of the character on this ballclub," manager Ron Washington said. "They never feel like they're out of it and they keep battling. We were fortunate enough that I had the horses to pull that type of stuff off."

Kinsler's 30th home run of the season came on a full-count pitch leading off the eighth against A's reliever Grant Balfour (4-2).

Balfour then retired Elvis Andrus on flyball before Hamilton connected for his 24th home run to right field. The ball landed halfway up the stairs at the Oakland Coliseum then bounced the rest of the way up.

"The one to Kinsler was a mistake, up and over the plate. The one to Hamilton I thought was a good pitch," Balfour said. "Just a good piece of hitting on his part. I guess it's the life of a reliever."

Koji Uehara (2-3) pitched a scoreless seventh for the win, his first with the Rangers since being acquired from the Baltimore Orioles on July 30. Mike Adams worked the eighth and closer Neftali Feliz handled the ninth for his 29th save in 35 chances.

Jemile Weeks had two hits for the A's, who announced the signing of manager Bob Melvin to a three-year contract before the game. Oakland has lost three straight to fall a season-low 17 games under .500 for the first time since Sept. 4, 2009.

One of Melvin's priorities next season will be trying to get the A's to shake out of their funk against the first-place Rangers.

Texas has won 12 of the last 13 games against Oakland and is 13-4 against the A's this season. The 13 wins matches the club's season record for most victories against one team.

At least this time it was close.

The A's managed to get the tying run on base in the ninth when Feliz walked Josh Willingham, but he retired the next three batters to end it.

Young singled and scored on a double-play grounder in the second inning to give the Rangers a 1-0 lead.

Oakland, held hitless through the first three innings, tied it when Cliff Pennington doubled off starter C.J. Wilson in the fifth and scored on Brandon Allen's two-out RBI single. Allen's hit ended an 11-for-79 rut for the A's first baseman.

After Michael Taylor walked, Weeks hit a sharp grounder just under the glove of diving Rangers third baseman Beltre to drive in Allen and put Oakland in front 2-1.

The Rangers struggled to get much else going against A's starter Brandon McCarthy, stranding a runner at second in the fifth and at third in the sixth. Texas also put the two runners on with one out in the seventh before breaking through against Balfour in the next inning.

Neither starter factored in the decision in this one.

Wilson allowed five hits over six innings and became the first Texas left-hander to have 200 or more strikeouts in a single season. He fanned eight, walked three and has given up two earned runs or fewer in nine of his last 10 starts.

"(Wilson) tried to go down and away to Allen and when you're sitting on a one-run lead you can't make any mistakes," Washington said of his staff ace. "I'm not saying that was a mistake. He kept us in the ballgame and the bullpen came in and did the rest."

McCarthy, Oakland's best pitcher over the last month, scattered six hits over seven innings and left with a 2-1 lead. He pitched out of jams with runners in scoring position three consecutive innings before Balfour relieved him and allowed two home runs to the first three batters he faced.

Andrus went hitless in four at-bats, ending his modest 13-game hitting streak.

NOTES: Oakland is 4-5 on its final homestand with Thursday's series-finale against Texas remaining. The A's fell to 18-25 in one-run games this season. ... The last Rangers pitcher to reach 200 strikeouts in one season was Nolan Ryan, who had 203 in 1991. ... Rangers INF Esteban German, who returned to the Dominican Republic following the passing of his mother, is expected to rejoin the Rangers this weekend. ... A's RHP Trevor Cahill (11-14), who has the second-highest ERA in the majors since the All-Star break, pitches for Oakland on Thursday and will go for his fourth win against Texas this year. ... RHP Colby Lewis (13-10), who spent 2007 with the A's, chases his third straight win for the Rangers.