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Napoli plates six as Rangers reach postseason

By T.R. Sullivan

10/1/2012 12:13 AM ET

ARLINGTON -- This was an extraordinary day, and it ended with Mike Napoli having another spectacular game against his former team, Joe Nathan displaying his fortitude and the Rangers drinking a small toast for clinching a third straight trip to the playoffs.

The Rangers still won't have the big celebration until they clinch the American League West title, but they are one victory away from that after holding on for an 8-7 victory over the Angels in Game 2 of a day-night doubleheader at the Ballpark in Arlington on Sunday.

The Rangers can wrap up the division by winning just one of three games against the Athletics in their season-ending series that begins on Monday in Oakland. But they have assured themselves of at least a Wild Card spot, even if they were to get swept by the Athletics.

"We've got the opportunity to play in the postseason again, but our goals are not over with yet," manager Ron Washington said. "We had a toast, but all it was, was congratulating them on getting to the postseason. But what we're after, we haven't got there yet. So enjoy it and go to Oakland and keep going."

The Rangers have a two-game division lead going to Oakland. They also have a one-game lead over the Yankees and the Orioles for the best record in the American League, which would give them home-field advantage through the first two rounds of the playoffs. But the division is the immediate goal.

"It would have been better if we had clinched [a playoff spot after the first game] today," third baseman Adrian Beltre said. "But we didn't play well enough to do that. At least we won the last game tonight, and now going to Oakland and trying to win one game out of three. It's a lot easier than two out of three."

The Rangers' situation seemed to be turning bleak after a 5-4 loss in Game 1 and a bad start to Game 2. Nathan blew a 4-3 lead by allowing a two-run double to Torii Hunter in the ninth and then the Rangers started Game 2 by falling behind 4-0 in the first inning.

But Napoli drove in six runs with two home runs and a double as the Rangers rallied to take an 8-4 lead. Howard Kendrick's three-run home run in the seventh off Derek Holland made it a one-run game, but Koji Uehara struck out the side in the eighth and Nathan shut down the Angels in the ninth for the save.

"We went from one extreme to the other today," outfielder David Murphy said. "You could say the first game was the ultimate heartbreak and the second game was the ultimate gratification. But the best part of the day was Joe Nathan getting a second chance and coming through with it."

Nathan said this is the first time in his career that he has pitched in both ends of a doubleheader. But Washington said there was no doubt that Nathan would be used in any save situation.

"I'm OK," Nathan said. "I feel OK. I definitely wanted to get back on the horse, especially with the quick turnaround. Any reliever will tell you he wants to get right back out there and put this afternoon behind him. It's nice to get a win. That team over there pushed us to the limit."

Nathan blew a save in Game 1 because he could not retire the bottom of the Angels lineup in order. In Game 2, he had to go against the middle of the Angels order and hitters who could tie the game or win it with one swing of the bat.

Albert Pujols led off and Nathan got him to pop out. Hunter drew a walk, but Mark Trumbo flied out to right and Kendry Morales fouled out to Napoli to end the game.

"All you can do is trust your stuff," Nathan said. "You don't re-invent the wheel, you just try to make better pitches. Fortunately tonight was better than today."

Nathan saved it for Holland, who gave up four runs in the top of the first. He recovered from that by holding the Angels scoreless for five innings while Napoli led the charge of the Rangers offense.

"They got me, but I told myself I can't quit," Holland said. "Those guys are grinding it out for you, now you've got to grind it out for them. They got the best of me, but I continued to fight."

The Rangers' comeback started when Elvis Andrus drew a one-out walk in the first off of Angels starter Ervin Santana and scored on a double by Josh Hamilton. The Rangers then cut it to 4-3 in the second on back-to-back home runs by Murphy and Napoli.

"It definitely wasn't a good feeling falling behind like that, but we just kept fighting," Napoli said. "Holland did a good job battling."

Napoli added a three-run home run in third and a two-run double in the fifth that gave the Rangers an 8-4 lead. It was the 10th time he has hit multiple home runs in a game and four have come against the Angels. Napoli played for the Angels from 2006-10.

"Today was The Mike Napoli Show," Hunter said. "Mike knows this organization, he knows the styles, and I wonder if that has something to do with it the last two years. He's playing with a vengeance. He was my teammate, so, I hate he's doing it to us. But that's how you really make a statement."

Nathan also had a starring role in this one and now there is one act left in this season-ending drama.

Beltre exits game with left shoulder strain

By Todd Wills

10/01/12 12:42 AM ET

ARLINGTON -- Adrian Beltre and Michael Young both had to leave Sunday night's game against the Angels because of injuries, with the Rangers trying to maintain a four-run lead and clinch a playoff spot.

They vowed after the game -- an 8-7 victory over the Angels to clinch at least a Wild Card berth -- that they will be in the starting lineup on Monday in Oakland as the Rangers try to get one victory against the A's to clinch the American League West title.

Beltre left with one out in the seventh inning, due to a re-aggravation of a left shoulder strain he suffered in the ninth inning of the Rangers' 5-4 loss in Game 1 of the doubleheader. Beltre felt pain after he leaped for a line drive off the bat of the Angels' Mark Trumbo that deflected out of his glove.

Young was removed to start the seventh inning because of a sore left Achilles' tendon he said has been nagging him for the last month. The Rangers ended up with rookies Mike Olt at third and Jurickson Profar at second base in the most pivotal game of the season to this point.

Beltre said after the game that he wasn't going to have an MRI. He didn't tell anyone in between Sunday's games about the soreness, so he didn't receive any treatment. He didn't want manager Ron Washington to talk him out of playing.

"Hopefully it's nothing serious and I'll play tomorrow," Beltre said. "I was sore, but I can't afford to sit in a game like this. I didn't tell anything to anybody. I just got ready for the game and tried to get through it, but Wash didn't let me finish."

Beltre suffered the same injury diving for a ground ball earlier this season and played the next day.

Young also said he's prepared to play Monday. He said he would have stayed in the game if he had been playing first, third or been the designated hitter, but he played second base in Game 2, so Ian Kinsler could DH.

Ironically, Young would have been able to move to third base for Beltre if he had remained in the game in the seventh inning.

"Second requires a little bit more movement, mobility," Young said. "At the time we had a four-run lead, so we were in good hands. I was going to stay in, but Wash saw me get down the line and limping a little bit, so he decided to pull the trigger on it. I'll be fine."

Beltre has been the Rangers' hottest hitter in September with 11 home runs. He reached the 100 RBIs mark for the third consecutive season on Friday. He's hitting .319 with 36 home runs and 101 RBIs, and has played in 153 of the Rangers' 159 games.

Young had one hit in seven at-bats, but he's still batting .343 in his last 19 games to raise his season batting average to .274.

A's, Rangers set for AL West showdown

By Evan Drellich

10/1/2012 12:56 AM ET

Entering Monday, the A's have spent 91 days in second place this season. The Rangers have had the American League's best record for 40 straight days, and have been in first place for 175 straight days.

With three games to go, an upheaval could be on hand in the American League West.

"Everybody said Oakland has been a surprise, but not to us," Texas' Michael Young said ahead of the teams' three-game series that starts Monday. "We saw them early in the season and felt they had a chance to be good."

The Rangers (93-66) clinched a postseason berth with an 8-7 win over the Angels on Sunday night in the second game of a doubleheader, but the division title isn't a wrap. The A's (91-68) could take the division with a sweep, but they also could still miss the playoffs.

"We still want to win the division and get the home-field advantage," Rangers catcher Mike Napoli said. "We've still got to take care of business."

The Angels and Rays are both 88-71, and at three games back of Oakland in the Wild Card hunt, mathematically alive. For the A's to miss the playoffs, Texas would have to sweep them, and one or both of the Angels and Rays would have to sweep their series, against the Mariners and Orioles, respectively. That would lead to a two- or three-way tiebreaker.

Still, Oakland's focus is the division. If they hadn't kept their heads above water against their West opponents all season long, that wouldn't be viable.

"We're just going to try to win tomorrow," A's manager Bob Melvin said. "I think we're best suited just to do that and not worry about all of the different variables. We're in the dugout today and all of a sudden the Angels' score goes up. It's so emotional this time of year, that your thoughts can go back and forth based on one scoreboard change. It is exciting. It is fun. It's a bit of a rollercoaster at times."

Oakland has a 54-26 record since the start of July, and a 69-38 record since June 2 -- the best mark in the Majors -- but they're also 30-24 against teams in the West. Against the Rangers -- the Rangers who went to the World Series the past two years and who seemed easily on their way to another division title -- the A's are 8-8. Texas, meanwhile, is 27-27 against West teams.

"It's been key," A's manager Bob Melvin said of the intra-division record. "I think early on in the season it was a key aspect for us, because right away, we played well in Anaheim, we did some good things in Texas, some places we've had some difficult times playing in the past. It's easy to notice the moves and so forth that other teams have made. We made quite a few moves, too, and they just went a bit under the radar based on the names we traded away, but the guys we've brought in, almost every one of them has contributed here and contributed dramatically."

Oakland probably wouldn't rather have anyone else on the mound for the opener. Right-handed rookie Jarrod Parker (12-8, 3.44) is 3-0 with a 2.25 ERA in his last four starts, and he's 2-0 with a 1.93 ERA in two career starts against Texas. The most recent of those came Wednesday, in his last outing, when he let up three runs in six innings of a 9-3 victory for the A's, striking out eight in the process. The teams split a four-game series in Texas.

Parker's allowed an average of 0.46 home runs per nine innings, which is the lowest mark in the AL and second lowest in the Majors, which is significant since Texas is a homer-happy team. Notably, though, the A's have become even more homer-happy: they have a Major League-leading 110 since the All-Star break.

Rookie left-hander Martin Perez (1-3, 5.03) is likely to start Monday for Texas. He lasted only two-thirds of an inning in the start opposite Parker on Wednesday, giving up five runs.

The Rangers' biggest advantage in the West this season was 6 1/2 games, last through games of Aug. 12. Entering Monday, they had held a lead of at least 3 1/2 games for 146 of 167 days, beginning April 17.

"They're playing pretty good baseball," Texas manager Ron Washington said of the A's. "They're playing their best baseball down the stretch, and they're finding ways to win."

Rangers: Adams up in the air for playoffs

Rangers reliever Mike Adams (5-3, 3.27) has been diagnosed with thoracic outlet syndrome, a condition where a rib bone presses against a nerve. That causes pain and numbness in the shoulder and arm.

Adams could need surgery, which would require three months of recovery time, but it's not yet known if he'll be unavailable for the playoffs. He's consulting with two specialists.

A's: Anderson could be ready to pitch Friday

A's lefty Brett Anderson (right oblique) is on track to throw a bullpen session on Monday. If all goes well during that session, Anderson could possibly be considered to start a potential one-game Wild Card playoff on Friday.

Anderson's made just six starts this season as he comes back from Tommy John surgery and now the oblique injury, but he's been effective when on the mound, going 4-2 with a 2.57 ERA.

Worth noting

The A's have 108 errors on the season, which entering Sunday, was third-most in the American League. They haven't gotten burned for them, though: they've allowed 44 unearned runs, fourth-fewest in the AL entering Sunday.

Rangers have resources, chemistry to win it all

By Lyle Spencer

09/30/12 10:57 PM ET

Ron Washington tells a story that sheds light on why the Rangers, two-time reigning American League champions, are so much more than the popular image of a marauding band of bash brothers, pounding the opposition into submission.

A players' manager of the highest order, respected for the freedoms and trust he grants his athletes, Washington has his rules and regulations.

Above all, this man, who was content teaching infielders and flashing signs from the third-base coach's station, is fastidious about fundamentals, about playing the game the right way and making no excuses. He will not compromise there.

When one of his players gets mentally lazy -- no matter the rank -- the nice-guy manager will vent. On this particular occasion, he was on his way to the offending athlete's locker after the game to hammer home a point.

"Before I got there," Washington said, "I saw Adrian [Beltre] in his face, letting him have it. I turned and went back to my office. That's what you want on your team, and that's what we have. These guys run their clubhouse. We have strong leaders on this team."

The Rangers are rawhide-tough. Balancing the voices of authority, such as Beltre and Michael Young, is the light, fun-loving touch of Elvis Andrus, who can create a party atmosphere in a heartbeat.

To sustain winning chemistry over a long season, you need that positive energy along with the physical and emotional commitment. In spite of the rueful way the 2011 season ended, the Rangers still have it. It's impossible to miss.

Supremely confident, they are destined to reach their promised land, at last, in 2012. They have the resources -- pitching, power, defense, speed -- and the mental toughness. Having achieved so much these past three seasons, the final hurdle awaits.

It's time to win the World Series.

Everyone knows how close they came last season when the Cardinals staged their comeback of the ages. Game 6 of the 2011 Fall Classic is the stuff of legend -- at the Rangers' expense. Game 7 became an extension of the implausible way Game 6 played out.

It was reminiscent of the 1986 World Series when the Mets, down to their last out in Game 6, improbably rallied, canceling a seemingly certain Red Sox championship. Boston would have to wait another 18 years.

The Rangers won't have to wait 18 months.

They'll wash away all the lingering ill effects of those two Busch Stadium nightmares with a liquid celebration in the afterglow of the franchise's first title.

It won't be easy -- there will be stressful moments and situations along the path -- but this club is built to win it all.

From club president Nolan Ryan and general manager Jon Daniels down through Washington and his gifted troupe, the organization has done everything right to get to this point.

The personnel decisions have been remarkably on target, going back to the midseason Mark Teixeira trade in 2007 that yielded Andrus, Matt Harrison and Neftali Feliz on the current roster.

This season's main moves -- acquiring starter Yu Darvish and closer Joe Nathan via free agency and dealing for starter Ryan Dempster and catcher Geovany Soto at the non-waiver Trade Deadline -- have been vital to the team's ongoing success.

Coming from Japan, with its history of hit-and-miss with pitchers, Darvish was viewed as high risk while replacing C.J. Wilson (off to the Angels) in the rotation. Darvish, the subdued right-hander with the loud stuff and repertoire, has turned it on down the stretch, pitching brilliantly.

Dempster is a tough-minded veteran who, like Soto, was quickly integrated into the team's fabric. Both are intelligent and driven, grateful to be in a winning environment after leaving the Cubs.

While the rotation losses of Colby Lewis, who thrives in the postseason, and Feliz should not be minimized, the Rangers remain in fine shape. Four starters carry you through the postseason. Harrison, Darvish, Dempster and Derek Holland are good enough to take this team to the finish line.

The bullpen, with Nathan bringing a cool, veteran presence to the ninth inning, is top shelf. Nathan is 37-for-40 in save opportunities for a 92.5 success rate.

The setup roles are in the capable hands of Mike Adams, Alexi Ogando and southpaw Robbie Ross.

Operating in a hitter-friendly park half the time, the Rangers' staff has assembled the sixth-best ERA in the league, no small achievement.

The defense is superb in some areas -- there is no better left-side infield than Beltre and Andrus -- and capable across the board. The outfield is solid, and Craig Gentry makes it better when he moves into center field. Soto joins Mike Napoli to supply savvy leadership behind the plate.

The offense rocks.

Nobody knows where potential free-agent Josh Hamilton is headed when the season ends, but he can bust open any game or series in a heartbeat. Beltre, with his will and total game, is a legitimate Most Valuable Player candidate.

Nelson Cruz, with 14 homers and 27 RBIs in 33 postseason games, is Senor October. Napoli, last October's masher alongside Cruz, is finding his groove right on time after a season of struggle.

Ian Kinsler and Andrus form a dangerous top of the order, running the bases with intelligent aggression, the Washington way.

Underrated David Murphy and Mitch Moreland are tough outs, taking this lineup dangerous nine deep.

For all their visible assets, it is their heart -- their ability to rise to the challenge -- that separates the Rangers. And that is what made the last two games of 2011 and the five-game demise against the Giants in the 2010 World Series so galling.

The time has come to set things right. Washington will be looking for nobody to lecture -- or hug, in pain -- when this season ends.

Rangers' Path to the Postseason: Oct. 1, 2012

By Todd Wills

10/01/12 1:15 AM ET

ARLINGTON -- The Rangers' drive to a playoff spot finally ended Sunday night.

Now comes the next task at hand -- winning the American League West.

The Rangers will get their first chance Monday night in Oakland against the second-place A's, needing one win in three games against a red-hot opponent. The Rangers take a two-game lead into Oakland against an A's team that right now is positioned to win the second Wild Card.

The Rangers had a toast of champagne before departing for Oakland late Sunday night, but that was it.

"I don't think we should celebrate," said third baseman Adrian Beltre, who left Game 2 of Sunday's doubleheader with an aggravation of a left shoulder strain. "This year the Wild Card is just a one-game playoff, so even if you win the Wild Card, you're not in yet. So I'm glad we get another shot in case something happens but we never had in mind the Wild Card. We had in mind the division."

The Rangers endured a decent amount just to clinch at least a Wild Card. They could have clinched as early as Friday, but lost to the Angels, 7-4. Then came the rain on Saturday as they sat around all day until what was scheduled for a 3:05 p.m. CT start. The game was postponed four hours later, setting up Sunday's day-night doubleheader.

Game 1 on Sunday saw the Rangers take a 4-3 lead into the ninth inning, only to have Torii Hunter's two-run double to left-center field ruin their chance to celebrate and maybe play to clinch the AL West title -- had the A's lost to Seattle (Oakland won, 5-2).

The Rangers fell behind, 4-0, in the first inning of Game 2, but ex-Angel and current Halos-killer Mike Napoli belted two home runs and had six RBIs to help rally his club to a much needed win and chance to relax for a moment.

"It was huge," Beltre said. "The first game it was a little bit upsetting for us but we got behind the first inning, 4-0, and come back was huge for us. And to be able to hold the lead the one-run lead was huge for us. We didn't want to go to Oakland and have to win two to win the division. It's not done yet, but it's a lot easier to have to win one and not two."

Today's key games to watch (all times ET)

Rangers (Perez, 1-3) at A's (Parker, 12-8), 10:05 p.m. [Preview >](#)

Red Sox (Buchholz, 11-7) at Yankees (Sabathia, 14-6), 7:05 p.m. [Preview >](#)

If the postseason started today ...

This is how the teams would match up: [Postseason Bracket »](#)

Postseason 101

Magic numbers

To calculate a team's magic number, take the number of games it has remaining and add one. Then subtract the difference in the number of losses between that team and its closest pursuer.

Tiebreaker scenarios

A tiebreaker game will be played to determine a division winner, even if the tied clubs are assured of participating in the postseason. If a division championship tiebreaker is necessary, the head-to-head record between the clubs will determine home-field advantage. If the head-to-head record is tied, then the division record will be the next tiebreaker.

If two clubs are tied for the two Wild Card berths, home-field advantage will be determined by the head-to-head record between the clubs. If the head-to-head record is tied, then the division record will be the next tiebreaker.

• [Tiebreaker rules »](#)

2012 postseason schedule
Wild Card playoff games: Oct. 5
Division Series: Oct. 6-12
AL Championship Series: Oct. 13-21
NL Championship Series: Oct. 14-22
World Series: Oct. 24-Nov. 1

Rangers can't clinch after blown save in Game 1

By T.R. Sullivan

9/30/2012 7:50 PM ET

ARLINGTON -- This was a classic pennant-race baseball game. However, the American League West race is getting much tighter down the stretch than the Rangers anticipated.

Torii Hunter hit a two-out, two-run double in the ninth inning off of Rangers closer Joe Nathan to give the Angels a 5-4 victory in the first game of a doubleheader at the Ballpark in Arlington on Sunday.

This was Nathan's third blown save of the season, and the loss left the Rangers with a 1 1/2-game lead in the division over the A's, who beat the Mariners on Sunday. The Rangers led 4-1 after three innings before the Angels came back.

"That's where we wanted to be," Rangers manager Ron Washington said. "They just fought back and took it from us."

The Angels were 1-for-8 with runners in scoring position before Hunter delivered the game-winning hit against his former Minnesota Twins teammate.

"That's a heck of a game," Angels manager Mike Scioscia said. "Both teams did a lot of things well, and fortunately for us, Torii came up big against one of the best closers in baseball. Needless to say, every game is critical for us, and that's no doubt the biggest hit of our season so far."

Nathan was trying to protect a 4-3 lead and was facing the bottom of the Angels' order. He retired Mark Trumbo on a grounder to second, but Maicer Izturis reached on a single. Nathan then got ahead 0-2 on Chris Iannetta, the Angels' No. 9 hitter, before throwing four straight balls.

"He took some good pitches," Nathan said. "I've seen some people chase, but he's 0-2 and he's able to lay off some good stuff. We knew that going in. We tried to give him some different looks with the same pitch and couldn't get him to offer at any of them, so good at-bat by him for sure."

The walk put runners on first and second. Nathan struck out Mike Trout, but Hunter, jumping on a 1-1 slider, doubled deep into the left-center-field gap to drive home both runners.

"It was a bad pitch," Nathan said. "One bad pitch in the inning. Honestly, the slider was probably up all inning. But they were taking it most of the time. Just when I was involved in an at-bat with him, you can't leave a slider up right there because he's going to be swinging. Bad pitch, wrong time."

"I've gotten him most of the time. He's a good player. He got me this time. Unfortunately, it was in a big spot."

Hunter was 0-for-4 with two strikeouts previously against Nathan.

"That's my buddy, man," Hunter said. "He's gotten me several times. This is really my first time ever getting him, so I'm pretty excited. He's a good friend of mine, but he knows this is baseball."

Rangers starter Yu Darvish, who was skipped in his last start because of a stiff neck, allowed three runs in 6 2/3 innings. Nathan's blown save cost him his 17th win of the season. If the Rangers don't hold on to win the division, his next start may be on Friday in a Wild Card game. Darvish allowed nine hits, walked one and struck out seven.

"I didn't feel sharp, but I felt I did the best I could to give the team a chance to win," Darvish said. "My neck felt fine. Three days ago I couldn't even play catch, so my preparation was a little different, but under the circumstances I felt I pitched OK."

Darvish had a 4-1 lead after three innings. Nelson Cruz hit a two-run home run in the second and, after an RBI single by Albert Pujols in the top of the third, the Rangers put together a two-out rally in the bottom of the inning against Angels

starter Zack Greinke. Elvis Andrus drew a walk to start the rally. Andrus then broke for second on a 1-0 pitch to Josh Hamilton, who lined a single to right-center. Andrus came around to score and Hamilton went to second on the throw. Beltre followed with a high pop to right that Hunter never saw. Izturis, the Angels' second baseman, raced out and tried to catch it, but the ball fell in for a run-scoring double.

That was it for the Rangers, as they managed just two singles the rest of the afternoon against Greinke and three relievers.

"You face Greinke, you're fortunate to score four runs," Washington said. "You get four runs -- that was enough to get us into the ninth inning. We just didn't shut it down."

The Angels got a rally started in the sixth, as leadoff singles by Hunter and Pujols put runners on the corners. Kendrys Morales drove home Hunter with a sacrifice fly and, after Alberto Callaspo flied out, Erick Aybar singled to center. That put runners on the corners again, but Darvish struck out Trumbo to end the inning.

But the Angels made it a one-run game with Trout's two-out home run in the seventh. Darvish then gave up a double to Hunter before Alexi Ogando got Pujols on a grounder to end the inning. Ogando retired the side in order in the eighth, leaving the ninth for Nathan.

Olt says he's ready to return to action

By T.R. Sullivan

09/30/12 2:07 PM ET

ARLINGTON -- Rangers infielder Mike Olt, who has been sidelined for two weeks with inflammation in his right heel, said he is ready to play in a game. But manager Ron Washington said he's still waiting for clearance from the medical staff.

"It feels good," said Olt, who has been running without significant problems for the past few days. "It's definitely a lot better than it was."

There is still some question if Olt will be ready for the postseason. He has had just seven at-bats in September, and has just one hit in his last 17 at-bats going back to Aug. 17. With the Minor League season over, the only place Olt could get at-bats before the playoffs would be in the instructional league.

"When we decide he's ready, we'll cross that bridge," Washington said.

Adams hopes to pitch through shoulder issue

ARLINGTON -- Rangers reliever Mike Adams has been diagnosed with thoracic outlet syndrome, a condition where a rib bone presses against a nerve. That causes pain and numbness in the shoulder and arm.

The condition can require surgery and a three-month recovery. Adams is planning to see two specialists and see if there is a way he can pitch through it during the playoffs. Right now that's a big unknown for the Rangers.

"We don't know the severity of it," Adams said. "Hopefully we can do something to relieve the pressure and what's going on, make it good enough where I can pitch and pitch effectively."

Adams has been dealing with pain and stiffness in his right shoulder and neck the past couple of weeks, and that is causing more discomfort right now. But Adams said he has had thoracic outlet syndrome symptoms all through the season.

"This explains a lot and answers a lot of questions," Adams said. "It answers why things were feeling the way they were and why they were going the way they were."

Adams will not travel to Oakland with the team for the final series of the regular season, but will remain in Texas and continue to get treatment. The Rangers will decide sometime later this week if Adams is able to pitch in at least the first round of the playoffs.

"There are some guys who have been able to pitch through it," general manager Jon Daniels said. "Obviously if it gets to a point where it doesn't respond, surgery becomes an option. We'll just take it day to day and see how it responds to treatment. It's possible he pitches again, we just don't have a timetable. A lot of it is based on how he's feeling. There is no risk involved, it's just a matter of how he's feeling."

Rangers pitcher Matt Harrison underwent surgery for thoracic outlet syndrome in 2009 and has since made a full recovery.

"In speaking with Harrison, he said he was having trouble with his feel and his location," Adams said. "He was having trouble repeating his mechanics. That's kind of the stuff I've struggled with all year. It makes sense about what was going on."

Right now the Rangers are still focused on trying to clinch the American League West title, but Adams' availability for the playoffs remains unknown. Adams is 5-3 with a 3.27 ERA in 61 appearances for the Rangers this year. He is a free agent after the season.

"It's a bad situation with free agency," Adams said. "I hate to make it sound selfish, but I've got to do what's right for myself and my family. Hopefully I can make this work and pitch the next few weeks or month."

Worth noting

- The Rangers remain undecided about their pitcher for Monday, but Martin Perez is the leading candidate if he's not used on Sunday. Scott Feldman is another possibility.
- Saturday was the first rainout at the Ballpark in Arlington this season. The Rangers haven't had their first rainout this late in the season since Sept. 30 and Oct. 1 in 1980.
- The Rangers are just the seventh team in Major League history with two players -- Josh Hamilton and Adrian Beltre -- 31 or older to hit at least 36 home runs in a season. The White Sox did it in 2006 with Jim Thome and Jermaine Dye.

FORT WORTH STAR-TELEGRAM

Rangers 8, Angels 7 (F)

Drew Davison

09/30/12

ARLINGTON – The Texas Rangers have clinched their third consecutive postseason berth.

The Rangers assured themselves as being one of the two American League wild card teams with an 8-7 victory over the Los Angeles Angels in Game 2 of Sunday's doubleheader at Rangers Ballpark.

Texas has a two-game lead in the AL West, and can clinch a third straight division with one win in its three-game series at Oakland beginning Monday to wrap up the regular season.

It wasn't all good news for the Rangers on Sunday, though.

Third baseman Adrian Beltre left Game 2 with a re-aggravation of a left shoulder strain that he initially suffered making a diving stop late in Game 1. The extent of Beltre's injury is not known at this point.

Game 1 didn't go well for the Rangers, either, as they blew a lead in the ninth inning. Things didn't get much better at the start of Game 2, as the Angels jumped out to a four-run lead.

Rangers starter Derek Holland allowed four runs in the first inning, including a two-run homer to Mark Trumbo.

But the Rangers chipped away at the deficit. They scored a run in the bottom of the first on an RBI double by Josh Hamilton, and David Murphy and Mike Napoli opened the second inning with solo homers.

Napoli delivered the go-ahead blow for the Rangers with a two-out, three-run homer in the third off Angels starter Ervin Santana.

Napoli extended the Rangers lead to 8-4 with a two-run double in the fifth, which was needed in the end.

Holland settled down with five straight scoreless innings, and started the seventh by getting Albert Pujols to ground out.

But Holland gave up back-to-back one-out singles to Torii Hunter and Trumbo. Two batters later, Howard Kendrick drilled a three-run homer to pull the Angels to within 8-7.

That ended Holland's night, as he allowed seven runs on 12 hits with two walks and five strikeouts over 6 2/3 innings.

Robbie Ross got the final out of the seventh, and Koji Uehara struck out the side in the eighth. Uehara has retired the last 23 batters he faced.

Nathan, hours after blowing the save in Game 1, worked around a one-out walk to Hunter in the ninth for his 37th save of the season.

Rangers secure playoff spot with win in Game 2 of doubleheader

By Drew Davison

09/30/12

ARLINGTON -- They were in the midst of a miserable Sunday.

The Texas Rangers blew a lead in the ninth inning of Game 1 and found themselves in an early four-run deficit in Game 2. A loss would have been the Rangers' fifth in their last six games and would have shrunk their lead in the American League West to one game over Oakland.

At the end of the day, though, the Rangers were sipping a little champagne before taking off to Oakland.

Texas clinched its third consecutive postseason berth with an 8-7 victory over the Los Angeles Angels in Game 2 of Sunday's doubleheader. The Rangers are guaranteed to be at least one of the two AL wild-card teams but now are focused on securing their third division title.

The Rangers will win the West with one victory against the A's this week.

"We had a light toast, and I congratulated them on what they accomplished to this point," manager Ron Washington said. "But there's unfinished business out there. We're very happy we got an opportunity to play in the postseason again, but our goal is not over with yet."

The road to a division title seemed to be getting tougher and tougher by the minute for the Rangers.

They let a 4-3 lead slip away in the ninth in Game 1 as closer Joe Nathan suffered his second blown save of September. He walked the Angels' No. 9 batter, Chris Iannetta, but the game-deciding hit was Torii Hunter's two-out, two-run double.

Things didn't go much better to start Game 2. Derek Holland allowed four runs in the first inning, including a two-run homer to Mark Trumbo.

"They got me that inning, but you've got to fight and you can't quit," Holland said. "These guys are out there grinding it out for me. I've got to go grind it out for them."

Holland did that by throwing five straight scoreless innings as the offense chipped away at the lead.

The Rangers scored a run in the bottom of the first on an RBI double by Josh Hamilton, and then David Murphy and Mike Napoli opened the second inning with solo shots off Angels starter Ervin Santana.

Napoli then deposited a three-run homer into the left-field seats with two outs in the third inning to give the Rangers a 6-4 lead.

Napoli continued his dominance against his former team by providing a pivotal two-run double in the fifth inning to cushion the Rangers' lead to 8-4.

"We needed to win tonight, and it was a good feeling for sure," Napoli said.

Holland kept the lead intact but stumbled in the seventh inning. He gave up a three-run homer to Howard Kendrick, as the Angels pulled to within 8-7.

But Robbie Ross got the final out of the seventh, and Koji Uehara struck out the side in the eighth. Despite Nathan throwing 28 pitches and blowing the save in Game 1, the Rangers turned to him to close it out.

And Nathan redeemed himself, working around a one-out walk to Hunter to convert his 37th save of the season.

"Any reliever would ask to get out there and try to put this afternoon's game behind him," Nathan said. "It's a roller coaster, and I try to keep it as even-keeled as possible. I try to keep my emotions in check even after I got that last out."

It was a day of highs and lows for the Rangers.

Or, as Murphy put it, "You can say the first game was ultimate heartbreak and the second game was ultimate gratification. The best part of the day was seeing Joe Nathan get a second chance and come through with it."

It wasn't all good news afterward, though.

Third baseman Adrian Beltre had a re-aggravation of a left shoulder strain, but Washington expects him to play tonight. And Michael Young exited with a sore left Achilles but said he would be ready tonight.

Mike Napoli resembles a Rangers' guardian Angel after doubleheader split

By Gil LeBreton

09/30/12

ARLINGTON -- He was described as a fallen Angel, of sorts.

A catcher, they said, who couldn't catch. A guy with shortcomings, the manager said, who needed to work on his craft.

And so the Los Angeles Angels of Anaheim let Mike Napoli go -- traded him to the Toronto Blue Jays on Jan. 21, 2011, for Vernon Wells and cash.

Four days later, the Texas Rangers acquired Napoli, once their AL West nemesis, by sending reliever Frank Francisco to Toronto.

The rest is history. And so, it may well be, are the 2012 Angels.

Napoli doubled, homered twice and drove in six runs Sunday, as the Rangers rebounded to defeat the Angels 8-7 and gain a split of their day-night doubleheader.

A split. Just like 73.8 percent of all baseball doubleheaders, according to the Elias Sports Bureau.

A split. But, oh, the gamut of emotions that engulfed the ballpark in-between.

The Rangers were one out away -- stop me if you've heard that before -- from winning the first game of the twinbill, when Torii Hunter doubled off Texas closer Joe Nathan and transformed a crippling defeat into a 5-4 comeback victory.

"Bad pitch, wrong time," Nathan, ever a class act, confessed in an otherwise empty clubhouse between games.

More than six hours later, Nathan was back on the mound for the ninth inning, nailing shut the coffin where Napoli had planted his old team.

So went the day for both the Rangers and Angels.

Los Angeles, after spending more than \$350 million in free agent cash in the off-season, cannot win the American League West. By virtue of their Game 2 defeat, the Angels can only hope for the Rangers to sweep the Oakland Athletics over the next three days.

One Oakland victory and the Angels, who some wrote had "too much talent" before the season, will be sitting at home during the postseason.

So went the day.

Agony and desperation, in alternating doses. Worry on the part of Rangers fans -- and, if they're honest, the Rangers themselves. Only to be followed a few hours later by the Angels' despair.

The nightcap of the doubleheader also ran an emotional gamut of its own.

The Angels struck for four runs off Derek Holland in the top of the first inning, inducing squirms of anguish throughout the stadium.

But David Murphy and Napoli homered in the second inning, and then the catcher launched a three-run homer in the third.

In 33 games against his former team, Napoli is batting .391 (43 for 110) with nine doubles, 12 home runs and 23 RBIs.

The Rangers love him.

"We needed to win tonight," Napoli said. "It was a good feeling for me."

The Rangers can wrap up their third consecutive AL West title by just winning one of the three remaining games in Oakland.

"We're going out there to try to win the division and get home-field advantage," Napoli said.

"We have to take care of some business."

The task took on a cloak of desperation after the way the day's first game ended.

In the Rangers' clubhouse, a lone TV in the corner showed the Packers-Saints NFL game. Nobody was there to watch it.

Blue bags lined the room, silently waiting to be packed for a trip westward that suddenly had new meaning.

The clubhouse was utterly, tellingly quiet -- Game 6 in St. Louis quiet, to be honest. The working media was allowed into the room for about 30 minutes, but few, if any, of Sunday's Game 1 performers were to be found.

When the Rangers promptly fell behind 4-0 in the second game, visions of a historic collapse came to mind. My mind, not theirs, as it turned out.

"It was definitely not a good feeling," Napoli said. "We knew we were going to have to battle."

But Nathan redeemed himself, and quite likely, the Rangers season.

A split.

Heartbreak and redemption all on the same day.

The rest was history, and so likely is Napoli's old team.

Rangers notes: Nerve syndrome leaves Adams' future uncertain

By Jeff Wilson

09/30/12

ARLINGTON -- Right-handed reliever Mike Adams will be treated for thoracic outlet syndrome and a neck strain over the next few days before determining if he will be available for the Texas Rangers in the postseason.

Adams said on Sunday that he has the condition where a rib pinches a nerve that feeds into the arm and causes numbness and a dead-arm sensation.

The Rangers, though, believe the symptoms are mild enough that he can continue pitching without the risk of making the symptoms worse. The discomfort Adams is feeling, general manager Jon Daniels said, is the result of the neck issue.

Adams wants to give it a go, too, but he is also preparing for the worst-case scenario. That would be off-season surgery ahead of free agency.

"Not good at all," he said. "I've got to see a couple more specialists to see exactly what route we're going to take. Right now we're just going to rest it, and see, hopefully, if it will release a little bit to where I'll be able to pitch."

The Rangers seemed less concerned than Adams, who admitted that a potential operation is a concern as he tries to land a new contract this winter.

But he also felt some relief to have an explanation for many of the physical issues he has dealt with this season.

"It explains a lot and answers a lot of questions I had all year," Adams said. "There are so many things that went on this season that I kept questioning myself."

The Rangers hope Adams can pitch again and add another arm to the back end of the bullpen. He won't travel with the team to Oakland for their final three games, but could head west in a few days.

He hasn't thrown since surrendering three home runs to the A's in the eighth inning Thursday. Adams likely won't throw until Tuesday at the earliest, and could receive a cortisone injection.

"We don't have a timeframe on that," Daniels said. "A lot of it is going to be on how he's feeling. There's no risk on him going out there."

Olt thrust into play

Third baseman Mike Olt, who hadn't played since Sept. 12 because of plantar fasciitis, was inserted into the Rangers' lineup in the seventh inning Sunday after Adrian Beltre left with an injury.

Olt started hitting and running last week. It had seemed unlikely that he would get any at-bats ahead of the postseason.

Rangers manager Ron Washington had said before Sunday's game that the rookie hadn't been cleared for game action.

"He said he's ready, but we haven't deemed him ready," Washington said.

Scouts abound

The Rangers have had scouts on the road for three weeks evaluating potential playoff opponents. That will stretch a travel budget.

"We've been tracking every team that's alive, which hasn't really changed much," Jon Daniels said. "We're focused on the American League, but we've been following the National League as well."

The addition of a second wild-card team has had more teams in play for the postseason in both leagues. Seven AL teams, including the Rangers, were still alive for playoff spots entering Sunday.

"It's a logistical headache in some regards," Daniels said. "It's not fun to be an advanced scout or a traveling secretary right now, but from the standpoint of the fans and the game, I think it's great theater."

World Series title is all that's missing from Texas Rangers' résumé

By David Thomas

09/30/12

With all the attention being paid to the Texas Rangers' magic number the past week -- for the past three seasons, for that matter -- it's not lost that for longtime Rangers fans, the magic number used to be one. As in, "Can the Rangers please make the playoffs just one time?" It took 24 years in Arlington for the Rangers to make the playoffs and 38 years for them to win their first playoff series. Now, only one thing is missing. Could the Rangers' 40th anniversary season be the one that finally brings baseball's biggest flag to Arlington? While we wait to see how that plays out, here's a look back at the Rangers' postseason history.

1996 ALDS

Date Opp. Result Winning pitcher Losing pitcher

Oct. 1at NYYW 6-2John BurkettDavid Cone

Oct. 2at NYYL 5-4 (12)Brian BoehringerMike Stanton

Oct. 4vs. NYYL 3-2Jeff NelsonDarren Oliver

Oct. 5vs. NYYL 6-4David WeathersRoger Pavlik

Series in review: The Rangers won Game 1 behind John Burkett's complete game and led the second game 4-1 after three innings, but Cecil Fielder's RBI single in the eighth tied the score and Derek Jeter scored from second on Dean Palmer's throwing error in the 12th. The Rangers also led both games in Arlington. The Yankees won Game 3 with two runs in the top of the ninth and overcame an early 4-0 deficit in Game 4 to eliminate the Rangers.

Notable

The Rangers became the first team to win the opening game of a Division Series then lose the next three.

Juan Gonzalez, who homered in each of the games, hit .438 with five home runs and nine RBIs. The rest of the Rangers batted .190 with one homer and seven RBIs.

The Rangers' bullpen had a 3.08 ERA for the series, but blew save opportunities in all three losses.

The Yankees outscored the Rangers 7-0 after the sixth inning.

1998 ALDS

Date Opp. Result Winning pitcher Losing pitcher

Sept. 29at NYYL 2-0David WellsTodd Stottlemyre

Sept. 30at NYYL 3-1Andy PettitteRick Helling

Oct. 2vs. NYYL 4-0David ConeAaron Sele

Series in review: David Wells and Mariano Rivera shut out the Rangers in Game 1. Todd Stottlemyre went the distance for the Rangers, allowing two runs in the second inning on a Scott Brosius RBI single and a double steal. In Game 2, Brosius and Shane Spencer homered early while Andy Pettitte held the Rangers to one run over seven innings. Another shutout ended the series, with the Yankees scoring all four of their runs in the sixth inning off Aaron Sele.

Notable

For the series, the Rangers had 13 hits and a .141 batting average and averaged striking out nine times per game.

Todd Zeile (3) and Royce Clayton (2) were the only Rangers with multiple hits in the series.

Ivan Rodriguez accounted for the only RBI, on a single in Game 2.

During the regular season, the Rangers had finished second behind the Yankees in the American League for runs scored.
1999 ALDS

Date Opp. Result Winning pitcher Losing pitcher

Oct. 5at NYL 8-0Orlando HernandezAaron Sele

Oct. 7at NYL 3-1Andy PettitteRick Helling

Oct. 9vs. NYL 3-0Roger ClemensEspanola Loaiza

Series in review: For the second consecutive postseason, the Rangers scored only one run in being swept by the Yankees. Bernie Williams drove in six runs in Game 1 while the Rangers were being limited to two hits. Juan Gonzalez's home run in the fourth inning gave the Rangers a 1-0 lead in Game 2, but New York scored single runs in the fifth, seventh and eighth. In the series finale, the Yankees scored their three runs on Darryl Strawberry's homer in the top of the first, and Roger Clemens held the Rangers to three hits through seven innings.

Notable

The Rangers' nine-game losing streak in Division Series games remains the second-longest behind the Minnesota Twins' current 12-game DS skid.

After hitting .141 in the '98 playoffs, the Rangers hit .152 in '99.

This marked the third time the Yankees eliminated the Rangers in the ALDS en route to winning the World Series.

The '98 and '99 Rangers both scored one total run against the Yankees, and no team has ever scored fewer runs in a postseason series of any length.

2010 ALDS

Date Opp. Result Winning pitcher Losing pitcher

Oct. 6at TBW 5-1Cliff LeeDavid Price

Oct. 7at TBW 6-0C.J. WilsonJames Shields

Oct. 9vs. TBL 6-3Joaquin BenoitDarren Oliver

Oct. 10vs. TBL 5-2Wade DavisTommy Hunter

Oct. 12at TBW 5-1Cliff LeeDavid Price

Series in review: Cliff Lee (10 strikeouts in seven innings) and C.J. Wilson (two hits in 6 1/3 innings) got the Rangers off to a 2-0 start. But in Game 3, the Rays bounced back to score five runs in the final two innings for a 6-3 win in Arlington to extend the series. Tampa Bay sent the series back to Florida with a 5-2 win in Game 4. In the deciding game, Lee again outpitched David Price, going the distance to give the Rangers their first postseason series victory.

Notable

This was the first postseason series in MLB history in which the road team won every game.

Ian Kinsler and Nelson Cruz each homered three times, joining Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig as the only teammates to do so in a series of five games or fewer.

Cliff Lee struck out an ALDS record 21 batters without issuing a walk.

Rangers starters had a 1.15 ERA against the Rays and struck out 55 batters -- most in either an ALDS or an NLDS.

2010 ALCS

Date Opp. Result Winning pitcher Losing pitcher

Oct. 15vs. NYL 6-5Dustin MoseleyDarren O'Day

Oct. 16vs. NYW 7-2Colby LewisPhil Hughes

Oct. 18at NYW 8-0Cliff LeeAndy Pettitte

Oct. 19at NYW 10-3Derek HollandA.J. Burnett

Oct. 20at NYL 7-2CC SabathiaC.J. Wilson

Oct. 22vs. NYW 6-1Colby LewisPhil Hughes

Series in review: The Yankees trailed 5-0 in Game 1 but scored one run in the seventh inning and five runs in the eighth inning to win. Colby Lewis was given an early 5-0 lead in Game 2 and made that advantage hold up for the Rangers' first-ever postseason win in Arlington. Cliff Lee dominated Game 3, allowing two hits and striking out 13 over eight innings. Josh Hamilton homered twice in a Game 4 win, then the Yankees stayed alive with a 7-2 win behind ace CC Sabathia. In

Game 6 in Arlington, Nelson Cruz homered as part of a four-run fifth and Colby Lewis pitched eight strong innings as the Rangers earned their first World Series berth.

Notable

ALCS MVP Josh Hamilton hit an LCS record-tying four home runs and drew eight walks, including five intentional.

All four Rangers victories came by at least five runs.

The Rangers outscored the Yankees 38-19 and outhit them 63-38.

The American League pennant was the first in the 49-year history of the Rangers/Senators franchise, the longest drought in AL history and second-longest ever in MLB.

2010 World Series

Date Opp .Result Winning pitcher Losing pitcher

Oct. 27at SFL 11-7Tim LincecumCliff Lee

Oct. 28at SFL 9-0Matt CainC.J. Wilson

Oct. 30vs. SFW 4-2Colby LewisJonathan Sanchez

Oct. 31vs. SFL 4-0Madison BumgarnerTommy Hunter

Nov. 1vs. SFL 3-1Tim LincecumCliff Lee

Series in review: Cliff Lee was hit hard for seven runs in 4 1/3 innings and the Rangers committed four errors in an ugly series opener. A pitchers' duel in Game 2 got out of hand with the Giants' seven-run eighth inning that included four walks. All six runs in Game 3 scored on homers, including Mitch Moreland's three-run shot in the second inning. But the Rangers' power disappeared in the Game 4 and 5 losses, in which they combined for one run and six hits.

Notable

The Rangers hit .190 against the Giants.

Rookie Mitch Moreland had a hit in every game of the series.

In Game 3, Neftali Feliz, at age 22, became the second-youngest pitcher to earn a World Series save.

Josh Hamilton and Nelson Cruz each hit a homer in the series, giving both five for the postseason. Cruz broke the MLB single-postseason record with 13 extra-base hits.

2011 ALDS

Date Opp. Result Winning pitcher Losing pitcher

Sept. 30vs. TBL 9-0Matt MooreC.J. Wilson

Oct. 1vs. TBW 8-6Derek HollandJames Shields

Oct. 3at TBW 4-3Colby LewisDavid Price

Oct. 4at TBW 4-3Matt HarrisonJeremy Hellickson

Series in review: Rays rookie Matt Moore baffled the Rangers in Game 1 while catcher Kelly Shoppach hit two home runs. In the second game, the Rangers fell behind 3-0 before scoring five runs in the fourth. Evan Longoria's three-run homer in the seventh made it close, but the Rangers left Arlington with a split. Back-to-back 4-3 wins at Tampa Bay gave the Rangers the series win. Mike Napoli's two-run homer highlighted the Rangers' four-run seventh in Game 3. Ian Kinsler homered to lead off the clincher, and Adrian Beltre blasted three solo shots.

Notable

Adrian Beltre's three-home run game was the seventh in postseason history.

The Rangers won despite batting just .211.

The Rangers' 15 RBIs came from five players: Beltre (4), Mike Napoli (4), Ian Kinsler (3), Josh Hamilton (2) and Mitch Moreland (2).

Rangers starters recorded a 4.29 ERA and produced only one quality start, by Colby Lewis in Game 3.

2011 ALCS

Date Opp. Result Winning pitcher Losing pitcher

Oct. 8vs. DETW 3-2Alexi OgandoJustin Verlander

Oct. 10vs. DETW 7-3 (11)Mike AdamsRyan Perry

Oct. 11at DETL 5-2Doug FisterColby Lewis

Oct. 12at DETW 7-3 (11)Scott FeldmanJose Valverde

Oct. 13at DETL 7-5Justin VerlanderC.J. Wilson

Oct. 15vs. DETW 15-5Alexi OgandoMax Scherzer

Series in review: The Rangers won the first two games at home, including 7-3 in 11 innings in Game 2 when Nelson Cruz became the first player in postseason history to end a game with a grand slam. In Detroit's Game 3 victory, Doug Fister pitched out of a first-inning jam and the Tigers hit three home runs. The Rangers took a 3-1 series lead with another 11-inning, 7-3 victory, with Cruz hitting a three-run homer in the 11th. Facing elimination, Detroit opened a 6-2 lead after six and held off a late Rangers rally for a 7-5 victory in Game 6. The Rangers wrapped up the series with a 15-5 win that included a nine-run third inning.

Notable

Nelson Cruz was selected ALCS MVP after setting MLB single-series playoff records with six homers and 13 RBIs.

The Rangers' bullpen accounted for all four victories, including two by Alexi Ogando.

The Tigers out-homered the Rangers 13-7 in the series. Miguel Cabrera had three of those and drove in seven runs.

The Rangers became the first team to win back-to-back AL pennants since the 1998-2001 New York Yankees.

2011 World Series

Date Opp. Result Winning pitcher Losing pitcher

Oct. 19at STLL 3-2Chris CarpenterC.J. Wilson

Oct. 20at STLW 2-1Mike AdamsJason Motte

Oct. 22vs. STLL 16-7Lance LynnMatt Harrison

Oct. 23vs. STLW 4-0Derek HollandEdwin Jackson

Oct. 24vs. STLW 4-2Darren OliverOctavio Dotel

Oct. 27at STLL 10-9 (11)Jake WestbrookMark Lowe

Oct. 28at STLL 6-2Chris CarpenterMatt Harrison

Series in review: All the runs in St. Louis' opening 3-2 win were scored against the teams' aces, as both bullpens combined to throw 51/3 scoreless innings. Colby Lewis allowed only one run over 62/3 innings in Game 2, but it took sacrifice flies by Josh Hamilton and Michael Young in the ninth inning for the Rangers to even the series. Albert Pujols went 5 for 6, hit three of St. Louis' four home runs and drove in six runs in a Game 3 rout. The next night, Derek Holland and Neftali Feliz shut out the Cardinals. A two-run bottom of the eighth in Game 5 gave the Rangers a 4-2 win and sent them to St. Louis one victory shy of their first championship. Twice in Game 6, the Rangers were one strike from clinching. But David Freese delivered a game-tying triple with two outs in the bottom of the ninth and a game-winning homer in the 11th. In Game 7, the Rangers scored twice in the top of the first but were shut down the rest of the way and lost 6-2.

Notable

The Rangers scored 30 runs, becoming the first team in 10 years to score that many in a World Series and lose.

Both teams had two come-from-behind victories.

Mike Napoli's 10 RBIs were third-most in World Series history.

Angels 5, Rangers 4 (F)

By Drew Davison

09/30/12

ARLINGTON – The Texas Rangers still haven't clinched a postseason berth.

They were on the cusp Sunday afternoon with a 4-3 lead over the Angels in the ninth inning and Joe Nathan coming in. But Nathan gave up a two-out, two-run double to Torii Hunter and the Angels held on for a 5-4 victory.

It was Nathan's second blown save this month, along with Sept. 13 against Cleveland.

With a 4-3 lead in the ninth, Nathan retired Mark Trumbo but then gave up a one-out single to Maicer Izturis and walked Chris Iannetta. Nathan came through with a clutch strike out of MVP candidate Mike Trout for the second out, but Hunter ripped a two-run double to left-center field.

The Rangers went down in order against Angels closer Ernesto Frieri in the bottom of the ninth.

With the loss, the Rangers can only clinch a postseason berth with a victory in Game 2 of today's doubleheader. There was a chance they could clinch the American League West today, but the division will be decided in their upcoming three-game series at Oakland. Their magic number holds at three with four to play.

Yu Darvish pitched well for the Rangers in Game 1, allowing three runs on nine hits with one walk and seven strikeouts over 6 2/3 innings. And he pitched with the lead all day.

The Rangers took a 2-0 lead in the second on a two-run homer by Nelson Cruz. The Angels scored a run in the top of the third, but the Rangers scored two in the bottom half on two-out RBI hits by Josh Hamilton and Adrian Beltre for a 4-1 lead.

The Angels then scored a run in the sixth on a sacrifice fly by Kendrys Morales and another run in the seventh on a solo homer by Trout.

After giving up a two-out double to Hunter in the seventh, Darvish exited the game. With Angels slugger Albert Pujols due up, Rangers manager Ron Washington brought on Alexi Ogando.

Ogando retired Pujols in a six-pitch at-bat, getting him to ground out on a 98 mph fastball.

Ogando worked a perfect eighth, which was started when Beltre made a dazzling diving stop and throw on a sharp grounder by Morales.

But the Angels rallied for their first lead -- and made it stand -- in the ninth.

Derek Holland will start Game 2 for the Rangers, while Ervin Santana goes for the Angels.

Spotlight: Yu Darvish not feeling added pressure as playoffs near

By Drew Davison

09/30/12

Yu Darvish understands he will likely be a cheerleader the next three games for the Texas Rangers. He made his final regular-season start on Sunday, and would only be used in a relief role should the Rangers need him at some point during their three-game series at Oakland.

Darvish pitched well enough for the Rangers to clinch a postseason berth in Game 1 of Sunday's doubleheader, but that wasn't enough as the Angels rallied for a 5-4 victory.

Darvish went 6 2/3 innings, allowing three runs on nine hits with one walk and seven strikeouts. He was working with a 4-1 lead after the third inning, and exited with a 4-3 lead with two outs in the seventh inning.

"In any game it's a game we should win or we play to win," Darvish said. "In baseball, even if the score is 4-1 after the third, this game you don't know what's going to happen. I didn't feel anything in particular after that, like we should win."

Darvish missed his last start with neck stiffness, but said it wasn't an issue Sunday. He also didn't feel any added pressure with a postseason berth hanging in the balance. For whatever reason, Darvish said, he is immune from getting too high or too low in intense games.

"I don't know if I just don't feel it, but a lot of people are saying the crowds seem like a playoff atmosphere, but I don't get like that," he said. "When I'm on the mound, all I see is the hitter, the catcher and the catcher's mitt."

The next time Darvish is on the mound will likely be in a playoff setting. He is in prime position to start the Rangers' first game after Game 162. By winning Game 2 of Sunday's doubleheader, the Rangers assured themselves of at least a wild-card playoff spot.

If he doesn't pitch again in the regular season, Darvish finishes his rookie campaign 16-9 with a 3.90 ERA. He threw 191 1/3 innings with 221 strikeouts and 89 walks.

"The only thing I can do is be on the bench and cheer our guys on," Darvish said. "If the coaches or manager tell me or ask me to pitch, I'll pitch. But we'll see what happens."

DALLAS MORNING NEWS

Fraley: Relieved Rangers nail down playoff spot, but there's work to be done

Gerry Fraley

09/30/12 11:01 PM

ARLINGTON — The Rangers went through six hours and 29 minutes of roller-coaster split-doubleheader baseball on Sunday.

They endured the shock of a blown ninth-inning lead with closer Joe Nathan on the mound in the opener at Rangers Ballpark in Arlington. They faced the uphill climb of trailing by four runs before their first swing in the second game.

When the draining episode ended, the weary Rangers could make one loud statement.

They are going to the playoffs again.

Fueled by the power of Mike Napoli, the Rangers came back to defeat the Los Angeles Angels, 8-7, in the second game of the marathon period. That clinched at least a wild-card spot in the American League playoffs and eased the sting of the Angels rally against Nathan for a 5-4 win in the opener.

"We're still trying to win the division," said Napoli, who had two homers and six RBIs against his favorite whipping-boy club. "We're going to go out there [to Oakland] and get after it again. We've still got to take care of some business."

The Rangers need one win during the season-ending three-game series at Oakland to take the West for the third consecutive season. Manager Ron Washington nonetheless deemed this important enough to call for a post-game toast.

"There's unfinished business out there," Washington said.

Nathan neatly tied up the long day's journey into night.

In the opener, he gave up a 4-3 lead in the ninth when Torii Hunter drove a high slider for a two-out, two-run double. It was Nathan's second blown save in his last five chances.

Nathan threw 26 pitches in the blown save but insisted he would be ready for the second game because "there are no more days off." After Koji Uehara struck out the side in the eighth, Washington never hesitated. He asked Nathan to handle the middle of the Angels' lineup.

"There was no way I could have kept him off that mound," Washington said. "He came in and showed what he's made of."

Nathan started with the most important out, retiring slugger Albert Pujols on a pop-up to the infield. Hunter remained a pest by working Nathan for a walk, but he retired All-Star Mark Trumbo and Kendrys Morales.

In terms of pitches, Nathan changed nothing. He continued to throw fastballs, sliders and curveballs. To change would have been a sign of flagging confidence.

"I definitely wanted to get back on the horse," Nathan said. "Any reliever would ask to get out there and put the afternoon game behind him."

"The name of the game is trust your stuff. I'm not going to go out there and re-invent the wheel. I just try to make better pitches. Fortunately, the night was a little better than the day."

In the second game, starter Derek Holland trailed 4-0 before getting his second out. After the first-game loss, that created a less-than-ideal situation for the Rangers, but the offense brought them back.

The Rangers scored in the first on a double by Josh Hamilton, and David Murphy led off the second with a homer off right-hander Ervin Santana, who leads the galaxy in home runs allowed. Napoli took over from there.

Napoli followed Murphy with another homer, cutting the deficit to 4-3. Napoli put the Rangers ahead at 6-4 and knocked out Santana with a three-run homer in the third. Napoli added two more runs in the fifth for an 8-4.

After the 2010 season, the Angels traded Napoli to Toronto, which shipped him to the Rangers five days later. Napoli is hitting .392 with 12 homers, 25 RBIs and a .821 slugging percentage against his old club.

This may have been the sweetest game yet for Napoli. He put the Rangers into the playoffs and left this former club in the bad spot of having the slimmest of chances of getting into the playoffs. The Angels need a sweep at Seattle and a Rangers sweep of Oakland.

"It was special because I did something to help us win," Napoli said. "We needed to win."

On to the playoffs.

Despite recent stumbles, Rangers can still achieve goals in Oakland

By Rick Gosselin

09/30/12 10:58 PM

ARLINGTON — The Rangers have played this season with a sense of purpose — but not a sense of urgency.

Not since April, anyway, when a 12-2 start provided the propulsion for a summer-long joy ride.

But that sense of urgency hit Sunday with the suddenness of a thunderclap after the Rangers failed on their home turf this week to close the book on this regular season. Another division title and home-field advantage in the American League were both there for the taking — and the Rangers failed to claim them.

Now, the two-time defending American League champion must travel to Oakland for a regular season-ending, three-game series that will determine whether the Rangers open the playoffs as the top seed in the American League, the second seed — or, gasp, a wild-card qualifier.

A disappointing closing homestand, losing four of seven games to division rivals Oakland and Los Angeles, left the Rangers in this predicament.

A whopping 94,802 fans turned out at the Ballpark for the two games Sunday, hoping to see the Rangers claim their third consecutive division title. But an Oakland victory and a doubleheader split with the Angels prevented that.

The Rangers needed to rally from a four-run first-inning deficit in the second game to salvage that split.

The Rangers won all summer because they were the most talented and balanced team in the American League. Now, they have three games left to prove they still are. The Rangers haven't lived in this sort of pressure cooker since last year's playoffs.

For the first time all season, there will be consequences for failure.

That blazing start in April allowed the Rangers to build a stunning 51/2-game lead in the West just 14 games into the season. They took a 61/2-game lead into May.

The Rangers held at least a four-game lead in the division race for 138 days this season. That gave them the luxury and understanding that they could withstand a sweep in any series and still remain in first place.

The Rangers suffered just two such sweeps — a two-gamer against the Royals in May and a three-gamer against the White Sox in July. Both left the Rangers with still-comfortable four-game leads in the West. They never endured a losing streak longer than five games — and then just one of those. When they did lose, they didn't lose for long.

The Rangers have held at least a five-game lead in the West for 83 days this summer and a six-game lead for 17 days. That cushion allowed the Rangers to play on their own terms. This has been a relaxed team.

The Rangers were merely competing with themselves to become the best team they could be — a better team than the editions that represented the American League in the last two World Series.

That provided the sense of purpose — taking care of the unfinished business from the previous two Octobers. The A's and Angels provided mere background chatter this summer.

But now the Rangers head to Oakland in competition with the surprising A's just to become the best team in the West. Oakland sat 13 games behind the Rangers on June 30. Yet here the A's are now — on the doorstep of a division title, just two games back with three to play.

The magic number for the Rangers is two, which means they must win once in Oakland to claim the division. The A's open the series with their ace Jarrod Parker on Monday night.

All that said, the Rangers still have the best record in the American League at 93-66. Everything they hoped to achieve in 2012 is still in front of them: division title, home field, American League pennant and World Series championship.

If there's a button that can be pushed that can return the Rangers to their April form, it's time for Ron Washington to push it. It's October — time for the Rangers to start playing their best baseball of the season.

Napoli finds his groove at the plate

By Gerry Fraley

09/30/12 11:28 pm

Mike Napoli pushed a growing slump to 2-for-20 when he grounded out to end the Texas Rangers' 5-4 loss to the Los Angeles Angels in the first game of a split doubleheader on Sunday at Rangers Ballpark in Arlington.

Napoli found his stroke in the second game. In his first three at-bats, Napoli hit two homers and drove in six runs, keying the Rangers' comeback from a four-run deficit as they defeated the Halos 8-7.

"I felt better, obviously," Napoli said. "But it's day-to-day. I have to keep my routine and try to keep this going, take it one at-bat at a time."

Napoli began his career with the Angels. They sent him to Toronto, for outfielder Vernon Wells, before the 2011 season. Five days later, the Blue Jays shipped Napoli to the Rangers for right-hander Frankie Francisco.

Ever since, Napoli has performed as if he has a vendetta against the Halos. He is hitting .392 with 12 homers, 25 RBIs and an .821 slugging percentage for 112 at-bats against the Angels.

For the season, Napoli hit .451 with six homers and 14 RBIs in 51 at-bats against the Halos. He is hitting .192 with 17 homers and 41 RBIs in 291 at-bats against all other clubs.

This was Napoli's 10th career multi-homer game: four with the Angels and six with the Rangers. Of his six multi-homer games with the Rangers, four have come against the Angels.

"That's pretty incredible to be able to treat your former team that way," outfielder David Murphy said. "There's a little added incentive when you're playing against the team that traded you away or a team that you once played for. That incentive seems to always be there when he plays against them. He definitely takes it out on them."

The Angels' decision to trade Napoli came about in part because of manager Mike Scioscia's unhappiness with his defensive work. By the end, there was a chill in the relationship between the two.

"Sometimes there's going to be that one hitter you don't match up that well against," Scioscia said. "Mike has power, but he's hitting .200. Against us, those numbers are obviously off the charts."

"We know what we need to do. ... A lot of it has to do with matchups and sometimes some pitchers just aren't able to get to some spots where you can make pitches and minimize some power and hopefully get outs. Mike's really hit the ball well against us, no doubt."

Oakland columnist: Why Rangers and A's could both be popping champagne Monday night

Joe Stiglich

10/01/12 01:35 AM

OAKLAND, Calif. — The Oakland A's enter their final series of the season on the cusp of a wild-card berth, which is enough in itself to boggle the mind.

Now consider they control their own destiny to the American League West championship, and the stage is set for a potentially historic three days at the Oakland Coliseum.

Sunday's 5-2 victory over the Seattle Mariners pulled the A's to within two games of first-place Texas as the Rangers arrive for a season-ending three-game series beginning Monday.

The A's would have to sweep all three games to capture the division crown—just one loss gives the Rangers their third straight A.L. West championship.

But the way this storybook season has unfolded for the A's so far, there's no reason to think three straight victories is out of their grasp.

"It's our choice," A's closer Grant Balfour said. "We go out there and win, and good things are going to happen."

They're also on the verge of punching their postseason ticket with a wild-card berth. After a sweep of the Mariners, their magic number is one to clinch one of the American League's two wild card spots.

The A's (91-68) trail the New York Yankees and Baltimore Orioles—tied atop the American League East—by one game for the top wild-card spot.

But the A's need to win only one game against Texas, or have the Los Angeles Angels and Tampa Bay Rays each lose once, to secure at least the second wild-card berth and their first playoff trip since 2006.

Were the A's to lose Monday but the Angels and Rays both lose, two clubhouse celebrations would break out at the Coliseum.

The A's would celebrate a wild-card spot, while the Rangers would party it up over a division title. It's weird to consider, but such is life with this year's addition of a second wild card in each league.

"We're just going to try to win (Monday)," A's manager Bob Melvin said. "I think we're best suited to just to do that and not worry about all the different variables.

"Man, we're in the dugout and all of a sudden the Angels score goes up, and it's so emotional this time of year. Your thoughts can go back and forth based on one scoreboard change. It is exciting. It is fun. But it's bit of a roller coaster at times."

The A's kept the joy ride going for a crowd of 21,057 on Sunday.

They entered the bottom of the eighth tied 2-2 and having mustered just three hits.

Then Yoenis Cespedes hit a towering one-out home run to left that gave the A's the lead. After Brandon Moss' single, Josh Reddick crushed a two-run homer to the second deck in right field for a three-run cushion.

The A's send rookie Jarrod Parker to the mound Monday night against Martin Perez. Parker is 5-1 with a 2.83 ERA over his past eight starts, and he threw six innings of three-run ball against the Rangers in Arlington on Wednesday.

Oakland sends left-hander Travis Blackley to the mound Tuesday against 18-game winner Matt Harrison. Blackley hasn't made it through three innings in either of his past two starts.

"I don't know that we have any other options," Melvin said. ". . . He's done some good things for us. I talked to him about redirecting his thoughts and trying to revert back and think about the good things he's done, and not get too consumed with the last couple of games."

Rookie A.J. Griffin will start Wednesday. He threw six shutout innings in his only start against Texas on June 29 but hasn't made it through six innings of any of his previous three starts.

—Cespedes' 23 homers are third-most by a rookie in Oakland history, and his 82 RBIs rank fourth. He was also instrumental in the A's two-run first, delivering an RBI triple, then tagging up and making a mad dash for home on Moss' shallow sacrifice fly.

Melvin was asked how Cespedes' impact compares to that of Angels outfielder Mike Trout, the consensus A.L. Rookie of the Year and an MVP candidate.

"You look at Trout's numbers and they're incredible," Melvin said, "but I don't know of anybody that has a bigger impact on a team than Yoenis has on us."

—Reddick made a big defensive play, making a perfect throw home to nail Justin Smoak, who tried to score from second on Carlos Triunfel's single in the second.

Reddick ranks third in the majors with 15 outfield assists, and that's the most by an A's outfielder since Mike Davis had 16 in 1983.

—A's starter Tommy Milone gave up nine hits over 42/3 innings.

The rookie left-hander is on turn to pitch in Friday's do-or-die wild-card game should the A's play in it, though Parker could also be an option on three days' rest.

Brett Anderson, out with an oblique strain, is scheduled to throw off the mound Monday, but there might not be enough time to have him ready by Friday.

—The A's bullpen combined for 10 shutout innings over the final two games against Seattle.

—Were the A's to clinch a wild-card spot while the division title were still up for grabs, how much celebrating would be in order with business still to tend to?

"My feeling is if you get into the postseason, you should be able to celebrate," Melvin said.

Translation: Expect the champagne to flow should the A's lock up a wild-card spot.

Rangers expect Adrian Beltre, Michael Young to be available vs. Oakland after both leave with injuries

By Gerry Fraley

09/30/12 10:23 pm

The Rangers finished their nightcap against the Angels with rookies at second (Jurickson Profar) and third (Mike Olt.)

Third baseman Adrian Beltre came out in the seventh inning after an aggravating a strained left shoulder. Beltre has had trouble with the shoulder for about three weeks. The discomfort increased after he made a lunging try at a liner by Mark Trumbo. Rookie Mike Olt, in a game for the first time since Sept. 12, replaced Beltre.

Second baseman Michael Young came out after six innings because of a strained Achilles tendon and was replaced by Profar.

The Ranger expect both Beltre and Young to be available on Monday against the Oakland A's.

Briefly: Oakland manager Bob Melvin told reporters that he will keep left-hander Travis Blackley in the rotation to face the Rangers on Tuesday. Blackley has allowed seven runs in three innings during his last two starts. That includes five runs in one inning against the Rangers on Thursday. ... Napoli became the fourth Ranger to have six-plus RBIs in a game this season most in the majors. Josh Hamilton, Nelson Cruz and Brandon Snyder all accomplished the feat in May.

Rangers finish with team-record 3.46 million attendance for season, behind only Phillies and Yankees

By SportsDayDFW

09/30/12 8:52 pm

The Rangers hosted their final home game of the regular season Sunday, finalizing their record-setting attendance numbers for the year. Here's a release from the Rangers:

Arlington, TX—With a crowd of 48,089 in Sunday night's game, the Texas Rangers finished the 2012 home season with a final attendance of 3,460,280 in 81 dates at Rangers Ballpark in Arlington.

Texas will finish third in the majors in total attendance behind Philadelphia (3,565,718) and the New York Yankees (3,407,971 with 3 dates remaining) and in average attendance per home date at 42,720 behind Phillies (44,021) and Yankees (43,692).

The Rangers previous club records were a total attendance of 2,946,969 in 2011 and an average of 40,374 in 1994. The 2012 figure is an increase of 513,311 over the final 2011 total.

Texas also established club records with 38 sellouts (21 in 1994) and 59 crowds in excess of 40,000, including the season's final 10 dates.

"On behalf of the entire Rangers organization, I want to thank our fans for their outstanding support this season," commented Rangers CEO and President Nolan Ryan. "A final attendance of over 3.4 million is a tremendous accomplishment for our franchise, and it is certainly a tribute to the best fans in Major League Baseball. We really appreciate all of the support."

ESPNDALLAS.COM

Don't worry about closer Joe Nathan

By Richard Durrett

10/01/12 128:00AM CT

ARLINGTON, Texas -- The Twitterverse was panicking and the in-game chat on ESPN Dallas was buzzing about Joe Nathan's blown save Sunday afternoon. Some of you were worried Nathan was beginning to lose his mojo just as the calendar was ready to flip to October.

Don't worry about it, folks. Nathan has been as close to a sure thing this season as a closer can get. He gave up a two-run double to Torii Hunter in the ninth inning of the first game of a doubleheader for his third blow save of the year. The loss left the Rangers needing a win in the nightcap to clinch a playoff berth and head to Oakland one win shy of an AL West title.

They got that big win with Nathan throwing the final pitch. Six hours after he blew the save, he earned his 37th of the season in navigating through the heart of the Angels' lineup.

"I feel OK," said Nathan after two straight outings in the same day, including a 28-pitch appearance in Game 1. "I definitely wanted to get back on the horse. This is a quick turnaround to get back out there but I think any reliever would ask to get out there and try and put this afternoon's game behind them."

Nathan's velocity was still there and even after the first game, he made it clear that there "are no off days right now" when asked if he could pitch again. Manager Ron Washington wouldn't even rule him out for Monday's game if the Rangers are in position in a close game late to clinch the division.

But don't let Nathan's rare struggle cloud the big picture. The guy is 37-for-40 and in most of those saves, he doesn't even make it interesting. He's got swing-and-miss stuff, a slider that is normally nasty and constantly attacks hitters.

Nathan also has the right attitude for the postseason. He puts rough outings behind him and always wants the ball. And his experience doesn't allow him to get rattled, as Sunday night's save showed. He walked the second batter he faced and got Mark Trumbo and Kendrys Morales as both stood in as the go-ahead runs.

"It was really nice to see Joe come in and get the save," outfielder David Murphy said. "He's been great for us all year."

And he'll be great in the playoffs. Just watch and see.

Michael Young (Achilles) wants to play Monday

By Richard Durrett

09/30/12 10:57PM CT

ARLINGTON, Texas -- Texas Rangers infielder and designated hitter Michael Young came out of Sunday's 8-7 win in the middle of the game because of a sore left Achilles tendon.

Young said he could play any infield position except second base with the pain, which has been around for about a month. He said because he has to charge so many balls at second, it was bothering him a bit on Sunday.

Manager Ron Washington saw Young limping a bit after running to first and didn't want to take any chances, so he put Jurickson Profar in the field to take Young's place.

Mike Napoli continues to torment former team

By Richard Durrett

09/30/12 10:45PM CT

ARLINGTON, Texas -- If it's a late-season game against the Los Angeles Angels with something on the line, count on catcher Mike Napoli to have a big impact.

Despite struggling for much of the season to find the hitting stroke that powered him to a memorable second half and postseason in 2011, Napoli found his swing just in time to vault the Rangers into the playoffs and likely end the Angels' season.

Napoli had two home runs, a double and six RBIs in Sunday's 8-7 win in the second game of a doubleheader, helping the Rangers turn around an early 4-0 deficit and head to Oakland needing just one win to secure a third consecutive AL West title. The victory before boarding the plane to California was enough to clinch a playoff spot for the Rangers.

"I did something to help us win," Napoli said. "We needed to win tonight and it was a good feeling."

Napoli is now hitting .396 in 33 career games against his former team with 10 doubles, a triple, 12 homers, 25 runs and 25 RBIs. His hits also seems to be big ones. It was last season that Napoli hit two home runs in Anaheim to clinch home field in the ALDS for the Rangers, allowing them to fly to Arlington rather than New York to start the postseason.

"That's pretty incredible to be able to treat your former team that way," outfielder David Murphy said. "There's always a little added incentive when you're playing against the team that traded you away or a team that you once played for. That incentive seems to always be there when he plays against them. He definitely takes it out on them."

The loss means the Angels are three games behind the A's in the wild-card race with three to play. They need to sweep Seattle and hope the Rangers sweep the A's to force a playoff for that wild-card spot.

Rangers relieve (playoff) pressure with win

By Richard Durrett

09/30/12 10:38PM

ARLINGTON, Texas -- You could tell much of the pressure built up in the Rangers' clubhouse was let out after Sunday night's 8-7 win, which clinched a playoff spot for Texas.

Two straight losses, a full day of rain and a kick to the gut in the form of a blown save on Sunday afternoon made things a bit tense in there. The Rangers weren't panicking, by any means. That's really not a part of the club's DNA. But there had to be some worry, which turned into more than mild anxiety when Derek Holland gave up five straight hits and four runs in the first inning of the second game of Sunday's doubleheader.

David Murphy greets Mike Napoli after the catcher belted his second home run of the game Sunday night. Napoli finished with a career-high-tying six RBIs. "It definitely wasn't a good feeling," catcher Mike Napoli said. "We knew we were going to have to battle."

The sellout crowd at Rangers Ballpark in Arlington was fairly quiet as the Rangers came up to bat. But here's the thing about this club the past few years: Stick them in a high-pressure situation down the stretch, and they find a way to respond.

They did it pretty quickly, too, getting one run in the first and adding two more in the second, three in the sixth and two in the fifth to take control. Napoli, a one-man Angels wrecking crew, did most of the damage with two home runs, a double and a career-high-tying six RBIs. Holland settled down, thanks in part to another stern mound chat with manager Ron Washington, who did most of the talking, as usual. It didn't take a lip-reading expert to tell you the discussion wasn't PG rated.

But Holland, Washington and the Rangers did what they had to do to make the tournament. Now, they've got a chance to get a high seed if they can play well in Oakland.

"Those guys don't quit," Washington said. "They are very resilient. They fight. The thing I love about them the most is there's never any finger pointing in that clubhouse. We go down together, and we go up together. They're a class act."

For a team that has led the AL West since the second week of the season, making the playoffs seemed like a foregone conclusion. At least it did until the Rangers lost six of nine games prior to Sunday night.

That, combined with the amazing A's and hard-charging Rays and Angels, altered the calendar. This clinching thing was supposed to happen days ago.

Instead, the Rangers had a quick toast after Sunday night's win, deciding to save the big celebration for Oakland, assuming they can win one of three out there to clinch the AL West crown.

"We're trying to win the division," said Napoli, amid a clubhouse that included some rookies dressed in wild outfits as part of the traditional hazing. "We've got one more game to win. We're going out there to try to win the division and get home-field advantage. We've still got to take care of some business."

That business is a little easier now, which is why Sunday night's win was so crucial. Had the Rangers not come back from the early deficit to get the victory, they would have been forced to win two of three in Oakland to win the AL West for a third straight year. Now, they just need one of those games to pop the champagne corks and douse each other with water and ginger ale in the Oakland Coliseum visiting clubhouse for the second time in three years. The magic number is two, and it hits zero with a win against the feisty A's.

"It's nice," outfielder David Murphy, who homered in the second inning, said of the win and how it sets up the Rangers for Oakland. "It's been a battle lately. Some days we haven't been playing our best. A lot of the other days, teams are bringing their best for us. Teams are playing really well against us. It's very gratifying to have clinched a postseason berth, even though that's not the main goal."

Rapid Reaction: Rangers 8, Angels 7

By Richard Durrett

09/30/12 9:35PM CT

ARLINGTON, Texas -- The Texas Rangers clinched a playoff spot as closer Joe Nathan got the save about six hours after he blew just his third one of the season earlier in the day. The 8-7 victory in Game 2 of a day-night doubleheader came after starter Derek Holland allowed four runs in the first. The Texas offense picked him up and he got the win. Some quick thoughts:

What it means: The Rangers clinched a playoff spot with the win and they now need to win one game during the season-ending three-game series in Oakland to clinch the AL West (magic number is two). ... The win also allowed the Yankees and Orioles to clinch a spot in the postseason. ... The Angels are now in a really tough spot as they are three back of Oakland with three to play. The Rays are in the same spot. Both need sweeps in the final series combined with the A's getting swept to tie. ... As for the top seed in the AL, Texas is one game up on the Yankees and Orioles.

NAP-O-LI, NAP-O-LI: Rangers catcher Mike Napoli hit home runs in his first two at-bats. He smoked both, totaling 783 feet, and his second one turned a 4-3 deficit into a 6-4 lead. The "NAP-O-LI, NAP-O-LI" chants were out in full force. ... Napoli came up in the fifth with two on and hit a double to the wall in center. He had six RBIs through five innings and was a one-man wrecking crew.

Napoli crushes Angels: Napoli is now hitting .396 (44-for-111) with 10 doubles, a triple, 12 homers, 25 runs and 25 RBIs in 33 career games against his former team. And he seems to save the best for last. Last year, he hit two home runs in the final game of the regular season to give the Rangers home-field advantage versus Tampa Bay in the ALDS.

Early hole: Holland didn't have it in the first inning. After striking out Mike Trout to start the game, he surrendered five straight hits. He gave up a single to Erick Aybar and a double to Albert Pujols, which scored Aybar. After the red-hot Torii Hunter hit an RBI single, Mark Trumbo mashed a two-run home run. Just like that, it was 4-0 Angels.

Back-to-back jacks: The Rangers had consecutive home runs in the second inning when David Murphy hit a 413-foot shot to Greene's Hill in center and Napoli followed with a homer to left. That closed the gap to 4-3. It was the 11th time the Rangers have hit at least two consecutive homers.

Tough talk: Manager Ron Washington came out to chat with Holland, and Holland wasn't doing any of the talking. It came after Holland issued a two-out walk to Trout in the fourth inning with the Rangers up 6-4. Washington has done this several times during Holland's career, and it worked again Sunday as Holland got Maicer Izturis to end the inning.

Up and down for Holland: After the four-run first inning, Holland didn't give up a run in the second through sixth innings. But he ran into trouble again in the seventh. He gave up two singles and then, with two outs, faced Howard Kendrick, who blasted a pitch into the seats in left-center to score three runs and close the Rangers' lead to one. In the end, Holland allowed seven runs on 12 hits in 6 2/3 innings with five strikeouts and two walks, but left with the lead and got the win.

Nathan gets save: Hours after he blew a save, Nathan got the job done against the Nos. 3-5 hitters in the Angels' order. Nathan has 37 saves in 40 tries.

Hamilton's day: Josh Hamilton had an RBI double in the first inning but struck out twice, too. That came after he had an RBI single but added three strikeouts in the first game. He has a team-high 153 strikeouts to go with a team-high 127 RBIs.

Uehara's streak continues: Koji Uehara struck out the side in the eighth, pushing his streak of retired hitters to 23 in a row. He has 15 strikeouts in that span.

Record attendance: The Rangers had 48,089 at Sunday night's game, giving the club an attendance of 3,460,280 for the 2012 season. Texas will finish third in the big leagues in average per home date behind the Phillies and the Yankees. ... The attendance total is a new club record, as are the 38 sellouts.

Up next: The Rangers will head to Oakland to take on the A's with the AL West still on the line. The first game of the series is at 9:07 p.m. Monday on ESPN Dallas 103.3 FM and FSSW.

Adrian Beltre leaves with shoulder strain

By Richard Durrett
09/30/12 9:07PM CT

ARLINGTON, Texas -- Rangers third baseman Adrian Beltre left Sunday night's game against the Los Angeles Angels in the seventh inning with a left shoulder strain.

Club officials said he originally hurt the shoulder diving for a ball in the ninth inning of the first game of the doubleheader Sunday and then aggravated it in the seventh inning of the second game. Mike Olt took his place.

Yu Darvish continues strong stretch

By Richard Durrett
09/30/12 5:45PM CT

ARLINGTON, Texas -- Yu Darvish has likely made his last start of the regular season. Will his next one be a playoff opener?

The 26-year-old rookie continued his impressive late-season charge Sunday, pitching well enough to win the game. The Rangers gave up the lead in the ninth, meaning Darvish got a no-decision. But his performance was his eighth straight quality start and showed once again that he's primed and ready for the postseason.

Darvish gave up three runs on nine hits in 6 2/3 innings with seven strikeouts and one walk. The outing did end four straight starts of seven or more innings and four or fewer hits. But he kept his team in the game and left with the lead.

"I didn't feel that sharp today, but I thought I did the best I could to give the team a chance to win," Darvish said through interpreter Joe Furukawa.

Darvish didn't feel like the Angels' approach was any different and that he did have some unfortunate balls that dropped in for hits, but weren't hit hard. The stiff neck that prevented Darvish from making his last start was not an issue.

"My neck felt fine," Darvish said. "No discomfort whatsoever. Three days ago I couldn't play catch at all, so the preparation was a little different from my regular routine. Under the circumstance, I thought I pitched OK."

Darvish gave up runs in the third, sixth and seventh innings. He exited the game with two outs in the seventh after Mike Trout homered and Torii Hunter doubled. Alexi Ogando came in and finished the inning off.

Darvish will now prepare for what he hopes is a playoff game next weekend in the ALDS. The Rangers still have some work to do to get there. And Darvish says he'll be cheering and doing whatever he can to help.

Walk helps lead to Joe Nathan's blown save

By Richard Durrett
09/30/12 4:10PM CT

ARLINGTON, Texas -- The big hit for the Los Angeles Angels in the ninth inning of Sunday's 5-4 comeback win was Torii Hunter's two-out, two-RBI double. But the inning became a stressful one for the Rangers and an opportunistic one for the Angels when No. 9 hitter Chris Iannetta earned a one-out walk to put two batters on base.

Rangers closer Joe Nathan, who had blown just two saves all season, was ahead in the count 0-2 before Iannetta got the count back in his favor and walked.

"He took some good pitches, took some pitches that I've seen people chase, but he's known to be able to lay off some good stuff," Nathan said. "We knew that coming in. (We) tried to give him some different looks with the same pitch and couldn't get him to offer at any of them. So good at-bat by him."

That put two runners on with one out for Mike Trout, who had homered in his previous at-bat (against Yu Darvish). Nathan retired him with a 3-2 slider that Trout missed. That got the crowd really going as Hunter came to the plate as the last hope

for the Angels. Nathan threw him a slider and Hunter ripped it to left-center to bring home Maicer Izturis and pinch-runner Peter Bourjos with the tying and go-ahead runs.

"It was a bad pitch, one bad pitch in the inning," Nathan said. "Honestly, the slider was probably up all inning. But they were taking them most of the time. It's just that when I was involved in an at-bat with him, you can't leave a slider up right there because he's going to be swinging. Bad pitch, wrong time."

Nathan said he felt fine physically, he just didn't get the job done. And despite throwing 28 pitches in the first game of the doubleheader, Nathan said he'd be available if needed in the second game.

"There are no off days right now," Nathan said.

Nathan stayed in the dugout with a towel over his head for a while after he left the mound. When asked what he was thinking, Nathan said those thoughts were reserved for him. But with four games left in the 2012 season, the Rangers are still trying to clinch a playoff berth and the AL West title. They can nail down at least a wild-card spot with a win tonight.

Matchup: Derek Holland vs. Ervin Santana

By Richard Durrett

09/30/12 4:00PM CT

ARLINGTON, Texas -- The second game of today's doubleheader features LHP Derek Holland vs. RHP Ervin Santana. The game starts at 6:05 p.m. on ESPN Dallas 103.3 FM and FSSW. A look at the matchup:

Holland (11-6, 4.50 ERA): The 25-year-old is 6-0 with a 2.51 ERA in 10 starts in September the past two seasons. ... He gave up three runs in three innings in his last start, a 5-4 comeback win for the Rangers on Monday vs. Oakland. It was Holland's second-shortest start of the season. He threw 77 pitches in those three innings and allowed four hits and two homers. ... Despite that outing, he's still 4-0 with a 3.20 ERA in his last seven starts. ... In the middle game of the Rangers-Angels series last week, Holland held the Halos to two runs over seven innings. He is 1-2 with a 6.20 ERA in three starts against them this season.

Santana (9-12, 4.93 ERA): He recorded his 50th career home win in his last start, Sept. 21 vs. White Sox. ... He matched his career-high with 11 strikeouts in that game. ... This will be his 27th career start against the Rangers. ... In his last start vs. Texas, Santana gave up three runs on four hits in five innings in a 15-8 win. ... He is 2-1 with a 2.03 ERA in September. ... Is 2-3 with a 7.24 ERA against the Rangers since the start of 2011. ... He is 6-6 with a 7.08 ERA in 15 starts in Texas in his career.

Hitters: Michael Young is batting .355 against Santana (in 76 at-bats, the most of any Ranger). ... Ian Kinsler has a .365 average with a homer and six RBIs. ... Erick Aybar (10-for-33), Alberto Callaspo (9-for-27), Mike Trout (5-for-12) and Albert Pujols (5-for-9, 2 HRs) have hit Holland well. ... Torii Hunter is just 7-for-30 with seven strikeouts off Holland.

Rapid Reaction: Angels 5, Rangers 4

By Richard Durrett

09/30/12 3:32PM CT

ARLINGTON, Texas -- Texas Rangers closer Joe Nathan blew his third save of the season, giving up a two-run double with two outs in the ninth as the Angels came back to win 5-4 in the first game of a doubleheader Sunday. Some quick thoughts:

What it means: The Rangers' magic number to clinch the AL West stays at three as the club has lost the first two games of this series with the Angels. They are two up on the A's as Oakland plays the Seattle Mariners this afternoon. ... The Rangers are now a half-game up on the Orioles and Yankees for the best record in the AL. ... Texas can still clinch a playoff spot with a win in Game 2 of this doubleheader. ... The Rangers can't clinch the AL West today, regardless of later results. ... The Angels clinched the season series, taking a 10-8 lead with tonight's game remaining.

Nathan blows save: For just the third time this season, Nathan blew a save. He got Mark Trumbo to ground out to start the inning, but then gave up a single to Maicer Izturis and walked Chris Iannetta (after getting ahead 0-2) to bring up Mike Trout. Nathan threw him a 3-2 slider and got him on a strikeout. The crowd was standing at Rangers Ballpark in Arlington (and they were watching in Camden Yards, hoping a Rangers win would clinch a playoff spot for the Orioles) with Torii Hunter up with two outs. But the red-hot Hunter belted a double to left-center to score two runs and turn a 4-3 deficit into a 5-4 advantage.

Hunter at the plate: Hunter made a mistake in the field (see below) but made up for it at the plate. He had four hits, including two doubles. He had two RBIs, both on his final double of the game in the ninth. It didn't matter if Hunter was facing Yu Darvish or Nathan, he got the job done.

Darvish solid again: It wasn't a dominant performance by Darvish standards, but it should have been good enough. The 25-year-old gave up three runs in 6 2/3 innings for his eighth consecutive quality start. He had seven strikeouts, but did allow nine hits. That's the most hits allowed by Darvish since he gave up 11 to the Red Sox on Aug. 6. But Darvish pitched out of some jams and kept the Angels from having big innings. He left with a 4-3 lead.

Cruz missile (arm): Nelson Cruz's arm came into play right away. With Trout at second base -- after he walked and then stole second -- Hunter hit a fly ball to right field. Trout decided to try to tag from second, and Cruz threw an absolute bullet to get him. The throw had to be perfect, and it was. Adrian Beltre made a nice play to quickly catch and tag in the same motion to barely get Trout. Angels manager Mike Scoisicia came out to argue the call, but replays appeared to show Beltre barely got Trout before he touched the bag, though it was a very close play.

Cruz missile (bat): Cruz then drilled a Zack Greinke 93 mph fastball over the left-field wall with Beltre standing on base to give Texas a 2-0 lead in the second inning. Cruz has hit 24 homers this season. ... He has homers in two straight games and this season has hit eight homers and has 20 RBIs against the Angels this season. ... The homer put Cruz at the 90-RBI plateau.

Big reversal: Darvish caught Mitch Moreland's flip to first to try to retire the speedy Izturis for the first out of the seventh. Darvish approached the bag awkwardly, but appeared to catch the ball and swipe the bag with his foot in time to get the out. But first base umpire Mark Wegner called him safe. Manager Ron Washington jumped out of the dugout and sprinted to first to argue. Wegner gathered the umpires around and reversed the call. That, naturally, got Scoisicia out of his dugout to complain, but replays appeared to show that Darvish did get the out. ... The play ended up becoming an even bigger one when Trout hit a home run later in the inning with no one on. That only pulled the Angels within in one, rather than tying the score.

Speed, wind in third: The speed of Elvis Andrus was on display in the third. He drew a two-out walk on four pitches and was then on the move toward second when Josh Hamilton singled to center. Andrus just kept running and slid home ahead of the throw to put the Rangers up 3-1. They added another run when Belre hit a popup to shallow right that became a double when the wind blew it away from Izturis. Right fielder Hunter never saw the ball and didn't move toward it. When it dropped in, Hamilton scored.

Pujols delivers: Despite not hitting Darvish well this season, Albert Pujols was able to get his bat on a cutter away and send it to right field with two outs in the third inning to score Trout from third. The Angels had three consecutive singles with two outs in that third inning to get their first run.

Great defense: We had back-to-back terrific defensive plays in the game. First, Trout made a diving catch in shallow center field (after he broke back initially and didn't get a great read) to end the seventh and prevent the Rangers from adding to their lead. Then, Beltre made a diving stop on a hard-hit grounder by Kendrys Morales and threw to first to retire him in the eighth. That prevented the leadoff batter from reaching base.

Ogando pitches well: Alexi Ogando came in with the tying run at second and two outs in the seventh and got Pujols to end the inning. He then had a 1-2-3 eighth inning.

Jersey change: Greinke pitched the first four innings of Sunday's game with his name spelled incorrectly on the back of his jersey. It was "GRIENKE" until the fifth, when he returned to the mound with a jersey that had "GREINKE" on it.

Tidbits: Andrus was picked off by Greinke in the fifth inning after a two-out single. The Rangers lead the league in getting picked off, doing it 14 times. That's three more than the Mariners. ... Trout becomes the first rookie in big league history to have 30 home runs and 40 stolen bases in a season. ... Andrus had his 17th sacrifice bunt, which leads the league.

Up next: LHP Derek Holland (11-6, 4.50 ERA) is on the mound for the second game of the doubleheader against Ervin Santana (9-12, 4.93 ERA). The game starts at 6:05 p.m. on ESPN Dallas 103.3 FM and FSSW.

Buzz: Mike Adams in doubt for playoffs

By Richard Durrett

09/30/12 11:25AM CT

ARLINGTON, Texas -- Rangers reliever Mike Adams was diagnosed with Thoracic Outlet Syndrome, a condition where a rib bone pushes against a nerve and causes numbness or pain in the arm or shoulder.

Adams was told he needs to rest 7-10 days but said he hopes to pitch through the pain in the playoffs.

Rangers starter Matt Harrison had the same ailment a few years ago and was fine after surgery.

Read more about it here.

Other notes:

* Manager Ron Washington said he isn't sure what he's going to do about Monday's starter in Oakland, and much if it depends on today's doubleheader.

"We'll see where we are today and who we don't use, and make a decision," Washington said.

Martin Perez made the last start in that fifth-starter spot but isn't the only candidate for that spot. Roy Oswalt could pitch and perhaps give the club some innings. Scott Feldman and Justin Grimm also are possibilities.

* Washington said he can't worry about Adams' situation right now, saying he has to focus on "who we have on board now" as the club tries to clinch things.

* There were costumes hanging in a few lockers of some vets, meaning today is likely the day when the rookie dress up for the flight to Oakland, a baseball tradition.

Matchup: Yu Darvish vs. Zack Greinke

By Richard Durrett

09/30/12 10:00AM CT

ARLINGTON, Texas -- After missing his last start, Yu Darvish returns to the mound for the Texas Rangers as they take on Zack Greinke and the Los Angeles Angels at 12:05 p.m. in the first game of a day-night doubleheader. The game is on ESPN Dallas 103.3 FM and FSSW. A look at the matchup:

Darvish (16-9, 3.90 ERA): The 26-year-old was scratched from his last start with neck stiffness but said after his bullpen Friday that he's ready to go. ... He got his 16th win, which leads all AL rookies, on Sept. 20 in Anaheim, allowing one run on four hits in eight innings with a walk and nine strikeouts. ... He has four consecutive starts of seven or more innings and four or fewer hits and is just the third pitcher to have a streak of that kind (Nolan Ryan and Gaylord Perry). ... Darvish has 12 games with nine or more strikeouts, second-most in the majors. And his 214 strikeouts are third-most in the AL. ... He has a career-high seven consecutive quality starts and is 5-1 with a 2.13 ERA in that span. Opponents are batting just .151 in those starts.

Greinke (15-5, 3.42 ERA): He's won his last five and six of his last seven decisions since going winless in eight straight. ... Greinke became the first pitcher since 1920 to record 13 strikeouts in a start of five innings or less in his win against Seattle on Sept. 25. ... This is his 14th career appearance and 12th start against Texas. ... He did not factor into a decision in his last start vs. the Rangers, allowing one run in eight innings on Sept. 20. Darvish was also starting that game and held the Angels down. ... Greinke is 2-3 with a 1.23 ERA in 51 innings against the Rangers since 2007. He's struck out 53 and walked just five.

Hitters: As a team, the Angels are hitting .174 against Darvish. ... Kendrys Morales is 0-for-11 with six strikeouts. ... Alberto Callaspo is 5-for-11 with three RBIs. ... Mike Trout is 4-for-14 with a homer and three RBIs. ... Geovany Soto is 3-for-7 off Greinke. ... Ian Kinsler (3-for-22) and Josh Hamilton (0-for-16) have struggled off him.

Up next:

Mon at Oak: LHP Martin Perez (1-3, 5.03 ERA) vs. RHP Jarrod Parker (12-8, 3.44 ERA), 9:07 p.m., ESPN Dallas 103.3 FM/1540 AM/FSSW

Tue at Oak: LHP Matt Harrison (18-10, 3.26 ERA) vs. LHP Travis Blackley (5-4, 3.91 ERA), 9:07 p.m., ESPN Dallas 103.3 FM/1540 AM/FSSW

Wed at Oak: RHP Ryan Dempster (12-8, 3.18 ERA) vs. RHP A.J. Griffin (7-1, 2.71 ERA), 2:37 p.m., ESPN Dallas 103.3 FM/1540 AM/FSSW

Rangers rally to secure playoff spot in Game 2

By Anthony Andro

09/30/12

ARLINGTON, Texas – The number crunching three outs into Game 2 of Sunday's Texas Rangers doubleheader against Los Angeles had to have Rangers' fans concerned.

After losing a heartbreaking 5-4 decision in Game 1, the Rangers were on the verge of seeing their lead in the American League West trimmed to one game if they didn't rally from a 4-0 hole.

Forget about winning the West. The Rangers would have headed to Oakland for the final three games with work to do just to secure a wild-card spot.

That's not an issue anymore though, thanks to Derek Holland's ability to rebound from a disastrous first inning and Mike Napoli's continued ability to destroy his former team as the Rangers rallied for an 8-7 victory.

The win clinched a wild card for the Rangers and has them headed to Oakland needing to win just one of the final three games to wrap up their third consecutive West division title. The Rangers also still have a one-game lead for best record in the AL, which would get them home field until the World Series.

While the Rangers finished their final home stand 3-4, they head west riding high.

"It was huge," said third baseman Adrian Beltre. "The first game was a little devastating for us. Getting behind in the first inning 4-0 and being able to come back, it was huge for us. We don't want to have to go to Oakland to win two and win the division. It's not done yet but it's a lot easier.

Holland rebounded from the four-run first by pitching into the seventh. By the time he was pulled the Rangers were leading 8-7 thanks to two homers and six RBIs from Napoli.

The bullpen cleaned things up for Holland, with Joe Nathan getting the save a few hours after blowing one in Game 1 of the doubleheader by allowing two runs in the ninth inning.

Securing a playoff berth wasn't easy but the Rangers knew they would be able to bounce back from Game 1 and the first inning of Game 2.

"You would think there would be a letdown but because these guys take each game for what it is, there is no letdown," Texas manager Ron Washington said. "They come out there and they try to play the best they can every single day. Yes it was a tough loss the first one, but they came back out and battled. They fell down 4-0. It was no big deal. They just went out there and they put some good at-bats together and they played with a lot of energy, and Joe got a chance to redeem himself."

So did Holland. The Rangers had Roy Oswalt warming in the first after the Angels scored four times off Holland, with Mark Trumbo's two-run homer making it a 4-0 game. But then Holland didn't allow another run until the seventh.

By that time Napoli had done what he always does to the Angels. The Texas slugger, who came into the game 2 for 20 on the homestand, launched two home runs and added a two-run double on his way to matching his career high with six RBIs.

He followed David Murphy's solo homer in the second with one of his own and then gave Texas the lead for good with a three-run homer in the third to give Texas a 6-4 lead. He also lined a two-run double to center in the fifth for what proved to be the game-winning run.

Napoli has 12 homers against the Angels since he began playing for Texas and is hitting .396 against his former team.

Napoli didn't care who he was batting against. He just knew the Rangers needed a win.

"I did something to help us win," Napoli said. "We needed to win tonight and it was a good feeling."

Holland also left feeling good despite his tough first inning. He got two outs in the seventh before Howie Kendrick blasted a three-run homer off him to make it a one-run game. Holland's 12th victory was far from a thing of beauty – 12 hits, seven runs – but it was good enough on a night that started anything but.

"I continued to turn things around," Holland said. "I continued to fight. I continued to give my team a chance to win. They kept putting up runs and I kept shutting them down for a while. I continued to keep that boxing mentality. I took the blow and kept going out there and kept grinding."

Nathan was also able to grind after throwing 28 pitches in the first game and getting charged with just his third blown save of the year.

He was back out for the ninth and worked around a one-out walk to Torii Hunter to get the final outs and send the Rangers to the postseason. It capped a long afternoon of baseball that started at 12:05 p.m.

It was also well worth it. For now.

"We've still got a lot of work to do," said Nathan. "One win away from our division, but we've still got to stay atop of the American League. As much as we want to celebrate this win tonight, really it was just a quick sip of champagne and said we made the postseason, but let's get on a bird and do our job over in Oakland."

Holland: Twitter account hacked during game

Keith Whitmire

09/30/12

ARLINGTON, Texas — Rangers pitcher Derek Holland said it was a hacker who posted a homophobic slur on his Twitter account during Sunday night's game against the Los Angeles Angels.

The slur was in apparent response to critical comments posted by a fan on Holland's account, @Dutch_Oven45. Holland said he was told of the hacking after the game.

"It's obvious it was not me," Holland said. "It was during the game, for one. And for two, I'm in the dugout cheering my teammates on. Why would I say that anyway to begin with?"

Holland said his fiancée, Lauren Hicks, has access to his Twitter account but reiterated that the slur was the work of a hacker. The slur was deleted quickly, according to Holland's Twitter followers, but screen caps of the message were saved and re-posted.

"It's definitely a hacker," Holland said. "Obviously my fiancée can get into it, but trust me, she's not like that. She's one of the nicest people in the world."

Major League Baseball prohibits players from using electronic devices during games and within 30 minutes of start times.

"I apologize for whoever it was that decided to hack into my Twitter and do that," Holland said. "But I can't sit here and be responsible for that. I can't control what people do."

Holland started Sunday night's game and gave up four runs in the first inning. However, he ultimately earned the win in an 8-7 victory that clinched a playoff spot for the Rangers.

"To hear something like that once I came out of the game kind of kills me," Holland said. "People do dumb things and if that's what makes them happy, let them do that. But trust me, I'm better than that. I would never do that, especially during a game."

Beltre strains left shoulder, leaves game

Keith Whitmire

09/30/12

ARLINGTON, Texas — One of the major components of the Rangers' stretch run to the playoffs finally broke down Sunday: Third baseman Adrian Beltre was removed from a game.

But knowing Beltre's ability to ignore injuries, don't expect him to spend much time in the shop.

Beltre came out of Sunday's second game against the Angels during the top of the seventh. He re-aggravated a left shoulder strain suffered when he dove for a ground ball in the ninth of inning of Sunday's first game.

"Hopefully it's nothing serious and I'll be back out there tomorrow," Beltre said. "I knew it was pretty sore, but I couldn't afford to sit. I didn't say anything to anybody. I tried to get through it but Wash (Rangers manager Ron Washington) didn't let me finish."

The Rangers open their final series of the regular season Monday in Oakland after clinching a playoff spot with an 8-7 win in Sunday's second game. One more win and the Rangers clinch the AL West title.

Beltre went 2-for-3 with an RBI double in Sunday's first game, giving him three consecutive multi-hit games and extended a hitting streak to six games.

However, he was 0-for-3 in the second game after injuring his shoulder, in addition to being hit by a pitch in the first inning.

The Rangers are accustomed to seeing Beltre limp around when he doesn't have to run or make plays, but when he jumped to deflect a Mark Trumbo liner with one out in the seventh, they could tell this was more than the usual soreness Beltre deals with.

"He jumped up for that ball and it didn't look good," Washington said. "I certainly didn't want it to be any more than what it was ... Knowing Beltre, he'll be ready to go tomorrow."

Another sign of the severity of the injury: Washington didn't have to put Beltre in a headlock and drag him off the field. Rookie Mike Olt relieved Beltre at third.

Still, in typical Beltre fashion, he resisted being taken out.

"Yes, he did," Washington said. "He did, but it was the one time I didn't have to fight with him."

Washington also removed another veteran in mid-game. Michael Young, who started at second base, was replaced by Jurickson Profar to start the seventh inning.

Young has been bothered by a sore left Achilles tendon. He said he expects to play Monday in Oakland. Young said he could have stayed in the game if he were not playing second.

"No. No, no," Washington said when asked if the Young injury were serious. "I just wanted to make sure I had some fresh legs out there moving around."

Beltre said he suffered a similar shoulder injury earlier in the season and was able to play the next day.

"It's exactly what happened (earlier)," Beltre said. "I'm hoping it's the same case."

Nathan coughs up lead to Angels in Game 1

By Anthony Andro

09/30/12

Joe Nathan gave up two runs in the ninth inning after recording two outs for the blown save against the Angels. (Jim Cowser-US PRESSWIRE)

ARLINGTON, Texas – The Texas Rangers won't be clinching any division titles in Arlington this year.

The Los Angeles Angels rallied for two runs in the ninth off Texas closer Joe Nathan to beat the Rangers 5-4.

Texas was one out from securing a playoff spot but Torii Hunter doubled to left center off Nathan to score the tying and winning runs. It was just the third blown save of the year for Nathan but it couldn't have come at a more inopportune time.

Texas has lost both games of the series and their lead in the West over Oakland is now down to two games with four games remaining, including three in Oakland beginning Monday.

Nathan got the first out before Maicer Izturis singled to left. Nathan then got ahead of No. 9 hitter Chris Iannetta but ended up walking him. After striking out Mike Trout for the second out, Hunter slapped a Nathan slider to left center to score Izturis and pinch runner Peter Bourjos.

"It was a bad pitch," Nathan said. "One bad in the inning. Honestly I think the slider was up all inning. Just when I was involved in an at-bat with him, you can't leave a slider up because he's going to be swinging. Bad pitch. Wrong time. He's a good player. He's going to get you sometimes. Unfortunately it was a bad spot."

Despite the tough loss, the Rangers aren't in a bad spot. They still control their own destiny for winning the West.

But they could have made things easier with a win in Game 1 of the split doubleheader Sunday. They were in position to do so.

Texas got a two-run homer from Nelson Cruz off Zack Greinke in the second and an RBI single from Josh Hamilton and run-scoring double from Adrian Beltre in the third to build a 4-1 lead with Yu Darvish on the mound.

But the Angels kept Darvish in jams throughout the game, scoring runs off him in the third, sixth and seventh innings. He ended up allowing nine hits and three runs in 6 2/3 innings. Darvish finished with his eighth consecutive quality start, the longest by a Texas pitcher since 2005.

Darvish missed his last start because of a stiff neck and didn't think he was at his best Sunday.

"I didn't feel that sharp today but I thought I did the best I can to give the team a chance to win," Darvish said

Alexi Ogando kept in him line for the victory by pitching 1 1/3 hitless innings before the Rangers turned the game over to Nathan.

"Well that's where we wanted the ball," Texas manager Ron Washington said of the ninth. "They (the Angels) just fought and took it from us. But that is exactly where we wanted to be."

NEW YORK TIMES

Rangers Lock In Playoff Spot and Help Others, Too

By TOM SPOUSTA

09/30/12

ARLINGTON, Tex. — The Texas Rangers have proved dominant and resilient during their nearly season-long occupation of first place in the American League West. But anxiety was beginning to build at the Ballpark here, and after the Rangers dropped the first game of a doubleheader Sunday, the calendar couldn't flip fast enough for them.

Behind Mike Napoli's two homers and six runs batted in, Texas avoided a September swoon and secured a playoff spot with an 8-7 victory over the Los Angeles Angels. In a repeat of the Angels' 5-4 victory earlier Sunday, the ace reliever Joe Nathan again was entrusted to safeguard a one-run lead, and this time he prevailed for a split that pushed the Rangers within one victory of claiming their third consecutive A.L. West title.

Had Nathan retired Torii Hunter in the ninth inning of that first game, the Rangers could have clinched the division title Sunday night. Instead, Hunter ripped a two-run double to give the Angels a win, only the second time this season Texas lost a game it led after seven innings.

"We're happy we've got another opportunity to play in the postseason, but there's unfinished business out there," Texas Manager Ron Washington said.

He said the Rangers celebrated with a brief toast as they packed for Oakland, saying, "It was congratulations on what they accomplished, but what we're after we haven't gotten yet."

The split kept Texas with the A.L.'s best record at 93-66, one game ahead of the Yankees and the Baltimore Orioles, but after the Rangers fell behind by 4-0 in the first inning Sunday night, a three-way tie seemed a real possibility.

But David Murphy and Napoli blasted back-to-back solo homers in the second inning to pull the Rangers to within 4-3. Napoli, who didn't play in the first game, added a three-run homer in the third inning for a 6-4 lead and put the Rangers ahead, 8-4, when he ripped a two-run double in the fifth.

Texas then weathered a three-run homer by Howard Kendrick in the seventh before bringing in Nathan to close.

Starter Derek Holland worked 6²/₃ innings and was the winning pitcher despite allowing 7 runs and 12 hits. He gave up four runs and five hits in the first inning, including a two-run homer by Mark Trumbo. But that was all the Angels could push across until Kendrick's blast in the seventh, which knocked Holland from the game.

Meanwhile, the Athletics continued a remarkable run with a 5-2 victory Sunday over the Seattle Mariners and moved to within two games of Texas. The Rangers thus will need only one victory in their season-ending three-game series at Oakland to win the division. The Angels fell to three games behind in the chase for the final wild card, tied with the Tampa Bay Rays, with three games to play.

"We're laying in the weeds and need a little bit of help and hope somebody blinks," Angels Manager Mike Scioscia said.

By now, the Rangers were expected to be acting as referees as other teams jockeyed for postseason positions. Instead, the two-time A.L. champions were faced with added anxiety in having to play a doubleheader with the Angels after a rainout Saturday.

In the first game Sunday, Hunter was 4 for 5 with two doubles. Mike Trout's solo home run in the seventh inning had pulled the Angels to 4-3 and made Trout the first rookie in major league history with 30 home runs and 40 steals in a season.

Rangers starter Yu Darvish had the Angels under control until Trout belted his home run to center with two outs. Darvish struck out seven batters and gave up nine hits in 6²/₃ innings.

Nelson Cruz hit a two-run homer in the second, and Josh Hamilton and Adrian Beltre each drove in a run in the third against Angels starter Zack Greinke.

"I'm pretty sure everybody in baseball knew how close we are to the brink," Hunter said. "That was close, but we came through with some big hits."

The Rangers want more than a playoff berth after back-to-back A.L. championships and losses in both World Series appearances.

"It's just been a strange year," Washington said. "How many games did we give away? How many times did we struggle through the course of the year and still was able to hang on?"

"Luck certainly hasn't been on our side this year. I do believe that what we've gotten so far this year, we've earned. And to get further, seems like we've got to earn that, too. But that's all right. That's the way we want it."

LOS ANGELES TIMES

Mike Napoli bashes a big dent in Angels' playoff hopes

By Bill Shaikin, Los Angeles Times

10/01/12

ARLINGTON, Texas — The Angels shuffled off the field, their season over every way but mathematically, surrounded by the sights and sounds of joy. The Texas Rangers did not dance in the faces of the Angels, but the public address announcer shouted deliriously into the night air.

"With tonight's win, the Texas Rangers have clinched a spot in postseason play," he said.

The crowd went nuts. Mike Napoli appeared on the video board, the slayer of the Angels wearing a contented smile, and the crowd went nuts again.

In the Angels' clubhouse, where silence might have been in order, there was a high-pitched squeal, and a ripple of laughter. The rookies had found their dress-up outfits in their lockers, and outfielder Kole Calhoun was trying on his bonnet and bib, and trying out his rattle and pacifier.

It was a coincidence that this was the annual rookie hazing night, but the laughter seemed odd. After a raucous ninth-inning comeback capped a 5-4 victory in the first game of a doubleheader, the Angels blew a four-run lead en route to an 8-7 loss in the second game.

Yet, a little laughter might be the way to cope with the practically insurmountable hurdles to a playoff berth. The Angels must win their final three games, and the Oakland Athletics must lose their final three games.

Then, and only then, could the Angels force a tiebreaker for the final playoff spot.

That means the Angels need seven games to go their way — and maybe eight, depending on the Tampa Bay Rays, also three games behind Oakland for the second AL wild-card spot.

Not much chance of that.

"It's not a good chance," Angels outfielder Mark Trumbo said, "but it is a chance."

Napoli drove the ceremonial stake into the heart of his former team, another day of disaster for the Vernon Wells trade. Napoli did in the Angels in the nightcap with two home runs, a double and six runs batted in.

"He plays with a vengeance," the Angels' Torii Hunter said. "I hate that he's doing it, but that's how you really make a statement."

In 17 games against the Angels this season, Napoli hit six home runs and drove in 16 runs. He is batting .442 against the Angels, .197 against everyone else.

"Mike has power, but he's hitting .220," Angels Manager Mike Scioscia said. "Against us, obviously, those numbers are off the charts."

The Angels' loss enabled the Rangers, New York Yankees and Baltimore Orioles to clinch playoff spots. The A's clinched at least a tie.

It didn't have to be this way. The Angels scored four runs in the first inning of the second game, but Ervin Santana gave it all back in a hurry, in what might well have been the final start of his Angels career.

He gave up one run in the first, two in the second and three in the third, on Napoli's second homer. He gave up three home runs Sunday and 39 this season, the most in the majors.

The Rangers could enjoy champagne on Monday, if they clinch the division title. For the Angels, this is three consecutive years without one.

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Clinched! Rangers finally secure playoff spot after Mike Napoli crushes ex-club

BY AP STAFF

09/30/12

ARLINGTON — Closer Joe Nathan got the quick redemption he hoped for, and the two-time defending AL champion Texas Rangers are back in the playoffs.

They're still trying to win another division title.

Nathan ended a long day with his 37th save, after blowing a chance in the opener, and Mike Napoli homered twice while driving in six runs as the Rangers won 8-7 Sunday night for a doubleheader split against the Los Angeles Angels.

"Any reliever would ask to get out there and try and put this afternoon's game behind them," Nathan said. "The team over there is playing great, pushed us right the limit again. We've still got some work to do."

While overcoming an quick 4-0 deficit in the nightcap to assure themselves a playoff spot — and postseason berths for Baltimore and New York Yankees, as well — the Rangers (93-66) have to win at least once during their season-ending, three-game series at second-place Oakland for the AL West title.

"You would think there would be a letdown, but because these guys take each game for what it is, there is no letdown," manager Ron Washington said. "Yes, it was a tough loss the first one. ... Fell down 4-0, it was no big deal. They went out there and put some good at-bats together and they played with a lot of energy and Joe got a chance to redeem himself."

Los Angeles (88-71) , which won the opener 5-4 on Torii Hunter's two-run double with two outs in the ninth off Nathan, trails the A's by three games for the AL's second wild card with three games left.

The Angels have to sweep their three-game series in Seattle and have Texas do the same against Oakland to force a tiebreaking 163rd game between the A's and Angels for the second wild card.

"These guys played their hearts out," manager Mike Scioscia said. "I don't know that you can ask much more than that."

After only his third blown save for Texas in the opener, Nathan worked through the heart of the Angels lineup in the nightcap.

Los Angeles led 4-0 after only five batters off Derek Holland (12-6) in the second game, but Ervin Santana (9-13) quickly squandered after his former teammate went deep on him twice.

David Murphy and Napoli hit back-to-back homers in the second as Texas closed to 4-3. Josh Hamilton had a double in the first for his 127th RBI.

Napoli's 23rd homer an inning later made it 6-4 and chased Santana, who has given up a majors-high 39 homers. Napoli drove a two-run double into the left-center gap in the fifth to make it 8-4.

It was Napoli's 10th career multihomer game, four of them against his former team the past two seasons. Napoli played five years for the Angels before being traded twice in five days before the 2011 season, to Toronto and then Texas.

"Sometimes there's going to be that hitter you don't match up well against," Scioscia said.

Mike Trout, who in the opener became the first major league rookie to reach 30 homers and 40 stolen bases in the same season, struck out to start the second game against Holland.

But the Angels then had four straight hits. Albert Pujols had an RBI double and scored on a single by Hunter before Mark Trumbo's 32nd homer, a two-run shot.

Nathan took over after Koji Uehara struck out the side in the eighth. Uehara has retired all 23 batters faced his last nine games, with 15 strikeouts.

Holland managed to get into the seventh inning, and didn't allow any more runs until a three-run homer by Howie Kendrick, the last batter he faced. The left-hander, who made it only three innings his previous start, struck out five while allowing seven runs and 12 hits.

Hunter, who lives in nearby Prosper, had seven hits in the doubleheader. He is hitting .350 (98 of 280) since the All-Star break, and his game-winning double into the left-center gap came right after Nathan (3-5), his former teammate in Minnesota, struck out Trout.

The Angels are still trying to make up for two bad slumps. After adding slugger Pujols and left-hander C.J. Wilson this winter, they were 8-15 in April. They had a 4-13 slide to start August.

But they still have a chance to make the playoffs after winning 11 of their last 16 games, if they get a lot of help from the Rangers.

So what do the Angels do now?

"We go to Seattle and fight like hell," Trumbo said.

NOTES: Rangers 3B Adrian Beltre came out in the seventh inning after aggravating a strained left shoulder while leaping for a ball with his arm fully extended. He said he's fine and should play Monday. ... Garrett Richards (4-3) retired Nelson Cruz with two runners on in the eighth in the opener, and Ernesto Frieri pitched a perfect ninth in the opener for his 24th save in 26 chances. ... Yu Darvish struck out seven in 6 2-3 innings in the opener, when Cruz hit his 24th homer and also threw Trout out on the bases from right field. ... Texas ended with a regular-season attendance of 3.46 million, an average

of 42,720 per game — both franchise records. ... Holland and Santana was the scheduled matchup for Saturday's game, which was called off four hours after its scheduled start because of rain. ... The 21-year-old Trout is the youngest player with a 30-30 season. He needs two stolen bases to become only the third player ever with 30 homers and 50 stolen bases. The others? Eric Davis (1987) and Barry Bonds (1990).

Mike Napoli's second home run of the night gives the Rangers a lead they won't relinquish.

BY AP STAFF

09/30/12

ARLINGTON, Texas - Mike Napoli homered twice and drove in six runs as the Texas Rangers assured themselves and two other teams of spots in the playoffs with an 8-7 victory Sunday night, earning a doubleheader split against the Los Angeles Angels.

Napoli's second homer in the nightcap was a go-ahead three-run shot in the third.

Two-time defending AL champion Texas (93-66) can be no worse than a wild card. The Rangers can clinch their third consecutive AL West title by winning once in a three-game series at Oakland that starts Monday.

Los Angeles, which won Sunday's opener 5-4, trails the A's by three games for the AL's second wild card with three games left.

The loss by the Angels (88-71) also clinched playoffs spots for Baltimore and the New York Yankees, who are tied for the AL East lead.

After blowing a save in the opener by allowing Torii Hunter's two-run double with two outs in the ninth, Joe Nathan worked the ninth in the nightcap for his 37th save in 40 chances.

Los Angeles took a quick 4-0 lead in the nightcap that Ervin Santana (9-13) quickly squandered.

Mike Trout, who in the opener became the first major league rookie to reach 30 homers and 40 stolen bases in the same season, struck out to start the second game against Derek Holland (12-6).

But the Angels then had four straight hits. Albert Pujols had an RBI double and scored on a single by Hunter before Mark Trumbo's 32nd homer, a two-run shot, made it 4-0 before Holland worked through the seventh without allowing another run.

Nathan took over against the heart of the Angels lineup after Koji Uehara struck out the side in the eighth. Uehara has retired all 23 batters faced his last nine games, with 15 strikeouts.

David Murphy and Napoli hit back-to-back homers in the second as Texas closed to 4-3. Josh Hamilton had a double in the first for his 127th RBI.

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Holland managed to get into the seventh inning, and didn't allow any more runs until a three-run homer by Howie Kendrick, the last batter he faced. The left-hander, who made it only three innings his previous start, struck out five while allowing seven runs and 12 hits.

Hunter, who lives in nearby Prosper, had seven hits in the doubleheader. He is hitting .350 (98 of 280) since the All-Star break, and his game-winning double into the left-center gap came right after Nathan (3-5) struck out Trout.

The Angels are still trying to make up for their horrendous start to the season that put them in an early hole. They were 8-15 in April after adding slugger Albert Pujols and left-hander C.J. Wilson last offseason.

They still have a chance to make the playoffs after winning 11 of their last 16 games, but need a lot of help from the Rangers.

Los Angeles has to sweep its three-game series in Seattle, and have the Rangers do the same against Oakland. That would force a tiebreaking 163rd game between the A's and Angels for the second wild card.

Garrett Richards (4-3) retired Nelson Cruz with two runners on in the eighth in the opener, and Ernesto Frieri pitched a perfect ninth in the opener for his 24th save in 26 chances.

That was when the Orioles and their fans, after a 6-3 victory over Boston, were watching on the center field scoreboard in Baltimore. More than six hours later, the Orioles did finally have their first postseason berth since 1997.

Yu Darvish struck out seven in 6 2-3 innings in the opener, when Cruz hit his 24th homer and also threw Trout out on the bases from right field.