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**Martinez improves, but Texas can't solve Iwakuma
Rookie allows two runs in six innings; Snyder's first HR is only offense
By T.R. Sullivan / MLB.com | 6/15/2014 8:09 PM ET**

SEATTLE -- Mariners pitcher Hisashi Iwakuma had a big advantage in his Father's Day pitching duel against Rangers starter Nick Martinez.

Iwakuma had Kyle Seager on his side. Seager has a tendency to turn into George Brett when he sees the Rangers' uniform in the opposing dugout, and that made the difference on Sunday afternoon at Safeco Field.

Martinez, who had an 11.08 ERA in his last three starts, was much better on Sunday against Iwakuma. But Seager, on a 4-for-4 afternoon, put the Mariners ahead with a two-run double in the fifth and they went on to a 5-1 victory over the Rangers.

The loss snapped the Rangers' three-game winning streak although they still took two of three from the Mariners to open their nine-game road trip. The Rangers' next stop is Oakland for a three-game series with the division-leading Athletics.

Seager also had a double in the Mariners' three-run eighth inning against relievers Robbie Ross Jr. and Ben Rowen, who was making his Major League debut.

"He doesn't miss much when we face him," Rangers manager Ron Washington said. "The first couple of days I thought we did a good job against him, but today when we made a mistake he didn't miss it."

In his last 42 games against the Rangers, Seager is hitting .392 with nine home runs, 31 RBIs, a .432 on-base percentage and a .667 slugging percentage.

"It's just one of those things," Seager said. "It's just sometimes the way it lines up, I guess."

Iwakuma has also had pretty good success against the Rangers lately and the only run scored off him on Sunday was a two-out home run by Brad Snyder in the second inning. It was Snyder's first Major League home run. At age 32, he is the oldest Ranger to hit his first home run since Hector Ortiz in 2002.

"I had never faced him before but his numbers speak for themselves," Snyder said. "It was definitely a get-it-over fastball and I was ready for it. I ain't going to lie. I've been waiting for the first big league home run for a long time. It's a big sigh of relief to get the first one out of the way."

The Rangers needed more than that but Iwakuma held them to six hits, did not walk a batter and struck out six. Snyder's home run was the only extra-base hit and the Rangers didn't get a runner into scoring position until two out in the eighth inning.

"The guy pitched his tail off," Washington said. "He can pitch. He kept the ball off the fat part of the plate and bore his sinker inside on our right-handed hitters. He was good."

Martinez, regaining command of all his pitches, went six innings and allowed two runs on nine hits. He walked one, struck out three and threw 96 pitches while giving the Rangers a fourth straight quality start. But unlike Yu Darvish, Nick Tepesch and Joe Saunders, Martinez ended up on the losing end.

"I felt good. ... I felt like I was back on track," Martinez said. "I had command of all of my pitches. It's just disappointing we didn't get the win, but it was definitely a step in the right direction."

Martinez was in trouble in almost every inning but was able to hold the Mariners scoreless through four. But when Endy Chavez led off the fifth with a single, it marked the fourth time in five innings that the Mariners' leadoff hitter reached on a hit. This time the Mariners didn't strand him.

James Jones popped out, Robinson Cano walked and Logan Morrison popped out. That brought up Seager, who had two leadoff singles in his previous two at-bats. This time he was batting with runners in scoring position and he doubled into the right-field corner to give the Mariners a 2-1 lead.

"Game management," Martinez said. "I probably should have pitched around him or made him chase something outside of the zone."

Martinez got out of the inning by getting Mike Zunino to fly out, then he retired the side in order in the sixth for the first time on the afternoon.

"He found his secondary stuff today," Washington said. "Threw a lot of changeups and threw some breaking balls. With Nick, you need all of your pitches to maneuver through the batting order and he did. He made the mistake to Seager but it was certainly a big improvement."

**Iwakuma's brilliance, Seager's bat lift Mariners
Righty allows a run in eight innings; 3B goes 4-for-4 with three RBIs
By Adam Lewis / MLB.com | 6/15/2014 9:00 PM ET**

SEATTLE -- Right-hander Hisashi Iwakuma was brilliant for eight innings, third baseman Kyle Seager went 4-for-4 and drove in three runs and the Mariners snapped a five-game losing streak with a 5-1 win over the Rangers in front of 39,196 fans Sunday at Safeco Field.

The victory helped the Mariners improve to 35-34 and avoid a series sweep by Texas.

Seattle grabbed the lead for good when Seager delivered a two-out, two-RBI double down the right-field line off Texas starter Nick Martinez (1-4) in the fifth inning, giving the Mariners a 2-1 edge.

"He probably didn't play one of his best games last night and he came out very determined today and he was big for us," said manager Lloyd McClendon, referring to Seager striking out in his final two at-bats Saturday night.

Seager struck again in the eighth with an RBI double to nearly the identical spot, extending the lead to 3-1. In his last eight games against Texas, Seager is 16-for-32 with three doubles, three homers and 11 RBIs. The four hits tied a career high.

"He doesn't miss much when we face him," Rangers manager Ron Washington said. "The first couple of days I thought we did a good job against him, but today when we made a mistake, he didn't miss it."

Seager had no explanation for why he crushes Rangers pitching.

"It's just one of those things," he said. "That's just the way it lined up, I guess."

From there, the Mariners tacked on as left fielder Dustin Ackley followed with an RBI single. Shortstop Brad Miller's sacrifice fly provided the insurance run that allowed McClendon to avoid using closer Fernando Rodney.

When Rangers first baseman Brad Snyder hit the first home run of his MLB career, staking the Rangers to a 1-0 lead in the second inning, it looked as if the Mariners might drop their sixth straight game to begin the homestand.

But Iwakuma was stellar, scattering six hits and allowing just a run after nearly getting scratched before first pitch because of neck stiffness.

"He had some problems warming up and really wasn't sure if he was going to make his start. It just goes to show you how tough he is," McClendon said. "The trainers actually had to go out to the bullpen and readjust him a little bit and he was able to go out."

The visit loosened Iwakuma's neck and gave him the confidence to pitch. It got better as the game progressed. When asked if it might cause him to miss his next start, he wasn't sure.

"I needed to pitch today," Iwakuma said through translator Antony Suzuki. "I felt responsible after [we] lost five in a row so I wanted to go out there and give it all I had."

The 33-year-old struck out six and didn't walk a batter, improving to 5-3 with a 2.59 ERA. He threw 68 of 106 pitches for strikes and tied a career high by lasting eight innings.

He kept the Mariners around when they stranded runners in scoring position in each of the first four innings.

"We were luring them into a false sense of security," McClendon joked.

Iwakuma slammed the door after Seager delivered in the fifth. He said he'll begin treatment on his neck Monday.

"Hopefully this won't affect [me] down the road," he said.

For a while, the Safeco Field crowd was on edge.

Right fielder Endy Chavez led off the bottom of the first inning with a double. He didn't advance farther than second base.

Seager began the second with a single. He was thrown out trying to steal after catcher Mike Zunino swung and missed a 3-2 pitch. Ackley followed with a double, then utility man Willie Bloomquist hit an infield single, advancing runners to first and third, before Miller popped out to the shortstop to end the frame.

In the fourth, Miller again came to the plate with runners on first and third and two outs but flew out to right fielder Alex Rios.

Despite it, the Mariners finished 5-for-14 with runners in scoring position and collected 13 hits. It helped them move in front of Texas for sole possession of third place in the American League West.

"Last year, we might have packed it in," Ackley, who went 2-for-4, said when asked about ending the losing skid. "This year, we're a different team."

Martin earns another day in leadoff spot

By T.R. Sullivan / MLB.com | 6/15/2014 3:31 P.M. ET

SEATTLE -- Rangers manager Ron Washington saw enough from Leonys Martin in the leadoff spot on Saturday night to use him there again on Sunday.

Martin was 2-for-4 with a walk and drove in the go-ahead run with a ninth-inning single in the Rangers' 4-3 win over the Mariners. It was his fifth game-winning RBI this season, most on the team, and snapped an 0-for-15 drought with runners in scoring position. But Washington saw more than just base hits.

"He did OK," Washington said. "He took some pitches I never saw him take before."

Washington still isn't ready to proclaim Martin as his leadoff hitter. It is a tantalizing option because of his speed but there is still his impatience at the plate to work through. Martin is seeing 3.68 pitches per plate appearance and that ranks eighth among 10 Rangers with at least 100 plate appearances. He also has the lowest percentage among pitches taken.

"If he sees something he likes, put a good swing on it," Washington said. "But down in the lineup, he was slashing at everything."

The Rangers tried Martin in the leadoff spot last year but he hit .238 with a .301 on-base percentage as opposed to .292 with a .336 on-base percentage in the No. 9 spot. But on a team clobbered by injuries, using Martin in the leadoff spot could be the answer to an offense that has been struggling to score runs.

"I feel comfortable leading off," Martin said. "I just have to keep my mind focused on getting on base and making something happen. I have the best hitters batting behind me so it's a good opportunity to score runs. Last year I got experience leading off. I just don't put pressure on myself, just go up to home plate and do what I can do."

Said Washington, "We'll just let him hit there and see where it goes. I'm not going to anoint him yet."

Rangers' Washington stays with Sardinas

SEATTLE -- Luis Sardinas was in the lineup for the second straight game on Sunday. After starting at shortstop for Elvis Andrus on Saturday night, Sardinas was at second base on Sunday to give Rougned Odor a day off.

"I wanted to give Sardinas back-to-back days so he can have some at-bats and he's not cold," manager Ron Washington said.

Sardinas had a key error on Saturday night, dropping a relay from Odor on a potential double play ball in the seventh inning. But he also had a one-out single in the ninth and ended up scoring the go-ahead run.

"They don't stop playing," Washington said. "That's what I like about both of them."

Washington is not concerned about Sardinas at shortstop even though he has three errors in six games -- including three starts -- over 32 innings.

"The kid can play shortstop," Washington said. "They work on that double play every single day. He took for granted the throw would be where it was supposed to. It was off and he didn't make the adjustment. He just has to slow it down and make sure it's there."

Washington originally had Donnie Murphy at third base so that Adrian Beltre could be used at designated hitter. But the manager switched Beltre back to third and Murphy to DH minutes before first pitch.

Soto still shooting for All-Star break return

SEATTLE -- Catcher Geovany Soto, who has been on the disabled list since undergoing surgery on his right knee at the end of Spring Training, is on his first road trip with the Rangers and still hoping to return after the All-Star break.

Soto is running, doing agility drills and has also started swinging the bat again. He is hitting off a tee right now with soft toss being the next step before he graduates to full batting practice. The final step would be to resume squatting as a catcher.

"They kind of slowly have me doing baseball-specific stuff," Soto said. "So far everything feels great."

With Soto on the disabled list and J.P. Arencibia with Triple-A Round Rock, Chris Gimenez and Robinson Chirinos have been splitting the catching duties. Since May 21, when Arencibia was sent to Triple-A, Gimenez and Chirinos have combined to hit .341 with three home runs and 16 RBIs over 23 games.

Rangers slowly building up quality starts

SEATTLE -- Joe Saunders turned in an official quality start by holding the Mariners to two runs in six innings on Saturday night. It was the third straight quality start, following Yu Darvish's shutout on Wednesday and Nick Tepesch's 6 1/3 scoreless innings on Friday.

It's the first time this season that the Rangers have received three quality starts in a row. Quality starts are defined as the starter going at least six innings and allowing three or fewer earned runs. It's only the third time this season that Rangers starters have pitched at least six innings in at least three straight games no matter how many runs given up.

The Rangers have 24 quality starts on the season. Despite leading the league in shutouts, the Rangers are last in the league in quality starts. Darvish has 10 of the 24 quality starts. Martin Perez, who had Tommy John surgery and is out for the season, and Tepesch each have three. Nick Martinez, Saunders and Robbie Ross Jr. each have two while Scott Baker and Matt Harrison each have one.

A shutout does not necessarily mean a quality start. Three of the Rangers' 13 shutouts have been accomplished without the starter going six innings.

Worth noting

- Outfielder Zach Cone, who was the Rangers' No. 1 Draft pick in 2011 but has been struggling to overcome a bad ankle injury from last season, has been activated off the disabled list and assigned to Class A Short Season Spokane. Cone was hitting .181 with a .263 on-base percentage and a .235 slugging percentage this season at Class A Advanced Myrtle Beach.

- Infielder Jason Donald has been placed on the disabled list at Triple-A Round Rock with a sore back. Double-A pitcher Keone Kela has been placed on the disabled list to get him some time off and catcher Patrick Cantwell went on the disabled list with a sore wrist. Pitcher Miles Mikolas was taken off the disabled list at Round Rock and put back in the Express rotation.

• Elvis Andrus went into Sunday's game with 16 stolen bases and Leonys Martin had 15. The Rangers were the only team to have two players with 15 or more stolen bases.

**Rangers looking to get leg up in AL West showdown
Lewis set to deal as A's counter with lefty Pomeranz in series opener
By Will Laws / MLB.com | 6/15/2014 9:30 PM ET**

The Rangers have managed to stay afloat in the American League playoff picture despite an injury list that could nearly fill out a lineup card and rotation.

They'll see if their makeshift roster can win a series against the AL West-leading A's.

Manager Ron Washington knows this is a big three-game series for the Rangers starting Monday night at O.co Coliseum.

"We've got to go up there and play well or we're going to get buried," Washington said. "We want to play well because they're leading the division. But I'm not going to call a meeting. We're just going to go into Oakland and play."

The A's won the division in 2012 and '13, with the Rangers finishing second both years. After dropping Sunday's finale with Seattle, Texas sits eight games behind Oakland in third place.

"It's a big series because it is the West and we have to beat the guys in front of us," said Rangers third baseman Adrian Beltre. "They're in first place and they have won the division the last two years. What else can you say?"

The teams have split their previous six matchups in 2014, with each recording road sweeps.

"With the amount of injuries they have ... to continue to play as well and as hard as they have is a testament to Ron Washington and the guys in their system," said A's manager Bob Melvin. "You do definitely tip your hat to a club that really has been decimated yet continues to play well and play hard."

The opener will match Oakland's Drew Pomeranz against Colby Lewis.

Lewis hasn't pitched into the seventh inning yet this season, as opposing hitters are batting .336 against him.

Pomeranz, meanwhile, lasted a career-high seven innings in each of his last two starts. He didn't earn a win in either, but he lowered his ERA to 1.90 by allowing just one total earned run. The lefty joined the A's rotation on May 7 and is 4-2 with a 1.88 ERA in seven starts.

A's: Slumping Donaldson drops to sixth in order
Josh Donaldson has temporarily been bumped from the middle of the A's lineup.

The third baseman batted sixth in Sunday's 10-5 win over the Yankees, snapping a career-worst 0-for-33 streak with an RBI ground-ball single.

"It's just a little bit of a change of scenery, which you do from time to time just to mix things up," Melvin said. "I talked to him about it last night so he was aware. But he hits two, three and four for us, and it won't be long before he's back."

Donaldson, who last batted sixth on Aug. 19, 2013, has spent the majority of the season hitting third for the first-place A's, racking up a team-leading 17 home runs and 50 RBIs. But his average slipped from .285 to .250 in just two weeks prior to Sunday.

Rangers: Murphy to get time at first base
When the Rangers face left-handers on Monday and Tuesday, Donnie Murphy is expected to be in the lineup at first base, adding a new position to the utilityman's defensive worth.

Brad Snyder had been starting there since being called up from Triple-A Round Rock on Tuesday to face five consecutive opposing right-handed starting pitchers. Washington is planning to use both at first base while Mitch Moreland recovers from ankle surgery, which is expected to cost him three months.

Murphy has made two starts at first base since Moreland sustained the injury last week. It's the first time he's played the position in his professional career.

"He's doing great, there have been no issues," Washington said. "He's an athlete, he can make all the plays. We're working with him so there will be no surprises and so far we haven't seen any surprises."

Worth noting

- Lewis will be making his 19th career start against the Athletics. That will tie him with Bobby Witt for the third most by a Rangers pitcher. Charlie Hough had 30 and Kenny Rogers had 28.

- A's right fielder Josh Reddick (right knee) is expected to begin a rehab assignment on Tuesday with Triple-A Sacramento this week.

FORT WORTH STAR-TELEGRAM

Rangers don't finish sweep, but rotation moves forward

Posted Sunday, Jun. 15, 2014

By Jeff Wilson

SEATTLE — To lose a game anytime a sweep is on the line always seems to leave a team feeling a little flat, and that was the case Sunday afternoon in the visiting clubhouse.

The Texas Rangers saw their nemesis, Kyle Seager, beat them with the bat again, and an emerging nemesis, Hisashi Iwakuma, quieted their bats in a 5-1 loss as the Seattle Mariners avoided a lost weekend.

But the Rangers boarded their charter flight for division-leading Oakland feeling good about themselves after two wins in the three-game series.

They should. They saw at Safeco Field the elements that could help them remain viable contenders for the postseason, with that second wild-card spot well within reach, or at least keep them from becoming also-rans before the All-Star break.

"We've just got to continue to prove to ourselves that we can continue to play consistent baseball," manager Ron Washington said. "Just go out there and play our game, pitch and catch the ball. When we have outs to be gotten, get them. When an opportunity presents itself for us to score some runs, pick the majority of them up. We'll be fine."

The key element is the starting rotation, which performed admirably against the Mariners. Granted, the Mariners' lineup isn't exactly loaded and their ballpark isn't exactly hitter-friendly, but four runs in 181/3 innings wasn't just the result of bad hitting and park factors.

Nick Martinez (1-4) took a tough-luck loss despite allowing only two runs in six innings. That performance came only six days after Cleveland punished Martinez for eight runs in two innings.

Nick Tepesch had the best start of his career Friday. Joe Saunders was competitive Saturday for a fourth straight start since coming off the disabled list.

Colby Lewis is up Monday to open the three-game series at Oakland. He's one of the four rotation question marks. The other three had some answers against the Mariners after watching staff ace Yu Darvish toss the first complete-game shutout of his career Wednesday.

"It's contagious," Martinez said. "When one of us does well, the other ones just kind of seem to fall in place. Unfortunately, it happens in losses, too. We didn't get the win today, but I felt like we've been battling."

Martinez had to battle throughout his six innings. The Mariners' leadoff man reached four times, and they had at least one base runner in the first five innings.

They finally got up to Martinez in the fifth, which started with an Endy Chavez single and included a one-out walk to Robinson Cano. Seager, who had already collected two hits, roped a double into the right-field corner to erase a 1-0 lead the Rangers had taken in the second inning on Brad Snyder's first career major league homer.

Seager came through again in the eighth with a carbon copy of his earlier double to make it 3-1. Seattle would add two more in the inning, all charged to inconsistent left-hander Robbie Ross, as Iwakuma improved to 5-1 in his past eight starts against the Rangers.

Remarkably, at least after watching him against the Rangers, Seager is batting only .259 overall this season. But he's batting .396 against the Rangers — .226 against all others — and has collected 12 of his 42 RBIs against them.

Martinez regretted how he approach Seager in the fifth.

"I probably should have pitched around him," Martinez said.

Maybe, but Martinez had done well to that point limiting damage. He could command all of pitches, something that had been missing over his previous three starts, and he was on the attack more with his fastball.

It was a step forward for Martinez, just as the series was a step forward for the rotation. The starters can't take any steps backward if the Rangers want to stay afloat in spite of all the injuries they have been dealt.

"We'll get better before the year is over," Washington said. "We'll get better as it progresses."

Martin eager to seize Rangers' leadoff spot
Posted Sunday, Jun. 15, 2014
By Jeff Wilson

SEATTLE — Leonys Martin found himself atop the Texas Rangers' lineup Sunday for a second consecutive game, some 14 hours after he delivered the game-winning hit in a 4-3 victory late Saturday.

Martin badly wants to be the Rangers' leadoff man. He said that he has been there throughout his career and that he doesn't change his approach when moved up from the bottom of the order.

He knows what he's doing, he said.

"I feel comfortable," Martin said. "I stay with the same approach. I can read the pitcher a lot better. I try to get on base and take as many pitches as I can. I want to stay there and play hard for my team. I like leading off."

At the very least, it appears as though the left-handed hitter will batting first against right-handed starters. Martin might also get some lefties, but the right-handed-hitting Michael Choice could be leading off the next two games against Oakland lefties Drew Pomeranz and Tommy Milone.

Martin has the speed of a prototypical leadoff man, but he hasn't been a hitter who sees a lot of pitches.

"I'm not going to say, 'Take pitches,' " manager Ron Washington said. "If he sees something he likes, put a good swing on it. Down in the lineup, he was slashing at everything. We'll see how it goes."

Oakland bound

Washington gave a pretty frank answer when asked about the importance of the Rangers' three-game series this week at division-leading Oakland.

"We've got to go in there and play well, or we could get buried," Washington said.

Said third baseman Adrian Beltre: "We have to beat the guys in front of us. They're in front. They've won the West the last two years."

At the same time, though, Washington doesn't want to put too much emphasis on the series. He's not going to call a meeting to fire up the team. If the pitching holds up, he believes the Rangers will be fine.

But it didn't hold up in late April at Globe Life Park, when the A's swept three games. None of the Rangers' three starters lasted five innings, including the shortest outing of Yu Darvish's career at just 3 1/3 innings.

Colby Lewis will start the opener Monday. He hasn't faced the A's since suffering a torn flexor tendon during a start July 18, 2012.

Lewis has an enormous bruise on his right biceps after taking a line drive there Tuesday, but he said there is no pain.

"I haven't had any problems," said Lewis, who is 4-4 with a 5.74 ERA. "I'm just hoping to find that consistency."

Soto on trip

Rehabbing catcher Geovany Soto is making his first road trip of the season as he continues to do more and more baseball activities.

Soto was on the field early Sunday, running on his surgically repaired right knee and going through some agility drills. He then went inside to the batting cage, where he took 60 swings off a tee.

He hopes to be taking live batting practice during the Rangers' next homestand, and he fully expects to be activated for the first game after the All-Star break.

"I don't want to put words in the doctor's mouth," said Soto, who was injured late in spring training. "It feels awesome. I feel like I'm going to make that [July 18 at Toronto] no problem."

Rangers hope to play catch-up at West-leading Oakland
Posted Sunday, Jun. 15, 2014
By Jeff Wilson

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DALLAS MORNING NEWS

After inconsistent series against Mariners, Rangers know it's play well vs. Oakland or get buried
GERRY FRALEY | 15 June 2014 08:05 PM

SEATTLE — These are the stakes for the Rangers as they open a three-game series at American League West leader Oakland on Monday night.

"We've got to go there and play well," manager Ron Washington said. "Or we could get buried."

It's that simple for the Rangers.

A 5-1 loss to Seattle at Safeco Field on Sunday returned the Rangers to fourth place in the division, eight behind Oakland. Since these clubs last met in late April, in a three-game sweep by the Athletics, Oakland has added five games to its advantage on the Rangers.

"We don't have anything to prove to Oakland," Washington said. "We've got to prove to ourselves that we can continue to play consistent baseball.

"If we can do that, I'm not worried about Oakland."

The Rangers head into Oakland coming off a mixed weekend against the Mariners.

The Rangers won the three-game series despite not hitting well. They scored a total of six runs with four extra-base hits and went 2-for-15 with runners in scoring position. Robinson Chirinos was the main offensive engine, with two RBIs in a 4-3 win on Saturday night.

All-Stars "King" Felix Hernandez and Hisashi Iwakuma each pitched in the series. They combined to allow two runs in 16 1/3 innings.

In the series finale, Iwakuma allowed only two runners beyond first base. The Rangers' lone run came on Brad Snyder's first major league home run.

The best hitters in the lineup also went into a deep freeze against Seattle. Shin-Soo Choo, Adrian Beltre and Alex Rios, the Nos. 3-5 hitters, were a combined 5-for-33 with one extra-base hit. They have to do better against quality pitching.

Hernandez and Iwakuma are elite pitchers. Oakland does not have arms of their caliber, but the Athletics will send out three quality starters in left-handers Drew Pomeranz and Tommy Milone and right-hander Sonny Gray.

Milone has the highest ERA of the three at 3.47. He has found the feel for his changeup and is 4-1 with a 2.94 ERA in his last eight starts.

"We're playing great baseball on the road," said shortstop Elvis Andrus, expressing no concern about what awaits an inconsistent offense. "We have to carry that to Oakland. Don't try to be Superman. Just do what we did when we swept them."

The Rangers swept a three-game series at Oakland in April. In that series, the Rangers matched Oakland's pitching. Their starters allowed five runs in 20 innings. The bullpen had two wins and seven scoreless innings.

To be successful against Oakland, the Rangers must do that again. How their pitching holds up will determine how this series goes.

"We have to take care of our jobs," right-hander Colby Lewis said. "If we do that, everything else falls into place. We don't have to prove anything to Oakland."

Lewis will pitch the series opener. He has made 11 starts this season in his valiant comeback from hip surgery. Of the 114 major leaguers with at least 10 starts, he is the only one without a quality start.

Right-hander Yu Darvish will pitch the second game. Darvish is in the midst of an outstanding season, but he had the shortest start of his career the last time he faced the Athletics: four runs in 3 1/3 innings.

Right-hander Nick Tepesch gets the final game. Tepesch has shown improvement since returning from the minors. He had 6 1/3 scoreless innings against the Mariners on Friday. He also has a 9.00 ERA for eight career innings against Oakland.

"We want to play well, because they're leading the division," Washington said. "But I'm not calling a meeting."

"If we can pitch and take advantage of the opportunities we create, we'll win what we're supposed to win. We certainly aren't going into Oakland shaking at the knees."

In 2012-13, Oakland chased the Rangers much of the way and passed them to win the West. The Rangers, playing with a depleted roster, take their turn at trying to catch the leader.

Rangers' Yu Darvish feels great, ready for another start against his biggest nemesis **By Gerry Fraley | 8:40 pm on June 15, 2014**

SEATTLE – Yu Darvish on Sunday proclaimed himself ready for another start against the team that has handled him unlike any other on the globe: Oakland.

Darvish will start with five days rest on Tuesday at the Athletics. Manager Ron Washington gave Darvish the extra day to give him more time to recover from throwing 117 pitches in his first major-league shutout on Wednesday against Miami.

"I feel great," said Darvish, speaking through an interpreter, on Sunday. "There is nothing wrong with me."

Darvish is 1-7 with a 4.73 ERA for nine career starts against Oakland. Darvish said he was unaware if any team in Nippon Professional Baseball had the same success against him because "I don't really look at the numbers."

He had a career losing record against two teams in Japan. Darvish was one game under .500 against the Yokohama Bay Stars (0-1) and the Yomiuri Giants (2-3.)

Neal Cotts a victim of the numbers ties major league lead in blown saves

By Gerry Fraley | 8:43 pm on June 15, 2014

Neal Cotts moved into a tie for the major league lead in blown saves with five. His performance illustrated how that statistic can be unfair for middle relievers.

Cotts was asked to protect a 3-2 lead with the bases loaded and one out in the seventh inning. He lost the lead on a single by Robinson Cano but retired the next two hitters, Dustin Ackley and Logan Morrison, with the bases still loaded to preserve the tie.

Cotts retired the final five hitters faced, four on strikeouts, in his longest outing of the season. He got the win on a ninth-inning single by Leonys Martin.

Oakland's Luke Gregerson and St. Louis' Carlos Martinez also have five blown saves.

Rangers manager Ron Washington evaluates Leonys Martin in leadoff spot, explains why he's changing lineup

By Gerry Fraley | 8:52 pm on June 15, 2014

With Oakland starting a left-hander in the first two games of the series against the Rangers, Martin probably will return to the bottom of the order, Washington said. Martin has only four hits in his last 21 at-bats against left-handers.

Martin hit leadoff against right-handers in the final two games of the Seattle series and showed enough to earn more chances in the spot. He reached base four times and took more pitches than usual.

Martin saw 36 pitches in nine plate appearances. His season average is 3.68 pitches per plate appearance, too low for the Rangers.

"He took some pitches I never saw him take before," Washington said. "Just be a little patient. If he sees something he likes, put a good swing on it. But down in the lineup, he was slashing at everything."

Said Martin: "I'm trying. I've always hit leadoff. I want to stay there."

Scouting Monday's starters: Can Alex Rios lead the charge against Athletics' effective lefty?

By Gerry Fraley | 8:33 pm on June 15, 2014

NEXT at Oakland, 9:05 p.m. Monday (FSSW)

Rangers RHP Colby Lewis (4-4, 5.74) allowed three runs in five innings in a no-decision against Miami on Tuesday. Of the 114 major leaguers with at least 10 starts this season, Lewis is the only one without a quality start. He has worked six innings once in 11 starts. Left-handed hitters are batting .361 against Lewis. This will be Lewis' first start against Oakland since July 18, 2012. He has undergone elbow tendon and hip surgeries since that game.

Matchup of note: Coco Crisp has only four singles in 22 career at-bats against Lewis.

Oakland LHP Drew Pomeranz (5-3, 1.90) gave up one unearned run in seven innings during a no-decision at the Los Angeles Angels on Tuesday. Pomeranz has allowed more than two runs only once in seven starts since replacing Dan Straily in the rotation. Pomeranz will use the two-and four-seam fastballs, with the curveball as an off-speed pitch. Right-handed hitters are batting only .190 against Pomeranz.

Matchup of note: Alex Rios leads the majors with a .424 average against lefties.

Rangers' bats fall silent in loss to Mariners
By Gerry Fraley | 5:56 pm on June 15, 2014

SEATTLE – The Rangers had only two runners past first base in a 5-1 loss to Seattle at Safeco Field on Sunday.

Mariners' starter Hisashi Iwakuma gave up one run, on Brad Snyder's first major-league homer, in eight innings. The Rangers had only one at-bat against Iwakuma with a runner in scoring position.

The Rangers won the three-game series despite scoring only six runs overall. They faced the Mariners' top two starters in the series: "King Felix" Hernandez and Iwakuma.

The Rangers returned to fourth in the American League West, eight games behind Oakland. They open a three-game series at the Athletics on Monday night.

Rangers' starter RHP Nick Martinez lost a 1-0 lead in the fifth inning on the first of two run-scoring doubles by Kyle Seager. The Mariners blew up the game with three runs in the eighth against LHP Robbie Ross.

The arms: Seattle's left-handed hitters went 7-for-20 against RHP Nick Martinez. For the season, left-handed hitters are batting .370 for 108 at-bats against him. ... Kyle Seager continued to pummel Rangers pitching. He went 4-for-4 with three RBIs and is hitting .396 with 13 RBIs in 48 at-bats against Rangers for the season. ... In the eighth, LHP Robbie Ross allowed four consecutive hits to open the inning. Ross has allowed multiple runs in four of his last seven appearances.

The bats: In the eighth, SS Elvis Andrus had the Rangers' lone at-bat with a runner in scoring position and grounded out to the right side. Andrus is hitting .118 for 51 at-bats with runners in scoring position. ... In the sixth, Andrus led off with a single but was thrown out trying to steal second. The Rangers have 49 steals in 78 tries for the third-lowest success rate in the majors at 62.8 percent. ... DH Donnie Murphy, given a start to get ready for three left-handers in the next four games, extended his hitless streak to 14 at-bats.

The gloves: In the third, Andrus saved a run by keeping Willie Bloomquist's two-out hit from getting out of the infield. Dustin Ackley could advance only one base, to third. ... In the second, C Chris Gimenez caught Seager trying to steal second to complete a strikeout-thrown out double play. ... In the third, Martinez quickly got off the mound to take the throw at first on a grounder to the right side by Endy Chavez.

RANGERS SECOND

In career at-bat No. 48, Brad Snyder hit his first major-league homer. He drove the first pitch from Hisashi Iwakuma over the wall in left-center. Rangers 1, Seattle 0.

MARINERS FIFTH

Starter Nick Martinez handled Robinson Cano in his first two at-bats, retiring him on weak grounders. Cano walked on four pitches in his third try and scored on Kyle Seager's double. Seattle 2, Rangers 1.

MARINERS EIGHTH

Seattle's first four hitters reached against LHP Robbie Ross. In his last seven appearances, Ross has allowed 10 runs in 10 innings. Seattle 5, Rangers 1.

ESPN DALLAS

Quality starts key to quality wins
June, 16, 2014 | 8:00 AM CT
By Richard Durrett

Nick MartinezAP Photo/Elaine ThompsonThough he took the loss Sunday, Nick Martinez made it four straight quality starts for Texas.

If the Texas Rangers have any hope of hanging in the American League wild-card race, it won't come down to a revamped lineup full of substitutes for injured players. It will come down to pitching.

The Rangers entered Sunday's game against the Seattle Mariners with a 4.47 ERA from their starters. Only three AL teams had a higher rotation ERA -- Cleveland, Chicago and Minnesota. Perhaps an even more telling stat: Texas was second-to-last in innings pitched from its starters (Minnesota was last). That's put pressure on the bullpen and has hurt the club's ability to find a steady rhythm.

So what does rhythm from the starting rotation look like? Try the past four games. For the first time all season, the Rangers have had four consecutive quality starts (they didn't have three straight quality starts all season before this weekend). Starting with Yu Darvish's complete-game shutout to finish off the homestand Wednesday, the next three starters -- Nick Tepesch, Joe Saunders and Nick Martinez -- have followed suit.

Combined, those four starters were 1-1 with a 1.32 ERA with 21 strikeouts and six walks in 27½ innings pitched. Opponents are batting .253 against them. The bats gave them 3.29 runs of support, but that's been good enough to win three out of the past four.

Darvish's start had a ripple effect. Not only did it save the bullpen and give everybody an extra day of rest, which gave manager Ron Washington a full pen to work with in close games Friday and Saturday in Seattle, but it was a signal to the rest of the staff. It was the ace dropping the hammer and telling the rest of the rotation to start banging away, too.

Tepesch, for his part, found his sinker in Seattle, helping him give up just two hits in 6½ innings with five strikeouts and two walks. The Mariners hit just .163 off Tepesch as they beat balls into the ground. On Sunday, Martinez used his changeup to keep hitters off-balance and make his fastball even more effective. He gave up just two runs in six innings despite nine hits, finding a way to keep the Mariners from scoring (his defense helped, too). Saunders, as he's done in several starts, flirted with trouble at times, but also got out of it. He was impressive late in a close game, too, making key pitches to keep the Rangers in position to win.

Now it's Colby Lewis' turn. The veteran has yet to pitch more than six innings all season and still doesn't have a quality start in 2014. Can he continue what the rest of the rotation has started?

No matter how you feel about whether six or more innings and three or fewer runs allowed is a quality start, the bottom line that is these Rangers need those types of outings from its starters to have the successful stretches to keep within shouting distance of a playoff berth. To do it, they have to win eight of 10 or 11 of 14 and spans like that. You don't do that without the starting pitchers going deep into games -- and doing it repeatedly. The past four games are the recipe. But that was against the Marlins and the Mariners. Now, the Rangers need to cook up some quality starts against the A's and Angels, the next two stops on this road trip. That won't be easy. But it's necessary.

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Mariners stop slide with 5-1 victory over Rangers June 15, 2014

SEATTLE -- Hisashi Iwakuma's pregame neck stiffness was serious enough that he had to call for the training staff. Fortunately for the Seattle Mariners, he found a way to take the mound Sunday.

Iwakuma pitched eight effective innings to help the Mariners stop a five-game losing streak with a 5-1 win over the Texas Rangers.

"I needed to pitch today. I felt responsible, especially after losing five in a row," Iwakuma said through an interpreter.

Kyle Seager had four hits and three RBIs for Seattle, continuing his strong play against Texas. Dustin Ackley and Brad Miller also drove in a run.

Iwakuma allowed one run on Brad Snyder's first career homer in the second and six hits. Charlie Furbush then got three outs to complete the six-hitter.

It was quite a turnaround for Iwakuma after he felt stiffness in his neck as he prepared for his ninth start of the season.

"To be honest, yes, as I was playing catch before my bullpen I did feel that way," Iwakuma said of having doubts he would be able to pitch.

Iwakuma, who didn't make his first start of the season until May 3 due to a finger injury on his throwing hand, improved to 2-1 with a 1.61 ERA in three starts this month.

"My body's starting to get used to season mode and I'm feeling a lot better and stronger now, so I think I'm good to go from here on," said Iwakuma, who was hopeful his neck wouldn't be a problem moving forward.

The Mariners left a runner in scoring position in each of the first four innings before Seager drove in Endy Chavez and Robinson Cano with a two-out double in the fifth, lifting Seattle to a 2-1 lead.

"It's been a little bit of a grind as of late, but before that we were playing really good baseball," Seager said. "That's just kind of the way baseball goes. You go from scoring runs all the time to kind of hit a little rough patch, but that's just kind of one of the things you grind through it."

Seager added an RBI double in Seattle's three-run eighth as the Mariners avoided being passed in the standings by the Rangers.

Seager has played well against the Rangers in his career, hitting .338 with 34 extra-base hits and 38 RBIs. Seager is hitting .396 (19 for 48) this season against Texas with three home runs and 12 RBIs.

Rangers starter Nick Martinez (1-4) allowed nine hits and walked one, but held the Mariners to two runs in six innings. The right-hander is 0-3 with a 9.45 ERA in his last three starts.

"He found his secondary stuff today," Rangers manager Ron Washington said. "Threw a lot of changeups, threw some breaking balls. And with Nick, you need all of his pitches to maneuver through the batting order and they did. He made the mistake to Seager but certainly a big improvement."

Game notes

Mariners 1B Logan Morrison departed after five innings due to a cut above his left eye that needed five stitches. Morrison was hurt when he swung his bat in frustration at the dugout wall and had a piece fly back and hit him. Catcher John Buck replaced him in his first major league appearance at the position. ... Mariners 1B Justin Smoak (strained quad), OF Corey Hart (strained hamstring) and OF Michael Saunders (shoulder inflammation) are close to being sent out on rehab assignments as they work their way back from stints on the disabled list, manager Lloyd McClendon said. The Seattle skipper said all three could begin a rehab assignment by week's end. ... Texas OF Leonys Martin occupied the top spot in the lineup for the second time in as many days on Sunday as the Rangers try to find a consistent leadoff hitter. Washington said that doesn't necessarily mean he has secured that role, though.