



**TEXASRANGERS.COM**

**Vlad's eruption puts Rangers on the verge**

**By T.R. Sullivan / MLB.com | 09/25/10 2:30 AM ET**

OAKLAND -- Before Friday's game, equipment manager Richard Price was asked where he was storing the celebratory bottles of champagne.

"They are where they need to be until what's needed to be done is done," Price said.

The champagne at least needs to be on ice. What needs to be done is almost done. The scoring drought is over and the Rangers are one win away from securing the American League West title.

"We're pumped," outfielder Nelson Cruz said after the Rangers broke through offensively for a 10-3 win over the Athletics on Friday night. "We can taste it. Tomorrow we've got to come out and do it."

Starter Tommy Hunter picked up his 13th win of the season and designated hitter Vladimir Guerrero had three hits, including a home run and a three-run double, to help carry the offense. The Rangers were hanging on to a 2-1 lead going into the seventh before finally breaking through against Athletics starter Bobby Cramer and the Oakland bullpen.

"We're close," third baseman Michael Young said. "We're close. We played well tonight. Tommy threw the ball extremely well, and the bullpen did a great job. We played our brand of baseball tonight. We swung the bats, pitching and defense and we ran the bases well. That's the way we play."

Outfielder Jeff Francoeur also had three hits, including two that sparked the late-inning rallies. He hit a leadoff home run that ignited a five-run seventh and a leadoff single that started a three-run eighth.

"We needed this ballgame," Francoeur said. "We let out a lot of frustration on offense tonight. It's fun now. ... We know we're one more game away. Coming out tomorrow and taking care of business would be the perfect thing."

Manager Ron Washington said before the game that the Rangers needed somebody to step up offensively. Guerrero and Francoeur did just that.

"We just needed to stay positive," Guerrero said. "Not just me, the whole lineup. We just needed to stay focused and that's the one thing I brought tonight. I was able to open it up for us and get us going."

He did just that. The Rangers had gone 32 innings without scoring an earned run before Guerrero hit the first pitch of the second inning over the fence in deep right-center. It was his 28th home run of the season and gave the Rangers a 1-0 lead. They made it 2-0 in the fourth on a double by Ian Kinsler and a single by Francoeur.

At that point, Hunter was in command, allowing just four hits through five innings and sitting on a 2-0 lead. Then came the bottom of the sixth, which ultimately proved to be the most crucial moment of the game. Washington understood that clearly and managed that way.

Mark Ellis, sitting at the top of the Oakland lineup, led off with a single and, as Daric Barton was striking out on a full-count pitch, stole second. Kurt Suzuki then lined a sharp single to left, moving Ellis to third.

That left runners on the corners with one out and two left-handed hitters coming up in Jack Cust and Gabe Gross. Washington, concerned about Cust's power, brought in lefty specialist Clay Rapada. He struck out Cust on four pitches.

"I didn't want the momentum to change," Washington said. "I didn't want to see Jack Cust catch something and the momentum to change. You never know if they put runs on the board right there and go ahead what might happen. I was just trying to stop them from gaining momentum."

Athletics manager Bob Geren pinch-hit for Gross with right-handed-hitting Matt Carson, and Washington countered with righty sidearmers Darren O'Day. This was O'Day's first appearance since Sept. 10 as he has been dealing with tightness in

his lower back. Carson muscled a single into left field to drive in Ellis but O'Day struck out Chris Carter to keep the Rangers up by one.

The offense responded by striking back immediately in the top of the seventh. Francoeur started the rally with a home run to left field off Cramer and Jorge Cantu doubled in the same direction.

Cramer was pulled for right-hander Boof Bonser and Chris Davis ran for Cantu. Bengie Molina moved Davis to third with a sacrifice bunt and Julio Borbon brought him home with a squeeze bunt. Borbon also beat the bunt out for a hit when Bonser bounced his throw to first.

The Rangers dropped a third straight bunt, this one by Elvis Andrus that moved Borbon to second. A walk to Young and an infield single by Cruz loaded the bases, and Guerrero followed with a double into the left-center-field alley that brought home three runs.

"Just timely hitting," Kinsler said. "We were able to get big hits tonight, especially with two outs. We may not score that many runs every night, but that's what we expect out of ourselves."

The Rangers, one night after being held to one hit, ended up with 18 on Friday. They were 7-for-15 with runners in scoring position.

"We had some chances, but obviously they had a lot more chances and did a lot more damage," Geren said. "They swung the bats extremely well tonight. They're a good-hitting team. You're not going to hold them down to one hit very often. They can swing the bats. They proved that tonight."

Now, the Rangers are expecting to pop some champagne. It's time to put it on ice.

### **Rangers can clinch AL West with win over A's By Doug Miller / MLB.com**

It's very simple for the Texas Rangers on Saturday. If they beat Oakland, they clinch the American League West. If they lose, the A's stay alive in the race for at least one more day.

The task in front of young Texas left-hander Derek Holland figures to be a great challenge.

Holland must break out of the inconsistency that's hindered his progress in an injury-plagued year and try to win on the road so he can join his teammates in popping champagne corks in the visiting clubhouse at Oakland Alameda Coliseum.

He'll have to do better than he did last time out.

In that outing, on Monday in Anaheim, Holland took a 7-4 loss to the Angels after giving up four runs on six hits and three walks in 3 2/3 innings. He looked sharp for two innings, was saved by a home run-saving catch by center fielder Julio Borbon in the third and gave up three runs before exiting with two outs in the fourth.

"The first two innings, I felt really good," Holland said. "Everything worked perfectly. Then, my offspeed stuff kind of shut down and it really hurt me. It was easy for them to sit back and go after my fastball."

Holland, going back to last season, was 5-6 with a 4.52 ERA in his first 14 starts in the Major Leagues. Since then, he is 4-10 with a 7.25 ERA in his last 16 starts. He won his first two starts in May before ending up on the disabled list with shoulder inflammation.

Over his last seven Major League starts, he is 1-4 with a 5.64 ERA as he continues to try to find command and confidence in his three-pitch repertoire.

"He just didn't have the command he's capable of having," Rangers manager Ron Washington said after his last outing. "The thing that got him in trouble is he couldn't get that third out. If he gets that third out, he could have gone much deeper in the game."

The A's will do their best to continue Holland's struggles on Saturday in what could be a last-ditch effort to keep contention alive.

They'll turn to their own talented young left-hander, Gio Gonzalez, who has quietly put together a breakout season. A victory on Saturday would be Gonzalez's 15th of the season, extending his career-high total.

The southpaw has allowed one run or fewer in 10 of his last 17 starts and is 8-4 with a 2.67 ERA and .221 opponents batting average over that span.

Rangers: Feliz one save from history

Closer Neftali Feliz needs one more save to reach 38 for the season and set a Major League record for saves by a rookie. He can eclipse the mark of 37 that he shares with Kazuhiro Sasaki, who accomplished the feat for the Seattle Mariners in 2000. Feliz has pitched 12 scoreless innings in his last 12 games. ... Holland is 1-1 with a 2.84 ERA in five career games against Oakland, including a 1-1 record and 2.61 ERA in two starts.

A's: Success has been day and night

One thing in the A's favor for Saturday might be the fact that they've been a lot better during the day than they've been at night this year. The A's have a 34-18 record during the day, compared to a 43-58 mark at night. The day record is tied with Colorado for the best in the Majors and the night record is fourth-worst in the AL. ... Gonzalez is 3-1 with a 1.93 ERA in seven career appearances (five starts) against Texas and is 2-1 with a 2.74 ERA in four starts against the Rangers this year.

Worth noting

Texas designated hitter Vladimir Guerrero was hitless in his previous 10 at-bats entering Friday night's win over the A's, in which he went 3-for-5 with a homer, a double and four RBIs. He is batting .371 (26-for-70) over his last 17 games and has hit safely in 15 of his last 18 games overall with eight multihit games. ... The A's have used the disabled list 23 times, which is second-most in Oakland history behind 23 in 2008. They've used the DL 87 times since the start of the 2007 season. The only team that has used the DL more over that span is Texas (98).

### **Hamilton forced to sit while Texas struggles**

**By T.R. Sullivan / MLB.com | 09/24/10 10:04 PM ET**

OAKLAND -- Being injured is frustrating for Rangers outfielder Josh Hamilton.

Being injured at a time when his teammates are struggling offensively only makes it that much harder as he tries to recover from two small fractures in his right rib cage.

"Obviously, if I'm playing, I can help them with that," Hamilton said. "But when I can't do anything, and all I can do is encourage them. That's the most frustrating part. All I can do is get fixed and get right as fast as I can. My body will tell me when it's ready."

Hamilton continues to report some improvement in the rib cage area after getting two injections on Monday to help deal with the pain and discomfort. He has had some muscle spasms but otherwise continues to do a little more each day. On Thursday, he did some running in the outfield, beginning in a walk and getting up to about 75 percent speed.

"Every day I'm trying to do a little bit more," Hamilton said.

He still hasn't resumed baseball activities -- including swinging a bat -- but he is still hopeful of getting back in the lineup by the final weekend of the season.

"He's moving better, but until he starts taking batting practice and shagging fly balls, we're not any closer," Washington said.

### **Francisco encouraged by progress**

OAKLAND -- Rangers reliever Frank Francisco, who has been sidelined with a strained muscle in his right ribcage, had an extended session of long toss before Friday's game and was encouraged by how he felt.

Long toss, which can be anywhere from 90 to 150 feet in length, is a good test of arm strength and usually the last test before throwing off the mound again. Francisco would like at least one or two more long-toss sessions before he gets back on the mound.

"I just have to build my arm up a little more and get it a little more strong," Francisco said.

It's still going to be tight, as far as getting ready for the playoffs, but Francisco thinks he has enough time.

"I believe I am going to be there," Francisco said. "Maybe the playoffs, maybe the last few games of the season."

### **Worth noting**

Entering Friday, the Rangers had gone three consecutive games without scoring an earned run. That is the first time that's happened in club history. The last earned run was a home run by Chris Davis in the eighth inning on Monday. ... Dallas Braden came within one inning of being the fifth pitcher to throw back-to-back shutouts against the Rangers. The last to do it was Bert Blyleven in 1985. The others were Vida Blue (1972), Jim Hunter (1975) and Paul Hartzell (1976). ... The Rangers' bullpen ERA of 3.22 is the fifth-lowest in club history. The record is a 2.91 ERA by the 1981 unit.

### **For Rangers, runs hard to come by**

**By T.R. Sullivan / MLB.com | 09/24/10 8:21 PM ET**

OAKLAND -- Hitting coach Clint Hurdle compared his situation to the carnival plate spinner on the old Ed Sullivan Show, trying to keep as many plates spinning as possible.

"You try to keep all the plates spinning, but there are always three wobbling," Hurdle said on Friday afternoon. "We've got more than three wobbling right now, but we're trying hard to keep them all spinning."

In this case, spinning means hitting. The Rangers aren't hitting on this road trip, during which they have lost five of seven. They still have a commanding seven-game lead in the American League West, with 10 to play but they are not exactly sprinting to the finish line. Right now, the offense is collectively gripped in a tough slump, and it's getting worse instead of better.

"I'm trying to keep things simple for them," Hurdle said. "Focus on the task at hand. Don't look back at yesterday or look forward to tomorrow. Keep it simple. It's a new experience for a lot of these guys, and they've got to figure it out on their own."

"This is a wonderful part of the game. You get to see people grow up in front of you. You see the challenges of the game and how people react to them. There are a lot of things you just have to work through and play through."

The Rangers are hitting .112 in their past three games while scoring just two unearned runs over the course of 30 innings. They are also hitting .202 with 14 runs scored in seven games on the trip while batting .152 (8-for-52) with runners in scoring position.

"The bottom line is, we haven't been getting it done," manager Ron Washington said. "You can't put any more on it than that. We're not getting it done. You can talk all you want, but the game is played between the lines and we haven't been getting it done."

The Rangers search for ways to kick-start their hitters. They hold advance scouting meetings before every series. They met with the hitters in Anaheim. They hold early batting practice five hours before games, and even some of the regulars are showing up. Ian Kinsler was among those who were out there on Friday afternoon.

"This was probably the fifth or sixth time this season," Kinsler said. "Early BP is fun -- getting out there, trash talking, having fun. It gets the day started on the right foot."

The Rangers could use that on Friday night against the Athletics, with Tommy Hunter pitching against Oakland rookie left-hander Bobby Cramer.

"We're a very confident offense," Kinsler said. "We could easily score 10 runs. It's just a matter of time. Just keep swinging the bat. You can't get passive. Stuff happens. You have to grind through it. It's time to mentally grind through it."

The lineup on Friday was almost the same as the one that managed just one infield hit off of Athletics starter Dallas Braden in Thursday's 5-0 loss. The only changes were Bengie Molina starting at catcher instead of Taylor Teagarden, and Julio Borbon in the outfield instead of David Murphy. But with a left-hander on the mound, Washington stayed with Jeff Francoeur in right field and Jorge Cantu at first base.

The Athletics will throw another left-hander on Saturday with Gio Gonzalez pitching. Washington's original intention was to let Cantu, a right-handed hitter, play three straight games against left-handers. Washington is now reconsidering that. Cantu, who is hitting .171 and has yet to drive in a run in 71 at-bats with the Rangers, got the start on Friday, but Washington is no longer sure about Saturday.

"We'll just wait and see," Washington said. "If Cantu goes off [on Friday], he'll probably play tomorrow. But there is only so much I can do with the lineup. They've got to get it done. The guys I'm putting out there, they're the ones that have got to get it done."

In other words, the Rangers have no more trades, callups or dramatic quick-fixes up their sleeves. They could use Josh Hamilton, who is sidelined with a ribcage injury, but he won't be back until next weekend at the earliest. Hamilton hasn't take batting practice yet, though the injury is still showing definite improvement.

Washington takes his chances with what he has.

"Every guy on the roster, they're the ones that got us here," Washington said. "They've got to take us to the finish line. It will happen. It may not be happening as quickly as people want, but it will happen. We've coached them as much as we can. Meetings aren't going to do it. They've got to get it done between the lines.

"I believe they will. It's just taking a minute."

### ***FORT WORTH STAR-TELEGRAM***

**It has taken a minute, but Texas Rangers start feeling magic**

**By Gil Lebreton**

**Posted Saturday, Sep. 25, 2010**

OAKLAND, Calif. -- Before the game Friday, Texas Rangers manager Ron Washington had preached the gospel of inevitability.

"We're gonna get it done," Washington eloquently told a gathering of media infidels.

"It's just taking a minute."

He was referring, of course, to the Rangers' continuing pursuit of the great white whale. Or Bigfoot. Or anything else that few humans had seen in person recently.

Like, say, a Rangers' victory that was accompanied by a cascade of hits.

You know the back story. There are an American League West title and the franchise's first postseason appearance in 11 years at stake.

And there's a Rangers hitting attack that, before Friday night, had melted like government cheese during this 10-game road trip.

The players didn't want to hear it.

"I think probably over the last week or so, we've probably pressed a little bit," third baseman Michael Young said before Friday night's game with the second-place Oakland Athletics.

"But those games are over with. And it has nothing to do with how we're going to play today."

Young's and Washington's words turned out to be the most prophetic of the night.

The slump ended with lightning bolts Friday night. The Rangers' magic number is down to two, following their 18-hit, 10-3 victory over the Athletics.

A victory over the A's today in the third game of the series, and the Rangers -- finally -- can party like it's 1999.

All theories and psychoanalyses aside, the Rangers' hitting slump was real, and they had the .202 batting average on the road trip to prove it.

But as Young said, "One thing this team has been all season long is resilient. We don't let a tough stretch bother us.

"We make quick adjustments. We've done it all season, and this won't be any different."

Yet, who really knew? The Rangers were one-hit by Dallas Braden in the first game of the series Thursday night.

Runs weren't being created. Solid starting pitching efforts were being wasted.

"We just haven't been getting it done," Washington said before Friday's game. "We can talk about it. But the game is played between the lines."

And between the ears, he might have added.

Instead of living -- and batting -- in the moment, Washington suggested, Rangers hitters have been thinking too much.

"We're one swing away from a good at-bat and being able to move forward," the manager assessed.

Maybe that at-bat was Vladimir Guerrero's laser home run Friday in the top of the second inning. Maybe it was newcomer Jeff Francoeur's home run in the seventh.

Whatever, someone or something Friday ignited the spark and lifted the weight of a frustrating vigil from the Rangers' backs.

It was up to them, Washington had said. No one player -- but all of them.

"Every single guy that's out there has gotten us to this point," the manager said. "And every single guy has got to take us to the finish line. It's in their hands.

"We've coached them up as much as you can coach them."

Washington was coaxed into reflecting on the division-winning Oakland teams that he was a part of. The difference, Wash suggested, was that those A's teams "didn't let anything faze them."

Those A's had pitching, but above all they were grinders when the situation called for it.

"We didn't have a powerful offense," said Washington, who was Oakland's third-base coach.. "But they knew how to get a base hit when it counted.

"People stepped up. That's what we need here -- somebody to step up."

His call was heeded.

Francoeur stepped up Friday with three hits. Guerrero stepped up with four RBIs.

In the end, the Rangers' magic number was cut to two.

Any victory by the Rangers on either Saturday or Sunday will clinch the franchise's first division title since 1999.

It took a minute.

But one swing of the bat, as the manager said, changed the entire road trip.

It almost seemed like magic.

## Big hits put Rangers on brink of postseason

By Jeff Wilson

Posted Saturday, Sep. 25, 2010

OAKLAND, Calif. — Seeking a player to step forward and break the Texas Rangers out of their offensive funk, manager Ron Washington found two in his struggling lineup Friday night.

One is the best free-agent signing in the American League this season. The other has been with the team less than a month, but has done everything the Rangers have asked of him.

Together, Vladimir Guerrero and Jeff Francoeur jump-started a huge game by the offense that put the Rangers on the doorstep of the AL West crown.

Guerrero homered early for the Rangers' first run, and Francoeur homered to trigger a five-run rally in the seventh that Guerrero capped with a two-out three-run double.

The Rangers ducked an Oakland threat in the bottom of the inning and poured on a few more runs en route to a 10-3 victory that reduced their magic number to two.

A victory today or Sunday at Oakland Coliseum will give the Rangers their first playoff berth since 1999. They lead the West by eight games with nine to play.

"We feel good about ourselves, and we'll see what happens over the next couple of days," Washington said. "The game of baseball has to be played between the lines, and we have to go out there and play it. If things fall in our place, we'll get it done. We hope it's tomorrow, but if it's not, we'll continue to do the same thing."

The Rangers collected 18 hits by 10 different players after having only 11 hits in the previous three games. Francoeur and Guerrero had three each, and Guerrero's four RBIs pushed his season total to 111.

Francoeur is 11 for 29 since he was acquired just before the Aug. 31 waiver deadline from the New York Mets and has seven RBIs.

He was a big part of a badly needed outburst that made a winner of Tommy Hunter, who took a shutout into the sixth inning before Washington started drawing from his deep bullpen.

"We felt as soon as we could start picking up some of those runs that were out there, things were start turning out good for us," Washington said. "Tonight, it did."

Guerrero homered on first pitch of second inning to give the Rangers their first earned run since Monday. Ian Kinsler doubled with one out in the fourth and came around on a single by Francoeur after the ball bounced away from a diving Cliff Pennington at shortstop.

Down 2-0, the A's seized some momentum in the sixth. The Rangers went down on three pitches, thanks to a nifty inning-ending double play started by that Pennington.

Second baseman Mark Ellis opened the home half with a single off Hunter, stole second base as Daric Barton struck out and went to third on a single by Kurt Suzuki.

Washington went to the bullpen, summoning Clay Rapada in a lefty-lefty matchup against Jack Cust. Rapada won, getting the strikeout, but pinch-hitter Matt Carson delivered a bloop single off Darren O'Day to make it 2-1. Francoeur had the answer to start the seventh. He hit his first homer since joining the Rangers, driving a 2-1 pitch from Bobby Cramer just above the out-of-town scoreboard in left field.

Jorge Cantu, who made a pair of nice defensive plays in the third inning at first base, followed with a double. Bengie Molina moved Cantu to third with a sacrifice bunt, and Julio Borbon put down a squeeze bunt for another run and was safe at first.

After Elvis Andrus bunted Borbon over, Michael Young walked and Nelson Cruz legged out an infield hit. That brought up Guerrero, who hit a sizzling line drive that scooted all the way to wall for a three-run double and 7-1 lead.

"We needed that inning," Francoeur said. "I think we let a lot of frustration out that inning as an offense. It's fun now because you now you're one game away. If we come in tomorrow and take care of business would be the perfect thing for us."

Guerrero's big hit gave him a major-league-best 52 two-out RBIs and was the key hit the Rangers had been missing for much of this 10-game road trip.

"Just staying positive, not me but throughout the whole lineup," Guerrero said. "That's what I was able to bring out tonight with that approach, and I got the opportunity. It got all of us going from there." But for a moment it looked like the A's would come right back with their own big inning. Oakland collected three straight one-out hits and a walk off Darren Oliver in the bottom of the seventh. The walk to Barton loaded the bases, but Oliver retired Suzuki and Cust to stop the threat at just one run.

The Rangers finished off the A's with a three-run eighth. The Rangers can finish off the A's for good this season — and start planning for the playoffs — by winning one of the next two games. "Win tomorrow," Kinsler said. "We're down to one out of two. We want to close this thing out as soon as possible."

## **Hamilton has to deal with spasms**

**By Jeff Wilson**

**Posted Saturday, Sep. 25, 2010**

OAKLAND, Calif. -- Josh Hamilton took to the field early Friday afternoon at Oakland Coliseum, walking in the outfield, doing stretching exercises designed to strengthen his core and finally running at up to 75 percent effort.

His primary concern, though, continues to be the latissimus dorsi muscle on his left side where he has two fractured ribs. He experienced a muscle spasm there that lasted around nine hours late Thursday and early Friday morning.

The Texas Rangers' star outfielder can play through the pain that he feels after receiving anti-inflammatory and nerve-blocking injections Tuesday. But when the muscle is in spasm as it was, there's no chance.

"It feels like it will spasm up at some time today," Hamilton said. "If it's tight, it's one thing. If it's spasming, I'm done."

Otherwise, though, there continues to be improvement. There is still pain when he's breathing heavily, but he discovered that goes away if he lifts his arms above his head.

He and manager Ron Washington aren't sure when he will take the next step.

"He's moving better, but we're no closer," Washington said. "Until he can start taking BP and start shagging flyballs, we're not any closer."

## TV talks

The Rangers and Fox Sports Southwest are in negotiations for a long-term extension of their partnership, according to a source, but the status of the discussions and the structure of any deal is uncertain.

If a deal is reached, it would extend a partnership that was formed in September 1999 when both sides agreed to a 15-year deal. This is the 11th season for Fox Sports Southwest, which will finish 2010 with more than 120 telecasts.

## Francisco goes long

Frank Francisco had his longest, most intense throwing session in his own comeback from an issue with his lat muscle.

The right-hander made 40 throws -- 10 each at 90, 120 and 150 feet, and five apiece at 170 feet and a short, cool-down distance. Afterward, he said he felt good but still doesn't have enough arm strength.

"I think I've got to build my arm a little more," said Francisco, who was injured Aug. 27. "But I think it's going to be soon."

Once he's stronger, he can take the mound. He said that will happen next week, but he didn't guess which day. Francisco continues to confidently assert that he will be ready before the Rangers' season comes to an end.

"Believe me, I believe it will be soon," he said. "Maybe for the playoffs. Maybe for the last few days. We'll see."

Ear ye, ear ye

Left-hander Cliff Lee said that his right ear is fine after it was struck by a piece of Jack Cust's broken bat in the fourth inning Thursday night. The game was halted after Lee reached up and discovered that he was bleeding.

"I kind of followed the track of the ball off the bat, and [the shard] hit me in the ear," Lee said. "It's a non-issue."

The possibility of a broken bat, especially ones made of maple, injuring a player came to light last weekend when Cubs outfielder Tyler Colvin was impaled in the chest during a game at Florida.

"Everybody used to say somebody's going to get hurt," Ron Washington said. "Bats are just tearing up too much."

Renewed focus

Left-hander Derek Holland entered his start Monday with the secondary goal of securing a spot on the playoff roster. He lasted 32/3 innings and was the losing pitcher in a 7-4 loss.

He returns to the mound this afternoon, and he said his playoff fate will be the last thing on his mind.

"I'm just going to go out there and stay relaxed," said Holland, who worked on his mechanics between starts. "I've talked with other people, and the main thing is to not put pressure on myself."

Said Ron Washington: "I'm always telling him to worry about the task at hand. He shouldn't be worried about a playoff roster. We haven't made the playoffs yet."

## **Rangers' Lewis faces Athletics, Cahill one more time Sunday**

**By Anthony Andro**

**Posted Saturday, Sep. 25, 2010**

OAKLAND, Calif. -- There's one group of people happy that Colby Lewis' rotation spot keeps coming up when Texas faces Oakland.

Lewis grew up about four hours away from Oakland in Bakersfield, and his family makes the drive to watch Lewis pitch at Oakland-Alameda County Coliseum.

They've had plenty of opportunities this year.

"They love it because they get to see me pitch," Lewis said.

Lewis (11-13) will make his 31st start of the season Sunday, and it will be the sixth against the Athletics, with three of them in Oakland.

Facing a team that many times isn't always a good thing.

"At least you know the hitter's approaches and what types of swings they're going to be taking," Lewis said. "It's a two-way street because they know you, too. But as a pitcher, I still feel it's a little bit of a disadvantage."

Not only will Lewis have been on the mound for six of the Rangers' 19 games against Oakland this year, but he's scheduled to be matched against Oakland ace Trevor Cahill for the fifth time on Sunday.

So far, despite solid numbers by Lewis, the end result hasn't been good.

Cahill is 3-0 against the Rangers this year, with a sparkling 0.68 ERA; Lewis is 0-3 with a 3.69 ERA.

Run support for Lewis against Oakland has almost been nonexistent, with the Rangers averaging 1.17 runs a game against Oakland in Lewis' starts. The Rangers have lost all five of his starts against the Athletics. "They know what you're going to throw, so it's more difficult," Lewis said. "It's been kind of strange. I've only faced Anaheim once and I [struck out] 10. I don't really see any correlation, but it just seems like when you see a team a first time, you're more apt to do well."

Lewis said one of the reasons a good pitcher will have early success when he's called up to the majors is because teams don't have a good scouting report on him.

That's not an advantage Lewis has, so he has to do other things.

"Execution is what it boils down to," Texas pitching coach Mike Maddux said. "Our guys are in the same position. We've seen their guys a lot, and it's just a matter of making adjustments if you execute.

"There are some guys that really like familiarity and some guys thrive on unfamiliarity. It's all just a personal thing."

### **Rangers need fix of road woes for playoff success**

**By Anthony Andro**

**Posted Saturday, Sep. 25, 2010**

If and when the Texas Rangers wrap up a playoff spot, they know the only way they're going to win a playoff series is by winning on the road.

That could be prove to be difficult for the Rangers, who have struggled away from Rangers Ballpark in Arlington.

Texas came into Friday's game 36-42 on the road, which is the 13th best winning percentage on the road in the majors. While that number isn't awful, the Rangers have won just eight of their last 26 on the road. That's the third lowest road winning percentage since Aug. 7.

"I wish I knew because if I knew we'd correct it," Texas manager Ron Washington said. "I can say on this road trip we've faced some darn good pitching. We're not going to use that as an excuse, but we've faced some darn-good pitching."

Washington doesn't believe there's a quick fix for what ails the Rangers on the road. But just like he's been preaching for the last month, the Rangers have clinched nothing yet.

Once they make the playoffs, everything changes. Losing on the road doesn't necessarily equal playoff failure either. St. Louis went 34-47 on the road in 2006 and won the Series.

"When you finally make the playoffs, you shouldn't give a darn if you're on the road," Washington said. "Once you get to the playoffs it doesn't matter. You either play well and you win or you play bad and you lose, or you don't play and lose. You don't have to play bad to lose."

### ***DALLAS MORNING NEWS***

#### **Playoff success for Rangers depends on better play on the road**

**By Evan Grant**

**01:33 AM CDT on Saturday, September 25, 2010**

OAKLAND, Calif. – So much about the Rangers' October schedule remains undetermined. The possible playoff roster is a jigsaw puzzle barely removed from the box. The opponent is a mystery wrapped in a riddle.

The only virtual certainty: The schedule will start on the road.

With each passing day that has seemed like a more and more distressing proposition for the Rangers. Perhaps the Rangers started to reverse the trend with a 10-3 win over Oakland Friday that reduced the magic number to two. A win today or Sunday would clinch the club's first AL West title in 11 years.

The Road has been as dire for the Rangers this year as the eponymous Cormac McCarthy novel with the bleak view of the future. Come to think of it, if the Rangers don't figure out the road soon, a bleak and brief playoff landscape probably awaits them, too.

The Rangers have been, um, well, bad on the road this year. At least by the standards of a team hoping to extend its season deep into October. Texas began play Friday 36-42 in road games. Any way you peel the layers from that record, things get uglier.

Disregarding their interleague road schedule – since all nine of those games were against teams now officially eliminated from playoff contention – they were 28-41 vs. the rest of the AL. They were 12-27 against teams that began Friday with a winning record. They were an abysmal 0-12 against the teams that will likely comprise the rest of the playoff field.

"It's not like we don't realize that," outfielder David Murphy said of the road problems. "I don't think it has mentally gotten in our heads. It's just the way it is. And it's something we've got to change. "

The Rangers can't change the fact they will enter the postseason with a losing road record. In the 15-year wild card era, they will be only the fifth team to enter the playoffs with at least 42 road losses. Give you one guess how many of them won a series. Maybe a better game: Guess how many road playoff games they managed to win combined. Same answer. They both rhyme with "hero."

What they can perhaps change between now and Game 1 of the Division Series is their perspective of the road.

It's funny how much locking up the division on the road can do that.

The win Friday moved the Rangers to the brink of doing just that. A win in either of the final two games of the A's series will allow the Rangers to spray champagne all over an opposing stadium and perhaps wash away at least some of the past road troubles.

Friday's win featured an early homer from Vladimir Guerrero, which ended a streak of 32 innings without an earned run. It featured an RBI single from Jeff Francoeur - the first run-producing hit with a runner in scoring position in 28 at-bats – and a homer. It featured a successful suicide squeeze by Julio Borbon. And it featured a put-'em-away bases-loaded double by Guerrero to top of the five-run seventh.

By the time Guerrero eased into second on his double, it looked like a dam's worth of pent up energy had been released.

It was exactly what manager Ron Washington has been trying to explain before and after every game of the recent rough offensive stretch. He said again Friday that one hit – one big with runners in scoring position would be enough to unleash a flood of those hits.

"Every single guy out there has helped get us here," manager Ron Washington said in a measured and patient voice Friday. "We are at the point now, where they just have to take it the finish line. They've got themselves this far. They've just got to take it the rest of the way. And they will."

On Friday, they pushed themselves to the brink of ending this race. And, perhaps of more longer-term importance, they won on the road with some big hits. They might not be able to fix their unsightly road record for the start of the playoffs, but they can fix their state of mind.

### **Five notes worth noting: Is Vladimir Guerrero Rangers player of the year? By Evan Grant**

OAKLAND, Calif . - Regardless of what happens in September, you can make a very strong case for Josh Hamilton as the AL's Most Valuable Player. You could also make a case that nobody has meant more to the Rangers than Vladimir Guerrero.

After the Rangers had gone 32 innings without an earned run or very many balls hit hard, Guerrero delivered a homer to start the second inning Wednesday. That may have kept his teammates from hyperventilating.

And in the seventh, with the game still somewhat undecided, Guerrero lined a three-run double to center to make it 7-1.

"When he hit the homer it was a big relief," said Jeff Francoeur, who went 3-for-5 with his own home run. "But it was huge to go from 4-1 to 7-1. You just felt comfortable at that point that it was going to be put away. And there is nothing better than now knowing that you get up, come to the park and if you win that day, you win it."

Guerrero now has 111 RBIs and 28 homers to go with his .303 batting average. And the average might be even higher if he'd have asked Ron Washington to rest him occasionally during a six-week slump from late July through late August. Instead, with Ian Kinsler and Nelson Cruz on the DL, Guerrero played right on through. And since Hamilton got hurt on Sept. 4, Guerrero is hitting .360 with three homer and 12 RBIs in 18 games.

2. Francoeur's contributions can't be overlooked. If you match up the contribution with the cost, he might be the best acquisition the Rangers made this summer. And to think, he was acquired about an hour before playoff pools had to be submitted on August 31/September 1 for a guy who had already been designated for assignment.

As a Ranger Francoeur has already had a "walkoff" hit by pitch and is 11-for-29 (.379) with a .406 OBP. Francoeur is 7-for-14 (.500) against left-handed pitching and has reached base eight times in 15 plate appearances.

3. Maybe the only person at the Oakland-Alameda County Coliseum who may have been surprised by the Rangers' seventh inning squeeze bunt was A's manager Bob Geren. Cameras caught him with his mouth kind of agape after Chris Davis sprinted home from third while Julio Borbon squared around to bunt. Davis did not hesitate as soon as pitcher Boof Bonser lifted his leg to go home.

"I wasn't going to break hard and then stop," Davis said. "I was going all the way. I was just glad he got the bunt down. For a second, I thought I was going to truck right into [A's catcher] Kurt Suzuki and there was a good chance Julio was going to end up in the middle of it."

4. Faced with a tough call, manager Ron Washington chose to stick with lefty Darren Oliver vs. right-handed hitter Kurt Suzuki. It was an interesting call because the normally reliable Oliver had struggled, allowing three hits and walking Daric Barton to load the bases.

Having already used Clay Rapada (who struck out Jack Cust in the sixth), Washington wanted Oliver to get through Cust in the lineup. Oliver got Suzuki to pop up in foul territory on a 2-and-2 pitch, then got Cust to ground out to first to end the inning and preserve the five-run lead.

5. Good work by the Rangers management staff of Chuck Greenberg, VP John Blake and the entire staff to find a way to get Saturday's game on the air. The Rangers have a chance to clinch a playoff berth for the first time in 11 years and it was going to be the one game that wasn't televised. Rangers management served its fans quite well on this one. It's on at 3 pm CT on Ch. 4 in Dallas. Check local FOX listings in other Texas-Oklahoma-Louisiana markets.

## **Rangers strengthen relationship with FSSW**

**By Evan Grant**

**09:56 PM CDT on Friday, September 24, 2010**

OAKLAND, Calif. – The first big deal for Chuck Greenberg with the Rangers was a long-term extension of the club's exclusive cable broadcast rights with Fox Sports Southwest, two sources close to the situation said.

Greenberg, the new Rangers' chief executive officer, declined to comment, and Fox officials did not officially confirm the deal. But those officials indicated a long-term relationship between the parties would continue.

"The Texas Rangers have been a valued, longtime partner for Fox, and we're pleased that we will continue that relationship with the new ownership group," said Fox spokesman Chris Bellitti.

The Rangers and Stars, which were both owned by Tom Hicks at the time, agreed to a 15-year-deal with Fox in 2000. The deal for both teams was believed to be worth more than \$250 million.

Because of the deal, which included some up-front payments, Hicks decided against pursuing the regional sports network he had mentioned as a possible purchase. The deal also made it possible for the Rangers to get more involved in negotiations for then-free agent Alex Rodriguez, who ended up signing a 10-year, \$252 million deal with Texas after the 2000 season. That deal, which included more than \$40 million in deferred payments, was seen as one of the main reasons the Rangers' operations became insolvent in 2009.

An extension that includes an up-front chunk of money might allow the Rangers to be more aggressive in adding to their payroll this winter, but it could diminish the team's revenue streams in later years of the deal. The Rangers would also have to ship more than a third of any up-front payment to MLB as part of the league's revenue-sharing program.

**Pivotal 7th inning has team close to title**

**By Richard Durrett**

OAKLAND, Calif. -- When Rangers outfielder Jeff Francoeur started to dig in at home plate to start the seventh inning, the Rangers were clinging to a 2-1 lead after the A's had scored in the bottom of the sixth.

Francoeur, acquired for Joaquin Arias in a trade just before the Aug. 31 postseason eligibility deadline, belted a homer that immediately got the run back the Rangers lost. It served as the jarring hit that kicked open a door to a big inning the Rangers hadn't seen in a while.

"We need that inning," Francoeur said. "I think we let a lot of frustration out in that inning. It's fun now. You know you're one game away. To come in tomorrow and take care of business would be a perfect thing for us to be able to enjoy it and celebrate it. Since I've been here, I've absolutely enjoyed playing with these guys. It's enjoyable to be able to contribute."

Jorge Cantu followed Francoeur's homer with a double and after the Rangers loaded the bases with two outs, Vladimir Guerrero blasted one to deep center field to clear them. It was another moment the Rangers had been searching for on this road trip: a key two-out at-bat.

"I just came in after last night and refocused on today," said Guerrero through a translator. "We need to come out and play good baseball, put some runs up and let the pitching take care of it."

Francoeur and Guerrero accounted for six of the Rangers' 10 runs.

The Rangers ended up with five runs in the inning and added three more in the eighth thanks to five hits, including two doubles.

Other reaction:

\* Tommy Hunter lobbied manager Ron Washington to keep him in the game in the sixth. Of course, while Hunter was making his case, Clay Rapada was already trotting in to pitch to left-handed hitting Jack Cust. Hunter told Washington that Cust had one hit in five games off Hunter and that he could get him. BTW, Cust is 2-for-9 with five strikeouts off Hunter in his career.

"I wanted to stay in the game," Hunter said. "I had just 78 pitches then. But I understand the move. Rapada has been money against lefties."

Hunter said everything was working for him on Friday and he felt particularly good out there. The sixth was really the only inning in which he got into any trouble. He kept the ball down, got plenty of easy outs and pitched efficiently.

\* Rapada has nine appearances with Texas and has yet to allow a hit or run. He has four strikeouts and two walks in in 5 2/3 innings. And he certainly seems like a postseason roster addition with his throwing motion that clearly fools lefties.

\* Every Rangers player in the game on Friday, except for pinch-runner Esteban German, got a hit. Nelson Cruz, Guerrero, Francoeur, Bengie Molina, Ian Kinsler and Julio Borbon had at least 2 hits.

\* Washington said he felt the sixth inning was where the momentum of the game would be decided. So that's why he went to Rapada with one out and runners on the corners despite Hunter's well-pitched game and limited pitch count. Washington didn't want Cust giving the A's the lead with one swing of the bat. Rapada got Cust on a strikeout and Daren O'Day gave up a run, but got out of the inning with the Rangers still in front. They then extended the lead in the seventh.

\* Kinsler was 0-for-11 before he had a double in the fourth to end that skid. He ended up with two hits in the game.

\* Borbon has seven hits in the last 12 at-bats (.583) and is batting .343 over his last 21 games.

## **Offense still trying to get out of slump**

**By Richard Durrett**

OAKLAND, Calif. -- Rangers outfielder David Murphy wanted to make it clear that Dallas Braden, who has flummoxed this Texas team this year, deserved a lot of credit for holding the offense down in a 5-0 loss on Thursday.

But Murphy also didn't want that to be used as some excuse for an offense putting up one hit -- an infield one at that -- and no runs. In fact, the club didn't really have any chances after not even getting a runner into scoring position until the eighth inning.

"You have to give the pitchers their due, but we can't get shut out or one-hit this much," Murphy said. "There comes a point where if you're a quality team, you're going to have to execute and we're not executing. It starts with just getting guys on base. We maybe didn't get it done in some opportunities where we could have this trip, but tonight, we didn't really get any guys on.

"We've gone through some offensive struggles this season and this is just another instance of that and it's happening at an inopportune time. You could draw conclusions that we're pressing or we're putting too much pressure on ourselves. I think it's just very bad timing."

Through seven games of this road trip, the Rangers are 2-5. The magic number has not been magically disappearing of late and remains at four. But the offense is clearly the main culprit for the poor road mark. Texas is hitting .202 on this road trip and is scoring just two runs per game. In fact, that average is higher because of six runs scored in Seattle over the weekend. Take that game away and the Rangers have eight runs total in the six other games.

"We're trying too hard," said Nelson Cruz, who had the club's only hit on a chopper to second in the first inning. "We have to let things happen. We're trying to make things happen."

Players are trying to figure out what they can do to help get the team going again. Maybe some of them are trying to do too much in an effort to produce runs.

"For me, I think I'm too aggressive," said Elvis Andrus, who has two hits in his last 28 at-bats (both infield singles). "I need to take more pitches and quit swinging at bad pitches. I'm trying to go back to basic stuff, see a good pitch and hit it. Sometimes you try to force things when you don't need to."

Manager Ron Washington noted, like Murphy did, that the offense has had these streaks before during this 2010 season and found a way out of them.

"It's got to be the guys between the lines," Washington said. "They have to figure it out and I have no doubt they will."

Other reaction:

\* It was a clearly frustrated Cliff Lee that stood before the media after giving up four runs on six hits with two walks and three strikeouts in just five innings on Thursday. Lee said his back is fine and that physically he feels great. He just left some pitches up and the A's took advantage.

"There's nothing physically, I just lost a little bit of command there in the last couple of innings and they got a few runs due to that," Lee said. "Braden threw an unbelievable game and put up a bunch of zeroes. The fourth and the fifth was enough for the game to be over."

Lee walked Daric Barton on four straight pitches to start the fourth. That's only the third time all season he's walked a batter on four straight pitches unintentionally, the last being Miguel Cabrera on July 4 when Lee was with the Mariners. He then walked Kurt Suzuki, marking the first time he's had consecutive walks since June 4, 2008 when he walked the Rangers' Milton Bradley and Marlon Byrd in the bottom of the first. That's a span of 80 games and 585 1/3 innings.

"I try not to walk anybody," Lee said. "I'm not happy walking anybody, much less two guys in a row in a 0-0 game. When something happens like that, you can't dwell on it. You have to try to move forward and make pitches."

It was the fourth time in the last six starts that Lee hasn't pitched six full innings. Before that stretch, he pitched at least 6 1/3 innings in every start this season.

\* Lee said the broken bat of Jack Cust hit him in the right ear (and he also had a slight cut on his cheek).

"I followed the path of the ball off the bat and it hit me in the ear," Lee said. "That's that."

\* Michael Young played in his 1,500th game as a Ranger. He's just the fourth player to appear in 1,500 games as a Rangers player, joining Rafael Palmeiro (1,573), Jim Sundberg (1,512) and Pudge Rodriguez (1,507).

## **Josh Hamilton rides out muscle spasms** **By Richard Durrett**

OAKLAND, Calif. -- Texas Rangers outfielder Josh Hamilton said Friday that his slightly fractured ribs feel fine, but his biggest concern is the latisimus dorsi muscle in his side which he said is tight.

After he worked out Thursday, Hamilton felt the muscle spasm while he was in the dugout shortly after the game against the Oakland Athletics started. He said it didn't calm down until about 4:30 a.m., when he was finally able to get some sleep.

"I can't play with it if it spasms," Hamilton said. "I can't even move when it does it."

Hamilton said the Rangers' trainers and doctors have told him the muscle spasms will stop when the ribs improve enough to where that muscle isn't trying to protect them.

The majors' leading hitter has a .361 batting average and 31 home runs and 97 RBIs but hasn't played since Sept. 4, when he crashed into the right-center field wall making a catch in Minnesota.

The AL MVP candidate, who did some light running Friday, said he may try some twisting and turning to see how the ribs and lat feel Saturday. It's unclear as to when he might pick up a bat and resume baseball activities.

Hamilton did say he could feel a little pain in his ribs after running on Friday and found that putting his arms over his head helped ease the discomfort.

In the meantime, Hamilton is trying to encourage his teammates.

"I'm trying to keep their spirits up and be in the dugout as much as I can," Hamilton said. "I don't know what else to do. I'd much rather be out there swinging and helping rather than just talking."

The Rangers' magic number to clinch the AL West is four. They would win the division with two wins over the Athletics this weekend.

## **ASSOCIATED PRESS**

### **Rangers edge closer to AL West crown**

**AP**

**01:48 AM CDT on Saturday, September 25, 2010**

OAKLAND, Calif. (AP) – For the past few days, as their offense struggled, the Texas Rangers tried not to think about winning their first division title in more than a decade.

Not anymore.

After beating their closest competition and reducing their magic number to two, the Rangers are completely focused on the task at hand.

"Before, it was like we could smell it and now we can taste it," said second baseman Ian Kinsler after Texas beat the Oakland Athletics 10-3 on Friday night. "It's getting closer and closer. We definitely understand the situation that we're in. We want to close this thing out as quick as possible."

The Rangers held a 10-game lead over Oakland a week ago before dropping four of five. The A's won four of five, including a 5-0 blanking of Texas on Thursday, to keep things interesting.

Now up by eight games with nine left, the Rangers are within reach of securing their first division title since 1999 after a tough offseason that included manager Ron Washington admitting during spring training to using cocaine once. The

franchise also underwent an ownership change in August when Bill Hicks sold the club to an 18-member investment group led by team president Nolan Ryan.

Texas can clinch the AL West by beating Oakland in either of the final two games of this four-game series.

"We felt as soon as we could start picking up some of those runs that were out there on the bags that things would work out good for us, and tonight it did," Rangers manager Ron Washington said. "We feel good about ourselves and we'll see what happens in the next couple of days. We hope it's tomorrow but if it's not we'll continue to do the same thing."

One night after getting shut out for the second time in three games, the Rangers snapped out of their offensive slump in a big way with 18 hits while Tommy Hunter and five relievers combined to handcuff the A's.

Hunter pitched effectively into the sixth inning to earn his career-high 13th victory while Vladimir Guerrero was a triple shy of the cycle and drove in four runs for the Rangers (85-68).

Hunter is a key reason why Texas turned things around.

He scattered six hits over 5 1-3 innings and didn't allow a runner past second base until the sixth when the A's scored their first run. Hunter (13-4) struck out four and didn't walk a batter for the fifth time this season.

Hunter's 13 wins lead the Rangers.

"Hopefully we can win another ballgame here," Hunter said. "That's what we came to do. I don't think pressure is anything that we have to deal with."

Guerrero homered to right-center leading off the second against Oakland starter Bobby Cramer (2-1). It's only Guerrero's third home run in September but his 28th this season, his most since hitting 33 in 2006 while with the Los Angeles Angels.

Texas went up 2-0 after Kinsler doubled and scored on Jeff Francoeur's sharp grounder that glanced off Oakland shortstop Cliff Pennington's glove and rolled into left field. Francoeur, who went 3 for 4, later homered in the seventh and Guerrero added a bases-loaded double to drive in three more to make it 7-1.

Oakland scored on Pennington's RBI double in the seventh and loaded the bases with one out against reliever Darren Oliver before Kurt Suzuki fouled out and Jack Cust grounded out to end the threat.

"Obviously we're not real thrilled about it," said Oakland outfielder Gabe Gross. "We don't want them doing any kind of celebrating at our expense, especially at our place. We'll come out and play hard tomorrow, there's no doubt about it."

Bengie Molina and Michael Young each had RBI doubles in the eighth for Texas.

Cramer had won both of his starts since being called up from Triple-A Sacramento on Sept. 10 but was in trouble early and often against Texas. The left-handed rookie allowed eight hits and four runs.

Jeremy Hermida matched his career high with four hits for Oakland.