

Sports

TANK McNAMARA

by Jeff Millar & Bill Hinds



Rangers take White Sox

United Press International ARLINGTON — The word was out last year: If you want to beat the Texas Rangers, throw a southpaw at them. But opposing teams may be ready to revise their thinking.

The Rangers, who failed horribly against left-handers last season, have defeated seven of the last nine they have faced, including three straight Chicago White Sox starters.

"We've played well against left-handers," Texas catcher Jim Sundberg said following Thursday night's 9-4 triumph.

After Harold Baines gave Chicago a 3-2 lead with a two-run triple in the sixth inning the Rangers came back to score seven times in the eighth to sweep the three-game series.

Sundberg cited two other improvements in the team's current success — a "positive attitude" and a stronger bench.

"I'm pretty pleased with the progress of the team. We have a lot of confidence right now," he said.

"Everybody has been doing the job — even guys who weren't starters — like (Bill) Stein and (Leon) Roberts. We aren't playing with pressure this year."

Three Rangers starters, Buddy Bell, Billy Sample and Mickey Rivers, have been sidelined with injuries, but Stein has hit .444 (8 of 18) in five games and Roberts has supplied a home run, double and four RBI the last two nights.

Texas took a 2-0 lead after four innings, scoring once in the second when Mario Mendoza singled home John Grubb, who had doubled.

Grubb, who went 2-for-5 and scored three runs, tallied in the fourth on a Bump Wills single.

"This team is more exciting than last year's," Sundberg said. "We have a chance to win more games than any other year. There is a great atmosphere and we are getting that feeling about winning — that things can get better."

Murphy's agent demands opportunity to renegotiate

United Press International BOSTON — Calvin Murphy's agent, Tom Woolf, says the Houston Rockets' unwillingness to negotiate a new contract for his client before the NBA playoffs will cause them to pay more to keep him.

"Calvin's value has risen considerably as a result of the Rockets' success in the playoffs," Woolf said. "But aside from the dollars

and cents, there's a goodwill aspect to be considered."

Murphy, who will be 33 Saturday, becomes a free agent at the end of the Rockets' current NBA championship series, and Woolf said he will actively seek offers from other clubs.

The Rockets can retain Murphy by matching another offer.

For most of this season, the 5-10 guard with the feather shoot-

ing touch has performed as the Rockets sixth man. He lost his starting job early in the season.

He has consistently come off the bench to add an offensive lift, and in one playoff game he scored 42 points.

The agent said he had wanted to deal only with the Rockets but that the team forced him to shop his client.

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Rockets even series

United Press International BOSTON — Walk the ball up. Slow it down. Take a time out. Don't run. Be patient. Take another time out.

That's what the Houston Rockets wanted to do to the fast-breaking Boston Celtics before their NBA Championship series began.

And Thursday night they played the slow-down game and half-court offense well enough to beat the Celtics 92-90 and even the best-of-seven series at 1-1. They also broke a 14-game losing streak against Boston.

"Don't call what we play out there a slowdown game," said Houston coach Del Harris. "That's what the Celtics were calling it."

"A slowdown is impossible with a 24-second clock. Colleges play a slowdown when the players stand around at halfcourt and talk about what they did over the weekend," Harris said.

But Houston refused to run with the Celtics, several times stalling even on what appeared to be potential fast-breaks.

Boston, which loves to run and play a transition game from defense-to-offense, was frustrated all night trying to increase the pace.

"They controlled the tempo of the game all night," said Celtic guard M. L. Carr. "That's why the tempo was so sporadic."

Celtic forward Larry Bird, who had 21 rebounds, 14 defensively to start some fast breaks, said, "We ran pretty good in spurts but we couldn't continue it. We slowed the game down ourselves."

Celtic coach Bill Fitch said, "We're a fast break team. We should make five or six turnovers a game more than a team that plays a slowdown."

The Celtics though had 22 turnovers to Houston's nine, disgruntling Fitch so much he broke a blackboard in the locker room at halftime.

Celtic guard Chris Ford said, "I don't think their slowdown and working for the shot disrupts our shooting. We turned the ball over too many times in our backcourt."

Rocket guards Tom Henderson, Calvin Murphy, Mike Dunleavy and Allen Leavell took turns setting up Houston's offense. Thursday night that was mostly dumping passes into Moses Malone in the low post and letting the bullish 6-10 center roll for layups.

The deliberate offense worked. Malone had 10-for-24 from the floor and went to the free throw line 18 times, sinking 11. Boston, suffering in the slowdown, out rebounded Houston 48-35 and outscored the Rockets from the floor 41-34.

But the Celtics had only 13 free throws, hitting eight.

Knepper hurls Astros past Cubs

United Press International CHICAGO — While Los Angeles Fernando Valenzuela has been grabbing all the early season headlines, Houston's Bob Knepper has quietly been pitching shutouts of his own in relative obscurity.

His latest gem came Thursday afternoon at Wrigley Field when the veteran southpaw hurled a six-inning shutout to lead the Astros to a 6-0 triumph over the hapless Chicago Cubs.

Knepper's shutout was his third of the season and lowered his earned run average to 1.00.

"There are no superstars on this team," said Knepper, acquired from San Francisco in exchange for Enos Cabell. "We're all a regular group of guys here. I don't mind working in some obscurity."

Knepper, who walked only two and struck out five, credited his turnaround — he won only nine and had an ERA of over four last year — to his ability to relax.

"The biggest thing is to relax and try not to throw harder than I have to," Knepper explained. "I'm not trying to kill myself out there. Besides, it's nice to have an early lead."

Houston, winner of eight of 10 on its current road trip and 16 of its last 18 against the Cubs, staked Knepper to a 2-0 lead in the first.

Terry Puhl, who scored three times in the game, led off with a walk off Chicago starter and loser Randy Martz, 1-1. Puhl stole second and scored on Craig Reynolds' infield single and a throwing error by Chicago third baseman Ken Reitz. Danny Heep singled Reynolds to third and Jose Cruz's sacrifice fly scored Reynolds.

"I'm sure it makes a pitcher more relaxed to have the early lead," Puhl noted. "But, in Wrigley Field, even with the wind blowing in, you need all you can get."

Houston added two runs in the second on Cruz's second sacrifice fly and an RBI single by Art Howe and two more in the sixth on an RBI triple by Reynolds and an RBI double by Heep.

"We sure could use the complete game," said Houston manager Bill Virdon. "We've used our bullpen a little more than we had wanted lately, so this came in handy."

The only serious threat the Cubs had was in the sixth when they had runners on first and third. But Knepper struck out Scot Thompson and got Bill Buckner to bounce into a double play.

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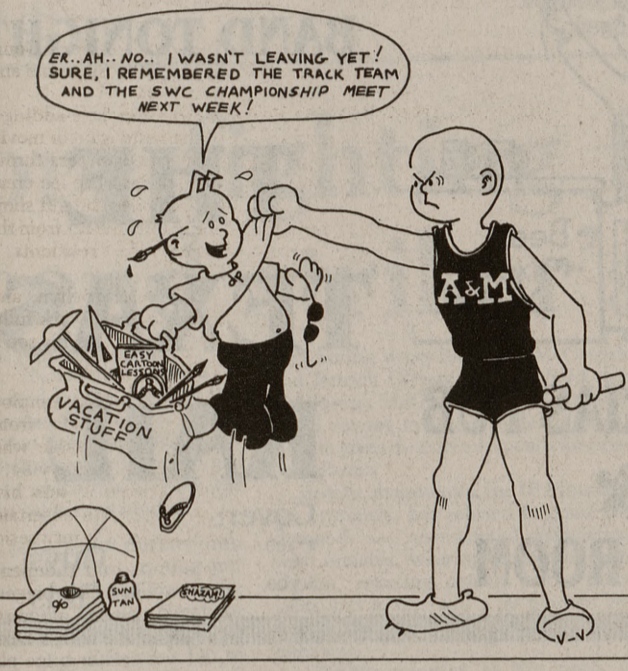
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