

Cruz powers Astros by Reds

CINCINNATI (AP) — Jose Cruz delivered the knockdown punch to the Cincinnati Reds' playoff hopes Wednesday night with his finest power display in two years.

Cruz drove in five runs with a pair of homers as the Houston Astros beat Cincinnati 6-1 to take a commanding nine-game lead over the Reds in the National League West.

Cruz, who didn't hit a homer until July 11, padded his total to nine with his first two-homer game since July 24, 1984. He claimed his two-run and three-run homers off left-hander Chris Welsh were a matter of good fortune against a pitcher who is usually tough on left-handed batters.

"I was just lucky tonight," Cruz said. "Tonight was one of those nights. Tonight was my night."

Right-hander Danny Darwin, 3-1, allowed just five hits to continue the Astros' domination of the Reds, who went into the game in second place a half-game ahead of San Francisco. Houston has won 13 of its 17 games this season against Cincinnati, including the first two games of the current three-game series.

Astros Manager Hal Lanier traced his club's dominance against the Reds to a three-game sweep at Riverfront Stadium on April 18-20, when Cincinnati was stuck in its early-season slump.

"At the start of the season, we came in here and won three straight," Lanier said. "Maybe that gave the club confidence that they could beat that club. At the start of the season, even I was picking Cincinnati. Maybe it showed them they could play with Cincinnati."

The Reds have been held to three or fewer runs in 10 of their 13 losses to Houston, including a pair of shutouts. They managed just four hits Tuesday night in losing the series opener 6-1.

"I'd say we've been nonproductive," Reds player-manager Pete Rose said. "We're just not hitting. When you get (no more than) five hits two games in a row, you're not going to win many games."

Cruz snapped a scoreless tie with his two-run homer in the fourth inning off Welsh, 6-7, and added a three-run homer in the eighth.

Darwin, acquired from Milwaukee on Aug. 15, struck out three and didn't walk a batter in his fifth NL start. He lost his shutout in the fifth when Eddie Milner singled, stole second and scored on Ron-Oester's soft single to center.

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Clemens keeps Sox winning

BOSTON (AP) — One year ago, with young prospect Roger Clemens recovering from shoulder surgery, the Boston Red Sox were en route to a fifth-place finish in the American League East, 18½ games behind champion Toronto.

Now, with Clemens healthy and no longer a prospect, the Red Sox are riding the big right-hander's blazing fastball to their first division championship since 1975.

"He's the best pitcher in the league, maybe the best in baseball," Milwaukee Manager George Bamberger said Tuesday night after Clemens defeated the Brewers 2-1 for his 23rd victory of the season, tops in the major leagues.

"You can't have a losing streak with a guy like that," Bamberger said.

The Red Sox agree. Clemens has won 13 games after a Boston defeat.

He has failed to win after a loss only twice.

"These guys are counting on me and I'm supposed to help the club win, stop losing streaks," Clemens said. "I don't like having to stop losing streaks, but I know they have to be stopped."

Clemens also looks at his job as a personal challenge if he starts after the Red Sox have lost a game.

"I pitch better when I've got something challenging me," he said. "If something presents itself that is a little bit tougher, then I like that."

Tekulve plans to extend NL mark

PHILADELPHIA (AP) — Reliever Kent Tekulve, one of the most successful submarine-style pitchers, has passed Eloy Face for career mound appearances in the National League, and is looking to pad the record considerably.

"I'm thinking about my next appearance," the 39-year-old Tekulve said after getting credit for the Philadelphia Phillies' 9-5 victory Tuesday night over his former teammates, the Pittsburgh Pirates.

The respected Tekulve, who had 722 of his 847 appearances

while pitching for the Pirates, came on with one out in the seventh inning and blanked Pittsburgh for his 11th victory of the season. He needs only one more victory to tie his career high, set in 1982.

It was his 67th appearance this season.

While his number of appearances are tops in the National League, Tekulve is far short of the major league mark, held by Hall of Famer Hoyt Wilhelm, who retired after making 1,070 pitching appearances for five

NL teams and four in the American League.

"I'm not thinking about that," Tekulve said. "A thousand is a lot of appearances. Realistically, that would take another three or more seasons."

The way the veteran Tekulve has pitched this season, he isn't thinking about retirement.

"It still hasn't entered my mind," he said. "This (record) is just something I'm passing through. It just happens to be one of the highlights of my career."

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Rangers' Incaviglia cracks two homers in downing A's, 4-0

OAKLAND, Calif. (AP) — Pete Incaviglia hit two home runs and Edwin Correa scattered six hits over eight innings to lead the Texas Rangers over the Oakland A's 4-0 Wednesday and a sweep of the three-game series.

The loss was the A's sixth straight. Correa, 10-13, walked three and struck out 10. Mitch Williams got the last out for his eighth save.

Incaviglia snapped a scoreless tie with one out in the fifth inning when he hit Oakland starter Rick Rodriguez's first pitch over the 400-foot sign in straightaway center field for his 26th homer of the year. It was only the Rangers' second hit off Rodriguez, who was making his major-league debut.

Larry Parrish walked to lead off the Texas seventh and Incaviglia followed with a two-run shot on an 0-2 pitch, giving the Rangers a 3-0 lead.

Larry Parrish closed the Texas scoring with a two-out, solo homer, his 27th, in the eighth inning off Rodriguez.

Rodriguez allowed seven hits over 7½ innings, walking three and striking out one.

Jose Canseco struck out once and increased his total to 167, one shy of the major-league rookie record set by Juan Samuel in 1984.

Major League Baseball

AMERICAN LEAGUE East Division					NATIONAL LEAGUE East Division				
W	L	Pct.	GB		W	L	Pct.	GB	
Boston	89	57	.610	—	x-New York	95	50	.655	—
New York	79	67	.541	10	Philadelphia	76	69	.524	19
Toronto	79	67	.541	10	St. Louis	73	72	.503	22
Detroit	77	69	.527	12	Montreal	72	72	.500	22½
Cleveland	74	72	.507	15	Chicago	61	84	.421	34
Baltimore	69	77	.473	20	Pittsburgh	59	86	.407	36
Milwaukee	68	78	.466	21					

West Division					West Division				
W	L	Pct.	GB		W	L	Pct.	GB	
California	83	60	.580	—	Houston	83	62	.572	—
Texas	76	70	.521	8½	Cincinnati	74	71	.510	9
Kansas City	68	76	.472	15½	San Francisco	74	72	.507	9½
Oakland	67	80	.456	18	Los Angeles	68	77	.469	15
Seattle	64	81	.441	20	Atlanta	67	77	.465	15½
Chicago	63	81	.438	20½	San Diego	68	78	.466	15½
Minnesota	62	83	.428	22					

Wednesday's Games

American League: Texas 4, Oakland 0; Baltimore 3, New York 3; Cleveland 5, Minnesota 2; Detroit 8, Toronto 6; Boston 4, Milwaukee 1; Kansas City at California, (n); Chicago at Seattle, (n)

National League: Houston 6, Cincinnati 1; Montreal 6, Pittsburgh 5, 1st game; Pittsburgh 4, Montreal 1, 2nd game; St. Louis 8, Philadelphia 5; New York 4, Chicago 2; Atlanta 4, Los Angeles 1; San Diego 5, San Francisco 4, 10 innings

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