

# Get a doctor, I've got Rangers' fever



**PHILIP LEONE**  
SPORTSWRITER

**M**an, did I really sock it to 'em! This time last week, in this same location, I let myself get off on a mean-spirited little rant about the Texas Rangers.

I poked fun at the franchise's miserable 24-year history of pennant-less futility. I sneeringly predicted another lackluster season for Johnny Oates and Co. in '96.

I even stooped low enough to bring up a 1985 incident involving then-Ranger pitcher Dave Stewart, a transvestite prostitute named Lucille and the LAPD.

Well, with just over a week removed from this Major League baseball season, I'd like to take this occasion to say a few things to the Rangers. Things like, I'm sorry, I'm terribly sorry.

I'm an idiot. I was drunk. Find it in your hearts to forgive me for jumping off the bandwagon. Who would've thunk it?

Not even the Rangers themselves would have predicted that they would be the only undefeated club left at this point. But after sweeping the Boston Red Sox and the New York Yankees, the 7-0 Rangers are the hottest team in baseball, and they're off to their best start since 1979.

I know, I know, seven games don't make a season — they don't

even make a good two weeks — but the Rangers' stellar play so far has impressed even the most cynical critics like yours truly. Don't tell anybody, but I think I got myself a nasty case of Rangers' fever.

So what gives? Something must be in the Arlington water system, right? The secret to the Rangers' success thus far has been, get this, good pitching, solid defense, and timely hitting — not exactly what I'd call franchise hallmarks.

After a turn and a half through the rotation, the question-marked Rangers pitching staff is exceeding pre-season expectations. Texas pitchers have given up just 12 runs, have a combined 2.00 ERA and have walked only 18 hitters.

All seven victories have gone to starters, who are averaging nearly seven innings an outing. And the bullpen, arguably the league's most inconsistent a year ago, has allowed a measly six hits in 13 innings of work. So far so good from the mound.

The Rangers' defensive unit, among baseball's worst for the past decade or so, has committed just two errors, neither of which led to runs.

This comes with shortstop Benji Gill on the disabled list after back surgery and Craig Worthington playing third base for three games in replace of Dean Palmer.

On the offensive side, the Rangers are hitting at a relatively heated clip of .300 and have pounded out 40 runs against the all-star caliber likes of Roger Clemens, Tom Gordon, Tim Wakefield, Jimmy Key, Dwight Gooden and David Cone. That bunch in-

cludes three former Cy Young winners and two fellas that have come damn close.

The Rangers are burning it up on the base paths as well. After stealing five bases during Sunday's doubleheader with the Yankees, the Rangers are now a spot-less 9-for-9 this season in stolen base attempts.

The only bad thing that has happened to the Rangers was a Doc Gooden fastball that nailed tender slugger Juan Gonzalez on the left forearm. But even that had a silver lining as Gonzalez's replacement, utility man Warren Newsum, homered, drove in two runs and scored twice to lead the Rangers to a 4-1 victory.

With the fast start and solid play all around, optimism is no doubt spewing in Arlington and in the hearts of Rangers fans everywhere as the Rangers. However, optimism has a tendency to mask the truth. The truth here being the fact that the Rangers are still a ballclub that's only notch or so above mediocre.

Realism, people, I urge realism. The 1979 Rangers, the only other Texas club to start the season at least 6-0, finished in third place in the American League West at 83-79.

My advice to Rangers' fans: Ride this winning wave out with a big grin until Rangers' fever gives you a bad rash and makes you nauseous when the Rangers wilt in the summer heat like they always do and finish a few games above .500.

I'll apologize for the above statement if the Rangers make the playoffs. Don't hold your breath.

# SWEEP

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in the bottom half of the ninth inning.

Despite having to go down to the wire to pull off the sweep, A&M Head Coach Mark Johnson believed the struggle will pay off down the road for the Aggies.

"Southwest has a good team," Johnson said. "I think they're in first place in their conference, so it's not like they're a bunch of slouches."

"The biggest plus today was being able to win two ballgames in the bottom of the ninth. That's not easy to do, and once you start doing it, you get a better feel for it. For that, I'm pleased."

Nine different Aggie pitchers took the mound on the evening, but all proved inconsistent at best, Johnson said he was concerned with his pitching staff's inability to nail down the Bobcats' coffin late in both games.

"That was the biggest disappointment today," Johnson said. "This time of year, we've got to have somebody get on a roll. We're knocking on a lot of doors, but we're not seeing a lot happening."

Sweeping the doubleheader pushed A&M's all-time series lead over Southwest Texas to 19-3 and improves the Aggies' overall season record to 27-14.

A&M will resume Southwestern Conference play this weekend when Texas Christian University visits Olsen Field for a four-game series starting Friday at 7:00 pm.

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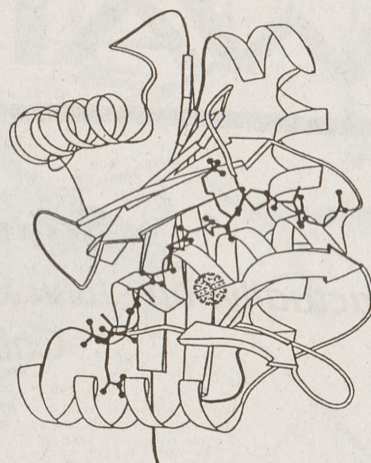
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