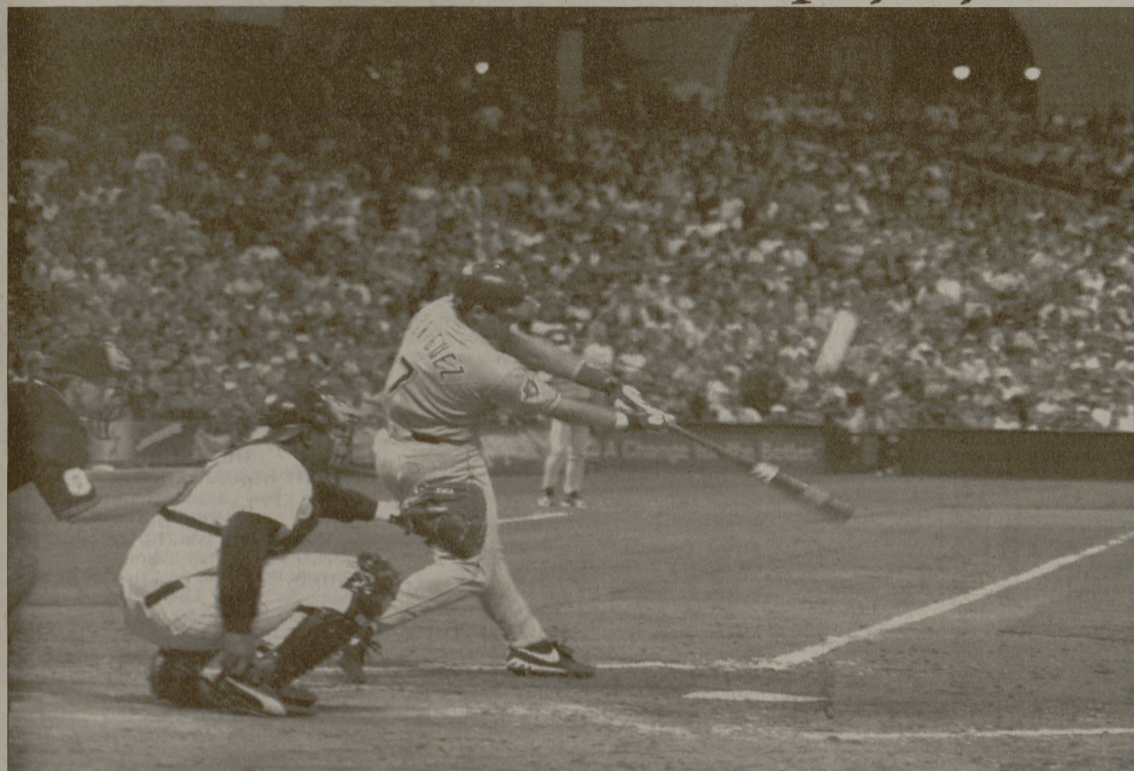


Astros, Rangers split Lone Star Series

Texas wins Silver Boot trophy by outscoring Houston 44-28 in six game set



Texas Rangers catcher Ivan Rodriguez pops up a pitch from Houston Astros pitcher Wade Miller during Friday night's

Mark Passwaters The Battalion

At the beginning of the season, the ownership of the Texas Rangers and many of their fans expected the team to win the American League title. If not the entire league, at least the American League's Western Division.

With a record of 23-42, the Rangers have not won much of anything, until now. They are the proud owners of the Silver Boot, the prize awarded to the winners of the Lone Star Series between the Rangers and the Houston Astros.

The Rangers did not win the Boot outright, as the series was a split. They won it by outscoring the Astros in six games, 44-28.

The first three games were played last weekend at the Ballpark in Arlington, with the scene shifting to Houston's Enron Field this weekend. Many of the Rangers were impressed with the Astros' new home.

"It's great," said Rangers outfielder Ruben Sierra. "It's a

lot different to than the [Astro]dome."

The Rangers got a taste of how the new stadium, nicknamed "Homerun," played on Friday night.

Rangers starter Rick Helling was hammered for eight runs — seven earned — in five innings. He gave up three home runs, two to Astros' right fielder Moises Alou.

He got little help from his friends, as first baseman Rafael Palmeiro dropped a Lance Berkman popup one pitch before Alou's second homer, a booming shot which cleared the railroad tracks in left field.

Fortunately for the Rangers, the Astros were just as awful. Houston ace Wade Miller was tagged for seven runs in six innings of work, including homers to Frank Catalanotto and Palmeiro. Still, Miller was in line to pick up his eighth win until the Astros bullpen imploded in the eighth inning.

Jay Powell relieved Octavio Dotel with two men on base

and promptly gave up a two-run single to Alex Rodriguez. After an error by first baseman Jeff Bagwell, Powell gave up two more runs on singles by Sierra and Gabe Kapler.

When the carnage was over, the Rangers had a 12-9 lead which stayed for the rest of the game.

As horrid as the pitching was on Friday, it was splendid on Saturday. Astros starter Tony McKnight — making his first big league start of the year — gave up only one run through six innings, only to be matched by Rangers starter Doug Davis.

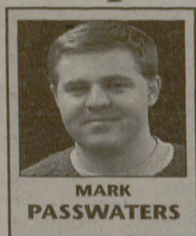
The Astros took a 2-1 lead in the eighth on Alou's RBI single, which scored Bagwell on a wild play at the plate. Sierra, the Rangers right fielder, game up throwing as Bagwell headed for home. The ball beat the Astros first baseman, but he was able to pirouette around Rangers catcher Marcus Jensen and dive onto home plate.

See BASEBALL on Page 6.

Rangers and Astros are losing the arms race

Lone Star Series exposes problems both teams have with pitching, need to make changes soon

This weekend, the Houston Astros and the Texas Rangers faced off for the right to claim the Silver Boot as the winner of the Lone Star Series. The results reinforced what fans of both teams already know: They need to give the boot to most of their pitching staffs.



MARK PASSWATERS

Houston's Enron Field is located right next to the city's old train depot, Union Station. Rarely, even in the glory days of America's rail system, have they seen a train wreck like the Rangers pitching staff.

At the start of the season, Texas knew they might have trouble with their pitching depth but expected big things from Kenny Rogers and Rick Helling. Rogers has almost been decent, but his record is a mere 3-3.

Helling is enduring a horrific season. On Friday night, he allowed eight runs in five innings, including the first home run Astros shortstop Jose Vizcaino had hit in two years — a span of 546 at-bats. Moises Alou hit two home runs off of Helling fastballs and had a third pulled back on a great catch by right fielder Ruben Sierra. A scout for the Anaheim Angels in attendance at the game said, "Helling has never had much of a fastball, but he had good location. Now he has no location, so he's roadkill."

Darren Oliver may have pitched well in his victory on Sunday, but American League teams are hitting .341 against him. Rookies Doug Davis and Ryan Glynn have also had their problems, with records of 2-5 and 1-5 respectively.

The bullpen also has been awful. They have saved 10 games and blown nine. Their record as a whole is an anemic 7-17. Tim Crabtree was supposed to be the closer but has failed miserably. A whole list of "who's not who" has spent time getting lit up in the Ranger bullpen. Where is John Wetteland when he is really needed?

Texas expected to be able to make up for some pitching deficiencies with a powerful offense, much like a slow-pitch softball team. That has not worked out either. The Rangers are an old team and their players have started to show their age all at once.

Alex Rodriguez has been as impressive as advertised, but 38-year-old third baseman Ken Caminiti, 40-year-old designated hitter Andres Galarraga and 38-year-old second baseman Randy Velarde have all struggled. 36-year-old Rafael Palmeiro has hit 19 home runs, but is hitting a mere (for him, at least) .260. Sierra has resurrected his career, but he is also 35 years old. The situation in Texas — a record of 23-42 — is even worse than owner Tom Hicks' disaster scenarios.

In many circles, the Astros .500 record is an even larger disappointment than that of the Rangers. Once again, the problems start with pitching. Scott Elarton was the Astros ace last season, winning 17 games. This season, Elarton looks scared on the mound, afraid to use his 95 mile-an-hour fastball to challenge hitters.

Shane Reynolds, Houston's most consistent pitcher over the past five years, has also been smacked around. Jose Lima, who won 21 games just two years ago, now does his electric slide out of the bullpen. Free agent pickup Kent Bottenfield may be taking his batting practice fastball

elsewhere after taking his 2-5 record to the disabled list.

Fortunately for the Astros, help may be on the way. Wade Miller has been a pleasant surprise with seven wins, and he is only 24. Tony McKnight won four games last season in a September callup and pitched six strong innings on Saturday. Roy Oswalt dominated the AA Texas League last season and may have already become the ace of the Astros' staff in only four starts.

The Astros have a ton of talent in the minors, with the defending Texas League Champion Round Rock Express destroying AA with a record 50 wins in the first half of the season. The AAA New Orleans Zephyrs are also in first place, with players like pitcher Tim Redding, third baseman Morgan Ensberg and infielder Keith Ginter projected by many scouts to be big leaguers in the making. Some scouts have claimed that Round Rock's pitching staff may be the best at any level of minor league baseball in the past 15 years. Redding had a record of 10-2 with a 1.80 earned run average

at Round Rock before being called up to New Orleans, and could probably move into the Astros rotation in a matter of weeks.

The Astros have a great amount of young talent to tap into, they just have to have the courage to risk calling them up and seeing what happens. With the likes of Craig Biggio, Jeff Bagwell, Lance Berkman and Alou already established in the Houston lineup, the addition of one or two quality prospects may make them into a contender.

The Rangers, on the other hand, have an aging team and no help on the horizon. Hicks and general manager Doug Melvin either have the option of suffering through a few average seasons with young, improving players or suffer through a group of aging players on the down side of their careers. If they do not take a deep breath and gut the team — which may include trading catcher Pudge Rodriguez — they will be getting the boot, silver and otherwise, for many years to come.

Mark Passwaters is a senior electrical engineering major.

HOUSTON

Batting Average: .269
Slugging Pct: .457
Home Runs: 97
Team ERA: 4.95
Home Runs Allowed: 102

RECORD: 31-31

TEXAS

Batting Average: .273
Slugging Pct: .480
Home Runs: 107
Team ERA: 5.95
Home Runs Allowed: 91

RECORD: 23-42

CHAD MALLAM/THE BATTALION

Sports in Brief

Goosen, Brooks playoff for championship

Two feet away from claiming the U.S. Open, Retief Goosen buckled under the stifling pressure and missed a short par putt on the 18th green that tied him with Mark Brooks and set up a Monday playoff.

Goosen, trying to go wire-to-wire Sunday for his first major championship, needed only two putts from 12 feet away. Instead, he rapped the first one 2 feet past the hole, and the par putt coming back missed badly to the right.

Brooks, from Fort Worth, Texas, earlier three-putted the 18th from 40 feet to make bogey and seemingly blow his chance to win the U.S. Open.

"I don't know what happened on the second putt," Goosen said. "It's golf, you know. Tomorrow is another day."

There should have never been a tomorrow in this case. Instead, the U.S. Open will be decided by an 18-hole playoff, the first in seven years.

It wasn't quite as wild as Jean Van de Velde taking triple bogey to squander the British Open at Carnoustie in 1999, but it was no less shocking.

Lost in the drama was Tiger Woods, who was long gone and his incredible streak of four straight majors ended.

He shot a 69 and finished in a tie for 12th. Asked if it was the most disappointed he had been after a major in a long time, Woods said, "Considering I won the last four, yes."

Goosen's three-putt — he had to make a 3-footer for that — gave him a 71 and left him and Brooks at 276. Brooks closed with a 70.

It will be the first 18-hole playoff in the U.S. Open since 1994, when Ernie Els defeated Loren Roberts and Colin Montgomerie at Oakmont.

"I look forward to tomorrow," said Goosen, a soft-spoken South African. "I'm not worried at all."

Save some sympathy for Stewart Cink. He was tied for the lead with Goosen at 5 under when they came to the 18th, where no major champion at Southern Hills has ever made a par or better.

Cink figured his hopes for an Open victory were doomed when he missed the green long, chipped to 15 feet and the par putt just slid by the edge of the cup on the left.

He could have marked, but it's a professional courtesy to let the likely champion — Goosen looked like a lock — have the final putt.

Cink proceeded to push the 18-inch bogey putt. A few minutes later, that cost him a spot on the playoff.

Goosen will have a chance to redeem his gaffe, or join a long list of golfers whose championships slipped away because of missed short putts — Scott Hoch in the 1989 Masters and Doug Sanders in the 1970 British Open are the most famous.

With a cool, unflappable demeanor to the end, Goosen sounded up to the task.

Orioles get revenge on Phillies

Brady Anderson drove in three runs with one of Baltimore's four homers as the Orioles avoided a series sweep with a 10-7 victory Sunday over the Philadelphia Phillies.

Chris Richard also had three RBIs for the Orioles, who were outscored 36-23 in the three-game series that featured 18 homers.

Jeff Conine, David Segui and Jay Gibbons also homered for Baltimore.

Baltimore's Jose Mercedes (2-8) pitched past the sixth inning for the fifth time in eight starts and is 2-3 in that span. He gave up three runs and eight hits in seven innings, walking three and striking out seven.

Marlon Anderson, who was 3-for-4 with three RBIs and two runs scored, was responsible for all three runs surrendered by Mercedes with a two-run homer — his seventh — and an RBI single.

Phillies starter Amaury Telemaco (5-3) went just three innings — allowing six runs, three earned, on five hits and a walk.

Cubs sweep Twins with a 5-4 victory

Kerry Wood won his sixth straight start, and Sammy Sosa reached 20 homers for the eighth straight season as the Chicago Cubs completed a three-game sweep of the Minnesota Twins with a 5-4 victory Sunday.

The Cubs have won 13 straight at Wrigley Field — their longest stretch since winning 14 in a row in 1936 — and have won 20 of 25 overall.

Wood (7-4) went six innings, allowing two runs on three hits and three walks. He struck out six.

Ricky Gutierrez homered for the third straight day and Sosa added a solo shot for the Cubs, who at 41-25 are a season-best 16 games over .500.

Sosa hit Bob Wells' 0-2 pitch in the seventh over the stands in left for his 20th homer. It was also Sosa's 1,000th career run scored.