

Rangers fire Narron after last place finish

ARLINGTON, Texas (AP) — Jerry Narron was fired as manager of the Texas Rangers on Tuesday after the team's third straight last-place finish in the AL West.

Narron went 134-162 after taking over in May 2001, including a 72-90 mark this season. He replaced Johnny Oates after the team started 11-17 last year.

"This has been a very difficult decision because I like and respect Jerry Narron," Texas general manager John Hart said. "But we have to make some tough decisions now. Our fans deserve better than the record and performance of the 2002 Texas Rangers."

Narron is the fifth manager fired since Sunday, the last day of the regular season. The New York Mets fired Bobby Valentine on Tuesday, while the Cubs' Bruce Kimm, Tampa Bay's Hal McRae and Detroit's Luis Pujols also were dismissed.

Hart spent several hours Monday and Tuesday meeting with owner Tom Hicks and assistant general manager Grady Fuson about the future of the team. Hart said he made the decision Monday night.

"I would like there to be a different voice as we establish a different culture and a different era," he said.

Narron drove home to North Carolina after Sunday's season-ending game. He had one year left on a two-year deal signed two months after he replaced Oates.

Narron did not immediately return a telephone call.

"I am convinced that John and Grady have made a thorough and complete evaluation in reaching the decision to change managers," Hicks said.

The Rangers also fired trainer Danny Wheat after 11 seasons. Wheat joined the organization in 1976 and had been with the big-league team since 1985.

Texas struggled all season, even with All-Star shortstop Alex Rodriguez hitting .300 and leading the majors with 57 homers and 142 RBIs, and an opening-day payroll of \$105 million.

Part of the problem was injuries. The Rangers had 17 players spend a team-record

1,429 days on the disabled list, including closer Jeff Zimmerman, two-time AL MVP Juan Gonzalez, 10-time All-Star catcher Ivan Rodriguez, and expected No. 1 starter Chan Ho Park.

Narron used 51 players, including a club-record 27 pitchers.

"This season has certainly been very frustrating and painful for all of us," Hart said. "Injuries have obviously played a major factor, but there are a number of areas in which we need to change and improve."

Possible replacements include bench coach Terry Francona, pitching coach Orel Hershiser, and Buddy Bell. Another candidate could be former Cleveland manager Charlie Manuel, who worked for Hart with the Indians.

Hart said there would be "some sense of urgency" to find a replacement. He said he'd start with a short list of candidates from inside and outside the organization, and that not all would have managerial experience.

Narron came to Texas as a third-base coach in 1995, then became manager when Johnny Oates resigned after an 11-17 start in 2001.

He was promoted by then-general manager Doug Melvin, who was fired following the 2001 season. Melvin recently became the GM in Milwaukee.

His departure cuts one of the final front-office ties to the Texas teams that won division titles in 1996, 1998 and 1999. Those are the only postseason appearances in franchise history.

"There's a certain level of comfort that's here, a certain part of that is the tail end of a terrific era that we tried to extend. At the same time, we knew what we had to do," Hart said.

Texas lost 13 of its last 16 games, including a closing 1-9 road trip against playoff teams Oakland and Anaheim, and Seattle. The Rangers finished 31 games behind the AL West champion Athletics.

"He was in a tough situation this year, without a doubt," Rangers pitcher Kenny Rogers said before the season ended. "He's done very well at it, but they go by what you do on the field, and we weren't a very good team on the field. Without a doubt, no one person is to blame for what went



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SPORTS IN BRIEF

Mavericks, sign Redd hope to keep Wang

DALLAS (AP) — In about two weeks, the Dallas Mavericks will know whether they've lured Michael Redd and whether they've lost Wang Zhizhi.

The Mavericks signed Redd, a Milwaukee guard who set an NBA record with eight 3-pointers in one quarter last season, to an offer sheet late Monday. The Bucks have 15 days to match it, work out a sign-and-trade deal or lose him without compensation.

Also Monday, Wang signed a three-year offer sheet with the Los Angeles Clippers. The Mavs face the same options and Donnie Nelson, the team's president of basketball operations, said all three are being considered.

"We're not going to lose him outright," Nelson told the Fort Worth Star-Telegram, which reported the offer-sheet signing in its Tuesday editions. "We are trying to come to some win-win situation."

The 7-foot-1 Wang averaged 5.6 points in 55 games last season.

The Mavericks made Wang the first Asian-born player in the NBA, but relations between the two have been a bit strained by his refusal to return to China after the end of last season to join the national team.

Redd was a second-round pick by the Bucks in 2000 and played just six games that season because of a knee problem. He played 67 games last season, starting eight, and ranked eighth in the NBA in 3-point percentage at .444. His record-setting performance came against Houston in a game when he scored a career-high 29 points.

On Tuesday, the Mavericks also announced the signing of guards Raja Bell and Adam Harrington, forward Derek Hood and center Kip Christianson, just in time for the start of training camp.

Bell played the last two seasons with the Philadelphia 76ers.

Harrington was undrafted after leaving Auburn following his junior season.

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