

SPORTS

THE BATTALION

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Astros win 2003 Silver Boot Rangers win final meeting but too little, too late

By Michael Lutz
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

HOUSTON — The Texas Rangers didn't miss their chance this time.

Rafael Palmeiro connected for his 509th career home run and Alex Rodriguez hit a tiebreaking, two-run triple as Texas rallied for an 8-5 victory over the Houston Astros on Sunday.

After failing to score with the bases loaded and none out in the seventh inning of a 2-0 loss Saturday, the Rangers came through to end the season series against Houston on a winning note.

"This is a start," Rodriguez said. "If we can focus on winning series, and get some rhythm and momentum going, we will be more focused. It starts with good pitching. We had that tonight after our starter got in trouble. Our other guys kept us in the game."

The Astros still retained the Silver Boot trophy that goes to the winner of the annual series between the state rivals for the second straight season. Houston took this year's series 4-2 and leads the all-time series 11-7.

"We did some good things today," Rangers manager Buck Showalter said. "It didn't look good early, but we were finally able to score some runs. We needed some help in the ninth."

Palmeiro's leadoff homer in the seventh tied it at 3, tying him with Sammy Sosa for 17th on the career list.

In the eighth, Octavio Dotel (6-3) allowed a single to Michael Young and walked Hank Blalock before Rodriguez tripled over center fielder Craig

Biggio's head. Biggio fell down trying to chase down the hit.

"I don't know what happened," Biggio said. "I slipped and fell. It was a terrible play. I would have caught it if I hadn't fallen down. I feel horrible. The situation was it was a tie game so if you want to blame this one on me, I'll take the heat."

Kevin Mench added an RBI single in the eighth for Texas and Juan Gonzalez hit a two-run single in the ninth.

Rosman Garcia (1-0) pitched a perfect seventh inning for his first major league victory. Ugueth Urbina struck out Richard Hidalgo with a runner on for his 21st save in 25 chances.

Ron Villone made his third major league start this season since being called up from Triple-A New Orleans and didn't allow a baserunner until he walked Gonzalez to start the fifth inning.

After Palmeiro popped out, Mench hit a two-run homer for the Rangers' first hit, cutting Houston's lead to 3-2.

"I felt all right," Villone said. "I got in a good groove, but then I left a couple of pitches up. It was just a couple of mistakes, but they have a pretty good lineup. You can't make mistakes against a lineup like that."

The Astros took a 3-0 lead in the first inning off Mario Ramos, who got his first major league victory in his last start. Ramos couldn't find his control this time. He threw 39 pitches, 24 for balls, walked three and hit one batter in the first inning.

After Biggio fouled out and Eric Bruntlett grounded out to start the inning, Jeff Bagwell

LONE STAR SERIES




Astros 12	Rangers 3
Astros 9	Rangers 5
Astros 3	Rangers 1
Arlington Houston	
Rangers 10	Astros 7
Astros 2	Rangers 0
Rangers 8	Astros 5

* Second consecutive year that the Astros have won the Silver Boot

RUBEN DELUNA • THE BATTALION

walked, Hidalgo doubled and Morgan Ensberg walked to load the bases.

Ramos hit his former Rice teammate, Lance Berkman, with a pitch to force home the first run, then walked Brad Ausmus and Adam Everett to force in two more runs for a 3-0 lead.

Ramos finally struck out Villone to end the inning after almost hitting the Astros pitcher with an inside pitch at 1-2. Ramos left after 3 1-3 innings, allowing two hits, three runs

'Clydian Curse' still haunting Rangers



JEFF ALLEN

There used to be a saying in Boston, "It's Johnny Sain, or pray for rain." This year there's been a similar saying in Arlington, except, unfortunately for the Texas Rangers, they have no Jonny Sain, so they are left with, "Pray for rain."

The name of the game in Major League Baseball is pitching, something the Rangers have lacked since Billy Martin and the boys burned out young phenom David Clyde's left arm in the 1970s. This created the Rangers' own version of the "Curse of the Bambino" that has plagued the Red Sox for the better part of a century. Here in Texas, the "Bambino" curse is taken a little more literally. If Clyde stepped onto the mound today, he wouldn't be old enough to drink. When he made his debut in 1973, he was just a couple weeks out of high school.

Since that point, the Rangers have had little luck when it comes to their hurlers. Typically, the team has followed a basic pattern; it doesn't try to get pitchers and attempts to slug its way to a .500 record, forgetting the division crown all together. Meanwhile, the ownership is left hoping fans are so mesmerized by the dingers that they don't notice the long string of last place finishes. Or the owners spend a little money on a pitcher, and once he steps on the green grass of Arlington he is stricken by the Clydian Curse, with the exception of Nolan Ryan, and inevitably withers. (ie: Chan Ho Park, Kevin Gross, Justin Thompson...)

Given this, it doesn't seem like a bad sign that the Rangers tried to take a new course last week when

they attempted to trade long-time son Juan Gonzalez to the Montreal Expos for a couple of minor league prospects, including at least one pitcher. After all, Gonzalez' contract is up this year, the Rangers' farm system is depleted and the team is in last place again.

It makes sense to check out some more affordable talent. Take the fact that Gonzalez is in the midst of finishing up a two-year \$24 million contract, and the fiscal end of the deal seems to shine as well.

Of course, this is all well and good, but Gonzalez had a no-trade clause. He exercised it, and the trade is as dead as Clyde's arm. Gonzalez cited his love for his native team in turning down a deal that would stand to propel him into a pennant race.

This sentiment is fairly noble for a modern athlete in an age when loyalty is not the first thing associated with athletes. According to The Dallas Morning News, Gonzalez has already agreed with manager Buck Showalter that the possibility of less playing time while in Texas is acceptable.

Gonzalez' real loyalty will be tested this winter when he's a free agent and the Rangers aren't too forthcoming with another \$12 million contract.

Gonzalez, though, doesn't deserve any blame in the current situation. He exercised his right to veto a trade, and one shouldn't expect any less of him. He's given the best part of his career to the Rangers and has kept people in the seats with hundreds of mesmerizing dingers.

The Rangers' dilemma cannot be blamed on any one person: it is the Clydian Curse at work again. Seung Song, one of the principles in the trade from Montreal, can thank his lucky stars that he's staying thousands of miles away from that can of worms.

SPORTS IN BRIEF

McNeal undergoes surgery for sports hernia

Sophomore A&M quarterback Reggie McNeal is recovering from surgery to repair a sports hernia and is on schedule to return to action when two-a-day workouts begin in August.

The medical procedure was performed on Monday and will keep McNeal from actively participating in the team's voluntary summer workout program during July.

A&M coach Dennis Franchione said that he was glad the team medical staff was able to diagnose the problem early.

"We're fortunate that our medical staff made an early diagnosis on Reggie," Franchione said. "They have treated him early and that looks promising for a quick rehabilitation process. The doctors and training staff tell me that the time frame for his recovery is on schedule and that he should be ready for the August workouts."

McNeal earned National Offensive Player of the Week honors last season when he led the Aggies to a 30-26 victory over then top-ranked Oklahoma at Kyle Field. He threw for a freshman record four touchdowns on 8-of-19 passing attempts against the Sooners.

Angela Stanford wins first professional championship

GALLOWAY TOWNSHIP, N.J. (AP) — Angela Stanford set a torrid pace early and played error-free golf the rest of the way Sunday to win the ShopRite LPGA Classic, her first championship as a pro.

Stanford, who led or shared the lead after all three rounds, shot a 6-under par 65 to finish at 16-under par, three shots ahead of late-surging Becky Morgan.

Annikka Sorenstam, who came into the final round four shots off the pace, was unable to mount a challenge, finishing with a 72.

"I believe if you want to be the best, you have to beat the best," Stanford said. She did — and then some, besting a 144-player field that included former winners Sorenstam and Juli Inkster, as well as 13-year-old phenom Michelle Wie.

The 25-year-old Stanford, of Saginaw, Texas, is in her third year on tour but hadn't won an event. Her best finish last year was second.

She shared the opening-round lead with Laura Diaz and Kris Lindstrom, but moved out to a one-shot lead heading into the final round.

Toms wins second event of year

By Teresa M. Walker
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

MEMPHIS, Tenn. — David Toms shot a 7-under 64 Sunday and won the St. Jude Classic by three strokes for his second victory in eight weeks.

Toms, who won the Wachovia Championship in May, picked up his ninth PGA Tour victory in a town where his swing teacher lives and he visits for duck hunting.

He couldn't have looked much more comfortable in a final round that had five players tied atop the leaderboard early.

He started a stroke behind Sweden's Richard Johnson, a tour rookie, but Johnson couldn't keep pace as everyone attacked the TPC

at Southwind course by going low in nearly perfect conditions.

Toms separated himself from the pack with an eagle, eight birdies and three bogeys for a 264 total and the \$810,000 prize.

Nick Price tied his career-low round with a 62 to finish second at 267. Bob Estes, who won here in 2001, shot a 65 and was tied with Fredrik Jacobson (67) and Johnson (69) at 268. Lee Janzen, who was tied atop the leaderboard with five holes left, finished with a 68 and tied for sixth with Bob Crane (67) at 269.

Toms stumbled with a bogey on his first hole but birdied his next four for a share of the lead at 16 under. He birdied the par-3 8th to take the lead to himself at 17 under. But Janzen and Price, a two-time winner here, wouldn't go away.

Janzen birdied Nos. 10 and 11 to drop to 18 under along with Toms atop the leaderboard, while Price,

who teed off 80 minutes earlier, birdied three of his final holes to go to 18 under. Toms birdied No. 12, then bogeyed the par-4, 430-yard No. 13 when he pushed a par putt just right.

The toughest hole on the course helped Toms take control.

Janzen, who has not won since the 1998 U.S. Open, three-putted for bogey after putting his tee shot on the left edge of the wide green and dropped to 17 under. Toms put his tee shot in almost the same area and then rolled in a 50-footer across a ridge in the green for birdie and a two-stroke lead at 19 under. It was only the fifth birdie on that hole Sunday.

Toms sealed the victory with his only eagle on the par-5, 528-yard 16th. He put an iron 15 feet from the hole on his second shot and rolled the putt in for eagle and a four-stroke cushion over Price, who then left the course.



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