

## No A-Rod, no problem

### Rangers tied for first atop AL West

By Stephen Hawkins  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

ARLINGTON, Texas — After three straight last-place finishes in Texas, Alex Rodriguez wanted out.

Now the American League MVP's former team is tied for the AL West lead, while Rodriguez and the New York Yankees are struggling.

The Rangers, built around a core of young players, are 11-8 after the opening stretch of the season against division opponents. They're even with Anaheim for first place — and Texas won five of seven against the Angels.

"Us being young and everything said about us, we came out and just wanted to play well," catcher Gerald Laird said Monday. "It's just chemistry. Our team is really open and we like to have fun and do a good job."

When Texas traded Rodriguez just before spring training, having already let go of sluggers Rafael Palmeiro and two-time AL MVP Juan Gonzalez, there were plenty of dire predictions of a 100-loss season.

Imagine the thoughts after the Rangers lost their first two games. But three weeks later, Texas tops the division after a three-game weekend sweep of Seattle that culminated with a 14-6 win.

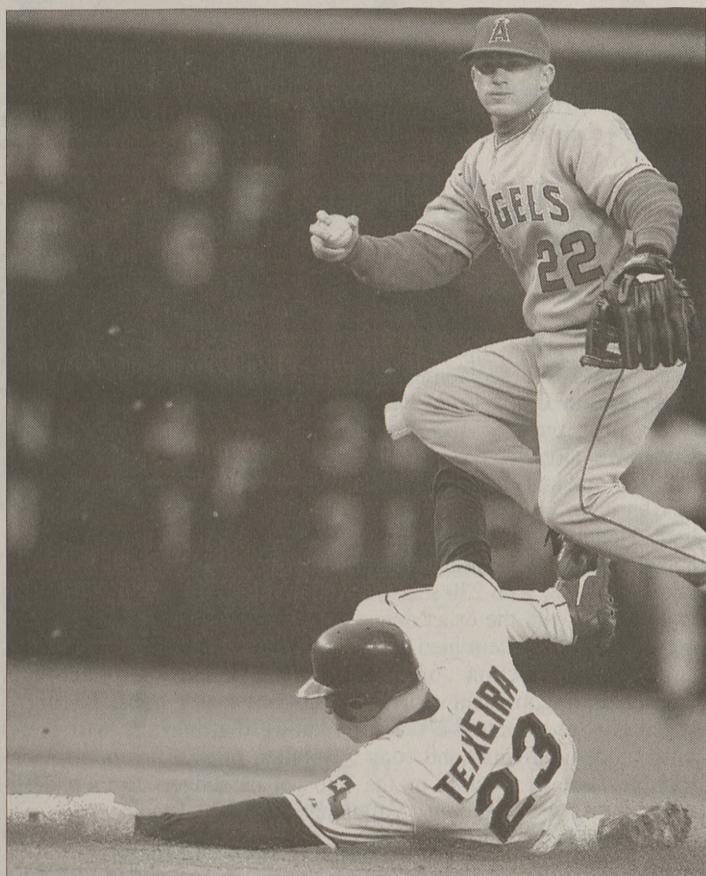
The Rangers are still scoring a lot of runs (5.8 per game) despite the departed power hitters, and lead the majors with a .315 batting average — the only team over .300. Their pitching staff, the worst in the majors three of the last four seasons, has a 4.34 ERA, fifth-best in the AL.

"We have a lot of confidence in our young guys," manager Buck Showalter said. "I'm not intentionally low-keying. It's reality. We've played 19 games out of a 162-game schedule. So far, so good."

Especially for a team coming off four straight last-place finishes.

During the three seasons with Rodriguez, the Rangers lost 270 games and were atop the division for only three days, one of those after winning last year's season opener.

While Rodriguez is finally starting to shake his slump in New York, the Yankees were swept by Boston last weekend to drop to 8-11 and 4 1/2 games out in the AL East. The last time



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Texas Ranger first baseman Mark Teixeira disrupts a throw from Anaheim Angel second baseman David Eckstein during the first inning of the Rangers' 7-6 win April 12 at the Ballpark in Arlington. Texas and Anaheim are tied for first place in the American League West.

New York was three games under .500 this late in the season was 1997, the last time they didn't finish first.

"It's not going to get any easier. I'd rather go through this now than any other time," Rodriguez said. "We will turn this around."

The Rangers, whose last division title was in 1999, have sure turned it around without A-Rod.

The last time Texas was three games over .500 was at 30-27 in June 2000, the summer before Rodriguez arrived. The Rangers then lost eight in a row and spent most of the time since at the bottom of the AL West.

Things are much different this season. Not only is their record, but the feeling surrounding the team.

"We have a sense of direction. We talked about it all winter, and I think it was ultimately culminated with the trade," general manager John Hart said. "We were going to commit to as many young players as we could. We also realize we do have holes, this is not a finished product."

But a pretty good one.

Michael Young, one of the AL's best defensive second basemen, has made the transi-

tion to shortstop to fill the void left by Rodriguez and is hitting a team-high .378. His only two fielding errors came on consecutive plays in the home opener.

Alfonso Soriano, the second baseman who came over from the Yankees in the A-Rod deal, is hitting .338. He has just 10 strikeouts in 78 at-bats.

The Rangers are also getting good production from young players such as Hank Blalock (.325, four home runs, 17 RBIs), Laynce Nix (.364, 5, 13) and Laird (.356), who played in 19 major league games before this season. Veterans such as Eric Young (.378) and David Dellucci (.314), signed to one-year contracts to fill gaps, also have been solid.

"We're a confident group of guys right now," Michael Young said. "We believe we can go out and win, and that's a good feeling to have."

Even with starting pitchers Colby Lewis and Mickey Callaway on the disabled list, the pitching staff has not self-destructed. The struggles of Chan Ho Park (1-3, 5.19 ERA) continue, but Kenny Rogers (3-0, 3.96) has been a solid No. 1 starter in his third stint with Texas.

## Archery

Continued from page 8

archery team will be that it has to fund itself — just like the other 29 club sports currently at A&M.

But without a significant growth in archery, that money can be better used elsewhere. It could be used toward the other 16 varsity sports currently sponsored by A&M, or it could go to a new varsity sport that already has NCAA sponsorship — even if the budget allocated for archery is minimal.

Either way, it is money better spent if it

increases the Athletic Departments' success across the board.

Although archery does give A&M some prestige to those who follow the sport, it does little else. Archery brings very little revenue, if any, to the Athletic Department.

Without a chance of growth in the sport and an NCAA-sponsored championship on the horizon, the benefits that archery brings to A&M don't justify the money spent for it.

Byrne's decision to put the archery program under review is the best decision for A&M's Athletic Department.

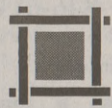
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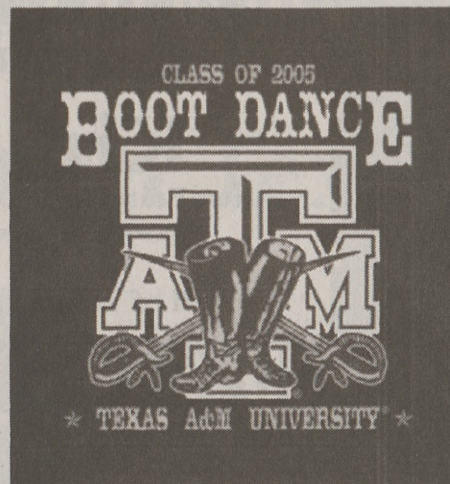
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