

Rain postpones Indians-Rangers game Doubleheader set for Tuesday at Progressive Field

Anthony Castrovince / MLB.com

CLEVELAND -- The Rangers came to town, and so did the rain.

As a result, Labor Day turned into a day off for the Indians, as it was for much of the working world.

Monday's series opener against the Rangers, originally scheduled for a 6:05 p.m. ET start, was postponed by rain. The game will be made up as part of a two-night doubleheader on Tuesday at Progressive Field. The first pitch of the first game is scheduled for 5:05 p.m. Gates will open at 4 p.m., and the second game will take place approximately 20 minutes after the conclusion of the opener.

All those with tickets to Monday's game can exchange them for a ticket to any remaining home game in 2009 or an April or May home game in 2010. Those with tickets to Tuesday's game will be treated to two games for the price of one.

The Tribe's probable starters do not change as a result of the rainout. Carlos Carrasco will start the first game, and Aaron Laffey will start the nightcap.

This marks the first rainout in the '09 schedule for the Tribe.

Tribe calls up prized prospect Marson Recent acquisition could be starting catcher in 2010

By Anthony Castrovince / MLB.com

CLEVELAND -- For the moment, Lou Marson is merely the fourth catcher added to a Tribe roster bursting with backstops.

But given Kelly Shoppach's arbitration situation (not to mention his offensive woes), Wyatt Toregas' projection as more of a backup backstop and Chris Gimenez's projection as a utility man, Marson's promotion from Triple-A Columbus is a significant one for the Indians. This very well might be fans' first look at the guy who will be handling the regular catching duties at the outset of 2010.

For now, however, Marson, who was one of four prospects acquired from the Phillies in the Cliff Lee trade, needs to get acclimated to his new surroundings.

Marson had some help in that department, as the Indians called him up a day earlier than originally speculated so he could be in the starting lineup with fellow former Phillies player, Carlos Carrasco, who was scheduled to start against the Rangers.

Due to Monday's rainout, Marson and Carrasco are expected to be the starting battery for Game 1 of Tuesday's doubleheader.

"I've been catching him since 2004 in the Gulf Coast League," Marson said of Carrasco. "I'm tougher on him than I am on some of the other guys."

What will be tough for Marson in the coming weeks is getting to know the other pitchers he'll be working with. September will have a bit of a Spring Training feel for him, in that sense.

"To be honest with you, it's going to take a while to learn not only their names, but what they throw," Marson said. "It's not one of those things that happens overnight."

And the Indians aren't asking Marson, who made eight total appearances with the Phillies in 2008 and early this season, to be an overnight sensation. He won't be in the lineup every day. Rather, manager Eric Wedge said he'll pick his spots with his catchers from here on out.

When Marson gets the starting nod, he hopes to build on the strengths he's showed in the Minor Leagues. He comes with a reputation as a solid game-caller with a leadership personality.

As far as the 23-year-old Marson's offense is concerned, he batted a combined .277 with 18 doubles, two home runs and 33 RBIs in 91 games with Triple-A Lehigh Valley in the Phillies' organization and Columbus. Known as a contact hitter and not a power guy, he had a .361 on-base percentage.

"He's still developing in all areas of his game," Wedge said. "But we think he has a chance to be a good hitter, too."

Before the '09 season, Baseball America ranked Marson as the third-best prospect in the Phillies' organization and the 66th overall prospect in baseball. He was a fourth-round pick in the 2004 First-Year Player Draft.

Marson, Carrasco, infielder Jason Donald and right-hander Jason Knapp were the four players acquired in the July 29 trade that sent Lee and outfielder Ben Francisco to Philadelphia. Donald probably would have been among the callups, but he recently suffered a lower back injury that is expected to prevent him from getting the call. Knapp has been shut down with a shoulder issue, and the Indians still are in the process of determining if the injury will require surgery.

Marson was the fifth player the Indians promoted from Columbus since rosters expanded on Tuesday. Wedge said one more player will be added on Tuesday, as the Columbus season was set to wrap up Monday night

Sipp seeing more important situations Cleveland (60-76) vs. Texas (76-60), DH, 5:05 p.m. ET

Matt O'Donnell / MLB.com

CLEVELAND -- Tony Sipp spent much of the first half of the season shuttling between Triple-A Columbus and Cleveland.

But he's since settled into the Indians' bullpen, and lately, very quietly, he's made another move -- to the back of the 'pen.

Going into Tuesday's game with the Rangers, Sipp had racked up an impressive scoreless streak (8 2/3 innings) that has given manager Eric Wedge the confidence to use him later in games. Much of that success can be attributed to a better command of his pitches, particularly his changeup.

"Everything is filling up the strike zone," Sipp said. "I've thrown my changeup for strikes, and I haven't done that, really, in my lifetime."

The 26-year-old Sipp has been almost unhittable of late.

He has given up four hits with 13 strikeouts and just two walks in his last nine outings -- covering those 8 2/3 scoreless frames. In that span, he lowered his ERA from 4.43 to 3.19.

"He's throwing the ball well," Wedge said. "He's been pitching in a very pivotal role for us."

In Sunday's 3-1 win over the Twins, Sipp was brought in to face the top of Minnesota's lineup in the eighth inning of a two-run game. He got Denard Span to ground out and then struck out Orlando Cabrera and Justin Morneau to end the frame.

The only blemish in the outing was a Joe Mauer single, which is nothing to be ashamed of, considering Mauer has the highest batting average in the Major Leagues.

Sipp's newfound control of the changeup has made all the difference.

When he threw his changeup in the past, Sipp said, he couldn't even get the pitch to the plate. It would bounce to the catcher.

Now, hitters have to account for it, which has only made his other pitches better.

"It kind of equalizes my fastball," Sipp said. "It makes that fastball even faster."

Cleveland pitching coach Carl Willis said Sipp simply is a different pitcher than he was at the beginning of the season.

"He's been a very pleasant surprise," Willis said. "He's going out and proving his value on the mound."

After Monday's series opener was rained out, the Indians and Rangers will play a doubleheader on Tuesday at Progressive Field. All those with tickets to Monday's game can exchange them for a ticket to any remaining home game in 2009 or an April or May home game in 2010. Those with tickets to Tuesday's game will be treated to two games for the price of one.

Pitching matchup

Game 1

CLE: RHP Carlos Carrasco (0-1, 18.00 ERA)

Carrasco turned in a dud of a Major League debut against the Tigers on Tuesday, coughing up six runs on nine hits, including three home runs, and three walks while striking out three in three innings. The 22-year-old fell victim to the temptation to overthrow in his first start, and, as a result, he couldn't command his fastball. He is expecting to be calmer in his second outing. Carrasco, acquired in the Cliff Lee trade, was 11-10 with a 4.64 ERA in Triple-A this year.

TEX: RHP Tommy Hunter (7-3, 3.14 ERA)

Hunter continues to be a bulldog for the Rangers' rotation, going seven innings in a winning effort against the Blue Jays on Wednesday. He allowed four runs on six hits to pick up his seventh win of the season. Hunter had one of his best starts of the year against the Indians, going 7 2/3 scoreless innings and allowing six hits while striking out five.

Game 2

CLE: LHP Aaron Laffey (7-4, 3.36 ERA)

Laffey didn't get any help from his defense or his offense in a loss to the Tigers on Wednesday. Sinkerballers like Laffey need defensive support, but the Tribe made four errors. Laffey gave up four runs -- two earned -- on seven hits with four walks and three strikeouts in 6 1/3 innings. He has allowed three earned runs or fewer in each of his past six starts.

TEX: RHP Brandon McCarthy (6-2, 4.61 ERA)

Making his first start since June 4, McCarthy looked impressive, going 6 1/3 innings and allowing one run on three hits against Toronto on Tuesday. McCarthy, who was sidelined with a stress fracture in his right shoulder blade, has one start against the Indians this season, going five innings and allowing three runs on four hits.

Tidbits

Grady Sizemore's elbow surgery is confirmed for Wednesday at the Cleveland Clinic. Team medical director Mark Schickendantz will perform the arthroscopic procedure. ... Michael Brantley is the second Indians player in the past 50 years to hit safely in his first six games. ... Yohan Pino, the player Cleveland acquired in the Carl Pavano trade, pitched seven shutout innings and gave up five hits with six strikeouts and two walks. He is 4-2 with a 2.49 ERA in 10 starts between Triple-A Columbus and Triple-A Rochester.

Rainout part of doubleheader today

By Sheldon OckerBeacon Journal staff writer

CLEVELAND: The Indians and Rangers waited two hours, 19 minutes before calling Monday night's game because of rain.

The game will be made up as part of a traditional (one admission) doubleheader beginning at 5:05 this afternoon.

Fans with tickets to today's regularly scheduled game can watch both games without additional cost.

Those holding tickets for Monday night's game can exchange them for any remaining game at Progressive Field on the 2009 schedule or any home game in April or May (excluding Opening Day) of next year.

In today's opener, Carlos Carrasco will face Texas' Tommy Hunter.

In the second game, Aaron Laffey will oppose Brandon McCarthy.

THE CLAMOR OF JETS — With the air show going all weekend, fighter jets have buzzed Progressive Field, creating sudden and deafening noise.

"It bothered me a few times," manager Eric Wedge said. "I'm sure the guys who are out there [on the field] are feeling the same thing. I don't think anybody can concentrate well enough not to notice that."

Justin Masterson was on the mound Friday night, when Progressive Field, at times, seemed under attack.

"I've been in there before when it's happened," he said. "You kind of get used to it. It adds a little bit to the excitement."

SURGERY I — Grady Sizemore will undergo surgery to clean out the inflammation in the lining of his left elbow Wednesday at the Cleveland Clinic. Dr. Mark Schickendantz will perform the procedure.

About a week later, Sizemore will travel to Philadelphia to repair his abdomen.

Recovery for both operations is expected to be four to six weeks.

ONE MORE TIME — One more unnamed player will be called up from Columbus today. In addition, Clippers manager Torey Lovullo will join the Tribe staff for the rest of the season.

FARM FACTS — Jordan Brown hit his 15th home run of the season and singled, driving in two runs, as Columbus defeated Toledo 7-2. Yohan Pino (4-2, 2.49 ERA) pitched seven shutout innings, allowing five hits and two walks. . . . Lucas Montero had three hits and one RBI. Paolo Espino (9-6, 2.59 ERA) gave up two runs in five innings. . . . T.J. House (6-11, 3.15 ERA) threw six scoreless innings, allowing five hits and three walks, as Lake County beat Hagerstown 2-1.

Akron Beacon Journal LOADED: 09.08.2009

Tribe prospect hopes to catch on

By Sheldon Ocker
Beacon Journal staff writer

CLEVELAND: Is Lou Marson destined to become the Indians' No. 1 catcher next year?

Certainly, he will be given that opportunity in a test that began Monday night and will continue into next spring training.

Marson was called up from Columbus and would have been in the lineup against the Texas Rangers, if the game had not been postponed by rain.

"He'll get as much time behind the plate as we can give him," manager Eric Wedge said. "It might not be every day, but we want to take a good look. And with [Carlos] Carrasco pitching, there's a lot of history between them. It will be good for Carrasco to have a guy behind the plate who knows him better than anybody."

Marson and Carrasco were part of the deal that sent Cliff Lee to the Philadelphia Phillies in July.

"We've been together since 2004 in the Gulf Coast League, when we were 17," Marson said, then smiled, adding, "I've been having to deal with him since then, so I'm tougher on him than the other guys. It just comes from having a long relationship with someone."

Ever since Victor Martinez was traded to the Boston Red Sox on July 31, Wedge has been using three players to catch: backup Kelly Shoppach, who was behind the plate almost as much as Martinez; Wyatt Toregas, getting his first taste of the majors, and super utility player Chris Gimenez, who also plays the outfield.

Wedge and General Manager Mark Shapiro probably don't know with certainty who will be the everyday catcher in 2010. Even if they do, they are not about to divulge their secret.

"Nobody has established any roles yet," Wedge said.

Shoppach would seem to be the logical choice, because he has experience, but he has struggled through a sub-par season, and with a \$1.9 million salary that likely would rise, he might be the odd man out.

"The way you play is always going to affect your future," Wedge said of Shoppach. "The biggest thing we need to see from him is consistency."

"He knows very well what he needs to do. The test for him — if he wants to be more than a backup catcher — is to do that. I think Kelly has the ability to be more than a backup. I really do."

Marson comes to Cleveland with a reputation as a big-league ready receiver with a leader's makeup and a contact hitter who has yet to learn to turn on pitches.

In 91 Triple-A games this year, he batted .277 with two homers, 18 doubles and 33 RBI in 314 at-bats.

Asked to describe himself as a catcher, Marson said, "I think my strength is calling a game."

Wedge hasn't seen Marson play, but his reports reinforce the catcher's self evaluation.

"He calls a game well for a young catcher, and he knows how to handle a staff," the manager said. "He's still developing in all areas of the game, but he has a chance to be a good hitter, too. He's a line-drive hitter right now."

And as a hitter?

"I was pretty good last year, and this year I was pretty good until a couple of weeks ago," he said. "I've definitely learned what my strengths are. The thing I really try to do is have good at-bats."

Marson was an infielder until his junior year of high school, but all the while he harbored a desire to catch.

"I was an infielder growing up, but I always wanted to be a catcher," he said. "I tried to get my high school coach to throw me back there. He finally did, when one of our catchers failed a class, and I went behind the plate my junior year."

Akron Beacon Journal LOADED: 09.08.2009

Aeros 9, SeaWolves 3

Santana ties franchise record for RBI

Designated hitter Constanza doesn't have as much luck trying to increase his runs, stolen bases

By Stephanie Storm Beacon Journal sports writer Published on Tuesday, Sep 08, 2009

Mike Sarbaugh was all for giving his guys a shot, but the Aeros manager wasn't going to risk too much on a meaningless final day of the regular season.

So Eastern League MVP and catcher Carlos Santana and designated hitter Jose Constanza started the Aeros' 9-3 victory over Erie at Canal Park on Monday afternoon with the caveat that they probably only had a couple at-bats to get the job done.

Both players were closing in on franchise records, and wanted a final shot at securing their places in team history.

Santana needed just two RBI to tie last year's Aeros third baseman Wes Hodges for the single-season RBI mark of 97.

With the ease of everything else Santana has achieved this season, the slugger needed just two warm-up at-bats before completing his mission with a two-run home run that landed in the left-field canal.

"He really works hard and he loves to play the game," Sarbaugh said of Santana, who also recently set a mark for the most walks in a season with 90.

"He's been involved with some 130 games — as a catcher. He wants to be out there. And to be honest, he didn't look tired one time."

Despite talking Sarbaugh into letting him play the whole game, Constanza wasn't as successful with his chase to increase his stolen-base total and move up on the run-scoring charts.

Although he successfully reached base three times with three singles in four at-bats, he only scored once — in the first inning on Josh Rodriguez's double.

In the fourth and sixth innings, Constanza was caught trying to steal second base — the final time on a questionable call that left him banging his helmet on the dirt in frustration as he pleaded with umpire Brad Purdom to reconsider.

"I thought he was safe and I wanted to argue," Sarbaugh said.

"But with the feel of the game, it just wasn't the right thing to do."

Thus, Constanza finished the regular season with 98 runs scored, second behind former Aeros outfielder Omar Ramirez, who'd racked up 116 runs in 1993.

However, Constanza's rough day running the bases does not erase how much he dominated all season.

The speedster had already taken over the single-season franchise record for stolen bases for a game (four) and for a single season (49) this season, breaking the record previously held by Eider Torres, who had 41 in 2006.

Perhaps Constanza was gunning for 50 stolen bases for the sake of a round number.

All the record chasing overshadowed a solid start on the mound by Aeros left-hander Scott Barnes. In his best start since joining the team Aug. 12th, Barnes limited Erie to two runs (one earned) on five hits with a season-high nine strikeouts.

"He made good adjustments," Sarbaugh said of Barnes. "His slider was real good and he had good life on his fastball. If he can get that combination like that going, he'll continue to do well."

However, Barnes was even a bit outdone by Aeros outfielder John Drennen. Making a rare start in center field in place of Constanza, Drennen hit solo home runs in the second and eighth innings to give him four longballs in the last three games.

Tribe prospects' big day delayed

Chronicle-Telegram Sports

CLEVELAND — The Lehigh Valley IronPigs ended their International League season Monday, but two of their recent prospects had already moved on to bigger and better things.

Catcher Lou Marson and pitcher Carlos Carrasco, who spent most of the year with the Phillies' Class AAA affiliate, were scheduled to be Indians' starting battery against the Texas Rangers.

Unfortunately for the youngsters, the game at Progressive Field never got started because of heavy rain and was postponed after a 2 hour, 19 minute delay.

Cleveland and Texas will play a doubleheader today beginning at 5:05 p.m., with Marson and Carrasco getting their chance in Game 1.

Both players were acquired from Philadelphia, along with infielder Jason Donald and pitcher Jason Knapp, in exchange for reigning American League Cy Young award winner Cliff Lee on July 29.

"We've got them in there together for a good reason: Marson has got a lot of experience catching Carlos," Tribe manager Eric Wedge said. "I think it's a good situation for both of them."

Marson was promoted to Cleveland's roster earlier on Labor Day from its top farm team in Columbus. He appeared in seven games with the Phillies from April 11-May 1, batting .235, but hopes his Indians debut serves as the start of a more permanent situation.

"This is something I definitely wanted and it's a good opportunity for me," the 23-year-old said. "Really, this is a good opportunity for all of us who were in that trade for both teams. To play my first game for the Indians with Carlos pitching makes it even better."

Carrasco and Marson have been teammates since 2004, when they both joined the Gulf Coast League Phillies (Class A-Rookie). They rose through Philadelphia's minor league system together and now will be forever linked as part of the Lee trade.

"I guess I'm tougher on Carlos than other guys because we're used to working with each other," said Marson, who hit .294 with Lehigh Valley and .243 with Columbus. "We've built a relationship that helps both of us out there. I know when he can locate his fastball and control his change-up, that's when he's on top of his game."

While Carrasco figures to make no more than five more appearances for the Tribe this season, his regular backstop should get plenty of action. Wedge said he plans on giving Marson "as much time as we can" because "we've heard a lot of good things about the way he calls a game."

Those words were music to the former third baseman's ears, though he admits to be flying blind in a new organization.

"It's going to take me a while to learn everybody's names and what they like to do," Marson said as he scanned Cleveland's large clubhouse. "To be honest, it's not going to happen overnight because I have to get used to them."

There are three other catchers on the roster in Kelly Shoppach (.209), Wyatt Toregas (.216) and Chris Gimenez (.157), but none have been very effective. Wedge said the starting job is considered open heading into 2010 and hinted Shoppach may be on the hot seat.

"I think Kelly has all the ability to do that, but we haven't seen what he needs to do consistently," Wedge said. "It's there for one game or two games, then you don't see it."

Eastern League MVP Carlos Santana also factors into the Indians' catching mix, but likely not for two more years, which is why Marson's time could be now.

"I try to catch the ball and try to keep it simple behind the plate, that's about it," he quipped. "Seriously, as a catcher, if you stick with a pitcher's strength, you should be successful. That's about it."

- Today
- Who: Cleveland vs. Texas
 - Time: 5:05 p.m.
 - Where: Progressive Field
 - Pitchers: Game 1: Carrasco (0-1, 18.00 ERA) vs. Hunter (7-3, 3.14); Game 2: Laffey (7-4, 3.36 ERA) vs. McCarthy (6-2, 4.61)
 - TV/radio: SportsTime Ohio; WEOL 930-AM, WTAM 1100-AM

Mud Hens 3, Clippers 0: Curtain falls with yet one more loss

Tuesday, September 8, 2009 3:04 AM By Jim Massie THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

The last game of the first season for the Clippers in Huntington Park served as a metaphor to this particular baseball spring and summer in Columbus.

The Toledo Mud Hens won 3-0 yesterday in front of an afternoon crowd of 9,005 that lifted the season attendance to a franchise record 666,797 -- for a team buried deeply enough in last place in the International League West Division to hear conversations in China.

Hector Rondon (4-5) suffered the loss, allowing three runs and eight hits in 7 2/3 innings. He struck out five and didn't walk anybody.

In the minutes after the final out -- a Stephen Head fly ball to Michael Rockett in left field -- Clippers manager Torey Lovullo used a team meeting to surprise utility infielder Niuman Romero with news that the parent Cleveland Indians had purchased his contract.

Romero's teammates gave him a spontaneous and genuine ovation. He will join 20 other former 2009 Clippers today in the Indians dugout.

"I'm so proud," Romero said. "It surprised me a lot. First of all, I worked for it. During the whole season, I was trying to get better every day to get to the big leagues. Now is my chance to play."

A few lockers away, Jordan Brown quietly received congratulations for winning the IL batting title. He was 1 for 3 for the game and finished with a .335 average. The Indians are not calling him up.

Lovullo delivered the bad news after Saturday's game. Brown promptly hit two home runs Sunday. Lovullo let him take his position in the eighth inning yesterday and then sent Ryan Blair to replace him so that the crowd could recognize his achievement.

"That was just pure class on Torey," Brown said. "But that's what you expect. I appreciate that so much. That was really nice of him. It was awesome."

The big crowds and the new facilities in Huntington Park have pleased all the players.

"The park was fantastic," Brown said. "You can't ask for a better place to play. The attendance was great and the fans were great. If you have to be in triple-A, this is the place to be."

The few player complaints that existed already have drawn the attention of Clippers general manager Ken Schnacke. Several said that they hoped some improvements would be made with the grass and dirt on an infield that contained a lot of bad hops. They also understood that the end of construction and the beginning of the '09 season left no time for a shakedown cruise.

"This place is beautiful," Head said. "Some stuff could go a little better with the field. We have talked to Ken. But it was a hurry to get in here. They did what they could over the course of the year to make it better."

"But it's obvious that stuff like that is going to happen the first year. With the park being as nice as it is, I think they'll just continue to make it better and better."

The ballpark's short dimensions -- 325 feet down the left-field line and 315 feet down the line in right -- caused concerns for pitchers upon seeing it for the first time in April. Yet it didn't really play like a band box.

"I loved playing here," pitcher Frank Herrmann said. "I think that it played pretty fair as far as fly balls. Center field plays true. Left field plays pretty true. It's a little short to right, but you've got a big wall there. I mean, every park has its quirks."

The players spoke of how much the fan support meant to them.

"This is a really nice park, especially for the fans," Romero said. "Everybody comes to the games. For me, that's good because it makes me feel comfortable. It makes me want to make every play."

jmassie@dispatch.com

September 7, 2009

Clippers open April 7 vs. Indianapolis

I picked up a pocket schedule for next season on my way out of the press box tonight. The Clippers are opening at home next season on Thursday, April 7, at 7:05 p.m. against the Indianapolis Indians.

It is a four-game series followed by two against Louisville and two against Toledo. I'm going to guess that Hector Rondon starts the game and throws his first pitch to catcher Carlos Santana.

Posted by Jim Massie on September 7, 2009 9:12 PM | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(1\)](#) | [TrackBacks \(0\)](#)

Romero final call up

Clippers manager Torey Lovullo used the post-game team meeting of final game of the season today to announce that the Cleveland Indians had purchased the contract of infielder Niuman Romero.

His teammates gave him a standing ovation.

Romero will join the team Tuesday in Cleveland and become the 21st former Columbus player in the Indians dugout this season.

Posted by Jim Massie on September 7, 2009 7:38 PM | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(0\)](#) | [TrackBacks \(0\)](#)

Brown wraps up title in Clippers loss

Jordan Brown won the International League batting title today in the season finale at Huntington Park but the Toledo Mud Hens captured the 3-0 victory.

Brown led off the fourth inning with an infield single this afternoon and wrapped up the batting title in the process. He went to his defensive position in left field to start the eighth inning and Columbus manager Torey Lovullo replaced him with Ryan Blair so that the crowd of 9,005 in Huntington Park could recognize the feat.

Scranton/Wilkes-Barre second baseman Kevin Russo was the only player left in the race who could have caught. He is 0 for 3 so far today.

Brown needed a 4 for 4 game to set a franchise record of .342 for a season. He is 1 for 3 right now so that isn't going to happen. He finished with a .336 average. The game breezed along. Guys came to the plate hacking. Cars, no doubt, were packed and ready for the drive home.

The Mud Hens scored two runs in the second inning on an RBI triple by Will Rhymes and a run-scoring single by Scott Sizemore. Back-to-back doubles by Sizemore and Jeff Frazier in the eighth accounted for the other run.

Hector Rondon (4-4) took the loss. Ryan Ketchner (2-0) got the win with a complete game six-hitter..

Indians rained out, doubleheader Tuesday.

The Associated Press Posted Sep 07, 2009 @ 09:39 PM Last update Sep 07, 2009 @ 10:57 PM

CLEVELAND — The Texas Rangers gained a half-game in the AL wild card race despite having the opener of a three-game series against the Cleveland Indians postponed by rain Monday night.

Texas moved within 2 1/2 games of Boston, which lost to the Chicago White Sox, 5-1. The Rangers could not pick up more ground as they never got started. The teams will try to make it up Tuesday as part of a doubleheader beginning at 5:05 p.m.

"It's Labor Day, so we should be working," Indians manager Eric Wedge said. "We wanted to play."

Both Wedge and Texas manager Ron Washington will keep their starting rotations intact.

Right-handers Tommy Hunter (7-3) of Texas and Carlos Carrasco (0-1) of the Indians are scheduled to start the first game. Rangers right-hander Brandon McCarthy (6-2) will face left-hander Aaron Laffey (7-4) in the second game.

"We'll keep it the same," Washington said, adding that he hopes the rain gave the Rangers' road-weary hitters enough rest to come back strong. Texas is at the end of a stretch of playing 25 of 36 games on the road and has not scored in its last 15 innings — since the third inning on Saturday in Baltimore.

The Rangers' lineup could get a boost as outfielder Andruw Jones is due to be activated Tuesday. He has been sidelined since Aug. 25 with a strained left hamstring.

"It would be huge if Jones could step up," Washington said. "It certainly would help if he could catch fire down the stretch."

The Rangers will still be without outfielder Josh Hamilton and third baseman Michael Young. Hamilton received a second shot for a pinched nerve in his back Monday is not expected to return until at least next weekend. Young, batting .322 with 22 homers and 67 RBIs, has missed four games with a strained left hamstring.

Washington said Omar Vizquel will start at third base in the first game and Esteban German will play third in the second game. He also plans to have Ivan Rodriguez catch the first game and Taylor Teagarden catch the second game.

The rain delayed the Indians debut of catcher Lou Marson, called up from Triple-A Columbus and tabbed to catch Carrasco. Both were acquired by Cleveland from Philadelphia when 2008 Cy Young winner Cliff Lee and outfielder Ben Francisco were traded to the Phillies for four players on July 29

Report any abuse or spam

"Rest assured I was on the Internet within minutes, registering my disgust throughout the world."

By Anthony Castrovince/MLB.com

It seems I've struck a nerve with the rabid (and, in the unfortunate case of a couple of the comments below, surprisingly crass) Wonder Girls fan base.

Effeminate high school boys are picketing outside the press box, and my approval rating among prepubescent South Koreans has never been lower.

To the Wonder Girls community, I humbly beg for forgiveness. And to the CastroTurf community, I happily report that the Wonder Girls, more often than not, do not resort to lip synching to pull off their dazzling dance moves. While they certainly did appear to be lip synching during their brief display on the Progressive Field Party Deck during Sunday's game, it didn't affect the integrity of the performance nearly as much as the ballpark sound system cutting out and leaving the 17,911 in attendance with about a minute and a half of the sounds of silence.

My respect and esteem for the Wonder Girls has grown by leaps and bounds, now that I've gotten a taste of what a fervent following they command. And I will keep the good vibes going by pledging to never use this space to erroneously report that the Jonas Brothers don't write their own songs and Miley Cyrus does not do her own choreography.

With that out of the way, let's return to real life... or at least our own warped version of it.

EXCRUCIATING MINUTIAE OF THE DAY...

- Grady Sizemore's elbow surgery is confirmed for Wednesday at the Cleveland Clinic. Team medical director Dr. Mark Schickendantz will perform the arthroscopic procedure.

- Lou Marson is here, and this final month of the season will be an important time for him to not only prove he's capable at this level but also to learn the Tribe's pitching staff inside and out. "To be honest with you, it's going to take a while to learn not only their names but what they throw," Marson said. "It's not one of those things that happens overnight."

- Eric Wedge said Marson won't play every day (which is obvious, considering the Indians are now carrying four catchers). But Marson will obviously get a firm look, considering the Tribe's 2010 catching outlook and the fact that Marson has a chance to be the regular starter next season.

- The Indians felt it was important to get Marson up here today, even though Columbus has one game left, because they wanted to pair him with Carrasco. They think that pairing will benefit both pitcher and catcher. "I've been catching him since 2004 in the Gulf Coast League," Marson said of Carrasco. "I'm tougher on him than I am on some of the other guys."

- I must be getting older, because Marson looks really young to me.

- Wedge said the Indians will call up one more player after Columbus' game tonight.

- Regarding a CastroTurf Commenter's question about Kerry Wood's vesting option status, Wood has finished 44 games this season, with 26 to play. He needs to reach 55 for his \$11 million option for 2011 to vest. It's starting to get interesting.

- Matt LaPorta, as you've no doubt noticed, has not seen any time at first base in the games. But he continues to do pregame work at the position with infield coach Luis Rivera, and the reports have been positive. "Luis feels good about his progress over there," Wedge said. Wedge said it's important that LaPorta get comfortable at first, in case the Indians need him at that spot next season. He also said there's still a chance LaPorta will see time at first before this season is over.

- It will be interesting to see Omar Vizquel at third base tonight. He's been filling in for an injured Michael Young. MLB.com's Rangers scribe, T.R. Sullivan, is already calling Omar the best defensive third baseman in Rangers' history. And this comes after he dubbed him the best defensive second baseman in Rangers' history earlier this year.

- According to the Elias Sports Bureau, Michael Brantley is just the second Indians player in the last 50 years to hit safely in his first six games in the big leagues. The only other was Josh Bard, who hit in nine straight games to open his career in 2002.

- David Huff is now tied with Carl Pavano for the team lead in wins, with nine. That is really sad.

- But how about Yohan Pino, the player to be named from the Pavano trade with the Twins? He won his second start for Columbus on Sunday, working seven scoreless innings in which he allowed just five hits with two walks and six strikeouts. He is now a combined 4-2 with a 2.49 ERA in 10 starts between Columbus and Triple-A Rochester this year.

notes: Marson catches on, making a full house

By Jim IngrahamJIngraham@News-Herald.com

The Indians now have more catchers than outfielders.

Monday, the Tribe added a fourth catcher to their swollen September roster. They recalled Lou Marson from Columbus and he is expected to be in the starting lineup for the first game of tonight's twi-night doubleheader, catching longtime batterymate Carlos Carrasco.

Marson and Carrasco were both acquired by the Indians from Philadelphia as part of the Cliff Lee trade.

"I wasn't surprised by the trade," said Marson. "I knew the Phillies were going to do something. But it's a good opportunity for all of us in the trade. I think it will turn out to be a good trade for both teams."

At the start of this season, the 23-year-old Marson was ranked by Baseball America as the third-best prospect in the Phillies' organization and No. 66 on the publication's top 100 prospects in all of minor-league ball.

Marson joins Kelly Shoppach, Wyatt Toregas and Chris Gimenez as the stable of catchers on the major-league roster, and the organization's top catching prospect, Akron's Carlos Santana, hasn't even arrived yet — and won't.

At least not this year.

"I'm going to give him as much playing time as I can," said Tribe manager Eric Wedge of Marson. "He won't be an everyday guy, but we'll try to get him in there as often as possible."

Offensively, Marson won't remind Indians fans of Victor Martinez. He has a .274 career average in six minor-league seasons. This year in a combined 314 at-bats at Columbus and Lehigh Valley, Philadelphia's Class AAA affiliate, Marson hit .277 with two home runs and 33 RBI. Of his 87 hits this season, 66 were singles. His .360 slugging percentage is sub-Jamey Carroll.

"The biggest thing for me is I just try to have a quality at-bat and see what happens," said Marson.

Wedge, an ex-catcher himself, admits it's the defensive side of the game that is Marson's strength.

"He's a catcher, first and foremost," said Wedge. "He runs the game well, handles the staff well. He's still developing in all phases. He has a chance to be a good line-drive hitter."

Marson's player profile sits well with Wedge, who has always put a premium on defensive skills when it comes to catchers.

"When Victor (Martinez) first came up I told him, 'You could go 5-for-5 with three home runs, but we could still lose the game if you have a bad day behind the plate,' " said Wedge. "Just like you could go 0-for-5 but we could win the game if you have a good day behind the plate. The impact the catcher has on a pitcher is real."

Catcher's corner

The catcher who figures to lose the most playing time to Marson the rest of the way is Shoppach, who has had a horrible season, hitting .209 — just .181 vs. right-handers — with 90 strikeouts in 235 at-bats. He has thrown out 20 percent of attempted base stealers (12-of-60), with three errors and six passed balls.

"The biggest thing we need to see from Kelly is more consistency," said Wedge. "We'll see it for a game or two, but we need to see it more often than that, and he knows it. For him to be an everyday player, he needs to be more consistent. We need to be able to count on him from day to day. I think he has the ability to do that. We just haven't seen that from him yet."

Who's on first?

Prior to batting practice each day, Matt LaPorta works with infield coach Luis Rivera on the nuances of playing first base.

"We want to put Matt in a position where if we need to put him there next year we won't be starting from scratch. And there's a chance I might play him there some this year," said Wedge.

O.R.

Grady Sizemore's elbow surgery has been scheduled for Wednesday at the Cleveland Clinic. Indians team physician Dr. Mark Schickendantz will perform the arthroscopic surgery to clean out the joint in Sizemore's left elbow.

Sizemore will then have surgery to repair damage to his abdominal wall next week in Philadelphia. The exact day for that surgery has not yet been set.

Notes

According to the Elias Sports Bureau, Michael Brantley is just the second Indians player in the last 50 years to hit safely in his first six games in the big leagues. Josh Bard hit in his first nine games in 2002. ... Wedge said the Indians will recall one more player from Columbus today. The logical choice — given that the Indians' starting left fielder last Friday vs. the Twins was utility infielder Jamey Carroll — would be outfielder Jordan Brown, who is hitting .336 with 15 home runs and 67 RBI.

Nothing rains on Texas Rangers rookie Hunter's parade

03:32 AM CDT on Tuesday, September 8, 2009

By JEFF WILSON / Special Contributor to The Dallas Morning News

CLEVELAND — A clan of Hunters made the five-hour drive from Indianapolis to Progressive Field to watch one of its own pitch Monday night.

But 23 family members and friends of Rangers right-hander Tommy Hunter will have to return today after a steady stream of showers soaked the area and forced the first of three games against Cleveland to be postponed.

That's fine with them and fine with Hunter, who will start the first game of a doubleheader that begins at 4:05 p.m. Just as he has shown this season during tough spots on the mound, a little rain delay isn't going to affect the Rangers' unflappable rookie.

"Let's roll, baby," Hunter said. "I'm good. I'm good to go. I'm just going to go with the flow. If they give me the ball, I'm going to go out there and do what I do."

That means, in most instances, he's going to give the Rangers a winning effort. Hunter is a nifty 7-3 with a 3.14 ERA in 14 starts this season, and he has been a mainstay in the rotation since June 28.

He lost that game to San Diego despite allowing only two runs in 6 1/3 innings. His performances have been remarkably similar since, as he has developed a knack for overcoming rough patches in games.

"What Tommy's showing us this year is he can go out there early and not have it, and next thing you know he finds a way to get it," manager Ron Washington said.

Look no further back than to Wednesday to find an example of his ability to plug a leak in a sinking ship. He was trailing 4-0 after four innings but didn't allow any more to Toronto and gave the Rangers a chance to rally to a 6-4 win.

He allowed three runs in the first inning Aug. 28 at Minnesota, then posted six zeroes as the Rangers came up two feet shy on David Murphy's bid for a go-ahead homer in a 3-2 loss to Minnesota.

The key is his four-pitch arsenal.

"When he has four pitches, he seems to find a way to find one that works enough to get him through until the rest show back up," Washington said. "That's maturity right there."

Hunter's breakthrough season will go down as one of the most pleasant surprises of the year for the Rangers, who gained half a game in the AL West and wild-card races Monday when the Los Angeles Angels and Boston Red Sox lost.

His 2008 major league debut lasted three starts, and they weren't very good. He started this year at Double-A Frisco but could finish it in the playoffs.

"It's not a shock," Hunter said. "Everybody knows that I can do it. It's just a matter of doing it. It's fun that it's happened right now, and we've got to keep rolling."

The Rangers not only have Hunter on their side in the first game today – he shut out the Indians over 7 2/3 innings Aug. 12 – but they have a nice run of success in doubleheaders in their favor.

Over the last 15 seasons, the Rangers have swept 13 doubleheaders, split six and lost four. They have swept both this season.

Dallas Morning News LOADED: 09.08.2009

Texas Rangers getting DH Andruw Jones's bat back

12:00 AM CDT on Tuesday, September 8, 2009

By JEFF WILSON / Special Contributor to The Dallas Morning News

CLEVELAND – Andruw Jones will be activated from the disabled list today and start at designated hitter against Cleveland left-hander Aaron Laffey in Game 2 of a doubleheader.

Jones will get a chance to jump-start a lineup mired in a 15-inning scoreless slump.

After a fast start, Jones had cooled to a .217 average when a strained left hamstring sent him to the disabled list Aug. 25.

"Whenever they put me in the lineup, I'll try to go out there and do what I've been doing," said Jones, who has 17 home runs. "If it's playing against lefties, go out there and help. Hopefully, I'll be swinging the bat and play against right-handers, too."

Hamilton on hold: Manager Ron Washington confirmed Monday that outfielder Josh Hamilton (back) won't join the team in Cleveland.

Hamilton had a second root-nerve injection, but the procedure usually requires 24 to 48 hours for the cortisone to calm the nerve. The latest plan calls for Hamilton to join the club Friday for the start of a nine-game homestand.

Extra rest for Holland: Left-hander Derek Holland will get extra rest between his next two starts as the Rangers use two upcoming off days to manipulate their starting rotation.

Holland, who has a 16.05 ERA over his last three starts, is scheduled to have an extra day off before starting Saturday against Seattle and seven days' rest before facing the Angels on Sept. 20 in Arlington.

More Pudge? Ivan Rodriguez will be the starting catcher in Game 1 today with Tommy Hunter on the mound. That duo clicked in a 6-4 victory Wednesday over Toronto.

It will be Rodriguez's sixth start behind the plate in the last eight games, a clear bucking of the two-on, three-off schedule implemented when he was acquired Aug. 18 from Houston.

"We'll just go day-to-day and see who's back there," Washington said.

Young ahead of schedule: Third baseman Michael Young remains ahead of schedule in his recovery from the left hamstring injury he suffered while legging out a grounder a week ago. He has jogged, done squats and lunges, thrown and swung a bat.

His hope his to return for the Sept. 18-20 series against the Angels.

"Yeah, I'm hopeful, but I don't know what the timetable is because I've never been through this before," said Young, who is hitting .322.

Dallas Morning News LOADED: 09.08.2009

Hamilton doubtful for rest of Texas Rangers' road trip

02:41 AM CDT on Monday, September 7, 2009

By JEFF WILSON / Special Contributor to The Dallas Morning News

BALTIMORE – The chance that Josh Hamilton will play at all on this six-game road trip became more remote Sunday, when the center fielder returned to Texas to receive a second injection for his ailing back.

Hamilton said he has seen only minimal improvement with a pinched nerve that sends pain shooting down his right leg. Massage therapy has helped him to walk better, but he can't accomplish the simple task of standing on only his right leg.

He will meet with Dr. Drew Dossett today for a second shot that he hopes will hit the affected area more directly to allow the cortisone to cool the nerve.

"If the shot gets on it in the right spot, I'll feel better," Hamilton said. "It might come back in three weeks, but it's three weeks of playing."

The plan is for him to join the team Tuesday for the second of three games in Cleveland. But the nature of the shot, which sometimes needs 48 hours to take effect, makes it less likely that Hamilton will play against the Indians.

He left Wednesday's game after the fifth inning and had a root-nerve injection Thursday. But he had too much pain in his back to travel Friday.

It's possible that he will stay in Arlington and rejoin the Rangers on Friday for the start of a nine-game homestand against Seattle, Oakland and the Angels.

"We'll figure that out once he gets back there and gets it done," manager Ron Washington said. "He may come to Cleveland. He may not."

Borbon the fielder: The Rangers on Sunday faced right-handed starter Jeremy Guthrie, which meant Julio Borbon was back atop the lineup. But he wasn't the designated hitter, as he had been his previous seven starts.

Borbon was in left field for the first time since Aug. 18. Outfield coach Gary Pettis gave Borbon a stamp of approval after extended side work.

The five-time Gold Glove winner has been trying to change Borbon's throwing mechanics and have him make throws with his hand on top of the ball to create more backspin.

For now, any outfield time will be in left field, even though Borbon is expected to eventually become the everyday center-fielder. That could begin next year, but he won't play ahead of Hamilton or Marlon Byrd this season.

The Rangers are trying to teach Borbon the intricacies of playing the outfield he might have missed while fast-tracking through the minor leagues.

"We're not just going to take a guy and throw him out there at the major league level," Washington said. "There's a lot more to playing the outfield than just going out there and running down baseballs."

Rotation switch: Right-hander Tommy Hunter will stay on his normal rest and pitch tonight against Cleveland, pushing Brandon McCarthy back to Tuesday.

Hunter was terrific Aug. 12 in his only career outing against the Indians, tossing 7 2/3 scoreless innings and allowing only six hits.

Briefly: Third baseman Michael Young did some light jogging and lunges and threw on the field before Sunday's game as he continues to recover from a pulled left hamstring. ... Craig Gentry made his major-league debut in the seventh inning, replacing Byrd in center field. Gentry bounced into a fielder's choice in the eighth

Labor Day weekend action sets up rest of season by Jon Paul Morosi

You sprinted to the car on Friday at 5 o'clock — maybe earlier — and began a weekend of football watching, back-to-school shopping and yard work that couldn't wait any longer.

Or perhaps you took a trip to Florida and didn't do much of anything, like the Charleston Southern defense.

For one reason or another, the Labor Day observance disrupted your usual baseball viewing/reading habits. That's OK. The season won't end until early November. You have time to redeem yourself.

So, here's a review of what you might have missed since Friday. After all, what's a new school year without CliffsNotes?

1. The Tigers completed their first road sweep in nearly four months, taking command of the American League Central.

We see games like this all the time: A two-run lead in the seventh becomes a rout with one base-clearing double.

Well, the same thing has happened in the AL Central: The Tigers hit a gapper.

They are 7-1 in their last eight games. In five of those victories — including all three in a weekend sweep at Tampa Bay — the winning run was scored in the eighth inning or later. After struggling away from home all year, Detroit has won back-to-back road series — against the Angels and Rays, no less.

And for those who believe in pennant-race mysticism, consider the following:

After his team clinched a playoff berth in 2006, Tigers manager Jim Leyland acknowledged that the "the biggest game of the year" came Aug. 30, when Craig Monroe's three-run home run at Yankee Stadium delivered a 5-3 win.

Exactly three years later, on Aug. 30, 2009, Placido Polanco punched a three-run home run just over the left field wall to secure a 4-3 triumph over Tampa Bay. (The victory began Detroit's current 7-1 stretch.)

Both three-run homers came with the Tigers trailing in their final at-bat.

When told of the parallel, Polanco smiled. "Destiny?" he replied.

Yes, it looks that way. The Tigers have a 6-1/2-game lead on the Twins, who won in Toronto on Monday but are 2-3 dating to Joe Nathan's rare blown save last Wednesday.

2. The Rockies have won four straight and gained a little daylight in the (apparently two-team) NL wild card race.

In one of the most closely followed races in baseball, the Rockies look like the frontrunners (for now) after sweeping Arizona in a three-game set at Coors Field. They added a series-opening win over the Reds in a holiday matinee.

The Giants, meanwhile, absorbed a walk-off defeat in Milwaukee on Sunday afternoon to fall two games back. San Francisco rebounded to beat San Diego on Monday.

But this seems like the type of race that could seesaw three or four times before Oct. 4. And based on the returns of injured players, both rosters are getting stronger.

Freddy Sanchez was back in the San Francisco lineup on Monday, which may give the Giants a lift during a pivotal nine-game homestand. Meanwhile, outfielder Dexter Fowler should return to the Rockies on Tuesday, possibly followed by closer Huston Street for this weekend's series at San Diego. (Colorado right-hander Aaron Cook isn't expected to rejoin the rotation until late September.)

3. Uncertainty in the rotation and bullpen returned for the defending World Series champions.

Despite being swept by the Astros in a four-game series, the Phillies are going to win the NL East. They are too good, and their lead on Florida is too big.

But even with Cliff Lee's dominance and Pedro Martinez's mini-renaissance, their pitching woes resurfaced in two significant ways. On Saturday, closer Brad Lidge blew his 10th save of the season.

On Monday, National League Rookie of the Year candidate J.A. Happ was scratched from his start because of a mild right oblique strain.

Happ (10-4, 2.77 ERA) has looked like a strong candidate for the Phillies' postseason rotation. Jamie Moyer, bumped into a long relief role last month, performed well in Happ's place on Monday, allowing two earned runs in six innings.

So, the bullpen may be the bigger problem.

Lidge, a perfect 48-for-48 in save opportunities last year, has a 7.15 ERA. It's going to be difficult for the Phillies to fully trust him during the postseason.

Brett Myers, the team's closer in 2007, looms as a possible replacement for Lidge. He pitched a scoreless eighth on Saturday — and protected a one-run lead — after missing three months due to a torn hip labrum.

4. The Braves and Rays unofficially fell out of their respective wild-card races with extended losing streaks.

Nothing nuanced here, just a season-crushing skid for two teams.

Both have lost five straight. Both are now seven games back in the wild-card standings.

Tampa Bay players acknowledged last week's homestand against Boston and Detroit was a virtual must-win. Well, the defending AL champs went 1-5. And they had a lead in four of the losses.

Carl Crawford is slumping. B.J. Upton is hurting. There was some good news for the Rays, in that top prospect Wade Davis pitched impressively (seven innings, one earned run) against the Tigers in his big league debut on Sunday.

But the game had a familiar conclusion: The Rays' bullpen couldn't hold the lead.

The Braves, meanwhile, weren't able to take advantage of a three-game home series against the lowly Reds. If they can't beat an also-ran in the NL Central, how are they going to catch teams like the Phillies, Rockies and Giants?

5. Boston's pitching looks suspect, but Texas might be too shorthanded to take advantage.

Paul Byrd and Tim Wakefield started the first two games of Boston's weekend set with the White Sox. Neither provided a quality start.

Byrd surrendered seven earned runs and didn't complete the third inning. Wakefield allowed four earned runs in six innings. The Red Sox lost those two games by a combined 17-3 count — and dropped three of the four games overall.

Wakefield only recently returned to the active roster after spending more than a month on the disabled list because of back problems. After Saturday's start, he told reporters, "It hurts to walk." Not the sort of words a contending team wants to hear with less than four weeks left in the regular season.

Before Jon Lester's masterpiece on Sunday, the Red Sox had gone six games without their starter getting an out in the seventh inning. Translation: The bullpen has been busy, and team officials are probably glad to have Billy Wagner.

Boston's lead over Texas in the wild card race is only 2-1/2 games. That sounds tight, but the Rangers are without All-Stars Michael Young (strained left hamstring) and Josh Hamilton (pinched nerve) until further notice. And key left-hander Derek Holland is starting to look like the 22-year-old rookie he is, with 22 earned runs over his last 12-1/3 innings.

Hamilton received a second nerve-root injection on Monday and isn't likely to play until Friday's home series opener against the Mariners at the earliest.

That might not be soon enough. It's Labor Day, and time is short.

Some final thoughts on the weekend:

On their best days — and Labor Day was one of them — the Yankees look downright unbeatable. New York swept Tampa Bay in a day-night doubleheader at Yankee Stadium, snuffing out whatever postseason hopes the defending American League champs had left.

In the opener, Mariano Rivera (sore left groin) pitched for the first time in nearly one week. He threw a scoreless ninth with two strikeouts. Guess the 39-year-old should be ready for the postseason in four weeks. He wasn't needed in the nightcap, an 11-1 victory.

Also, Yankees center fielder Brett Gardner (broken left thumb) returned from the disabled list on Monday. His game-changing speed could be a factor in the postseason.

Last week, a dispute between Florida teammates Dan Uggla and Hanley Ramirez became public. At issue was Ramirez's perceived lack of toughness with a hamstring injury. That's a touchy issue, when talking about a \$70 million man in a clubhouse filled with players on more modest year-to-year contracts.

Well, Ramirez responded in the best way possible: He went 5-for-10 with two home runs and six RBIs in a three-game weekend series against Washington. And he played every inning.

Other than when Kevin Youkilis was serving his suspension last month for charging the mound, Boston's Mike Lowell hasn't started more than two games in a row at third base since the middle of June.

Lowell told reporters in Chicago over the weekend that it's been difficult for him to not be in the lineup every day. But the strategy seems to have served the Red Sox well, as Lowell continues to manage his surgically-repaired right hip. Lowell is hitting .325 since returning from the disabled list in mid-July, including at-bats as a part-time designated hitter.

We're about to witness two significant hitting milestones — and they could happen at almost the same time this week. As play began Tuesday, Ichiro Suzuki was five hits away from his ninth consecutive 200-hit season, a new major league record; and Derek Jeter was four from passing Lou Gehrig as the Yankees' all-time leader.

Coghlan should win NL ROY after big second half by Ken Rosenthal

Chris Coghlan, National League Rookie of the Year.

Who? What?

Coghlan, the Marlins' left fielder, isn't as well-known a rookie as Phillies left-hander J.A. Happ or Braves righty Tommy Hanson, but he should be.

In August, he became only the second National League rookie in the last 60 years to produce 47 or more hits in a month; Wally Moon had 52 in July 1954.

For all the talk about American League Most Valuable Player, the races for the two rookie awards are far more competitive, featuring numerous candidates in each league.

Coghlan, 24, is third in the N.L. in batting with a .376 average since the All-Star break. He has a higher on-base/slugging percentage than Pirates center fielder Andrew McCutchen and Rockies center fielder Dexter Fowler, the latter of whom has not played since Aug. 24 because of a bruised right knee. Brewers third baseman Casey McGehee is closer to Coghlan in OPS but has nearly 150 fewer plate appearances.

Among pitchers, Happ rates the edge over Hanson — he is 10-4 with a 2.77 ERA, while Hanson is 9-3 with a 3.02 ERA. Happ also had pitched 56 more innings than Hanson before missing his start Monday with a strained side muscle.

The question then becomes, pitcher or position player?

Well, a position player contributes every day, and the Marlins became a better team after Coghlan took over in the leadoff spot on May 30, working counts, getting on base.

Advanced defensive metrics indicate that Coghlan is below-average in left. However, he has made steady improvement after playing the position only once in the minors. The Marlins no longer are certain they will move him back to the infield at second or third next season.

One thing seems clear: The emergences of Coghlan and infielder Emilio Bonifacio have put the Marlins in better position to trade second baseman Dan Uggla and outfielder Jeremy Hermida this offseason.

Bonifacio has not proven he is a long-term answer; his OPS is the second-lowest in the NL. Still, he could end up at second next season with Coghlan moving to third. Or, Coghlan could stay in left, with Cameron Maybin playing center and Cody Ross right.

And in the American League ...

The AL rookie class is so good, two of the preseason favorites — Rays left-hander David Price and Orioles catcher Matt Wieters — are not even the top candidates on their own teams.

Rays right-hander Jeff Niemann, who is 12-5 with a 3.67 ERA, can mount an even stronger case than Tigers righty Rick Porcello, who is 12-8 with a 4.18 ERA. Orioles left fielder Nolan Reimold, meanwhile, leads all AL rookies in home runs, on-base percentage and slugging percentage.

Yet, neither Niemann nor Reimold is necessarily the favorite for the award.

White Sox manager Ozzie Guillen was talking up third baseman Gordon Beckham over the weekend. A's closer Andrew Bailey is 23-for-27 in save chances with a 2.06 ERA. But I remain partial to my preseason choice, Rangers shortstop Elvis Andrus, in part because it might be the only prediction I got right.

Andrus, who turned 21 on Aug. 26, does not hit like Beckham, but his .338 on-base percentage at age 21 certainly is presentable and he has stolen 24 bases in 28 attempts. He also is the only AL position-player candidate who has been with his team the entire season.

His candidacy, though, is driven by his defense.

Andrus ranks third in the majors at shortstop in ultimate zone rating, yet his impact goes beyond any statistical measure. His arrival helped transform the Rangers into a pitching-and-defense team.

The Rangers last season ranked 29th in the majors in defensive efficiency, a statistic that measures the percentage of balls in play that are converted into outs.

This season they rank fifth.

AL MVP: Don't forget Youk

Twins catcher Joe Mauer is the favorite for American League MVP and Yankees shortstop Derek Jeter a strong contender, but the Red Sox's Kevin Youkilis is a better candidate than several first basemen drawing more prominent mention — the Yankees' Mark Teixeira, Angels' Kendry Morales and Tigers' Miguel Cabrera.

Youkilis owns the highest OPS of the group, and is second only to Mauer in the AL in that category. He is the major leagues' highest-ranked defender at first, according to the plus-minus ratings at Bill James Online. And he offers unmatched versatility, making 43 starts at third this season and even two in left field, though that experiment did not go well.

Youkilis finished third in the MVP balloting last season behind Red Sox second baseman Dustin Pedroia and Twins first baseman Justin Morneau.

Another top-five finish seems likely.

All Hale in D.C.?

Diamondbacks third base coach Chip Hale could emerge as a top managerial candidate for the Nationals, according to major-league sources.

Hale managed in the D-Backs' farm system when Nationals general Mike Rizzo was the team's scouting director.

The D-Backs bypassed Hale when they promoted farm director A.J. Hinch to replace manager Bob Melvin on May 8. Melvin could be another candidate in D.C., sources say.

The Nationals also have kicked around the idea of hiring Bobby Valentine, who would give the team an instant identity. Interim manager Jim Riggleman also will receive consideration.

Nationals team president Stan Kasten praised Riggleman during a recent interview with FOXSports.com's Jon Paul Morosi but did not indicate that he had an edge on other candidates for the permanent job.

"We'll sit down when the season's over and look at the best long-term interest of the franchise," Kasten said. "But we couldn't be happier with the job he's done up to now."

The White Sox: What went wrong?

Left-hander Clayton Richard was on a roll when the White Sox included him in a four-player package for right-hander Jake Peavy on July 31.

The loss of Richard, however, was not one of the main reasons for the Sox's demise in August.

Richard, 4-2 with a 5.40 ERA for the Padres, has produced only two quality starts out of eight. Right-hander Freddy Garcia, meanwhile, has given the White Sox three straight quality starts in Richard's spot.

One scout who saw Garcia beat the Red Sox on Friday night was unimpressed by the pitcher's stuff. But if Garcia keeps getting results, the White Sox likely will exercise his option for next season — a \$1 million base salary, plus \$2 million in incentives.

In any case, the bigger issue for the White Sox in August was their offense, which ranked only 11th in the American League in runs per game, and their bullpen, which was 4-5 with a 4.02 ERA.

"That's the great mystery as far as I'm concerned," GM Ken Williams says. "That's the last thing I was worried about. Then we went out and got (Tony) Pena, and I said, 'I'm not going to worry about that anymore.'"

Pirates' Duke, Maholm could be keepers

Some rival executives believe that the logical next step for the Pirates this offseason would be to trade either left-hander Paul Maholm or Zack Duke — or even both.

Not so fast.

Maholm is under control through 2012 at affordable salaries, while Duke will receive increases from his current salary of \$2.2 million in his remaining two years of arbitration.

The only way the Pirates would trade either, according to a source with knowledge of the team's thinking, is if they received a younger major-league ready starter of similar quality, plus another piece.

The Pirates have lost 29 of their last 40 games, own the second-worst record in the N.L. and have clinched their 17th straight losing season, the longest streak for any team in the four major North American team sports.

Still, club officials are not ready to concede 2010, much less 2011. Maholm's 4.72 ERA is more than a run per game higher than it was last season, but he, Duke and right-hander Ross Ohlendorf give the Pirates a reasonable chance to compete in most of the games they pitch.

As one team executive says, "It is time to start moving forward."

Papelbon going nowhere

There has been speculation that the Red Sox would trade closer Jonathan Papelbon and retain left-hander Billy Wagner as a one-year bridge to right-hander Daniel Bard in the closer's role, but one team official describes the scenario as "pretty unrealistic."

True, Papelbon is eligible for free agency after the 2011 season, and his salary will jump from its current \$6.25 million in his final two years of arbitration if he does not agree to a long-term deal.

Still, the Red Sox's goal every year is to win the World Series, and Papelbon has a 0.00 career ERA in 25 postseason innings.

Papelbon also has diminished early concerns that he was slipping. Since July 29, he is 9-for-9 in save opportunities with a 1.08 ERA in 16 2/3 innings, 23 strikeouts and four walks.