

Astros celebrate first playoff berth since 2005

Hamels pitches Rangers to AL West title

ARLINGTON, Texas, Oct 5, (AP): Cole Hamels and the Texas Rangers finally clinched the American League West title on the last day of the regular season.

Hamels pitched a three-hitter and Adrian Beltre hit a go-ahead homer as the Rangers beat the Angels 9-2 Sunday, eliminating Los Angeles from playoff contention.

A year after their 95 losses were the most in the American League, two months after they were still eight games out of first place and three days after ensuring themselves a postseason spot, the Rangers wrapped up their sixth division title.

Texas plays its first AL division series game since 2011 on Thursday at Toronto.

Moments after the final out, AL West championship banners already were flying at the ballpark. The Rangers will go there under first-year manager Jeff Banister, whose team lost ace Yu Darvish to Tommy John surgery before the season started.

Diamondbacks 5, Astros 3

In Phoenix, Houston is going to the playoffs for the first time in a decade despite ending the regular season with a loss.

The Astros led the AL wild-card race by a game heading into Sunday. They shared a few high fives in the dugout in the eighth inning after clinching it when the Angels lost to Texas.

Houston finished 86-76 to reach the postseason for the first time since playing the Chicago White Sox in the 2005 World Series. The Astros will play their first AL playoff game Tuesday night, against the New York Yankees at Yankee Stadium.

Not bad for a team that had three 100-loss seasons before going 70-92 in 2014.

Pirates 4, Reds 0

In Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh clinched home field in the National League wild card game, winning behind J.A. Happ's stellar outing and Pedro Alvarez's long homer.

The Pirates (98-64) locked up the right to host the Chicago Cubs (97-65) Wednesday night in a winner-take-all playoff with a victory on the final day

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of the regular season.

Despite having the second-best record in the major leagues, the Pirates finished second to the St. Louis Cardinals in the NL Central. Pittsburgh will host the wild card game for the third straight year after beating Cincinnati in 2013 and losing to the San Francisco Giants last season.

The Pirates had 20 straight losing seasons, the longest streak in major North American professional sports history, before their current run of post-season appearances.

Dodgers 6, Padres 3

In Los Angeles, Clayton Kershaw struck out seven batters in an abbreviated start to become the first pitcher in 13 years to reach 300 strikeouts, as NL West champion Los Angeles closed the regular season on a five-game winning streak.

Kershaw finished with 301 strikeouts and joined former Arizona teammates Randy Johnson (2000-02) and Curt Schilling (2002) as the only pitchers since 2000 to reach 300 strikeouts in a season. Kershaw became the second to do so in Dodgers history; his mentor Sandy Koufax accomplished the feat three times in the mid-1960s.

Kershaw allowed two hits and no walks on 60 pitches over 3-2/3 scoreless innings. The left-hander completed his final tune-up before the Dodgers open the NL Division Series against the New York Mets at home Friday. He is likely to start Game 1 against Jacob deGrom and the NL East champions, although the Dodgers have yet to announce their rotation.

The Padres announced after the game that interim manager Pat Murphy won't lead the team next year.

Cubs 3, Brewers 1

In Milwaukee, the Chicago Cubs beat the Milwaukee Brewers 3-1 on Sunday for their eighth straight win, but will have to play the NL wild card game in Pittsburgh.

Even with the itinerary now taking them to PNC Park, the Cubs head into their first postseason appearance since 2008 brimming with confidence. Chicago ended the regular season with a three-game sweep in Milwaukee.

Anthony Rizzo had a two-run single with the bases loaded in the first to reach a career-high 101 RBIs on the season. Starter Dan Haren (11-9) allowed three hits and a walk in six innings.

The rebuilding Brewers finished with 94 losses, 14 more than 2014.

The franchise is headed into an off-season of change under new general manager David Stearns.

Double-A call-up Jorge Lopez (1-1) went five innings and gave up three runs, all in the first.

Rays 12, Blue Jays 3

In St Petersburg, Fla., Mark Buehrle failed to become the fifth major leaguer



New York Mets starting pitcher Jacob deGrom delivers in the first inning of a baseball game against the Washington Nationals in New York on Oct 4. (AP)

to pitch 200 innings or more in 15 consecutive seasons as AL East champion Toronto missed out on home-field advantage throughout the playoffs.

Starting for the second time in three days, Buehrle (15-8) needed two innings to reach the milestone, but he failed to get through the first.

Two errors led to Buehrle allowing eight unearned runs and five hits over a career-low two-thirds of an inning. He had gone 6 2-3 innings Friday night en route to his 15th win.

Chris Colabello and Darwin Barney homered for the Blue Jays, who needed a win and a Kansas City loss to finish with the AL's best record.

David Price is scheduled to start Game 1 of the Blue Jays' AL Division Series Thursday at home against AL West champion Texas. Toronto ended the regular season at 93-69, a 10-game improvement over last season.

Orioles 9, Yankees 4

In Baltimore, New York stumbled into home-field advantage in the AL wild-card game after a loss by Houston made the outcome of this one meaningless.

New York will enter Tuesday's winner-take-all game against the Astros with little positive momentum after being swept in three games by Baltimore and losing six of their final seven regular-season games. The Yankees fell behind 7-1 in the fifth inning and stranded 11 runners.

New York was 4 for 31 with runners in scoring position in closing the series, including 1 for 12 Sunday.

Royals 6, Twins 1

In Minneapolis, Salvador Perez added to his career-best home run total and Johnny Cueto tossed five solid innings as Kansas City secured home-field advantage throughout the postseason.

Perez hit his 21st homer in the third inning, one behind Kendrys Morales and Mike Moustakas for the team lead. Cueto (4-7 with Royals, 11-13 overall) allowed one run over five innings, helping the Royals finish on a five-game winning streak.

The right-hander, whose transition to the AL since a trade from Cincinnati has hardly been smooth, surrendered six hits and four walks. Cueto struck out the last two batters to leave the bases loaded in the fourth after giving up an RBI single to Danny Santana.

The defending AL champion Royals (95-67) posted their best regular-season record since the 1980 team went 97-65.

Ricky Nolasco (5-2) started for the Twins for the first time since May 31 and lasted only 2 2-3 innings.

Mets 1, Nationals 0

In New York, Jacob deGrom looked especially sharp in his abbreviated playoff tuneup as NL East champion New York finally scored on Curtis Granderson's eighth-inning homer.

One day after Washington ace Max Scherzer pitched a no-hitter with 17 strikeouts to complete a doubleheader sweep, the Mets (90-72) made a run at a combined no-hitter of their own. They reached 90 wins for the first time in nine years and stopped a five-game losing streak that cost them home-field

advantage in the Division Series against the Dodgers.

Next up, deGrom starts Game 1 in the best-of-five matchup Friday at Los Angeles.

Seven pitchers combined to hold Washington to two hits - the first was Clint Robinson's two-out single in the seventh inning off reliever Jonathon Niese.

Phillies 7, Marlins 2

In Philadelphia, Dee Gordon went 3 for 4 with a home run and a double to win the NL batting title over Washington's Bryce Harper and outfielder Ichiro Suzuki pitched the eighth inning, but Philadelphia avoided a 100-loss season.

Gordon became the first NL player to lead the league in batting average (.333) and stolen bases (58) in the same season since Jackie Robinson did so in 1949, according to the Marlins citing the Elias Sports Bureau.

Harper went 1 for 4 Sunday and finished at .330.

Luis Garcia (4-6) stranded two runners in the seventh and earned the win. Andre Rienzo (0-1) allowed four runs in the seventh without recording an out. Suzuki allowed a run on two doubles.

The Phillies finished with the worst record in the majors at 63-99.

Braves 6, Cardinals 0, game 1

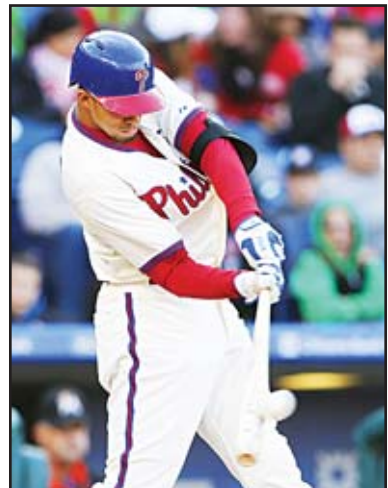
In Atlanta, Matt Wisler Atlanta won four hits over 8 2-3 inning as Atlanta won for a doubleheader sweep that sent St Louis' batters to the playoffs with a 27-inning scoreless streak.

St Louis was held to seven hits in the doubleheader, which included a loss to Shelby Miller in the first game that ended Miller's 24-start winless streak. The Braves won 4-0 Friday.

Wisler (8-8) won each of his last three starts, allowing a combined three runs.

Pinch-hitter Brandon Moss doubled with one out in the ninth to become the Cardinals' first runner in scoring position off Wisler. Jon Jay hit a groundout to first, Tommy Pham walked and Edwin Jackson struck out Randal Grichuk to end the game.

St. Louis, which won its third



Philadelphia Phillies' Aaron Altherr hits a bases-loaded triple against the Miami Marlins during the seventh inning of a baseball game on Oct 4 in Philadelphia. (AP)

straight NL Central title, opens the Division Series at home Friday against the Chicago Cubs or Pittsburgh.

Rockies 7, Giants 3

In San Francisco, Corey Dickerson hit a three-run homer and pinch-hitter Justin Morneau delivered a two-run single as Colorado rallied for seven runs in the ninth inning.

The Giants finished 84-78, a year after winning 88 games in the regular season and going on to take their third World Series title in five seasons.

Colorado's comeback spoiled Matt Cain's outing. He started for the first time in six weeks and pitched two-hit ball for five scoreless innings.

The Giants wound up using 11 pitchers. They took a two-hit shutout into the final inning before the Rockies rallied. Charlie Blackmon also drove in a pair of runs for the Rockies.

Rex Brothers (1-0) pitched a scoreless eighth for the win. George Kontos (4-4) took the loss.

Indians 3, Red Sox 1

In Cleveland, Danny Salazar finished his first season as a full-time starter on a positive note, allowing one run in 5 1-3 innings to win for just the second time in six starts.

Salazar (14-10) began the season at Triple-A Columbus, a demotion that served as a wake-up call for the 25-year-old, who bounced back and tied Carlos Carrasco for the team lead in wins.

The Indians battled inconsistency all season and finished 81-80, only the second time they were above .500 after April 9.

Boston starter Rick Porcello (9-15) came up short in his bid to hit double-digit wins for the seventh straight season.

Mariners 3, Athletics 2

In Seattle, Seth Smith hit a two-out, solo home run in the bottom of the eighth as Seattle rallied.

Smith's 12th homer of the season came off reliever Ryan Dull (1-2) and just eluded the leap of Sam Fuld in deep center field. Seattle avoided being swept in the final series of the season and finished at 76-86, 11 games worse than last season, when the Mariners were in playoff contention until the final day of the regular season.

Logan Kensing (2-1) pitched 1 2-3 innings for the victory. Tom Wilhelmson struck out the side in the ninth for his 13th save, a night after blowing a save opportunity.

Tigers 6, White Sox 0

In Chicago, Daniel Norris allowed just one hit for five innings and Tyler Collins had a bases-clearing triple as Detroit finished its first-to-worst tumble in the AL Central.

The Tigers (74-87) entered this season the four-time defending division champion but were hurt by significant injuries and shaky pitching in falling to last place for the first time in seven years.

Chicago finished the season at 76-86, in fourth in the Central, a slight improvement over last year, when the Sox won 73 games.

Norris (3-2) didn't give up a hit until Trayce Thompson's triple in the fourth. Thompson was stranded on third, however, when Alexei Ramirez hit into an inning-ending double play.

MLB Scoreboard

WASHINGTON, Oct 5, (Agencies): Scoreboard from the MLB games on Sunday.

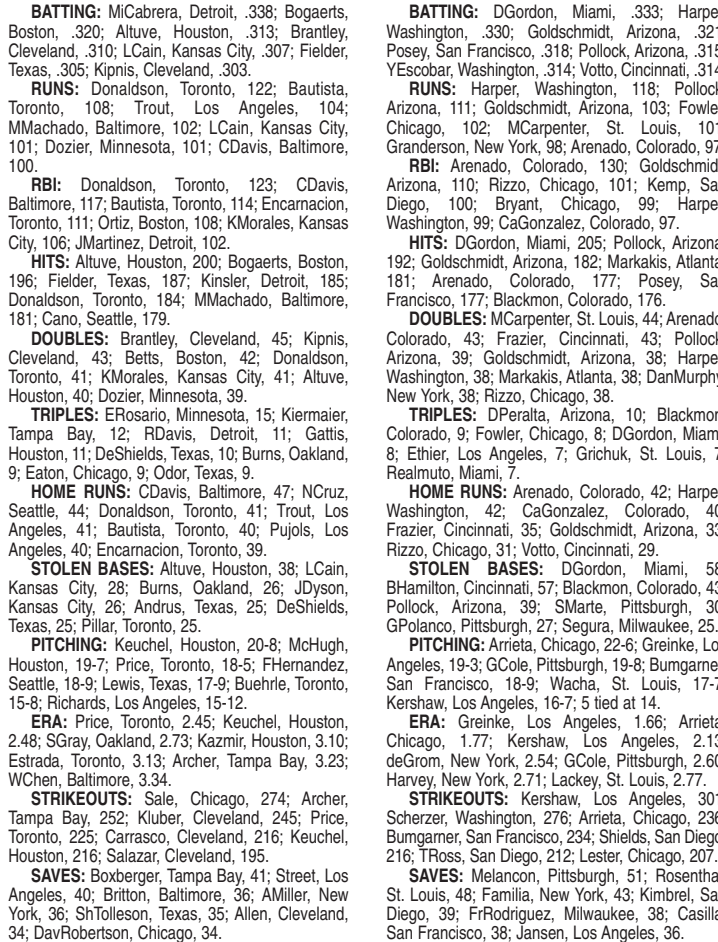
Table with Results showing scores for various MLB teams like Atlanta, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Texas, Colorado, Baltimore, Seattle, LA Dodgers, St Louis, Miami, Cincinnati, LA Angels, San Francisco, NY Yankees, Oakland, San Diego, Arizona, NY Mets, Tampa Bay, Detroit, Cleveland, Chicago Cubs, Kansas City, Houston, Washington, Toronto, Chicago White Sox, Boston, Milwaukee, and Minnesota.

Table with Standings showing league standings for American League (AL East, AL Central, AL West) and National League (NL Central, NL West, NL East) with columns for W, L, PCT, and GB.

Table with MLB Linescores showing game details for Los Angeles vs Texas, New York vs Baltimore, Oakland vs Seattle, Detroit vs Chicago, Houston vs Arizona, and Philadelphia vs St. Louis.

Table with MLB Leaders showing batting and pitching leaders for both American League and National League, including names like M.Cabrera, D.Gordon, M.Jones, and J.Herrera.

Table with MLB Leaders showing RBI and strikeout leaders for both leagues.



St. Louis Cardinals catcher Ed Easley (left), tags out Atlanta Braves' Hector Olivera at home plate on a fielder's choice during the fourth inning of the second baseball game of a doubleheader on Oct 4 in Atlanta. (AP)