8/The Daily Tar Heel/Thursday, June 14, 1990

SPORTS

Eckersley finally walks one and misses a save

From Associated Press reports

Someday, Dennis Eckersley was bound to walk someone. And some time, he was destined to blow a save.

So maybe it's no coincidence that both things happened at once. Eckersley's first walk in 52 innings since last August set up Ruben Sierra's two-out, two-run double, capping a four-run rally in the top of the ninth inning that led the Texas Rangers over the Oakland Athletics 6-5 Tuesday.

Eckersley had been perfect in 21 save opportunities when he relieved to start the ninth with a 5-2 lead. But an error helped get Texas 'going and a walk to Julio Franco set up Sierra's hit on a 3-2 pitch.

Eckersley, who walked only three batters all last season, was upset with blowing the save chance. He was even more bothered by what he perceived as the Rangers' slowdown technique.

"The whole inning was irritating," Eckersley said. "What is this timeout stuff. ... Definitely they were trying to get to me. But what's a guy to do? If you call them on it, it will take another 15 minutes."

Oakland lost for just the second time in 35 games that it led after eight innings. The defeat came the day after Nolan Ryan held the Athletics hitless.

An error by shortstop Walt Weiss on Kevin Reimer's one-out grounder started Texas' rally in the ninth. With two outs, Gary Pettis hit an RBI double and scored on a single by Rafael Palmeiro that pulled the Rangers to 5-4.

"Sierra was one thing, but it was Franco in particular," Eckersley said. "He was ridiculous."

After sixth no-hitter, Nolan Ryan goes to Hall

From Associated Press reports

Yes, the Ryan Express is heading to Cooperstown. Problem is: How are they going to fit 45 major-league records on one little Hall of Fame plaque?

On Monday night, Texas Rangers right-hander Nolan Ryan pitched his record sixth no-hitter to defeat the Oakland A's game 5-0. During his 23plus-year Major League baseball career, Ryan has pitched 12 one-hitters and 19 two-hitters, but this one was especially sweet.

"It comes so late in my career that it makes it extra special," he said.

At 43, Ryan is the oldest pitcher ever to throw a no-hitter. Cy Young was 41 when he threw once against the Yankees in 1908.

"He's 43 years old and he's throwing 93 and 94 miles per hour in the eighth and ninth inning," Oakland third baseman Carney Lansford said.

Willie Randolph, who made the last out, said: "It was Nolan as pretty much

Nolan. He's a Hall of Famer."

Ryan is the first pitcher to throw nohitters for three different teams and the first to toss a no-hitter in three different decades.

His first no-hitter came May 15, 1973, as a member of the California Angels when he beat Kansas City, 3-0.

On July 15, 1973, Ryan tied a record with his second no-hitter of the season. He struck out 17 and beat Detroit 6-0.

There were two more no-hitters for the Angels, in 1974 and 1975, and one in the National League for Houston in 1981 to break Sandy Koufax's record of four no-hitters.

"I haven't gotten bored with no-hitters, yet," said Ryan, the envy of middleage men and weekend athletes everywhere.

"I don't know how many more chances I'm going to get, but the way

I've been throwing, it's certainly not out of the question that I'll get another shot."

Along with no-hitters, Ryan has struck out more batters than any other pitcher in major-league history.

When Walter Johnson ended his career with 3,508 strikeouts in 1927, it seemed like a record that would last forever. Ryan fanned 14 A's in Monday's game in Oakland to increase his record to 5,152. He has more than 2,000 strikeouts in each league.

At least Johnson's record of 110 shutouts seems safe. Ryan has 59, but he is closing in on Warren Spahn, Mordecai Brown and Eddie Plank.

Last season, Ryan led the major leagues with 301 strikeouts. He also was the oldest pitcher ever to fan 300 batters in a season and it was the 21st time he struck out 100 or more in a season. Ryan's 14 strikeouts extended his record to 201 times with 10 or more strikeouts in a game. Among his strikeout victims are 44 MVP winners, 19 Hall of Famers and six father-son combinations.

Ryan's strikeout list also reads like a Capital offense: He has struck out a Washington, Adams, Jackson, Taylor, Grant, Hayes, Wilson, Kennedy, Johnson, Ford and Bush.

Despite his many records, Ryan's critics until recently said he was just a .500 pitcher.

"I think it's the nature of the teams I've played on," Ryan said in defense of his 294-266 record.

Ryan's next start is in Seattle, where the Mariners already had planned a promotion called "Guaranteed No-hitter Night." If someone doesn't hurl a nohitter, fans will get a free ticket to another game. Nolan Ryan just might save the Mariners some money.

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